

Decreasing Dropout Rates for Minority Male Youth with Disabilities from Culturally and Ethnically Diverse Backgrounds



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Introduction

National, state, and local efforts to improve graduation rates in the United States are beginning to show quantifiable progress. Data from the U.S. Department of Education reflect that for the first time in history, the nation has achieved an 80% high school graduation rate for the second year in a row¹. There have been notable improvements in graduation rates among students of color and students with disabilities. But it is with those same groups of youth that some of the greatest challenges remain if the nation is to achieve its goal of a 90% graduation rate by the class of 2020.

Students with disabilities drop out of high school at a significantly higher rate than students without disabilities. The dropout rate of male students of color who have disabilities is even higher. The cost of this phenomenon—in terms of both human and economic capital—is staggering. Dropouts suffer higher rates of unemployment, poverty, incarceration, depression—the list is long. Yet there is little research that focuses specifically on this cohort and, as a result, there are few educational or human service strategies designed to support these young men to stay in school.

This monograph examines the problem of high school dropout rates among males with disabilities through the lens of three ethnicities—American Indian, African American, and Latino. Three chapters explore the nature of the problem, review the existing—and paucity of—research, examine root causes and risk factors, consider conditions that protect against dropout, suggest existing programs and strategies that help these young men to stay in school, offer direction for much-needed research, and articulate important changes that need to be made in both policy and practice to better serve young males of color.

Susan Faircloth of North Carolina State University examines the impediments to graduation for American Indian males with disabilities. Ivory Toldson of Howard University examines the dropout phenomenon among African American males with disabilities. Robert Lucio of St. Leo University studies Hispanic males with disabilities and their dropout patterns. Because of the lack of research, all three of these educators generalized their studies to include, for example, what works to keep males of a particular ethnicity in school, or what works for students with disabilities.

Young males with learning, emotional, and behavioral disabilities “form a majority of prison populations”² in this country. Yet, the field knows little about what actually works to keep these young men in school. Much more can be discovered and done. This monograph, written by three scholars committed to the education of youth, examines this issue and makes an important contribution to efforts toward improving outcomes for young men of color with disabilities and staunching the “school to prison” pipeline.

¹National Center for Education Statistics. (2012). Common Core of Data (CCD). Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/tables/AFGR0812.asp>

²Russell, M. & Stewart, J., (2001). Disablement, Prison, and Historical Segregation. *Monthly Review*, 53(1) 61-75.

Executive Summary

Young male students with disabilities drop out of high school at a higher rate than their peers. The lack of a high school diploma leaves these individuals prone to unemployment, poverty, and homelessness; they are more likely to be incarcerated and suffer from a host of mental and emotional challenges than they would if they had finished twelfth grade. For males of certain ethnicities—African American, American Indian, and Hispanic—that dropout rate is even higher. Yet, there appears to be limited research on why these students drop out and what can be done to keep them in school.

American Indian Males with Disabilities

There exists a long history in this country of American Indian students not finishing school. But because American Indian students with disabilities represent such a small percentage of the student body, few data are tracked and less research conducted to help address the problem. Complicating the challenge is the unique linguistic and cultural diversity represented by the hundreds of tribes and Indian nations in the United States. Exacerbating the problem even further is the isolation of the schools operated or funded by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and tribes, schools that are located in remote, rural areas that lack the same level and quality of resources available to schools in urban and suburban areas.

American Indian students drop out of school for many of the same reasons that other students drop out: a general dislike of school, poor relationships with teachers and students, high levels of absenteeism, poor academic performance, low grades, failing one's courses, grade retention, behavioral problems, serious disciplinary infractions, suspension and expulsion, poor teaching, low expectations, social isolation, large schools, unresponsive and uncaring teachers, lack of culturally-sensitive curriculum, limited family involvement in the educational process, lack of school readiness/academic preparation, low socioeconomic status, and poor health care. Yet, anecdotal evidence reveals one antecedent to dropping out that might be unique to American Indian students with disabilities: the experience of sometimes being devalued by the educational system.

Effective practices

One of the few proven practices that research has identified for helping to keep American Indian males with disabilities in school is to have educators understand the cultural and familial dynamics of their students and establish effective communication between the school and home. Research also points to the effectiveness of culturally-responsive teaching practices, which include appointing a cultural liaison, hosting American Indian-focused events, and translating materials into the local tribal language.

Much more research needs to be done to document effective practices and to examine the educational experiences and subsequent outcomes of American Indian males with disabilities. If these students are to be effectively served, research must also identify and document effective strategies and practices for use with this population.

Recommendations

Many Native American males with disabilities do not feel welcomed or valued in school. They, in effect, feel “pushed out” before their education is complete. Educators and policy makers need to change the conversation to reflect this experience. Rather than examining why students are dropping out, they need to explore why our schools are pushing these students out. Schools also need examples of successful practice, such as those of the Menominee Indian School District in Wisconsin, which incorporates students’ cultures into the curriculum and encourages active and intensive family and community involvement in its schools, and of the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) in Northwest Alaska, where the district works with the National Dropout Prevention Center to provide e-mentoring for students most at risk, provide peer support, improve social competence, foster self-determination, and develop leadership skills.

The following ongoing actions are encouraged:

- Establishing an overall guiding framework from which a set of interventions and services can be developed.
- Focusing on the individual, whole child by fostering physical, social, emotional/mental, and spiritual health and wellbeing.
- Holding high expectations for all students, expecting students to graduate and succeed, and assisting them in developing a plan to achieve their postsecondary goals.
- Ensuring the sustainability of programs and services aimed at improving the educational conditions and subsequent outcomes of American Indian children and youth.
- Fostering more active parenting and parental involvement in the educational process.
- Diversifying the teaching, administrative, and service provider ranks to more closely resemble the demographic characteristics of their students, schools, and communities.
- Improving transition planning and related services.
- Examining discipline and academic placement rates and patterns, as well as attendance and in-grade retention rates as they are related to high dropout rates.
- Designing and implementing effective programs and practices aimed at increasing the number of students who stay in school and go on to graduate.
- Designing and delivering culturally and linguistically appropriate and relevant instructional practices that incorporate such Indigenous values as relationship, reciprocity, and respect.

- Developing and implementing a process for early identification of those at risk of dropping out and a system to respond to the warning signs.

Three barriers exist to educational persistence for American Indian students:

- The structural-, institutional-, and governmental-level barriers that deter a coordinated system/method of student tracking.
- Familial and community-level barriers for promoting student success.
- Student- or individual-level barriers, related to personal responsibilities such as parenting and to high rates of student mobility/transiency.

Policy implications

- At the local, state, and national levels, policymakers need to revisit, reconsider, and revise discipline/behavior policies that serve to remove or encourage the removal of American Indian students with disabilities from the regular education environment (e.g., suspension and expulsion).
- Schools need to define clearly how they determine who is graduating, dropping out, or completing school. Currently, each of these actions falls under the term “exit.”
- School systems need to disaggregate data.
- Indian education needs to be a priority at the local, tribal, state, and national levels.

Communities, families, and youth-related implications

- Programs and services for American Indian males must be developed in concert with parents, families, communities, tribes, and other stakeholders.
- There must be an increased emphasis on listening to and responding to the concerns of students in order to empower these students to reinvest and engage in their education.

Research implications

The field needs empirical research that details successful strategies and interventions aimed at improving the educational system and increasing the academic persistence and improving the subsequent life outcomes of American Indian students, particularly those identified as having disabilities.

African American Males with Disabilities

Because research is limited on the phenomenon of high school dropout for African American males with disabilities, any review of the extant research must be broadened to include African American males in general. For this cohort, there are four categories of risk: personal and emotional, familial, social and environmental, and school-related. For example, if a child starts drinking alcohol at a young age, that child is more likely to leave school. Familial disinterest in a child’s education also increases his chances of dropping out. So do social factors

such as growing up in socioeconomic distress—a condition that is exacerbated by a disability— or involvement in the juvenile justice system. School experiences such as grade retention, suspensions and expulsion, low grades, truancy, numerous transfers from one school to another, and unsupported transition, especially to the ninth grade, all are strong risk factors that mark a child as more likely to drop out of school.

Yet, there are also protective factors that fall into these same four categories. A child with a solid sense of his own worth, adequate future and goal orientation, a positive mood, family and community involvement, and fewer traumatic events in his life is likely to finish high school. African American males who are less likely to drop out had parents who monitored and helped with their homework and who placed reasonable limits and restrictions on behavior; these males had a positive self-worth and attitude about life in general. As well, the higher the educational achievement of a student's mother, the more that achievement appears to protect a child from dropping out. If involved in the juvenile justice system, a student is more likely to finish high school if robust transition programs are in place to provide strong supports for re-engagement in school.

Existing models

An intervention called *Check and Connect* has been shown to reduce dropout rates among African American males with disabilities. This program is designed to engage students in school—particularly those who are marginalized—through relationship building, problem solving, capacity building, and persistence. has been shown to reduce dropout rates among African American males with disabilities. Efforts to increase the cultural responsiveness of school staff have shown promise, although making this practice accessible and understandable to educators has been a challenge.

Gaps in research

Most existing research operates out of a deficit model that focuses on problems instead of evaluating the strengths of African American males.

Key findings

- Health and wellbeing seem to contribute to the academic success of African American students. The converse of that is also true: African American males who rate their general health and wellbeing to be lower than that of their peers are also more likely to report lower levels of academic success.
- How good or how poor a student's grades were in school had the strongest association with dropout outcomes.
- Positive modeling and sufficient resources play an important role in preventing dropout among African American adolescent males.
- While everyone who suffers from a disability also experiences its burden, the burden of disability (i.e., its relationship to negative academic outcomes) was the highest for African American males.

- African American males were significantly more likely to be misrepresented in special education—misdiagnosed and overrepresented—and less likely to be identified for hearing and vision problems than Hispanic and White males, which may indicate diagnostic biases. For example, an African American male who is underachieving because of difficulties seeing or hearing may be misdiagnosed with a learning or behavioral disorder.
- Many African American students who end up in special education or who are retained in school do not have a disability. Rather, there are circumstances in their lives that spur behavior patterns that are not compatible with the school environment.

Practice and policy implications

- Educational policy is needed to address and correct unfair applications of zero tolerance disciplinary policies and racial inequities in enforcing school disciplinary measures.
- States need to develop systems, strategies, and policies to ensure that school leaders and teachers understand the importance of, and have the resources and support to create, positive learning environments for all students.
- Professional development programs in schools should stress the importance of school engagement for academic outcomes and teach strategies for improving student experiences and connections with school.
- Educators need a broader understanding of the true nature of disabilities—how a disability does not have to be debilitating—and a better understanding of how African American male students with disabilities can remain and excel in school.
- Schools need to employ restorative justice practices, a proven approach to promoting student accountability and embracing all students as important members of their school community.
- Because African American males are far more likely to feel unsafe in their neighborhoods and have difficulty trusting their neighbors, policies are needed to expand connections between schools and communities and to encourage school- and community-based dropout prevention programs that promote high academic achievement, positive attitudes toward school, pro-social skills, character building, and school engagement.
- Schools should work in partnership with parents of African American males. They should employ strategies that foster, expand, and encourage parental engagement and that value the critical role parents can play in their child’s educational experience.
- Since African American males who are more likely to drop out exhibit higher levels of hopelessness and lower feelings of self-worth than their peers, counseling and mental health services at the school should be strengthened to address these feelings and mitigate the negative effects of disciplinary referrals.

Latino Male Students with Disabilities

While Latino students are the fastest growing school-age population in the country, Latino students have the highest dropout rate of any other racial or ethnic group. Latino males drop out at a higher rate than Latino females, and Latino males with disabilities drop out at an even higher rate. Yet, little research exists on why this specific group of students drop out, what exactly creates their disengagement from school, how to create programs that address/alleviate the problem, why some programs work, and how the qualities in those few effective programs could be used to develop other useful practices.

A review of the research reveals a gap in the literature on and knowledge about Latino male students with disabilities and what affects their academic achievement. As the topic broadens from Latino male students with disabilities to all Latino students with disabilities, the increase in knowledge is minimal. It is not until the focus is on all Latino students that we begin to see a considerable amount of information available. It is possible that many of the factors that relate to the achievement of Latinos in general can also be useful in keeping Latino students with disabilities, particularly Latino males, in school and on track to graduate.

Research does reveal certain conditions that contribute to school dropout for all students: poverty certainly is a contributing factor, as is poor health, which makes students with physical disabilities especially vulnerable to leaving school before completion. The small subset of research (five published articles) that do focus on Latino male students with disabilities reveals nine distinct risk and protective factors to dropping out of school. These include factors from the child domain (emotional/behavioral disorders, English fluency, gender, IQ, learning disability), the school domain (school behaviors), and the family domain (cultural factors).

Approaches

In order to address the problem of school dropout for Latino male students in particular, schools need to take a holistic approach, one that looks at the social, emotional, and educational needs of a child as well as his family and community and the influence of cultural and gender underpinnings. It is equally important to enhance protective factors, minimize those aspects of behavior that negatively affect school achievement, and design programs that incorporate all of these factors to encourage and support student success.

The literature about Latinos with disabilities revealed 13 unique factors related to achievement: academic engagement, culture, emotional/behavioral health, environment, gender, language, whether or not a student has a learning disability, IQ, parent involvement, parent engagement, race/ethnicity, school behaviors, and the presence (or absence) of other adults in the lives of a student. The research also suggests that student engagement in school and school completion are significantly influenced by the degree to which schools actively engage their communities and involve and collaborate with the families of the children they serve.

Effective programs

Evidence-based programs that focus on keeping Latino male students with disabilities in school are almost nonexistent. The exception is *Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS)*. This program incorporates problem-solving training, attendance monitoring, a focus on increasing students' sense of belonging, and training for parents in participation strategies and parent-child problem solving.

Two other programs have been shown to be effective for Latinos in general and may require some adaptation if they are to be effective for Latino students with disabilities. *AMIGOS* is a school-based mental health program designed to reduce dropout rates by focusing on reducing the stress of new arrivals to the country. The program provides support through case management to make sure families have their essential needs met (e.g., food, phone, housing) and by developing trust between the students and the program staff. An essential component of this program is its culturally-responsive design. While no research studies were available regarding the outcomes of the following program, they are worth mentioning as having promise. *Encuentros Leadership* is a program that works to address the educational issues confronting young Latino men as well as the social and economic factors that affect educational and life opportunities. And, *XY-Zone* is a fraternity-oriented program based on five foundational values: respect, responsibility, relationships, role modeling, and reaching out.

Recommendations

- Schools need early warning systems that serve to identify students who show the first signs of school disengagement or problems. This system must be able to identify students who are at risk of school failure through the development of a data-driven model in which school districts, parents, and communities collect and analyze data related to academic success.
- Available data must be understandable and useful for teachers and staff for early identification and intervention efforts.
- Schools need strategies to re-engage students who are already off track. Working with these students often involves skill remediation, alternative school options, and school planning.
- School staff must be trained in interpreting the risk data and implementing the appropriate intervention and preventions strategies.
- All school staff—from teachers and school administrators to bus drivers and secretaries—must be trained in cultural competence so that every adult in the school community can serve as a cultural broker and bridge cultural gaps between students, parents, and schools.
- Parents and family members must be involved in the school life of their children. Families play an especially vital role in the lives of Latino males. Family members must know about the educational options open to their children, the implications of staying in school, and the promise of their options when they do.



Factors Impacting the Graduation and Dropout Rates of American Indian Males with Disabilities



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*Native education is in a state of emergency,
and the federal government needs to take immediate action to ensure
that Native students grow into engaged, productive citizens
of both their tribes and the nation as a whole*

— National Indian Education Association, 2012

Introduction

Since the 1970s, the federal government has mandated the provision of special education and related services to students whose learning, behavioral, and/or physical differences negatively impact their academic performance in schools. Although such services are mandated, many students with disabilities do not remain in school or graduate. To address this issue, the Office of Special Education Programs requires states to report data on a number of indices, including Indicators 1 (graduation) and 2 (dropout). Indicator 1 reports data on the “percent of youth with IEPs [Individualized Education Programs] graduating from high school with a regular diploma” (National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, 2012a). Indicator 2 reports data on the “percent of youth with IEPs dropping out of high school” (National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, 2012b).

Although reporting requirements are in place, states have opted to use a variety of methods to calculate graduation and dropout rates, thus resulting in wide variations in data reported. For example, in 2010, among the 20 states using the adjusted 4-year cohort model, the average graduation rate was nearly 57 percent compared to 68.4 percent among the 30 states using the leaver calculation model (National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, 2012a). Of these 50 states, 36 (54 percent) reported dropout rates that met or were lower than their designated targets and 24 (46 percent) states reported dropout rates that were higher than their target goals (National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities, 2012b). As these data demonstrate, a large percentage of students with disabilities leave school before graduating, either through the process of dropping out or being pushed out.

According to the American Psychological Association (2010), “Students with disabilities drop out of school at disproportionately higher rates than their peers. Most recent available data found over 30% of students with disabilities were estimated to have dropped out” (p. 5). This is a particularly critical issue when one considers the fact that one-third (32 percent) of all students with disabilities are between the ages of 14 and 17 (Swanson, 2008), ages at which students typically begin to think about and plan for life beyond school.

Although not specifically referenced in the 2010 report cited above, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) has recognized a growing issue of concern: disparities in the rates at which minority males (i.e., African American, Hispanic, and American Indian) with disabilities graduate or drop out of school. For American Indian students, an example of this disparity is found in schools operated and/or funded by the federal Bureau of Indian Education, formerly known as the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), which serves slightly less than 10 percent of the nation's American Indian students. During 2009–2010, 50 percent of all American Indian males attending BIE operated or funded schools graduated compared to 44 percent of males with disabilities (BIE, 2010). Although the majority of American Indian students, with and without disabilities, attend public schools, little is known about the extent to which these students go on to graduate or drop out from school.

In response, this chapter addresses the following: (a) What are the factors that impede graduation rates for American Indian males with disabilities? (b) What are the current gaps/barriers in dropout prevention services for American Indian males with disabilities? (c) And, what is the desired state of practice when working to decrease the dropout rate and increase the graduation rate among American Indian males with disabilities? The following sections address the significance of this problem; summarize extant research specific to American Indian students; and provide recommendations and implications for a wide range of stakeholders, as well as researchers.

Significance of the Problem

American Indians comprise a relatively small—less than two percent—but significant segment of the student population in schools across the United States. American Indian students and their families represent more than 600 federally recognized tribes (U.S. Department of the Interior, Indian Affairs, 2013) and more than 60 state recognized tribes, with approximately 200 different languages spoken with differing degrees of fluency (e.g., Goddard, 1996, as cited in McCarty & Watahomigie, 2011; Krauss 1998, as cited in McCarty, 2013; McCarty & Zepeda, 1995, as cited in McCarty & Watahomigie, 2011; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2013; Zepeda & Hill 1992, as cited in McCarty & Watahomigie, 2011). The majority of these students attend public schools, with most of the remainder attending schools operated or funded by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and tribes. Many of these schools are located in rural, remote, and isolated areas (Ogunwole, 2006), making it difficult for them to access the same level and quality of resources available to schools in urban and suburban areas.

Due to a complex array of issues, American Indians, particularly those with disabilities, are among the students most likely not to finish high school. Unfortunately, this is not a new phenomenon (e.g., Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010), as American Indians have historically not fared well in the educational system. Two of the most visible indicators of this lack of success are persistently

American Indian students and their families represent more than 600 federally recognized tribes (U.S. Department of the Interior, Indian Affairs, 2013) and more than 60 state recognized tribes, with approximately 200 different languages spoken with differing degrees of fluency (e.g., Goddard, 1996, as cited in McCarty & Watahomigie, 2011).

high dropout rates (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010; Freeman & Fox, 2005; Senate Special Subcommittee on Indian Education, 1969¹; Swisher & Hoisch, 1992) and disproportionate representation in special education programs and services (e.g., DeVoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008; Hosp, 2004; Obiakor & Wilder, 2003), particularly among males. It is important to note that although having a disability may not be precursor to school failure, misdiagnosis and inappropriate treatment and services has been shown to link to poor performance in school and increased rate of dropping out (e.g., Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999).

Although American Indians represent a small proportion of the overall student population they represent a significant proportion of students receiving special education services. In total, nearly 14 percent of all American Indians² between the ages of 6 and 21 participate in special education programs and services, compared to 12 percent of African Americans, 9 percent of Whites, 8 percent of Hispanics, and 5 percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders. American Indians are 1.5 times more likely to be placed in special education programs and receive special education services than their peers. American Indians are also more likely than all of their peers, with the exception of Black students, to be suspended or expelled for more than 10 days (1.69 percent compared to 2.78 percent of Blacks and 1.12 percent of all students) and to be suspended or expelled on multiple occasions for periods of less than 10 days (1.03 percent compared to 2.39 percent of Blacks and .93 percent of all students) (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Further, American Indians are more likely than their peers to be identified in the categories of specific learning disabilities (1.81 times) and speech or language impairments (1.42) (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Data also indicate that the percentage of American Indian males identified as having a specific learning disability (SLD) tends to increase as the percentage of nonwhite students in the school increases. However, the likelihood of American Indian males being identified as having a SLD tends to decrease as the poverty level of the American Indian student group increases. While this first finding is markedly different for all other students groups, the second finding is markedly different from that of all student groups with the exception of White students (Coutinho, Oswald, & Best, 2002). In sum, as a school becomes more racially diverse, Native American students are more frequently identified as having a SLD; however, as the socioeconomic status of a student population declines (and more students live in poverty), the number of American Indian students identified as having a SLD also declines. This is an important point to explore when one considers the potential relationship between disability status and graduation/dropout status.

Although the majority of all students with disabilities who attend public schools graduate with a diploma (54 percent), data indicate that a significantly smaller percentage (42 percent during the 2004–2005 academic year) of American Indian students with disabilities go on to graduate (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). As demonstrated in Table 1 (at end of chapter), these percentages also vary by disability category. As this table illustrates, the dropout rate for American Indian students

¹ Commonly referred to as the *Kennedy Report*.

² The term American Indian is used here to refer to two groups: American Indians and Alaska Natives. State and national data collection efforts have tended to collapse the data for these groups, although they represent two distinct cohorts.

in the categories of emotional behavior disturbance and intellectual disabilities is particularly high, with 58 percent of American Indian students with emotional disturbances and 18 percent of those with intellectual disabilities dropping out of public and BIE-funded or operated schools. (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Although these percentages are telling, it is important to note that not graduating from school does not necessarily mean that a student has dropped out of school; thus it is important to also consider data specific to those who are known to have dropped out or been pushed out of school.

Data for BIE schools indicate that American Indian students with disabilities continue to lag behind their nondisabled peers in terms of overall graduation rates. For example, the 2011 BIE Annual Report indicates that 52 percent of students with disabilities within BIE-operated or funded schools graduated during the 2009–2010 academic year, compared to 58 percent of all students (including students with disabilities), 51 percent of all males and 48 percent of all male students with disabilities, compared to 65 percent of all females and 62 percent of female students with disabilities (BIE, 2011). Although these figures represent a slight improvement from the previous (2008–2009) academic year, the fact remains that more than 50 percent of American Indian males with disabilities attending BIE-operated or funded schools are not graduating each year. This is a significant number of children not completing high school. Similar data are found in public schools, with only slightly more than half (51 percent) of all American Indian students with disabilities graduating with a regular high school diploma and 39 percent dropping out (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

These are important findings, as failure to earn a high school degree has lifelong consequences for individuals' attainment of social and economic capital. According to Sum et al. (2009), individuals who drop out of school experience high rates of joblessness and reliance on state and federal financial assistance in order to provide for such basic life needs as food, housing, and health care. Many of these individuals also find themselves unmarried and parenting on their own. Individuals who do not graduate from high school are also more likely than their peers to be incarcerated as a result of criminal activity. This later point is of particular concern to males. As data indicate, approximately 90 percent of the U.S. prison population is male and approximately 10 percent of males who do not graduate are incarcerated. In effect, for many youth, failure to graduate creates a situation characterized by a former Illinois State Senator as “an apprenticeship for prison” (Sum et al., 2009, p. 11).

Overview of Existing Research

Why do American Indian students drop out of school?

Although Lehr et al. (2004) cite a lack of studies specific to dropping out among students with disabilities (e.g., Lehr, Johnson, Brewer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004), Swanson (2008) argues that the reasons for dropping out among students

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with disabilities are similar to those found among their non-disabled peers. These include: dislike of school, poor relationships with teachers and students, high levels of absenteeism, poor academic performance, low grades, failing courses, retention in grade, behavioral problems, serious disciplinary infractions, suspension and expulsion, poor teaching, low expectations, social isolation. (p. 20)

Similarly, while no empirical studies have been published that specifically identify the reasons why American Indian students with disabilities drop out of school, research does indicate a number of factors associated with the general population of American Indian students who drop out of school. These factors include large schools, unresponsive and uncaring teachers, lack of culturally sensitive curriculum, lack of parental involvement (Reyhner, 1992), lack of school readiness/academic preparation, low socioeconomic status, and poor health care (Lohse, 2008). Further, anecdotal evidence suggests that American Indian students with disabilities are sometimes devalued by the educational system, making it difficult for them to remain engaged and physically present in school. According to an American Indian higher education program director,

It's easier for a school district to accept that a student who is in special education has dropped or may drop out of school than it is for them to accept a student who is not in special education dropping out. (C. Wesberry, personal communication, June 13, 2011)

Effective Educational Practices for American Indian Students with Disabilities

Although a review of literature revealed no studies specifically addressing dropout prevention or effective special education services for American Indian males with disabilities, a limited number of publications do address strategies for improving outcomes for all American Indian students with disabilities. These publications underscored the importance of working effectively with parents and families. This requires educators to understand the cultural and familial dynamics of their students and to establish effective communication with families (Pewewardy & Fitzpatrick, 2009). According to Tepper and Tepper (2004), open communication, trust, and dialogue—all elements of healthy relationships—are especially important during the development of the Individualized Educational Program (IEP), a documented plan mandated for all students receiving special education services under IDEA. In establishing these relationships, it is important to note that American Indian families often include extended family members, such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles as well as other members of the community who may not be biologically related but who play key roles in the family. Pewewardy and Fitzpatrick (2009) emphasize this point and cite the importance of families and educators building strong relationships as they work collaboratively toward improving student outcomes. The authors also underscore the importance of culturally responsive teaching practices and strategies when working with American Indian students with disabilities. Such practices may include, but are not limited to, schools appointing a cultural liaison, hosting American Indian-focused events, and translating materials into the local tribal language(s).

Tepper and Tepper (2004) also cite the importance of considering students' cultural needs during the IEP process as well as in the design and delivery of instruction. This requires thinking critically about the development and implementation of culture-based curriculum. Three steps in developing a culturally appropriate curriculum include (a) avoiding content and strategies that directly conflict with the values of the local/tribal community; (b) building on the background knowledge of students and using culturally responsive strategies, examples, and analogies; and (c) helping students to increase their cultural confidence by teaching, when appropriate, the history, language, stories, and values of their culture(s) (Appelquist, 2009). According to Tepper & Tepper (2004), the IEP provides a unique opportunity for team members to address students' culture(s) and language.

Gaps in existing research

Although the strategies above are specific to American Indian students, they are not specific to American Indian males with disabilities. As noted by Orfield, Losen, & Ward (2004), there is a need for research regarding the educational experiences and subsequent outcomes of American Indian males with disabilities (Orfield, Losen & Ward, 2004). If these students are to be effectively served, research must also identify and document effective strategies and practices for use with this population. Although there are a number of publications regarding the education of American Indian students, there are no studies that specifically address low graduation rates among American Indian males with disabilities. While it is possible to draw from existing research on other student groups, to be effective, educators must acknowledge the linguistic and cultural characteristics specific to American Indians, as well as their unique sociopolitical status, which affords them the right to certain protections—beyond those guarantees outlined under IDEA and the Elementary and Second Education Act (ESEA) and not guaranteed to other racial, ethnic or cultural groups within the United States. Foremost among these rights is the right to education. According to the National Congress of American Indians and the National Indian Education Association (n.d.),

a unique government-to-government relationship exists between federally recognized Indian tribes and the Federal Government. This relationship is grounded in numerous treaties, statutes, and executive orders as well as political, legal, moral, and ethical principles. This relationship is not based upon race, but rather is derived from the legal status of tribal governments. The Federal Government has enacted various regulations that establish and define a trust relationship with Indian tribes. An integral element of this government-to-government relationship is that consultation occurs with Indian tribes. (p. 5.)

Unfortunately,

the United States history is replete with policies created to destroy Native identity and assimilate [American Indians] into the values and beliefs of European immigrants migrating to America. This same history has given birth to a trust responsibility enshrined in the U.S. Constitution requiring the

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U.S. to care for its Native American beneficiaries, including a duty to educate them. Unfortunately, the trust responsibility was too often used as a tool to impose ideals and beliefs that harmed rather than helped the Native American beneficiaries it was intended to serve (National Indian Education Association, 2011, p. 3).

While all students with disabilities who qualify for special education services have the right to free and appropriate public education under the IDEA, the legal protections and right to education for all American Indian students, including those with special educational needs, may at times supersede and in effect extend the legal protections and rights outlined in the IDEA. This makes American Indian students unique among the population of students in the United States found eligible for and currently receiving special educational services. Unfortunately, this is a point often not well understood within either American Indian communities or educational arenas.

Key Findings

As stated above, the linguistic and cultural diversity of American Indian students, particularly those with special education needs, necessitates the development and use of educational strategies, practices, and interventions designed specifically with this student population in mind. However, as also noted above, a review of extant research revealed a lack of published studies specific to this population of students. This review also pointed out a lack of data detailing graduation and dropout rates among American Indian students with disabilities and, more specifically, American Indian males with disabilities. However, anecdotal evidence coupled with professional experience within the field of Indian education did yield three key findings specific to American Indians: (a) the need to transform the conversation around student attrition from one focused on students actively dropping out to one that recognizes the potential for schools to either actively or inactively push students out of school; (b) the lack of parental/community engagement with schools; and (c) insufficient transition planning. These themes are discussed in brief below.

Need to transform the conversation: From dropping out to pushing out

As we work to increase the graduation rate and decrease the dropout rate among American Indian males with disabilities, we must critically examine the extent to which schools and communities serve to facilitate (i.e., push out) students' premature departure from school (e.g., Deyhle, 1989). As a former transition coordinator commented,

Upon close examination of numerous schools' behavior policies, it is clear that the policy itself pushes students away from the learning environment. For struggling students, this is a reprieve

from engaging in an activity of known difficulty. It is easy for students who struggle to disengage from learning, and many policies enable this disengagement. Early intervention largely does not exist for stand-alone high schools because of the lack of communication from feeder elementary and mid-schools.

The paperwork that does transfer with the student also lays the groundwork for the low professional expectations upon the student (Portley, personal communication, June 6, 2011).

Indeed, dropping out is more complex than a student simply deciding to leave school because he or she perceives school to be too difficult. In fact, the act of dropping out is often times a long-term process of students being either intentionally or unintentionally encouraged to disengage from education, thus the use of the term “push out” as opposed to “drop out.” By purposefully switching the use of terminology from dropping out to pushing out, we help to demonstrate the shared responsibility for students leaving school rather than placing the blame solely on the shoulders of the students themselves, their families, and their communities.

Lack of engagement

A potentially key element of this phenomenon of pushing out may very well be linked to the historical ways in which schools have served to acculturate and assimilate American Indians into the dominant Western culture (e.g., Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2013). As a result of such practices, many parents, families, and communities view schools as cold and unwelcoming places; and they are reluctant to actively engage in them. Although schools are becoming more culturally aware and responsive, some educators continue to hold negative stereotypes of American Indian students. According to a former American Indian educator and school leader, American Indian students are often characterized by having low levels of self-efficacy for learning and success. As a result, educators perceive these students as apathetic. In response, many American Indian students resort to self-isolation due to feelings of inferiority or of not being as smart as the other students (D. Owens, personal communication, June 6, 2011). To reverse this trend, educators must find ways to encourage students to believe in themselves and their potential for success—a first, important step in combating the dropout/pushout crisis among American Indian students. According to Sinclair, Christenson, Lehr, and Anderson (2003), “Promoting school completion implies much more than the reduction of dropout rates. Preparation of youth for productive and meaningful participation in a community begins, for educators, with the promotion of students’ engagement in school and learning” (p. 39). In essence, if students see themselves being successful they will be more likely to remain in school.

Lack of transition planning

For those students who do persist until high school, there is still the potential to encounter a lack of formalized planning geared specifically toward life after school. This is an unfortunate oversight, given IDEA’s mandate that students with

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disabilities be provided transition planning and related services in preparation for their eventual graduation and transition out of school. While there is little documented evidence of neglect in this area, there unfortunately is anecdotal evidence of a lack of clearly planned and executed transition planning for American Indian students with disabilities. For example, a former transition coordinator noted that

. . . the utter lack of postsecondary transition planning that occurs within schools, even at the high school level, attributes to the students' inability to prepare [for] and believe they can succeed in the postsecondary settings. Studies have shown . . . that even for students with low incidence disabilities [e.g., autism, blindness, Deafness], proper transition planning and programming early in school increases their success for both graduation as well as postsecondary outcomes (J. Portley, personal communication, June 6, 2011).

If we want our students to be successful beyond school, we must begin preparing them for their eventual transition earlier rather than later. In working with students, we must demonstrate to them that we believe in them and their potential for success both in and outside of school. Without these positive, affirming messages, students are often not apt to see the benefit of staying in school until they graduate.

Examples of successful practices

On a positive note, there are schools where the graduation rate is increasing and the dropout rate is decreasing among American Indian students. One example is the Menominee Indian School District in Wisconsin,³ which incorporates students' cultures into the curriculum and encourages active and intensive family and community involvement in its schools. According to the superintendent, Wendell Waukau (2012),

About seven years ago, we began our school improvement journey. While academics are a focus, the effort extends far beyond academics to include healthy eating, physical activity, Menominee language and culture, and on-site health care services. The results include dramatic gains in graduation rates; improved student learning, test scores, student attendance and retention; and vastly improved student behavior.

In 2012, Mr. Waukau was recognized by the White House as a Champion of Change. When interviewed about this award, Mr. Waukau commented,

It is an honor to be recognized. It's an honor, I gladly share with everyone in our district. . . . In order to be successful in turning things around, you have to design your plans to fit your own community. We have certainly done that and the results in areas like higher graduation rates, better student retention and higher

³ For additional information, see www.misd.k12.wi.us/

test scores show our plan is working. We're not done yet, but it's great to have educational leaders recognize our efforts (White House Office of Communications, 2012).

Another example is the Lower Kuskokwim School District (LKSD) in Northwest Alaska. The schools within this district work with the National Dropout Prevention Center⁴ to provide E-mentoring for students most at risk, provide peer support, improve social competence, foster self-determination, and develop leadership skills.⁵ The dropout prevention model utilized in Lower Kuskokwim focuses on three remote Yup'ik Eskimo villages in rural and remote areas of Alaska. E-mentoring is utilized with students in grades four through eight who are considered to be at high risk for dropping out. E-mentoring helps to provide the mentoring and other interventions that students cannot otherwise receive because of the long travel distances and harsh weather conditions, which make it difficult for service providers to travel to these students and their schools. These types of interventions have resulted in increased attendance, decreased dropout rates, and a decrease in disciplinary infractions (Cash, 2011).

What is unique about these programs is that they incorporate the strengths of language and culture that many Indigenous students, their families, and communities bring to the process of education. However, although anecdotal evidence suggests that these interventions are making a positive difference in both the in-school and post-school outcomes for students, what is missing is empirical data to demonstrate to the educational research community, as well as to policymakers, that these interventions are in fact responsible for improving students' educational conditions and subsequent outcomes. Given the current climate at both the state and federal levels—a climate in which empirical research and related data are required to document impact—it appears that such evidence will continue to be called for in the years to come.

Although empirical evidence is important, it is equally important to recognize the utility of professional wisdom or “craft knowledge” (e.g., Whitehurst, 2002), what educators learn through the act of teaching and engaging with students, their parents, families, and communities. Given the lack of empirical research specific to American Indian students with disabilities, and an even greater lack of research specifically related to American Indian males, there are numerous instances in which practitioners are called upon to use their own professional knowledge of what works and does not work with their students. Much of this knowledge base about American Indians is informed, or should be informed, by the cultural underpinnings of the communities within which these students live and from which they come. Failure to incorporate such cultural knowledge into the teaching and learning process will most likely result in continued failure to appropriately and adequately educate these students (e.g., Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Demmert & Towner, 2003; Powers et al., 2003).

⁴ For additional information, see <http://www.dropoutprevention.org/about-us>

⁵ For additional information, see www.lksd.org/

Given the lack of empirical research specific to American Indian students with disabilities, and an even greater lack of research specifically related to American Indian males, there are numerous instances in which practitioners are called upon to use their own professional knowledge of what works and does not work with their students.

In establishing goals and expectations for students, educators are also encouraged to think critically about cultural conceptions and notions of what is behaviorally acceptable within American Indian communities and to work to incorporate these values into school policies.

Recommendations from the field

The importance of involving the community in these efforts to combat the graduation/dropout crisis prompted an informal query of a small number of individuals in the field of Indian education. This query was conducted via email and yielded a variety of responses similar to those presented in the literature and evidenced in working with American Indian parents, families, and educators across the nation. These findings are outlined in brief below.

1. There is an *ongoing need to establish an overall guiding framework from which a set of interventions and services can be developed*. This framework should be based on the five principles of culturally responsive pedagogy: respect, responsiveness, relevance, rigor, and research-based practices (Gay, 2000). In doing so, it is important to acknowledge and value what has been described as “craft knowledge” or professional wisdom (e.g., Whitehurst, 2002) rather than to rely solely upon what is typically defined as research-based practices. This is particularly important given the dearth of currently available empirical research that is specific to American Indian males with disabilities.
2. There is an *ongoing need to focus on the individual whole child by fostering physical, social, emotional/mental, and spiritual health and well-being*. If needed, efforts should be made to provide counseling and other supportive services for students, families, and community members. Supportive services may include assigning case managers to follow student progress and meeting with parents and family members throughout the year (J. Portley, personal communication, June 2, 2011).
3. There is an *ongoing need to hold high expectations for all students, to expect students to graduate and succeed, and to assist them in developing a plan to achieve their goals post high school*. Unfortunately, as one mother described, students are successful in spite of educators’ failure to see their gifts and talents:

My youngest son is LD [learning disabled]. He is also gifted. He took AP [advanced placement] classes and did well. The teachers did not have that [high] expectation of him because of the LD [learning disability] label. [Today] he has a recording business and has eight albums out and one on the way. He works two jobs and takes classes. He is two classes short of his AA. It has taken him a long time but he is getting there. He is 27 (D. Owens, personal communication, June 6, 2011).

In establishing goals and expectations for students, educators are also encouraged to think critically about cultural conceptions and notions of what is behaviorally acceptable within American Indian communities and to work to incorporate these values into school policies.

4. There is an *ongoing need to ensure the sustainability of programs and services aimed at improving the educational conditions and subsequent outcomes of American Indian children and youth*. Too often programs

and services have been implemented on a short-term basis and then terminated without allowing adequate time to assess the effectiveness of these interventions. For these programs and services to work, there must be adequate commitment of time, funding, and other resources needed to promote and document the success of these programs.

5. There is an *ongoing need to foster more active and involved parenting and parental involvement in the educational process*. For some parents, this will require intensive support from educators and other community members as they work to help parents see the relevance of schooling and how schooling relates to local/tribal cultures and traditions, as well as to the world beyond school (e.g., Robinson-Zanartu & Majel-Dixon, 1996).
6. There is an *ongoing need to diversify the teaching, administrative, and service provider ranks to more closely resemble the demographic characteristics of their students, schools, and communities*. This requires intensive recruitment, as well retention efforts, targeted at American Indian teachers (e.g., Tepper & Tepper, 2004). For American Indian males, it will also be important to identify male role models and mentors who can work with schools and students (e.g., Dianda, 2008). As Sauter and Sauter (2010) point out, the need to diversify the teaching ranks is critically important. Failure to train, recruit, hire, and retain a more culturally representative pool of educators threatens to increase the cultural discontinuity in the classroom. However, it is also important to note that teachers, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, must work to understand and relate to children from cultures other than the teachers' own. Without this understanding, there remains a strong potential for teachers to encourage the removal of students from their classroom through disciplinary, behavioral, and academic referrals, often resulting in misplacement or overrepresentation in special programs and services such as special education (e.g., Sauer & Sauer, 2010), due in large part to these teachers' lack of cultural competence.
7. There is an *urgent need to improve transition planning and related services* (Swanson, 2008). Although not specifically designed for use with American Indian students, Person Centered Planning (PCP) is one example of an inclusive method of engaging students with disabilities in planning for their own future. PCP encourages individual and family participation in planning for educational and social services. It is a process whereby families, service providers, community members, and the individual work together to identify barriers to successful community membership (Callicott, 2003). PCP has been shown to be an effective intervention in assisting students with disabilities, especially those from culturally diverse backgrounds.
8. There is an *ongoing need to examine discipline and academic placement rates and patterns, as well as attendance and in-grade retention rates as they are related to high dropout rates* (Dianda, 2008). This calls for increased efforts to carefully examine data for disparities based on gender, race/ethnicity, and other demographic factors.
9. There is an *ongoing need to work to restructure schools so that they are more conducive to increased graduation rates*. Research shows that schools that

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Although research with other student populations is available, it is important to point out that this general research does not always accurately capture nor reflect the unique academic, social, and emotional experiences of students with disabilities, unique experiences that often result in their dropping out, stopping out, or being pushed out of school.

successfully graduate students are (1) “personalized, (2) offer rigorous and relevant curricula and instruction, (3) provide substantive assistance to students” and “employ qualified instructional staff” (Dianda, 2008, p. 17). In effect, these schools are student centered, high-quality sites of teaching and learning.

Discussion

Given the overall lack of data detailing graduation and dropout rates among American Indian males with disabilities, there is the danger of educators, policymakers and others in positions of power to minimize this issue. Failure to contextualize this lack of data may make it appear that a graduation or dropout crisis does not exist among American Indian male students with disabilities; or worse yet, this failure may prevent American Indian males with disabilities from being adequately included in national conversations on this issue. This possibility raises fear among educators and community members, a fear that is not unfounded, as similar arguments have been used to minimize the need for research on American Indian students at large, resulting in these students being deemed the “asterisk population,” referred to only as a footnote in studies of educational conditions, aspirations, and attainment (e.g., Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013). Although research with other student populations is available, it is important to point out that this general research does not always accurately capture nor reflect the unique academic, social, and emotional experiences of students with disabilities, unique experiences that often result in their dropping out, stopping out, or being pushed out of school. Further, because research fails to include American Indian students, the field remains unaware of strategies for addressing the cultural and linguistic uniqueness that the students themselves, their families, and their communities bring to the learning experience and to the way these students approach school.

Barriers to educational persistence for American Indian students

It is apparent that there are numerous barriers that prevent American Indian students from graduating from high school. However, given the lack of research specific to this population, it is necessary to couple the available empirical evidence with anecdotal evidence to better understand this issue. Indeed, American Indian students’ failure to graduate from high school is multilayered, as outlined below:

- 1. The first layer deals with structural-, institutional-, and governmental-level barriers that deter a coordinated system/method of student tracking. To address these barriers, it is important to understand the unique context(s) within which the education of American Indian students takes place. Although a complete discussion of these context(s) is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is important to note the existence of a unique relationship between American Indian tribes and the federal government, resulting in the federal government assuming responsibility for the education of American*

Indian children as part of its federal trust responsibilities. In spite of this relationship, slightly less than 10 percent of American Indian students attend schools operated or funded by the Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) and tribes (National Indian Education Association, 2011). Some of these students migrate between BIE/tribal schools and public schools. Although the BIE acts as a separate school system it is subject to the standards established by the 23 states in which its schools are located. This variability makes it difficult not only to calculate and report data in an accurate and timely manner but to also ensure that school records follow the students who transfer out of or into BIE-funded or -operated schools. In turn, this has implications for the quality and timeliness of services provided to American Indian students. The ability to provide timely and appropriate services (e.g., provision of IEP-mandated services such as speech, language, occupational and physical therapies) is also compromised by a lack of long-term organizational and structural stability of these services within the BIE, with ripple effects felt at the regional and school level (e.g., United States Government Accountability Organization, 2013). It is also important to note that although the federal government holds trust responsibilities for American Indian tribes and the education of their students, this does not relieve individual states from their responsibilities to educate these students as well.

Another critically important example of an institutional barrier is high teacher turnover (National Indian Education Association, 2010). This is an issue faced by many of the schools serving American Indian students. As these schools tend to be located in rural, remote, and often impoverished areas, and they tend to be under resourced, these schools are often viewed as less attractive to prospective teachers than those schools located in more urban, affluent areas. Failure to adequately staff and resource schools has implications for the overall quality and continuity of services students receive (e.g., Reyhner, 2001), thus increasing their likelihood of not doing well in school.

2. *The second layer involves familial and community-level barriers* for promoting student success. Such barriers include lack of student support (e.g., financial, emotional, social), as well as a lack of community and parental engagement in schools, resulting in premature departure from school (e.g., Deyhle, 1989). For American Indian parents, failure to engage schools must be viewed and understood from a sociocultural lens that acknowledges the historical role of schools in working to limit the involvement of parents, families, and communities in their children's education, as schools worked to acculturate and assimilate American Indians (e.g., Mackety & Linder-VanBerschoot, 2008). As a result, schools have often been viewed as unwelcoming, thus limiting parental and community engagement. If this trend is to be reversed, schools must work to address the lingering effects of such policies and practices.
3. *The third layer involves student or individual-level barriers* related to personal responsibilities, such as parenting and high rates of student mobility/transiency (e.g., Beaulieu, 2000). Other student-level barriers

Because research fails to include American Indian students, the field remains unaware of strategies for addressing the cultural and linguistic uniqueness that the students themselves, their families, and their communities bring to the learning experience and to the way these students approach school.

The process of dropping out among American Indian males is multifaceted. It generally does not happen quickly nor will it be resolved quickly. However, if we are to begin to evidence positive movement in this fight to keep American Indian males with disabilities in school, we must do as Brown and Rodriguez (2009) recommend and begin considering how each of these factors interacts and serves to promote the act of dropping out and/or pushing students out of school.

include poor academic performance, absences from school/class, and behavioral referrals (e.g., Rumberger & Lim, 2008). For some students, these barriers are intensified by the lack of role models and mentors that help to foster their desire for higher academic goals and aspirations. As a former transition coordinator noted, “There is a great deal of literature suggesting students with higher self-determination rates (mostly of non-Native, but minority students) have higher completion rates. This lends itself to understanding personal characteristics such as persistence, self-efficacy level, self-awareness (weaknesses and strengths), individual identify, ability to plan, goal setting, value performance, and adjust behavior” (J. Portley, personal communication, June 6, 2011). Although self-determination implies that students are self-motivated to achieve or accomplish their goals, for many students the development of self-determination requires the initial support and assistance of others both within and outside the academic environment.

As discussed above, the process of dropping out among American Indian males is multifaceted. It generally does not happen quickly nor will it be resolved quickly. However, if we are to begin to evidence positive movement in this fight to keep American Indian males with disabilities in school, we must do as Brown and Rodriguez (2009) recommend and begin considering how each of these factors interacts and serves to promote the act of dropping out and/or pushing students out of school. We must also assume responsibility for the ways we as educators, researchers, policymakers, parents, community members, governments, and tribes have been complicit in allowing this situation to progress to this point. As numerous scholars have noted, we have a moral and ethical obligation to promote educational environments that are equitable for all students, regardless of their race, disability status, or gender (e.g., Frick, Faircloth, & Little, 2013; Frick & Faircloth, 2007). In sum, responding to the graduation/dropout crisis among American Indian males with disabilities requires collaborative, deliberate, and swift action from policymakers, educators, researchers, community members, families, and youth themselves.

Implications for Improved Practice

Policy Implications

Three of the most pressing issues related to the graduation/dropout crisis among students with disabilities are (a) the need to revamp disciplinary policies to better promote the inclusion rather than exclusion of students with disabilities from the regular education environment; (b) the need to streamline and clarify how graduation and dropout data are collected and reported so that there is increased accuracy in the reporting of these numbers across, schools, districts, and states; and (c) the need to mandate the disaggregation of data—by race and gender, in combination and in isolation—so that trends in graduation and dropout rates among even the smallest of minority groups, such as American Indians, may be more accurately determined and reported. Specifically:

1. At the local, state, and national levels, policymakers are strongly encouraged to revisit, reconsider, and revise discipline/behavior policies that serve to remove or encourage the removal of American Indian students with disabilities from the regular education environment (e.g., suspension and expulsion). For example, data indicate that African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians are more likely (by 67 percent) to be removed to an alternate setting (1999–2000 academic year) than White students (NEA, 2007). Such disparities have implications for students’ access to the general education curriculum as well as for opportunities to interact with their nondisabled peers. Although some schools have already begun to address this issue, too few have made significant progress. One exception is the Menominee Indian School District, one of several districts in Wisconsin working to provide alternatives to expulsion as well as supplemental supports to students who are expelled. The provision of such services is in keeping with IDEA’s requirement that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education. Alternatives to expulsion include “community service, short-term suspension with a behavior intervention plan, or other forms of in-school interventions” (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2009, p. 9). Students who are expelled may be eligible to receive tutoring, attend a community college, or complete a GED program. Social and emotional supports are also provided for the students and their families (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, 2009).
2. Overall, there is a pressing need to clearly define how we determine who is graduating, dropping out, or completing school. Currently, each of these acts falls under the term “exit.” According to Swanson (2008), exit is measured by the number of students who drop out, earn a diploma or alternate certificate, or age out of the educational system. This definition differs from the cohort model used to measure graduation and dropout rates among the general school-age population. Local and state education agencies need to dedicate sufficient resources (Swanson, 2008) to ensure ongoing, timely, and accurate collection, analysis, and dissemination of graduation/dropout-specific data among American Indian students with disabilities, in both public and BIE operated or funded schools.
3. Related to this, we must address the need for disaggregated data. According to Swanson (2008), although students with disabilities are included in most measures used to determine school and district-level attainment of adequate yearly progress, little attention is placed on the graduation rates for students with disabilities, particularly in the calculation of AYP (or “Adequate Yearly Progress,” a measurement of school academic progress mandated by the federal No Child Left Behind Act). This has two immediate implications. The first implication is at the school level, where schools may not see an immediate incentive to tackle disparities in graduation and dropout rates if they are not required to collect, report, and respond to the data by picking it apart by race, gender and disability type. The second implication is for researchers and

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While the first step to addressing the graduation/dropout crisis is to obtain accurate data, an important next step is to design and implement effective programs and practices aimed at increasing the number of students who stay in school and go on to graduate. Thus, at the school level educators need to ask the question: What are the essential characteristics of an effective dropout prevention program for American Indian males with disabilities?

policymakers who utilize data as they work to make arguments for or against the provision of services for students with disabilities and other at-risk groups. As evidenced in this chapter, it is impossible to obtain up-to-date data on the graduation and dropout rates specific to American Indian males as compared to their male and female counterparts. Without such data, we will remain unable to tell the true story. Having said this, it is important to recognize that there are certain risks inherent in disaggregating data with small populations (i.e., potential identification of students); however, such risks must be weighed against the potential risks of not having sufficient data to accurately portray the current status and trends of historically marginalized student groups.

4. In order for any of these recommendations to gain traction, we must make Indian education a priority at the local, tribal, state, and national levels. For years, educational programs and services for American Indian students have been provided in a fragmented and uncoordinated manner. Although the bulk of these students are primarily served by public school programs and services funded in part by the federal government and funneled down to the state and local school level, in many cases, students transition between public schools and BIE-funded or -operated schools with minimal to no coordination, collaboration, or consultation between the various entities charged with providing educational services and supports to these students. Transition is further complicated by a lack of coordination of services within and among the schools operated or funded by the BIE and tribes (e.g., United States Government Accountability Office, 2013), not to mention the lack of documented coordination of services within and among public schools and school districts.

School-level Implications

While the first step to addressing the graduation/dropout crisis is to obtain accurate data, an important next step is to design and implement effective programs and practices aimed at increasing the number of students who stay in school and go on to graduate. Thus, at the school level educators need to ask the question: What are the essential characteristics of an effective dropout prevention program for American Indian males with disabilities? In doing so, educators must move away from the notion that there is one set of strategies or interventions that will effectively meet the needs of all American Indian children and youth. Rather than attempting to implement wholesale intervention models or best practices, educators need to identify key elements (i.e., promising practices) of these interventions that may be effective when modified and implemented in accordance with local beliefs and practices. Niles (2007) describes “best practices” as those that incorporate one’s cultural identity and acknowledge the “roles, relationships, and responsibilities” (slide 15) that families play. In this sense, best practice is a fluid rather than static concept that is shaped in large part by local/tribal context and that incorporates “Native language, ceremonies, stories, dances, and art” (slide 15). While Niles’ argument supports the recognition of the local context, it is also important to recognize the potential

for the term “best practices” to promote the notion of a one-size-fits-all model. Thus, it is recommended that the term “promising practices” be used. This term encompasses the recognition that there is no single set of practices that works best for a student group as diverse as American Indians; rather, each effective or promising practice should be shaped in large part by the unique characteristics of the students, schools, and communities with whom and within which these practices are implemented. Such practices affirm the use of culturally responsive practices (e.g., Gay, 2000) that speak to the unique cultural and linguistic nuances of a diverse student population.

The use of promising practices also requires the design and delivery of culturally and linguistically appropriate and relevant instructional practices that incorporate such Indigenous values as relationship, reciprocity, and respect (e.g., Oakes & Maday, 2009). When these values are reflected in the philosophies and actions of schools and educators, they serve to build strong, healthy relationships and learning environments in which American Indian students can thrive. Such practices also help to promote strengths-based rather than deficit-based models of American Indian students and families by focusing on the funds of knowledge (e.g., Moll et al., 1992) these students, their families, communities, and tribes bring to the teaching and learning process. Failure to recognize these strengths serves to negate the fact that, in spite of high rates of poverty (Ogunwole, 2006), low levels of educational attainment (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010), poor health care (Indian Health Service, 2006), and a host of other social, emotional, and economic maladies (Ogunwole, 2006), American Indian people continue to survive and in many cases thrive. Regardless of what data indicate, we, as American Indians, are a resilient people with much to offer to the education of our children and youth.

Although this practices hold promise, it is important to reflect on the work of Garrett (1995) who points out that it is important to recognize the potential for cultural discontinuity between the school and the home/community. Responding to these issues requires work on the part of educators to become more aware of and responsive to students’ cultural practices and ways of knowing, thinking, and doing. Unfortunately, this does not readily occur. Given the wide array of cultural and linguistic diversity represented among the American Indian population (Ogunwole, 2006), it is critical for colleges of education, designers of professional development materials and trainings, and schools to work to increase the cultural competence of preservice and practicing educators. In doing so, teachers should be encouraged and supported to incorporate American Indian languages and cultures (as appropriate) into the development and implementation of educational practices and related interventions. Similar training involving effective intercultural communication should also be made available to educators. Such training and support must be ongoing both at the classroom level and in leadership ranks.⁶

Finally, schools are encouraged to develop and implement a process for early identification of those at risk of dropping out and a system to respond to these warning signs. As Reyhner (1992) points out,

⁶ For additional information, see the National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems.

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Although much of the attention given to dropouts focuses on high schools, students are deciding in the primary grades whether school is something for them. If they are failed, if they do not find school interesting, if school is something alien and foreign, then they are ‘at risk’ of dropping out (p. 53).

Research has shown that risk factors, such as delayed reading skills, high levels of absenteeism, in-grade retention, and poverty—all associated with dropping out of school—are often present in early school years. The early identification of students presenting with these factors can lead to the implementation of intervention programs, which may potentially lessen students’ likelihood of dropping out (APA, 2012).

Communities, Families, and Youth-Related Implications

In order for the educational system to better serve American Indian students, educators must be aware of the unique cultural and linguistic characteristics of these students, as well as the context(s) within which these students live and learn. To be successfully implemented and sustained, programs and services for American Indian students must be developed in concert with parents, families, communities, tribes, and other stakeholders (e.g., tribal organizations, tribal education departments, the National Indian Education Association, National Congress of American Indians, National Indian Health Board, Tribal Head Start Program, Office of Indian Education, Bureau of Indian Education, Urban Indian Centers Indian Health Service). This requires relationship building, fact finding, and the demonstration of a genuine desire to improve the educational conditions and subsequent outcomes for American Indian students and their communities. Dianda (2008) argues that the conditions that foster and sustain the act of dropping out of school are fundamentally local in nature; therefore, responses must be crafted at the local level. She urges us to recognize that dropping out is a cumulative process and does not occur over night. Remediation of the conditions that serve to promote low graduation and high dropout rates necessitates the development of an early warning system in which particular attention is paid to transition points within the lives of our children and youth. According to Dianda, this should include a “tiered prevention and intervention system” (p. 16) that is able to respond to the unique circumstances each student presents.

To understand and respond to the conditions that enable or inhibit American Indian student success in schools, we must honor the knowledge and voices of those who are most directly involved in the formal and informal education of these students and who have the most up-to-date, comprehensive, and accurate knowledge of the factors that shape the educational experiences of children and youth and the subsequent outcomes. A critical element of this work entails capturing students’ voices. Fine (1991) speaks specifically to the importance of seeking student input into the question of why students drop out or are pushed out of school. As she writes, “those most likely to leave high school prior to graduation carry with them the most critical commentary on schooling” (p. 73). As Smyth (2006) writes,

When students feel that their lives, experiences, cultures, and aspirations are ignored, trivialized, or denigrated, they develop a hostility to the institution of schooling. They feel that schooling is simply not worth the emotional and psychological investment necessary to warrant their serious involvement (p. 285).

Increased emphasis on listening to and responding to the concerns of students is an important step in empowering these students to reinvest and engage in their education. Ways in which to facilitate a greater presence of and power for the student voice include hosting student and community forums or listening sessions and respecting and valuing what we hear and learn from these students, their families, and communities.

Research Implications

Although the educational conditions and academic outcomes of American Indian students have been documented (e.g., Pavel & Curtin, 1997), there is limited empirical research detailing successful strategies and interventions aimed at improving the educational system and increasing the academic persistence and subsequent life outcomes of American Indian students, particularly those identified as having special educational needs (e.g., Faircloth, 2006). According to Orfield, Losen, Wald, and Swanson (2004),

The extremely low graduation rates of Black, Native American and Latino males cries out for immediate action informed by research. While the plight of minority male children is no secret in America, there is little research, intervention or accountability directed specifically at subgroups of minority males. Education policymakers need to use research and proven interventions more proactively to address the unacceptably high rates of school failure experienced by Black, Latino and Native American males (p. 16).

In response, researchers are encouraged to do the following:

1. Conduct further research to better understand the relationship between students' race/ethnicity and their likelihood of being identified as students with disabilities.
2. Conduct further research to better understand the relationship between students' socioeconomic status and their likelihood of being identified as students with disabilities.
3. Conduct further research to understand the relationship between the racial/ethnic composition of schools and the effect of this composition on students' likelihood of being identified as students with disabilities.
4. Conduct studies focusing on the location (e.g., rural versus urban) (Smoker Broaddus, 2008), racial/ethnic composition (e.g., low and high concentrations of American Indian students), school size, and socioeconomic status of the schools attended by American Indian students. We know that low income and diverse schools tend to have

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“Unless this situation [the dropout crisis] can be reversed, we will keep witnessing the terrible price paid by our youth as they fail to reach their promise within our education system” (p. 13). For American Indian students, this reversal calls for radical shifts in the way we educate students as well as in the way we engage their parents, families, and communities in this education.

poor academic outcomes (Dianda, 2008). Many of these schools are what Balfanz describes as dropout factories—schools that consistently yield poor academic outcomes and are characterized by high poverty and high numbers of racially and ethnically diverse schools (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). According to Balfanz (2008, cited in Dianda, 2008), 81 percent of all American Indian students attend schools characterized as dropout factories (p. 55). These schools are located across the nation, with approximately half in urban areas and the other half in the south and southwest (Balfanz, 2007).

5. Conduct studies that pay particular attention to the key transition points in the lives of American Indian males with disabilities (Smoker Broaddus, 2008), and the impact of these transitions on these students’ subsequent academic outcomes, including graduation and dropout rates.
6. Ensure that future research includes sufficient numbers of American Indian students to allow for disaggregation and reporting of data specific to this student group.
7. Identify and publicize existing dropout prevention strategies specific to American Indian males with disabilities that have been found to decrease the dropout rate among this population.

The next step is for researchers to work to disseminate their findings and to facilitate the translation of their research into practice at the school and classroom levels.

Conclusion

Although little is known about the educational experiences and subsequent academic, career, or social outcomes of American Indian students with disabilities, empirical and anecdotal data tell us that many of these students do not persist until high school completion or graduation. Failure to complete high school has far-reaching consequences for individuals, their communities, and their families. As Sum et al. (2009) so poignantly write,

There is an overwhelming national economic and social justice need to prevent existing high school students from dropping out without earning a diploma and to encourage the re-enrollment and eventual graduation of those . . . who have already left the school system (p. 16).

This issue is particularly urgent among American Indian students. For years, generations of American Indian students with and without disabilities have dropped out or been pushed out of school systems across this nation. Our challenge, as educators, community members, researchers, and policymakers is to work collaboratively to develop, implement, and sustain educational programs and services that support the successful retention and school completion of all students. Failure to do so places the future of these students and their communities at risk for social, economic, and other maladies (e.g., Faircloth &

Tippeconnic, 2010). As Klug and Whitfield (2008) caution, “Unless this situation [the dropout crisis] can be reversed, we will keep witnessing the terrible price paid by our youth as they fail to reach their promise within our education system” (p. 13). For American Indian students, this reversal calls for radical shifts in the way we educate students as well as in the way we engage their parents, families, and communities in this education. “By persisting to insist there is only one ‘right way’ way of doing things, that of the dominant culture, we continue to lose Native students from our schools” (Klug & Whitfield, 2008, p. 13).

Table 1

Percentage of American Indian students with disabilities, by disability type, exiting high school (2004–2005)^{1*}

	All Public schools ²		BIA ³ schools	
	% Dropped Out	% Graduated	% Dropped Out	% Graduated
Specific Learning Disability	27%	60%	51%	42%
Speech/Language Impairment	25%	65%	75%	*
Intellectual Disabilities ⁴	24%	35%	18%	15%
Emotional Disturbance	48%	40%	58%	33%
Other Health Impairments	25%	62%	58%	38%

Note: Asterisk () indicates total number of students with speech or language impairments not provided. Insufficient data provided on the following categories of disabilities: multiple disabilities, hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, autism, deaf-blindness, and traumatic brain injury.*

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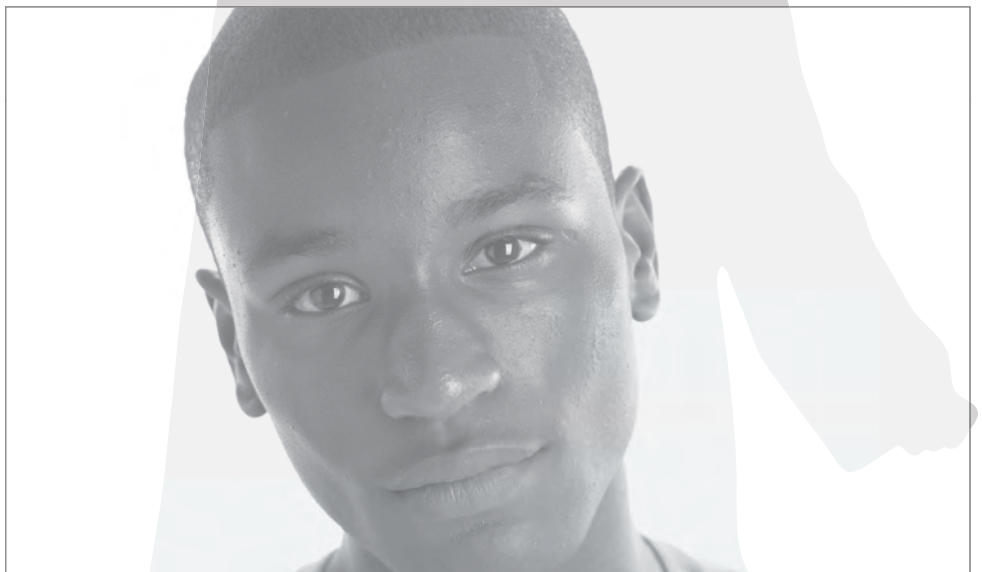
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Decreasing the Dropout Rates for African American Male Youth with Disabilities



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Author's Note

Unless otherwise noted, the data presented in this report were derived from Dr. Ivory A. Toldson's original analyses of secondary data.

If Black male ninth graders follow current trends, about half of them will not graduate with their current ninth-grade class (Jackson, 2010), and about 20 percent will reach the age of 25 without obtaining a high school diploma or GED (Ruggles et al., 2009).

Introduction

Today, approximately 258,047 of the 4.1 million ninth graders in the United States are Black males. Among them, about 23,000 are receiving special education services; and a health care professional or school official has told nearly 46,000 of them that they have at least one disability (Ingels et al., 2011). If Black male ninth graders follow current trends, about half of them will not graduate with their current ninth-grade class (Jackson, 2010), and about 20 percent will reach the age of 25 without obtaining a high school diploma or GED (Ruggles et al., 2009). Black males are no more likely to be diagnosed with a learning disability than Hispanic or White males (Adkison-Bradley, Johnson, Rawls, & Plunkett, 2006; Donovan & Cross, 2002), yet they are more likely than any other race or gender to be suspended, repeat a grade, or be placed in special education, and least likely to enroll in honors classes (Ingels et al., 2011).

The initial goal of this study was to explore strategies to decrease dropout rates for Black males with disabilities by analyzing antecedents to dropout across four domain areas: (1) personal and emotional, (2) familial, (3) social and environmental, and (4) school-related. Unfortunately, the existing literature is very limited in its exploration of dropout rates for African American males with disabilities. Research has shown that it is difficult to capture the unique experiences of African American males with disabilities due to misdiagnosis (Eitle, 2002; Harry & Anderson, 1994). Consequently, this study will explore the research literature of both African American males and African American males with disabilities to understand the dynamics that may exist within both populations and that influence their dropout patterns. In addition, this study analyzes achievement patterns of African American males with and without disabilities, using secondary data, to determine which factors might prevent them from dropping out of school.

Background and Significance of the Problem

Dropout among school-aged Black males is a systemic problem with far-reaching consequences for these individuals and for society in general. Black males who do not finish high school are more likely to live in poverty, be unemployed, and serve time in prison (Campbell, 2003). Failure to complete high school disproportionately affects Black male students. According to the Current Population Survey, the dropout rate among Black males is roughly twice the rate for White males (Chapman, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2010). Black males who drop out of school are more likely to live in poverty than White males who drop out (Toldson, 2010); yet prior to dropping out, Black males perform significantly better in school than White males who drop out (Toldson, 2008; Toldson & Lemmons, 2011).

Risk Factors

Researchers have found many risk factors associated with high school dropout among males. Among students of all races, being suspended frequently

(Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007) and being retained in a grade (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002; Stearns, Moller, Potochnick, & Blau, 2007) often precede dropping out of school. One study found that suspensions predict dropout among White males more precisely than for Black males (Lee, Cornell, Gregory, & Xitao, 2011). Also, higher-achieving Black male students are suspended at rates similar to lower-achieving White male students (Toldson, 2011). Nationwide, 59 percent of Black males have been suspended or expelled from school, compared to 24 percent of White males (Toldson, 2011). Further, grade retention predicted dropout among Black students more accurately than all other factors combined, and Black males are more than twice as likely to be retained in a grade than White males (Stearns et al., 2007).

Several studies found that socioeconomic distress in neighborhoods adversely affects the school productivity of Black males (Crowder & South, 2003; Vartanian & Gleason, 1999) and possibly influences their decision to drop out. Crowder and South (2003) conclude that exposure to neighborhood distress reinforces individual disadvantages. This distress exacerbates any disadvantage—such as a disability—that an individual might experience. As a result, a Black male with a disability is more likely to be more profoundly affected by the life stressors associated with neighborhood poverty than someone without a disability.

Some studies have traced the trajectory that leads to high school dropout to the first grade. One longitudinal study examined the developmental paths toward high school graduation or dropout for a cohort of 1,242 Black first graders from an urban community with a 50 percent graduation rate. For males, first-grade predictors of dropping out of high school included low grades and aggressive behavior. Another longitudinal study of elementary school students found that truancy, early drinking activity, parental poverty, and frequent school transfers were associated with high school dropout (Stroup & Robins, 1972).

Any involvement in the juvenile justice system also increases the likelihood that young Black males will drop out of high school (Keeley, 2006; Toldson, Woodson, Braithwaite, Holliday, & De La Rosa, 2010). Placement in a juvenile residential institution creates a serious disruption to already fragile academic progress.

Ninth-grade completion also affects chances that students will complete high school (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Indeed, nearly 40 percent of ninth-grade students in cities with the highest dropout rates repeated the ninth grade, and less than 15 percent of them graduated (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). According to Akos and Galassi (2004), 40 percent of students suffer serious problems after their transition to high school (Akos & Galassi, 2004). They concluded that transferring to a new school creates a transition period that is marked by declining academic performance, increased absences, and increased behavior disturbances. Nearly 40 percent of ninth-grade students in cities with the highest dropout rates repeated the ninth grade, and less than 15 percent of these grade-repeaters graduated (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Students who fail to make a successful transition to high school often drop out as early as the end of ninth grade (Cooper & Liou, 2007).

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Among students of all races, being suspended frequently (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007) and being retained in a grade (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002; Stearns, Moller, Potochnick, & Blau, 2007) often precede dropping out of school

Protective Factors

Research points to several factors that protect Black male students from dropping out of school. Having a mother with at least a high school education increases a male student's likelihood of graduating, even if that student performed poorly in first grade (Ensminger & Slusarcick, 1992).

Keeley (2006) found two factors that influenced school completion rates for those Black males involved in the juvenile justice system: their age on release and the presence of a school plan. The older the young men were when released, the more likely they were not to return to school. And unless a concerted plan was in place to help them return to school, these young men were not likely to complete their education. In general, Toldson et al. (2010) found that Black male youth were more likely to evince academic potential when they had a healthy level of self-esteem, adequate future goal orientation, positive mood, family and community involvement, fewer traumatic events, and less delinquent activity.

Finally, since ninth-grade completion improves the chances that students will finish high school (Stearns & Glennie, 2006), suggested solutions focus on linking successful high school juniors and seniors with eighth-grade students (particularly ones transitioning to the same school and/or from the same school); having ninth-grade orientation classes (like many colleges); and increasing interaction between middle and high schools (faculty and staff). Similar research by Kennelly and Monrad (2007) demonstrated that schools with operational transition programs have an average dropout rate of only 8 percent, while schools without these programs have a dropout rate of 24 percent.

Dropout Prevention

The literature has examined a few models and programs to prevent dropout among Black males. Specifically targeting a majority Black male sample of high school students with emotional or behavioral disabilities, one study used an experimental research design modeled after the "Check and Connect" intervention to examine the effectiveness of a long-term intervention to reduce dropout. The study found that persistent and targeted support for learning reduced dropout by 19 percent among Black males with disabilities (Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2005). Specifically, the program referred students to a continuous and systematic assessment of their school engagement (e.g., attendance, suspensions, grades, credits). In partnership with school personnel, family members, and community workers, the program also referred students to timely and individualized interventions that focused on students' educational progress.

Gaps in the Research

Most existing research operates out of a deficit model that focuses on problems instead of evaluating the strengths of Black males (Tucker & Herman, 2002). These deficit models diminish the relevance of resiliency among Black males who do graduate. Furthermore, the deficit model has worked to perpetuate the over identification and misdiagnosis of African American males for disability. In addition, a deficit model may fail to take into account possible environmental influences and instructional practice that can mitigate disadvantages.

Among other techniques, culturally responsive practices may benefit these students. Educating teachers and school personnel about cultural norms and processes could diminish the excuse of deficiency. Culturally responsive practices have been the answer for many Black psychologists for years; however, the ability to make these practices accessible and understandable to educators has been the challenge. Gay (2002) takes a step-by-step approach to explaining the integration of culturally responsive teaching into the classroom. More research is necessary to empirically measure the effectiveness of accurately implementing this kind of approach.

Regardless of the odds against them, many Black males with disabilities complete school. An exploration of the unique characteristics of African American male achievement in schools would provide greater depth of insight into factors that are also associated with high achievement among African American males with disabilities. A recent comprehensive review of the literature on educational research methodologies and race and school achievement called for “student-based inquiry” approaches to achievement and dropout prevention research (Wiggin, 2007).

The statistical findings presented in this report adhere to an edict among contemporary educational scholars to expand the scope and relevancy of research on African American students (Jackson & Moore, 2008; Spencer, 2005). Notably, Spencer (2005) indicated that informed research strategies should (a) expand the theoretical assumptions implicit in the work by employing strengths-based approaches and avoiding a narrow focus on risks factors, (b) eschew negative assumptions about African American youth and their families, and (c) acknowledge the presence of White privilege and its contribution to the achievement gap.

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The NCES estimates the current “event dropout” rates for Black students to be 6.4 percent, compared to 2.3 for White students.

Investigative Questions

This study examines the relationships between persistence in school and selected external factors among Black males in general, with a special focus on those with disabilities. Based on the literature, four factors have been empirically linked to dropout prevention in previous observations; these factors served as exploratory targets:

1. What is the prevalence of disability among school-aged Black males?
2. What personal and emotional factors, including emotional well-being/self-esteem, and future aspirations, are associated with Black males overcoming disability and persisting through high school?
3. What family factors, including parents’ education and parents’ relationship, are associated with Black males with disabilities persisting through high school?
4. What school factors, including perceptions of school, school policies and practices, and academic achievement, are associated with preventing dropout among Black males with disabilities?

Method

Sources of Data

This study used a variety of population surveys and nationally representative samples of middle and high school students, parents, teachers, and school administrators to answer research questions related to preventing dropout among Black males with disabilities. To determine the incidences and prevalence of dropout among Black males, we used the *American Community Survey (ACS)* of 2009 and the *Current Population Survey (CPS)* of 2009. Both datasets were assembled in the *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS)* for micro-level population data to be accessed with single queries using the computer program PDQ-Explore. In addition, three national surveys, the *Health Behavior in School-aged Children Survey*, *Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth*, and the *High School Longitudinal Study of 2009*, were used to determine the prevalence and burden of disability (i.e., its relationship to negative academic outcomes) and effective strategies to prevent dropout among school-aged Black males.

The first study included 6,490 Black, Latino, and White males (Black male N =1,351) who completed the *Health Behavior in School-aged Children Survey (HBSC)* (United States Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration, & Maternal and Child Health Bureau, 2008). The HBSC surveyed 11-, 13-, and 15-year-old children’s attitudes and experiences concerning a range of health-related behaviors. The World Health Organization (WHO) collected

data for the HBSC survey between 2001 and 2002. The survey employed a three-stage cluster design in which the school's county was the first stage, the school was the second stage, and the classroom was the third stage. The U.S. sample included 340 schools in a stratified, three-stage cluster sample of classes. Schools were stratified by racial/ethnic status and geographic region using data from the *National Center for Educational Statistics'* website.

The study also included data from 4,164 Black, White, and Hispanic males (Black male N = 703) who completed the survey, *Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth* (Johnston, Bachman, O'Malley, & Schulenberg, 2008). This data set included the responses of eighth and tenth graders regarding their values, behaviors, and lifestyle orientations. Data included is a subset of a larger data set. The original study used three stages. In Stage 1, researchers selected particular geographic areas; in Stage 2 they selected one or more schools in each area; and in Stage 3, they selected students within each school. The geographic areas used in this study are the primary sampling units (PSUs) developed by the researchers for nationwide interview studies. Selections of schools were made to ensure that the probability of drawing a school was proportionate to the size of its eighth- or tenth-grade class. Within each school, approximately 350 students were included in the data collection.

Finally, we analyzed 17,587 Black, Hispanic, and White male and female students (Black male N = 1,149) who completed the *High School Longitudinal Study of 2009* (HSLs). This study of the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, used a nationally representative sample of parents and children enrolled in kindergarten through twelfth grade. The sample acquired for this study was completed through the use of random digit dialing (RDD) telephone surveys of households. The HSLs reports on the condition of education in the United States by collecting data at the household level. The HSLs addresses homeschooling, school choice, types and frequency of family involvement in children's schools, school practices to involve and support families, learning activities with children outside of school, and the involvement of nonresidential parents (Ingels et al., 2011).

Analyses

This study used cross-tabulations to compare frequency and percentages of grade-school experiences across race and gender. The principle analytic technique used was a 3 x 4 factorial analysis of variance ANOVA, whereby three levels of race (Black males, with White and Latino males serving as comparison groups) and four levels of postsecondary expectations were tested for their independent main effects, as well as for interactions between race, gender, and achievement indicators. General linear modeling approaches were used to reveal differences in the relationship between postsecondary expectations and associated variables along race lines. The hypothesized relationships between postsecondary expectations and external measures were tested and accepted or rejected based on the p-value (tested at .01). Means plots are used for select variables to display the linear relationship between various indicators of academic achievement and hypothesized covariates, across races. The plots include a dashed reference line on the Y-axis that marks the estimated mean of the variable of interest. The

Health and wellbeing are associated with academic success among Black boys and girls. Black students who report higher levels of life satisfaction and rate their health to be good or excellent are also more likely to report good grades in school.

reference line is useful for determining the distribution of scores around the mean for various levels of academic achievement.

Key Findings

High School Dropout Among Black Males

New standards mandated by *No Child Left Behind* require states to use cohort comparisons when estimating graduation rates. Independent analyses of graduation rates, such as *The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males* (Jackson, 2010), estimates graduation rates by dividing the number of students receiving diplomas by the number of students beginning high school four years earlier. This method yields a national graduation rate of 47 percent for Black males and 78 percent for White males. According to the *American Community Survey* (ACS), in the United States, 80 percent of Black males have completed high school or obtained a GED (Ruggles et al., 2009). Forty-five percent of Black males have attempted college, and 16 percent of Black males have completed college (Ruggles et al., 2009).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) tracks dropout rates for the U.S. population using the *Current Population Survey* (CPS) (Chapman et al., 2010). The “event dropout” rate refers to the percentage of 15- through 24-year-olds in the United States who withdrew from grades 10 through 12 within the last 12-month period. The NCES estimates the current “event dropout” rates for Black students to be 6.4 percent, compared to 2.3 for White students. NCES uses the CPS to provide an estimate of the “status dropout” by surveying the proportion of the population who are between the ages of 16 and 24, who are not enrolled in school, and who have not earned a high school diploma or graduate equivalent. Current “status dropout” rate for Black males is 8.7 percent, compared to 5.4 percent for White males and 19.9 percent for Hispanic males (Chapman et al., 2010).

There are discrepancies between the graduation rate, dropout rate, and census estimates. When compared to census estimates, the graduation rate appears to overestimate failure, and the dropout rate seems to underestimate failure. However, the often-stated notion that more than half of Black males drop out, or do not graduate, is not true. From the CPS annual School Enrollment Survey, we can estimate that among the half of Black males not graduating with their cohort, 5.8 percent earned a GED (Bureau of the Census for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). Using the ACS, we can estimate that approximately 12 percent of Black males are graduating late (Ruggles et al., 2009). Therefore, if we use the census estimate of noncompletion for Black males (20 percent), we can account for about 38 percent of the 53 percent who are not graduating with their cohort. The remaining 15 percent is likely due to random error, including students transferring to schools outside of their district.

The relationship between health and wellbeing and academic success among Black students

Health and wellbeing are associated with academic success among Black boys and girls. Black students who report higher levels of life satisfaction and rate their health to be good or excellent are also more likely to report good grades in school. The *Health Behavior in School-aged Children* (HBSC) survey asked two questions that assessed students' emotional wellbeing and health. The first question read: "Here is a picture of a ladder. The top of the ladder '10' is the best possible life for you and the bottom '0' is the worst possible life for you. In general, where on the ladder do you feel you stand at the moment?" The average rating among all Black students was about 7.75. This average increases among students with higher grades in school, and declines among students with lower grades. For boys and girls, the relationship between grades and life satisfaction is statistically significant ($F = 30.6$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$).

The second question on the HBSC survey read: "Would you say your health is . . . ?" The response options were 1=poor; 2=fair; 3=good; and 4=excellent. Again, students with better health reported higher levels of academic success. For boys and girls, the relationship between grades and life satisfaction was statistically significant ($F = 19.1$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$); however girls were significantly more likely to report health problems.

The HBSC also included a survey for principals and other school administrators of schools educating the sample of 2,985 Black students from across the United States. Findings indicated that while most schools offer some form of mental health service, fewer schools offer services for specific mental health challenges, such as family services, drug treatment, and counseling for depression and stress. Table 1 provides a complete list of the mental health services, in order of their availability, reported to be available at schools educating Black students. Student health and well-being is significantly influenced by the availability of school supports and services.

Table 1
Survey of Mental Health Services at Schools Educating Black Students

*Does your school offer the following services?**

- Mental and social services (97.7%)
 - Individual counseling (97%)
 - Behavioral or social problems help at school (88.9%)
 - Crisis intervention for personal problems (81.8%)
 - Group counseling (78.3%)
 - Referral for physical, sexual, emotional abuse (78%)
 - Peer counseling or mediation (75%)
 - Counseling of anxiety or depression (68.3%)
 - Intake evaluation comprehensive assessment (60.3%)
 - Family counseling (58.7%)
 - Self help or support groups (58.7%)
 - Job readiness program (38.4%)
 - Stress management (36.3%)
 - Alcohol or drug treatment (27.0%)
 - Eating disorders treatment (23.4%)
-

*Figure in parentheses indicates the percentage of school administrators responding "yes."

Estimates from the HSLs indicate that Black males are no more likely to be diagnosed with a disability than Hispanic or White males; however they are significantly more likely to be assigned to special education classes and have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

The prevalence and burden of disability among school-aged Black males

The HSLs queried parents regarding whether a doctor, health care provider, teacher, or school official ever told them that their ninth-grade son or daughter had (a) a learning disability, (b) developmental delay, (c) autism, (d) hearing/vision problem, (e) bone/joint/muscle problem, (f) intellectual disability, or (g) attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Estimates from the HSLs indicate that Black males are no more likely to be diagnosed with a disability than Hispanic or White males; however they are significantly more likely to be assigned to special education classes and have an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Males of all races are more likely to have a disorder than females. When comparing within group, Black males are most likely to be diagnosed with a “learning disability” or “ADD/ADHD.” Table 2 provides the percent of Black, Hispanic, and White male and female ninth-grade students with specific disabilities in the United States.

Table 2
Percent of Black, Hispanic, and White male and female ninth-grade students with specific disabilities in the United States

	Male			Female			Total
	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic	White	
Learning Disability	9.0%	9.1%	8.2%	5.1%	5.7%	5.2%	6.9%
Developmental Delay	5.3%	4.0%	4.0%	3.2%	2.1%	2.3%	3.3%
Autism	.9%	.7%	1.4%	.9%	.4%	.3%	.8%
Hearing/Vision	.7%	2.5%	2.5%	.8%	2.4%	1.5%	1.9%
Bone/Joint/Muscle	3.3%	2.8%	1.5%	1.2%	1.9%	2.3%	2.1%
Intellectual Disability	.6%	.3%	.5%	.2%	.2%	.2%	.3%
ADD or ADHD	9.1%	5.9%	13.0%	3.6%	2.0%	5.4%	7.4%

Note: Uses the student base weight. Among questionnaire-capable students (n = 17,587). Question wording: “Has a doctor, health care provider, teacher, or school official ever told you that [your 9th grader] has any of the following conditions?”

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSLs:09) Base Year. Analyzed by Dr. Ivory A. Toldson, senior research analyst, Congressional Black Caucus Foundation, associate professor, Howard University

The HSLs asked parents a variety of questions related to their ninth-grade child’s potential to complete high school. For this study, we selected questions that could be objectively assessed and that had sufficient research evidence showing that the variable is related to high school completion (see Table 3). When comparing each variable across race and gender, we found that Black males are at the greatest risk for not completing high school. Specifically, Black males are more than twice as likely to repeat a grade and be suspended or expelled from school as White males. Black males were also more likely to receive special education services and have an IEP, and the least likely to be enrolled in honors classes. Parents of Black male students were the most likely to have the school contact them because of problems with their son’s behavior or performance. Table 3 displays the percent of Black, Hispanic, and White male and female ninth-grade students with specific school experiences in the United States

Table 3

Percent of Black, Hispanic, and White male and female ninth-grade students with specific school experiences in the United States

	Male			Female			Total
	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic	White	
Honors course	14.5%	18.1%	27.1%	22.4%	20.5%	33.3%	25.6%
Repeated a grade	17.9%	13.7%	8.1%	13.7%	7.4%	5.6%	9.2%
Special Education	9.1%	6.9%	8.8%	3.3%	3.8%	5.3%	6.5%
Suspended or expelled	24.7%	13.7%	10.4%	14.5%	6.9%	3.7%	9.8%
IEP*	14.7%	11.8%	12.6%	5.5%	6.4%	7.2%	9.7%
Problem behavior**	34%	29%	19%	23%	16%	9%	19%
Poor performance***	26%	25%	22%	17%	14%	12%	18%

Note: Uses the student base weight. Among questionnaire-capable students (n = 17,587). *having an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), **having the school contact the parent about problem behavior, ***having the school contact the parent about poor performance.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSL:09) Base Year.

When assessing dropout risk factors by disability among Black males, findings suggest that having a disability increased the odds that a Black male will repeated a grade, receive special education services, or be suspended, and decreased their odds of being in honors classes. Notably, Black males with disabilities are not completely absent from honors classes. Among the approximately 40,000 Black male ninth graders currently in honors classes, 2.5 percent have a learning disability, 3.3 percent have autism, and 6 percent have ADHD. Table 4 shows the percentage of Black males with specific disabilities who repeat a grade, receive special education services, have been suspended, and enroll in honors classes.

Table 4

Percent of Black males with specific disabilities who repeat a grade, receive special education services, have been suspended, and enroll in honors classes

	Repeated a Grade		Special education		Honors Classes		Have been suspended	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Learning Disability	51.2%	48.8%	73.2%	25.1%	4.2%	95.8%	47.3%	48.4%
Developmental Delay	38.8%	61.2%	64.9%	33.9%	7.6%	92.4%	44.5%	48.3%
ADD or ADHD	33.0%	67.0%	33.9%	65.2%	11.6%	87.5%	51.8%	48.2%

Note: Uses the student base weight. Among questionnaire-capable students (n = 17,587).

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSL:09) Base Year.

After flagging all ninth graders in the HSL:09 whose parents indicated that their child had a disability, the data were coded for all students with and without a disability. In addition, using six of the seven dropout risk factors found in Table 3 (enrollment in honors courses excluded), a variable was constructed to indicate

When assessing dropout risk factors by disability among Black males, findings suggest that having a disability increased the odds that a Black male will repeated a grade, receive special education services, or be suspended, and decreased their odds of being in honors classes.

the number of dropout risk factors each student had. Across all students, 52 percent did not have any risk factors and less than 20 percent had more than two of the six risk factors. Although the mean number of risk factors was 1 for all students, the mean number for Black males was 2.2. Across all races and genders, students with a disability were at a significantly higher risk for having one or more specific risk factor of dropping out. The mean number of risk factors for all students without disabilities was less than 1. However, for students with disabilities the mean number of risk factors was 2.5. Black males with disabilities had the highest mean number of risk factors with 3.7 (see Figure 1).

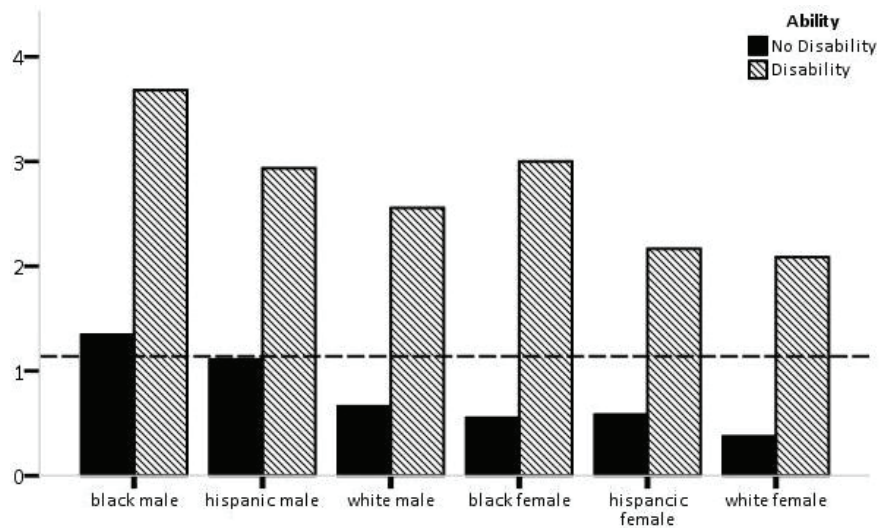


Figure 1: Mean number of risk factors for ninth grade students with and without disabilities across race and gender.

Note: Scale of measurement is 0 = No specified risk factors - 6 = All specified risk factors. Risk factors measured include (1) repeating a grade, (2) being suspended or expelled from school, (3) having the school contact the parent about problem behavior, (4) having the school contact the parent about poor performance; (5) receiving special education services; and (6) having an IEP Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Uses the student base weight. Among questionnaire-capable students (n = 17,587).

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics. High School Longitudinal Study of 2009 (HSL:09) Base Year.

Dropout risk and protective factors among Black males

Responses of Black males in a national sample of 8,465 eighth and tenth graders who completed the *Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth* questionnaire in 2008 were examined to determine differences between those expecting to drop out before completing high school and others who expected to graduate from college, pursue vocational/technical training, or join the armed forces. Table 5 displays the percentage of students who indicated their postsecondary education expectations across gender and race groups. In general, males were more likely to expect to eventually drop out than were their female counterparts. Hispanic males were the least likely to expect to graduate from college and the most likely to expect to drop out. The percentage of Black males expecting to graduate from a four-year college was lower than that of White males but higher than the percentages for Hispanic males.

Compared to White males, Black males were more likely to expect to go to vocational or technical school. However, as indicated in Table 6, Black males were less likely to participate in vocational or technical preparation programs at school. Black males and females were also less likely to indicate that they were enrolled in a college preparatory curriculum at school, compared to White males and females. Black and Hispanic students were more likely than White students to be unsure about the nature of their current high school curriculum.

Table 5
Postsecondary education expectations among Black, White, and Hispanic male and female 8th and 10th graders

	Drop Out	Voc/Tech	Military	4yr College
Black Male (N = 556)	2.3%	32.7%	19.6%	45.3%
Black Female (N = 581)	1.4%	36.0%	11.5%	51.1%
White Male (N = 2244)	1.1%	25.8%	28.8%	44.3%
White Female (N = 2353)	.8%	23.9%	7.3%	68.0%
Hispanic Male (N = 549)	6.2%	34.6%	31.3%	27.9%
Hispanic Female (N = 566)	3.2%	41.0%	14.8%	41.0%
Total	1.7%	28.5%	18.3%	51.5%

Data retrieved from *Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth* (Johnston, Bachman, O'Malley, & Schulenberg, 2008).

Table 6:
Secondary education programs among Black, White, and Hispanic male and female 8th and 10th graders

	College Prep	General	Voc/Tech	Other/DK
Black Male (N = 658)	37.4%	21.4%	5.9%	35.3%
Black Female (N = 680)	39.7%	17.9%	3.8%	38.5%
White Male (N = 2716)	42.1%	22.6%	6.2%	29.1%
White Female (N = 2855)	48.7%	20.8%	2.1%	28.4%
Hispanic Male (N = 683)	28.0%	20.4%	5.9%	45.8%
Hispanic Female (N = 719)	28.5%	19.5%	4.2%	47.8%
Total	41.5%	21.0%	4.4%	33.1%

Data retrieved from *Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth* (Johnston, Bachman, O'Malley, & Schulenberg, 2008).

Multivariate analyses were used to explore school-related, personal and emotional, and familial factors that were hypothesized to have a relationship with postsecondary expectations among school-age Black males.

School-related Factors (Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth)

When rating all variables tested across the three domain areas explored (school, family, and motivations), current grades in school had the strongest association with dropout expectations ($F = 51.1$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$) and the frequency of disciplinary referrals had the second highest ($F = 41.0$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$). However, comparisons by race suggested that level of academic achievement did not predict dropout for Black males as clearly as it did for White males. White college aspirants outperformed Black college aspirants, but Black males expecting to drop out outperformed White males expecting to drop out (see Figure 2a). When comparing students' number of disciplinary referrals, Black

Overall, the findings on school-related factors indicate that Black male students who expected to drop out of high school were considerably more prone to express disillusionment with school and exhibit more disciplinary problems. On the other hand, Black male students who aspired to go to college had more positive attitudes toward school and were less likely to experience disciplinary referrals.

... parents who were particularly successful in preventing their children from dropping out monitored and helped with their children's homework and placed reasonable limits and restrictions on behavior...

students who expected to drop out of school were much more likely to have been referred to the principal's office for disciplinary reasons (see Figure 2a).

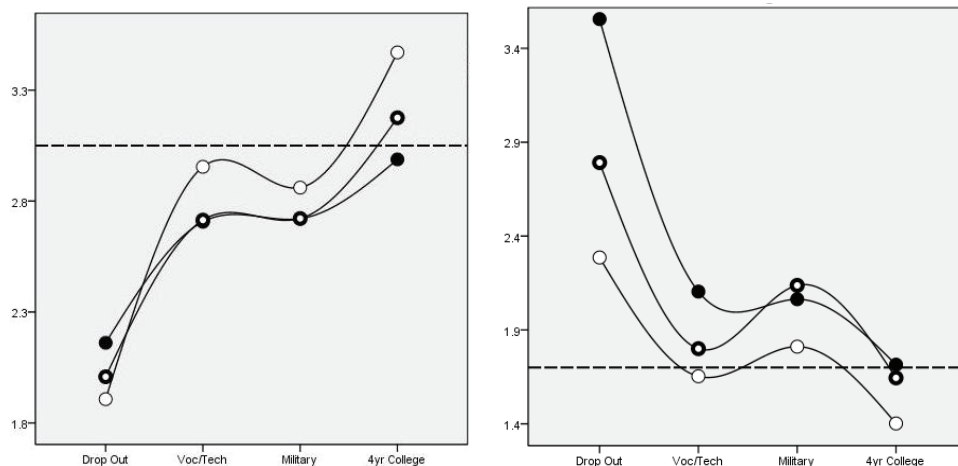


Figure 2a & 2b: Means plots of race (separate plots) and post secondary education plans (X Axis) on school factors (Y Axes) among Black, Hispanic, and White 8th and 10th graders.

Note: ● = Black students; ○ = Hispanic students; and ○ = White students. The dashed reference line on the Y-axis marks the estimated mean of the dependent variable.* Grades were recorded with responses to the question, "Which one of the following best describes your average grade in this school year?" Respondents selected one of the following options: (1) an "A+", "A" or "A-minus" average; (2) a "B+", "B" or "B-minus" average; (3) a "C+", "C" or "C-minus" average; and (4) a "D" or less than a "D" average.** The question read, "Now thinking back over the past year in school, how often did you get sent to the office, or have to stay after school, because you misbehaved?" The response options were: 1="never"; 2="seldom"; 3="sometimes"; 4="often"; and 5="almost always."

Overall, the findings on school-related factors indicate that Black male students who expected to drop out of high school were considerably more prone to express disillusionment with school and exhibit more disciplinary problems. On the other hand, Black male students who aspired to go to college had more positive attitudes toward school and were less likely to experience disciplinary referrals. Findings related to disciplinary referrals pointed to a trend, with Black college aspirants receiving disciplinary referrals about as frequently as White males who aspire to pursue the military or vocational education.

Family Factors (Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth)

Findings on family factors demonstrate that positive modeling and sufficient resources play an important role in preventing dropout among Black adolescent males. Mothers' ($F = 21.8$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$) and fathers' ($F = 15.9$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$) level of education significantly impacted the students' expectations to complete high school. Those parents who were particularly successful in preventing their children from dropping out monitored and helped with their children's homework and placed reasonable limits and restrictions on behavior ($F = 13.7$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$).

Personal and Emotional Factors
(Monitoring the Future: A Continuing Study of American Youth)

Findings on mental health, wellness, and motivational factors revealed unique interpersonal patterns and emotional attributes associated with postsecondary expectations among school-age Black males. Specifically, compared to students planning to drop out of school, college aspirants felt more positive about their lives ($F = 43.2$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$), and exhibited less aggressive ($F = 23.9$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$) and delinquent behaviors ($F = 8.4$; $df = 3$; $p < .001$). Notably, Black males who expected to drop out of school had a significantly lower rating of self-worth when compared to Hispanic and White males who expected to drop out (see Figure 3a & 3b).

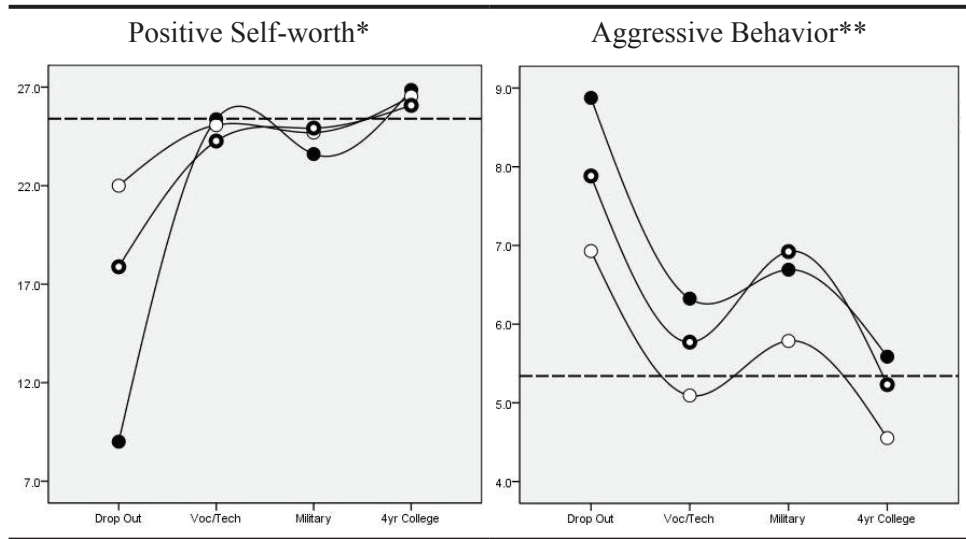


Figure 3a & 3b: Means plots of race (separate plots) and postsecondary education plans (X Axis) on personal and emotional factors (Y Axes) among Black, Hispanic, and White 8th and 10th graders. Note: ● = Black students; ◐ = Hispanic students; and ○ = White students. The dashed reference line on the Y-axis marks the estimated mean of the dependent variable. * The following items, with corresponding factor loadings, were derived from PCA: (1) I enjoy life as much as anyone; (2) On the whole, I'm satisfied with myself; (3) I take a positive attitude toward myself; (4) I feel I am a person of worth, on an equal plane with others; (5) It feels good to be alive; and (6) I am able to do things as well as most people. The response choice for each item was 1="disagree"; 2="mostly disagree"; 3="neither"; 4="mostly agree"; and 5="agree," and the range for the sum of the items was between 6 and 30. ** The following items, with corresponding factor loadings, were derived from PCA: (1) how often have you gotten into a serious fight in school or at work? (.77); (2) taken part in a fight where a group of your friends were against another group? (.77); (3) how often have you hurt someone badly enough to need bandages or a doctor? (.74); and (4) how often have you run away from home (for more than 24 hours)? (.48). The response choice for each item was 1="not at all"; 2="once"; 3="twice"; 4="3 or 4 times"; and 5="5 or more times." The range for the sum of the items was 4, indicating the respondent never engaged in the specified aggressive behaviors over the last 12 months, and 20, indicating that during the past year, the student participated in each of the behaviors 5 times or more.

Data from this study reveal a connection between disability and negative school outcome for Black males. Having a disability increases the odds that Black males will repeat a grade, receive special education services, or be suspended; and having a disability decreases the odds of these students being in honors classes.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to explore strategies to decrease dropout rates for Black males with disabilities by analyzing antecedents to dropout across four domain areas: personal and emotional, familial, social and environmental, and school-related. As stated, more than 50 percent of Black male high school students do not graduate with their cohort and about 20 percent drop out of high school. Black males are more than twice as likely to repeat a grade and be suspended or expelled from school as White males. Black males are also more likely to receive special education services and have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and the least likely to be enrolled in honors classes. Data from this study reveal a connection between disability and negative school outcome for Black males. Having a disability increases the odds that Black males will repeat a grade, receive special education services, or be suspended; and having a disability decreases the odds of these students being in honors classes.

The surveys analyzed also indicated that Black males who rate their general health and wellbeing to be lower than that of their peers are also more likely to report lower levels of academic success. While most schools surveyed report offering mental health services, less than half offer family services, drug treatment, and counseling for depression and stress—the very supports that would help Black males develop a more positive sense of health and wellbeing.

When surveying parents about their child's experience with health professionals, this study found that Black males are no more likely to be diagnosed with a disability than Hispanic or White males. However the burden of disability (i.e., its relationship to negative academic outcomes) was the highest for Black males. Among Black males with disabilities, most are diagnosed with a learning disability or ADD/ADHD. Black males were significantly less likely to be indicated for hearing and vision problems than Hispanic and White males, which may indicate diagnostic biases. For example, a Black male who is underachieving because of difficulties seeing or hearing may be misdiagnosed with a learning or behavioral disorder.

Black males who are less likely to drop out had parents who monitored and helped with their homework and who placed reasonable limits and restrictions on behavior; these males had a positive self-worth and attitude about life in general.

Survey data indicated fewer opportunities for Black males to achieve in school. Black males were less likely than White males to participate in college preparatory or vocational/technical programs. Compared to Black females, Black males are significantly more likely to expect to drop out of school. Black males' school experiences are also complicated by excessive suspensions.

Some studies suggest that common dropout risk factors do not predict dropout for Black males with the precision that it does for White males. For instance, frequency of suspensions has a much stronger association with dropping out (Lee et al., 2011) and delinquency (Toldson, 2011) for White males than it does for Black males. However, the larger implication of this finding is very unsettling:

while the act of suspension is reserved for the most deviant White male students, suspensions appear to be interwoven into the normal fabric of Black males' school experiences.

The following policy and practice implications are based on the findings of this study.

Policy Implications

Educational policy is needed to address and correct unfair applications of zero tolerance disciplinary policies and racial inequities in enforcing school disciplinary measures. Stark racial differences were found in suspensions and disciplinary referral rates among the racial groups in this study. Policymakers should consider implementing systems of regular and consistent monitoring and analysis of disciplinary referrals to improve precision, accuracy, fairness, and equity in the application of disciplinary measures.

The U.S. Department of Education can also play a key role in helping states develop systems, strategies, and policies to ensure that school leaders and teachers understand the importance of, and have the resources and support to create, positive learning environments for students. Specifically, school and community leaders can focus on the Assistant Deputy Secretary for Safe and Drug-free Schools' work around state indicators to ensure that the major findings on dropout prevention at school are fully accounted for in the lowest-performing schools.

Practice Implications: Schools

Professional development programs should recognize the significant contribution of school engagement to school outcomes by implementing strategies for improving student experiences and connections with school. This study found low and failing grades to be the strongest predictor of dropout across racial groups. Implementing school-based programs designed to promote positive school experiences and school connectedness may promote higher levels of student engagement (Shah, 2013), which would in turn reduce dropout.

A broader understanding of the true nature of disabilities would give educators a better understanding of how Black students with disabilities can remain and excel in school. Importantly, a disability does not have to be debilitating. For instance, a learning disorder may be more aptly described as an alternative learning style. For some students, mastering an alternative learning style will give them a competitive edge over students who are average "standard" learners. Visual learners could master the art of using pictures to encode lessons in their memory or use "concept mapping" to invigorate mundane text.

Similarly, while some easy-to-bore ADD and ADHD students have an impulse to create the havoc necessary to stimulate their insatiable nervous system, others may use their urges to energize the lessons. They may interject humor and anecdotes, or push the teachers to create analogies. While they may have difficulty processing large volumes of dense text, they may be the best at taking discrete concepts and applying them creatively to novel situations.

Stark racial differences were found in suspensions and disciplinary referral rates among the racial groups in this study. Policymakers should consider implementing systems of regular and consistent monitoring and analysis of disciplinary referrals to improve precision, accuracy, fairness, and equity in the application of disciplinary measures.

Restorative justice is one strategy that has been implemented in schools across the nation. Promoting accountability and school community, restorative justice employs interventions that encourage students to engage in more cooperative behavior. In addition, strategies for improving school engagement and decreasing the number of disciplinary actions taken against males of color should include efforts to promote parental involvement, create structured environments and school-wide discipline programs, and cultivate mutual respect between teachers and students.

Practice Implications: Connections Among Communities, Schools, Families, and Youth

Policies are needed to expand school- and community-based dropout prevention programs that promote high academic achievement, positive attitudes toward school, pro-social skills, character building, and school engagement. The results of this study suggest a significant relationship between delinquency and aggressive behaviors and the expectations to drop out among Black males. Schools and neighborhoods should enact policies that build connections between schools and communities to improve feelings of security and reduce difficulties with trust among school-age Black males.

Black males are far more likely to feel unsafe in their neighborhoods and have difficulty trusting their neighbors, which ultimately affect their academic performance. Increasing funding for community centers and providing incentives for community-based organizations to monitor students' grades, visit the schools, and mentor children can help to reduce delinquency and improve academic success (Toldson, 2011). Federal legislators should increase investments in Promise Neighborhoods, an approach to providing academic and developmental support to children and youth and ensuring that they are fully engaged, both in the classroom and in activities designed to foster resilience and deepen their appreciation for their environment (Bernstein, 2012).

Educational policy should increase attention to parent involvement in children's learning experiences. Tax breaks and other incentives could be given to parents who devote a certain number of hours to parent-teacher associations and volunteering at the school. In addition, school policies should incorporate parent involvement practices, such as having parents "sign-off" on homework and providing all parents with a parent handbook that details ways of getting involved in their child's education.

Since Black males who are more likely to drop out exhibit higher levels of hopelessness and lower feelings of self-worth than their peers, counseling and mental health services at the school should be strengthened to address these feelings and mitigate the negative effects of disciplinary referrals. Students often misbehave because of treatable mental health and adjustment problems, including depression, attention deficits, and acute stress and trauma reactions. School resources and personnel to help students cope, including counselors, social workers, and recreational therapists, can improve student behavior and reduce suspensions and disciplinary referrals. The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education should continue its investments in technical assistance to help states prevent dropout and increase graduation for students with disabilities.

Limitations and Need for Further Research

There are several limitations that must be considered within the context of the findings. First, since data were gathered from large national surveys about socially desirable attributes, some students may have used impression management during self-report procedures. Although all surveys were confidential, some respondents may have embellished grades or other information to present their abilities and achievements more favorably. In addition, the surveys were all lengthy and solicited information beyond this study's scope. The length may have created some fatigue and led to "yea-saying" or "nay-saying," whereby respondents may have selected only the positive or negative answers on the survey.

Importantly, having or not having a disability is not a rigid category. Most, if not all, people have some characteristics of one or more disability. We all have different attention spans, levels of anxiety, susceptibility to distraction, social acuity, and so forth, all of which are controlled by our past and present circumstances as well as our unique biochemical makeup. Many Black students who end up in special education or who are retained in school do not have a disability. Rather, there are circumstances in their lives that spur behavior patterns that are not compatible with the school environment. Situation-specific symptoms will usually remit with basic guidance and structural modifications to a person's situation.

In school settings, from the standpoint of disabilities, students can be divided into four categories:

- 1) A true negative: children who do not have a disability and have never been diagnosed
- 2) A true positive: children who have a disability and have been accurately diagnosed
- 3) A false negative: children who have a disability but have never been diagnosed
- 4) A false positive: children who do not have a disability but have been diagnosed with one; *or* who have a specific disability and are diagnosed with the wrong one.

Many problems are associated with false negative and false positive diagnoses. A child with an undiagnosed disability might experience less compassion from others and no accommodations for learning or behavioral challenges. A child with a genuine but undiagnosed learning disorder, for example, might be expected to maintain the same pace of learning as other students and be penalized with suspensions for opposing an incompatible learning schedule or process. False positive children may be relegated to a learning environment that is not stimulating or challenging. There is research evidence that Black males are more likely than students of other races to have false negative and false positive diagnoses due to culturally biased assessments, unique styles of expression, and environmental stressors (Eitle, 2002; Harry & Anderson, 1994).

Future research examining dropout prevention among Black males with disabilities needs to connect instructional practices with teacher behaviors that

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Exploring the question, “how Black males with disabilities end up in honors classes, while others without disabilities end up in special education” may help us to gain a better understanding of an enduring problem as well as reveal hidden solutions for optimizing education for school-aged Black males.

serve as protective factors. Teachers need research that provides them with specific strategies to offset risk factors associated with dropping out (e.g., reduce problem behaviors and suspensions, increase engagement and belongingness).

Conclusion

Studies of Black males with disabilities who end up in honors classes show that Black males with and without disabilities can excel in schools that provide adequate opportunities to learn and a structure that supports personal and emotional growth and development. On the other hand, schools that view disability and emotional adjustment difficulties as enduring pathologies and that permanently segregate students with these challenges from “normal” students will stunt academic growth and development. For example, the nearly 5,600 Black male ninth graders with a history of disability who are currently enrolled in honors classes likely benefitted from patient and diligent parents who instilled a sense of agency within them and from compassionate teachers who accommodated diversity among learners. These ninth graders are also likely to have experienced some protection from adverse environmental conditions, such as community violence, which can compound disability symptoms.

While we cannot ignore the injustices in many schools, these injustices should not overshadow the hope and promise of the Black male students that is demonstrated by those who realize school success. In addition, we should respectfully acknowledge schools and teachers who provide quality special education services designed to remediate specific educational challenges, with the goal of helping students to reintegrate and fully participate in mainstream classes. Exploring the question, “how Black males with disabilities end up in honors classes, while others without disabilities end up in special education” may help us to gain a better understanding of an enduring problem as well as reveal hidden solutions for optimizing education for school-aged Black males.

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Latino Males
with Disabilities
and School Dropout



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Introduction

The future outlook for students who do not complete their education is bleak. The unemployment rate for high school dropouts is 15.4 percent compared to 9.4 percent for those with a high school diploma (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009), and the earning potential for dropouts who do manage to find employment suffers: a high school dropout earns an average of \$9,245 a year less than a high school graduate (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009). This figure climbs to more than \$35,000 when compared to the earnings of a college graduate.

The detrimental effects of dropping out of school extend well beyond personal earnings. The Alliance for Excellent Education reports that nearly 1 out of every 10 high school dropouts was institutionalized, compared to only 1 out of every 33 of those who graduate—a set of statistics that results in massive costs, both social and financial. Dropping out of school increases the odds of being arrested during a lifetime by more than 350 percent (Harlow, 2003); 75 percent of state prison inmates in the United States are high school dropouts. The associated costs to the nation are staggering. In fact, if the current dropout trends were reversed and the male graduation rate rose by a mere 5 percent, the nation would save almost \$6 billion in crime-related costs (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006b). If that graduation rate were increased to 10 percent, the murder and assault arrest rates would be reduced by about 20 percent, motor vehicle theft reduced by 13 percent, and the estimated savings to the United States in Medicaid and health care costs could exceed \$17 billion (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006a).

Latino Dropouts

In the United States, Latinos are a young population, with 23 percent under the age of 17; this means that about 1 in 5 students in grades K–12 is Latino (U.S. Department of Education and the White House Initiative on Education Excellence for Hispanics, 2011). Yet, educationally, Latino students appear to suffer more than any other ethnic group. In 2007, this group of students had the highest dropout rates of any racial/ethnic group in the country (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Twenty-one percent of Latino students dropped out of school compared to 5.3 percent of White students, 8.4 percent of Black students, and 8.7 percent of students overall. This disparity is even greater for Latino males, whose dropout rate is 24.5 percent. Only 57 percent will finish high school by the age of 25, which is less than Blacks (80 percent) and Whites (89 percent) (Aud et al., 2011). These statistics don't improve as students get older: only 11 percent of Latinos by the time they are 25 will have earned a bachelor's degree compared to 27 percent of the rest of the U.S. population (Stoops, 2004).

Latino males are fairing poorly even within their own population, where females earn 60 percent of college degrees. Latino males account for 8 percent of the general population but only makeup 4 percent of college enrollment and 5 percent of advanced degrees awarded (Aud et al., 2011). Yet school failure is not a random act that happens in isolation; rather it is the “consequence of a host

of interacting influences that can set children on a trajectory toward lifetime difficulties” (Martinez, DeGarmo, & Eddy, 2004, p. 130).

Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) argue that Latino males are “vanishing from the American education pipeline,” (p. 54) so that high dropout rates among Latino males has become not only a focus of recent calls for research but of national concern in general. Velez and Saenz call for more research into programs that alleviate the problem of Latino dropout rates and suggest the need for an inventory of successful programs that address the problem (2001). A research agenda that identifies effective programs and strategies would open the door to the next step of explaining why these programs work and with whom these strategies are most successful.

Poverty rates among Hispanic children compound the issue, as low socioeconomic status puts students at risk of not finishing high school. Yet 27 percent of Hispanic children under the age of 18 live below the poverty line. These grim statistics are compounded by the projections of the U.S. Census Bureau, which predicts that by the year 2050 the Hispanic school-age population will increase by 166 percent, resulting in more school-age Hispanic children than any other age group (Frey & Gonzales, 2008)—and commensurate numbers dropping out of school and living in poverty unless the issue is addressed.

The large number of students who drop out of school can also be viewed as a public health issue (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007). Cutler and Lleras-Muney (2007) found that a lack of education effects high rates of morbidity and chronic diseases. However, they also determined that health behaviors alone fail to account for health status improvements and surmise that education affects health through a combination of many complex interactions. They propose that poor health in childhood constitutes a risk factor to school success and improved social/economic resources serve as a protective factor. Additional research also suggests that social policies that support school completion warrant greater attention from the health care community (Marmot & Bell, 2009), and the findings of this work could be used to direct social policies that support and sustain Latino academic success.

Recent authors have suggested that using “a holistic and comprehensive approach to optimizing adolescent development requires an understanding of factors related to both reducing problem behavior and increasing positive, competent youth behavior” (Youngblade et al., 2007, p. S48). Meeting the needs of all Latino youth requires a balance between the broader perspective of promoting what is going well with a more focused approach of minimizing the aspects of behavior that negatively impact achievement (Guerra & Bradshaw, 2008).

This chapter examines the factors that contribute to the high dropout rates of Latino males with a disability and those protective factors that help this cohort finish high school, explores the current research literature about Latino males with a disability, and offers a sample of available programs. Finally, the chapter offers recommendations for improving educational practice—and thus graduation rates—for these students.

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The Effect of Disability on School Completion

The national dropout rate among students with a disability is more than 24 percent, while the dropout rate for students without a disability is 8.1 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This problem is even greater among minority students. While White students with a disability drop out at a rate of 20 percent, Black, Latino, and American Indian students drop out at significantly higher rates (see table 1; U.S. Office of Special Education, 2010).

Table 1.

Dropout and Graduation Rate of Students with Disabilities by Race/Ethnicity

	Dropout Rate	Graduation Rate
White	20.38%	66.32%
Asian or Pacific Islander	12.66%	67.82%
Hispanic or Latino	30.42%	50.47%
Black or African American	32.33%	44.36%
American Indian or Alaskan Native	35.49%	54.69%
Total	24.51%	59.10%

Table 2 provides the percentage each disability category represents within all disabilities (Snyder & Dillow, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). For all students aged 6 to 21, the largest number students have a specific learning disabilities, with 43.36 percent of all disabilities falling under this category. This is followed by “other disabilities” (19.63 percent) and speech or language impairments (18.36 percent). When looking at the distribution among Latino students, the rates of specific learning disabilities are higher than any other group at 52.64 percent and 12 percent higher than White students. Among all Latino students, 8.51 percent are diagnosed with a disability (see table 3), with 4.55 percent likely to be labeled as having a specific learning disability.

Table 2.

Percent of disability by category

	Total	White	Black	Latino	Asian or Pacific Islander	American Indian or Alaska Native
Specific learning disability	43.36%	40.37%	45.73%	52.64%	34.45%	52.57%
Speech or language impairment	18.36%	20.55%	14.48%	19.61%	27.65%	17.30%
Mental retardation	8.25%	7.08%	12.84%	6.90%	7.95%	7.06%
Emotional disturbance	7.42%	7.30%	10.46%	4.77%	3.73%	7.75%
Autism	1.34%	5.06%	3.00%	2.99%	10.43%	2.08%
Hearing impairment	1.21%	1.13%	0.95%	1.57%	2.77%	0.95%
Visual impairment	0.44%	0.45%	0.36%	0.45%	0.79%	0.37%
Other disability	19.63%	18.07%	12.17%	11.06%	12.23%	11.93%
Any disabilities (Total)	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Table 3.

Percentage of students with a disability by category

	Total	White	Black	Latino	Asian or Pacific Islander	American Indian or Alaska Native
Specific learning disability	3.89%	3.42%	5.32%	4.55%	1.6%	7.09%
Speech or language impairment	1.65%	1.74%	1.76%	1.67%	1.34%	2.49%
Mental retardation	.74%	.6%	1.56%	.59%	.39%	1.01%
Emotional disturbance	.67%	.62%	1.27%	.41%	.18%	1.11%
Autism	.12%	.43%	.36%	.25%	.51%	.3%
Hearing impairment	.11%	.1%	.12%	.13%	.13%	.14%
Visual impairment	.04%	.04%	.04%	.04%	.04%	.05%
Any disability	8.96%	8.47%	12.15%	8.51%	4.85%	14.3%

Information regarding the precise dropout rate among Latino males with disabilities is meager. Searches of the current literature, the Office of Special Education Data Analysis System, and the National Center for Education Statistics provided no exact figures. In order to give some estimate of the dropout rate among Latino males with a disability, we examined the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS:2002). ELS:2002 tracked a nationally representative sample of more than 16,000 students from tenth grade through graduation and into college and employment. Within this dataset, students were classified by race/ethnicity, gender, disability status, and high school dropout history. Almost 27 percent of Latino male students with disabilities had dropped out of high school, compared to 15 percent of Latino males who did not have a disability. When compared to their peers who received special education services, Latino males rank higher in dropout rates than every group except Black/African American students and dropped out at nearly twice the rate of White students with a disability (see table 4).

Table 4.

Dropout rate of male students with and without disabilities

	White	American Indian or Alaska Native	Asian or Pacific Islander	Black	Latino	Multi-Racial	All Males
Special Education	15.5%	33.3%	18.7%	32.2%	26.8%	26.2%	20.9%
General Education	5.3%	19.0%	7.6%	13.8%	14.7%	11.7%	8.3%
Total	7.8%	23.3%	9.2%	19.1%	18.0%	16.2%	11.3%

Risk and Protective Factors

Not all children who experience risk factors end up displaying academic or social problems (Burchinal, Roberts, Zeisel, Hannon, & Hooper, 2006), particularly when a school intervention model is designed to counterbalance adversity with assets. Researchers have called for an intervention model that incorporates the use of assets, competence, and protective processes, along with the traditional

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Multiple factors, systems, and processes interact to affect the academic outcomes of Latino youth. Conditions of gender (Kuhn & Holling, 2009), family (Woolley, Kol, & Bowen, 2009), community (Gambone, Klem, & Connell, 2002), and society (Han, 2008) all interact to either support or impede Latino student achievement.

measures of addressing risk factors, symptoms, problems, and risk-producing processes (Luthar, 1991; Masten & Powell, 2003). Sameroff (2003) argues that rather than seeing protective and risk factors as competing, these two types of factors should be viewed within the context of additive contributors to the positive and negative outcomes for children. It is not any single factor that is responsible for outcomes, but the accumulation of these factors in any one child's life. The more protective factors present, the better the outcome. Conversely, the more risk factors present, the worse the outcome. In general, the study of risk and protective factors allows for the interdependent relationships among different variables of risk and protection across multiple levels, as they exerting a reciprocal influence on one another (Yates, Egeland, & Sroufe, 2003).

Risk and Protective Factors and Latino Students

When looking specifically at the risk and protective factors for students, it is also important to understand the ethnic differences for each group and to begin developing specific models that address the unique needs of each population (Hawley, Chavez, & St.Romain, 2007). The outcomes and risk factors are not the same across all groups and can vary based on the structural, economic, social, and cultural constraints that families face (Strayhorn, 2010).

Multiple factors, systems, and processes interact to affect the academic outcomes of Latino youth. Conditions of gender (Kuhn & Holling, 2009), family (Woolley, Kol, & Bowen, 2009), community (Gambone, Klem, & Connell, 2002), and society (Han, 2008) all interact to either support or impede Latino student achievement. Any effort to address high dropout rates must incorporate all of these factors. Since poor achievement is related to other negative public health outcomes and such high-risk behaviors such as premature sexual activity, early pregnancy, delinquency, crime, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide (Woods, 1994), these realities must also be factored in. For example, programs and strategies aimed at improving Latino achievement need to accommodate issues of gender, since what works well for females may not be effective for males. In addition, the Latino population represents a great deal of internal diversity, and what works in one community may not be successful in another, as there may be regional or country-specific differences that should be considered (Kiyama, 2010). For example, the needs of youths from an undocumented migrant farming community are different from the challenges faced by urban Latino males (Riggs & Greenberg, 2004; Vick & Packard, 2008); and the values and attitudes of Cuban youth may differ from those of Mexican youth. Programs and strategies need to consider the many differences within regional and local contexts (Hernandez & Nesman, 2004).

How the factors are generally understood contains strong cultural underpinnings, as well. Lopez (2001) found that school personnel understood "parental involvement" to mean showing up to school meetings, but Mexican American families felt that involvement meant teaching their children about hard work and responsibility. Strayhorn (2010) suggested that ethnic groups should be studied separately because the outcomes and risk factors are not the same for all groups

and are influenced by structural constraints, economic conditions, social life, and cultural values. Policymakers and educators need to understand the ethnic differences in how risk and protective factors interact and should examine the unique ways the outcomes vary by group and even within subgroups (Hawley et al., 2007; Kiyama, 2010).

Risk and protective factors for school dropout can be categorized into five broad domains: student, family, peers and friends, school, and neighborhood or community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Researchers have identified 134 unique risk and protective factors related to all students' academic achievement (Lucio, Rapp-Paglicci, & Rowe, 2010). It is important to also keep in mind that there are some risk and protective factors that are applicable to all students' academic achievement, while there are also some that are specific to Latinos.

This chapter will explore the risk and protective factors that have been linked to achievement for Latinos with disabilities, and more specifically Latino males with a disability. It is also important to keep in mind that a factor can be either a risk or a protection, depending on where it falls on the continuum. For example, within the factor of maternal education, lower maternal education is a risk factor, while higher maternal education can be a protective factor.

Table 5 provides an example of the interaction between risk/protective factors and specific groups. This table represents a linear regression analysis on data from the ELS:2002 dataset and looks at school-related risk and protective factors. Five separate analyses were run which included (a) all students, (b) all Latino students, (c) male students, (d) all Latino male, and (e) all Latino male students with disabilities. The risk and protective factors that predict academic achievement differ within each group, which illustrates the importance of examining each group in detail to understand the unique context surrounding the achievement within that group. It is important to frame research using the notion of contextual and group-specific risk and protective factors. The challenge now is to start developing a matrix of available knowledge when looking at the risk and protective factors that serve to increase the likelihood of dropping out or enhance the rates of graduation for each group.

Specifically, this analysis shows that there are differences in which risk and protective factors are likely to predict achievement in students, depending on their unique characteristics. Factors that might be useful in predicting success for all students or for Latino student in particular, such as academic expectations, appear less helpful in impacting the achievement of Latino male students with disabilities. Using this model as an example, designing programs that address the unique needs of Latino male students with disabilities suggests that the key areas of focus—reducing school-related risk factors and strengthening protective factors—should include homework, music playing, school safety, and school behaviors. This is not to imply there are no other factors that impact achievement, but rather the only conclusions that could be drawn from the limited available research in this area.

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Table 5.

Interaction between specific groups and risk/protective factors

	All		Latino		Male		Latino Male		Latino Male with Disability	
	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig	B	Sig
(Constant)	-0.560	0.000	-0.515	0.007	-0.821	0.000	-0.528	0.042	2.011	.000
SES	0.114	0.000	0.107	0.000	0.114	0.000	0.126	0.000	.102	.076
Gender	-0.104	0.000	-0.178	0.000						
Asian v White	0.020	0.204			-0.008	0.737				
Black v White	-0.366	0.000			-0.345	0.000				
Hispanic v White	-0.218	0.000			-0.255	0.000				
Multi	-0.075	0.001			-0.065	0.042				
AI/AN v White	-0.293	0.000			-0.326	0.000				
Academic Expectations	0.093	0.000	0.080	0.000	0.097	0.000	0.084	0.000	.011	.654
Academic Engagement	0.008	0.000	0.009	0.043	0.002	0.343	0.002	0.793	.017	.136
Academic Self-Efficacy	0.015	0.000	0.003	0.513	0.018	0.000	0.000	0.957	-.007	.599
Educational Support	-0.002	0.007	0.001	0.712	-0.004	0.011	-0.001	0.750	-.014	.100
Homework	0.319	0.000	0.317	0.000	0.315	0.000	0.301	0.000	.350	.000
Music Playing	0.067	0.000	0.052	0.094	0.080	0.000	0.089	0.061	.192	.031
Teacher relationships	-0.001	0.672	-0.006	0.418	0.001	0.717	0.009	0.398	.030	.116
School Relevance	0.005	0.554	0.024	0.330	0.009	0.435	0.016	0.632	.046	.436
School Mobility	-0.029	0.000	-0.029	0.001	-0.026	0.000	-0.022	0.085	.026	.286
School Safety	0.015	0.000	0.022	0.002	0.016	0.000	0.024	0.020	.036	.049
School Behaviors	0.041	0.000	0.034	0.000	0.042	0.000	0.032	0.000	.017	.253

Model 1(All): Step 1 $R^2 = .20$, Step 2 $R^2 = .50$, $\Delta R^2 = .30$; $F(18,14717)=807.10$, $p < .001$
 Model 2 (Latino): Step 1 $R^2 = .10$, Step 2 $R^2 = .39$, $\Delta R^2 = .29$; $F(13,2166)=108.05$, $p < .001$
 Model 3 (Male): Step 1 $R^2 = .18$, Step 2 $R^2 = .48$, $\Delta R^2 = .30$; $F(17,7330)=404.49$, $p < .001$
 Model 4: Step 1 $R^2 = .03$, Step 2 $R^2 = .35$, $\Delta R^2 = .32$; $F(12,1064)=48.285$, $p < .001$
 Model 5: Step 1 $R^2 = .03$, Step 2 $R^2 = .37$, $\Delta R^2 = .34$; $F(15,245)=11.826$, $p < .001$

Latino Males with Disabilities Literature Search

A search of the existing literature attempted to identify what is known about factors of school dropout for Latino males with disabilities. In order to locate articles that addressed the risk and protective factors directly related to the academic success and failure of Latino male students, a targeted search was performed. To be considered for this study, an article needed to (a) study males, (b) focus on disabilities, (c) specifically mention Latino, (d) use educational outcomes, (e) appear in a peer-reviewed journal, and (f) include academic achievement as an outcome

An initial search of the literature that met all six criteria revealed a total of thirteen articles. A further examination of these articles found that only five were relevant to the topic of Latino male students with a disability. These articles mentioned nine distinct risk and protective factors. These included factors from the child domain (emotional/behavioral disorders, English fluency, gender, IQ, learning disability), the school domain (school behaviors), and the family domain (cultural factors).

The next step involved removing the term “male” from the search criteria, which resulted in a total of 102 articles related to Latinos with a disability. A closer examination revealed that there were only nine additional relevant articles for

a total of fourteen articles. Eight of these articles appeared between 2000 and 2011, two were from the 1990's, and five were from the 1980's. In addition, four were single-case designs, two additional articles had sample sizes of fewer than twenty, and two were focused on teacher's perceptions and did not involve students. Finally, only ten focused specifically on Latinos.

This search revealed a true gap in the available literature on and knowledge about Latino male students with a disability and what affects their academic achievement. As the topic broadens from Latino male students with a disability to all Latino students with a disability, the increase in knowledge is minimal. It is not until the focus is on all Latino students do we begin to see a considerable amount of information available. A third step in the search of current literature was to remove the term "disability" from the search criterion, which resulted in a return of 1,578 articles. The search was then limited to the years 2000 to 2011, which produced 586 articles. Of these, 159 were articles relevant to the topic. These articles were then organized by the risk and/or protective factors they addressed, 73 in total.

While these articles are not specifically related to Latinos with a disability or Latino males, they might warrant further study. It is possible that many of the factors that relate to the achievement of Latinos in general can also be useful in keeping Latino students with a disability, particularly Latino males, in school and on track to graduate. The exact relationship between these 73 factors (see table 7 at end of chapter) and Latino males cannot be generalized for certain, since these factors have not been studied specifically with this population. The next logical step is to begin looking at each of these factors to determine the extent to which Latino males with a disability are affected so we can begin developing a clearer picture of the risk and protective factors in order to improve academic outcomes.

Risk and Protective Factors for Achievement of Latinos with a Disability

The literature about Latinos with a disability revealed 13 unique factors related to achievement: academic engagement, culture, emotional/behavioral health, the environment, gender, language, whether or not a student has a learning disability, IQ, parent involvement, parent engagement, race/ethnicity, school behaviors, and the presence (or absence) of other adults in the lives of a student. Additional future research may reveal other factors that impact the success or failure of Latino students with a disability. Table 6 at the end of the chapter provides more details on the existing studies that explore the relationship between Latino's with a disability and academic achievement in terms of these factors.

Programs

Evidence-based programs focused on keeping Latino male students with disabilities in school are almost nonexistent. Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS) is one of the few programs that includes any studies focused specifically on Latino students with a disability. There are other

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programs that are shown to be effective with Latinos, and these suggest that general programs have promise when they focused on specific populations. Applying any of these general programs to Latino male students with disabilities would certainly require some adaptation to the unique needs of these students.

Achievement for Latinos through Academic Success (ALAS) is a middle school program that earned an “evidence-based” designation by the What Works Clearinghouse. One of the studies of this program looked at a group of 94 at-risk, sixth-grade male and female students (Larson & Rumberger, 1995). Students were identified as high risk if their sixth-grade teacher rated them below the classroom average on a rating scale. Almost all the students who participated in the study were Latino (96 percent), the majority were male (65 percent), and most received free or reduced-price lunch (91 percent). Students included in the study were formally identified as learning disabled (LD) or severely emotionally disturbed (SED). In addition, students who exhibited characteristics similar to LD or SED were included, even if they were not formally identified by the school district. The program incorporated problem-solving training, attendance monitoring, a focus on increasing students’ sense of belonging, and training for parents in participation strategies and parent-child problem solving. Among students enrolled in the ALAS program from the sixth grade to the end of the ninth grade, only 3 percent dropped out of school compared to 18 percent of students in a high-risk comparison group (Larson & Rumberger, 1995).

AMIGOS is a school-based mental health program that was created with the goal of improving the academic, social, and personal skills of students (Garrison, Roy, & Azar, 1999). The AMIGOS program focuses in particular on reducing the stress of new arrivals to the country with the ultimate goal of reducing dropout. The program accomplishes this by providing support through case management to make sure families have their essential needs met (food, phone, housing) and by developing trust between the students and the program staff. An essential component of this program is its culturally responsive design, which addresses the unique needs of the families served, taking into account their cultural and immigrant experience. This is done through training for culturally competent services, individual and family therapy, and even parent education designed to foster increased parent involvement in school. Initial results indicated an increase in attendance rates for students and almost two-thirds of students achieving at grade level (Garrison et al., 1999).

Encuentros Leadership is a program designed to ameliorate the drop-out problem among Latino males in San Diego County, California (Encuentros Leadership, 2009; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). This program works to address not only the educational issues confronting these young men but also the social and economic factors that affect educational and life opportunities. *Encuentros Leadership* offers an annual conference, a week-long leadership academy, and an in-class leadership education program for Latino male students. Each of these components is designed to highlight the value of positive relationships, academic skills, the importance of culture, and self-respect. No research studies were available regarding the outcomes of this program.

XY-Zone is fraternity-oriented program designed to help male youth receive

the guidance needed to succeed in school and become more connected to their community (Aguiniga, Streeter, & Hurewitz, 2007; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). This program is based on five foundational values: respect, responsibility, relationships, role modeling, and reaching out. Each youth in the program initially participates in an 11-week, curriculum-based support group. They are also provided counseling, job readiness training, service-learning opportunities, and mentoring. No research studies were available regarding the outcomes of this program.

Recommendations

The recommendations presented below are broad in nature, can be applied to all students, and reflect the lack of available research and evidence that is specifically focused on Latino males. However, the focus of this section is to consider the unique needs of Latino male students with a disability within the broader context of student success.

Early Warning Systems

Limited research aside, any effort to reduce the dropout rates of Latino male students with a disability should focus on both the risk and the protective factors that are unique to these students. The first task is to determine a way to identify students who are at risk of school failure through the development of a data-driven model in which school districts, parents, and communities collect and analyze data related to academic success (Dynarski et al., 2008). This should include academic data but also information that reflects the nonacademic factors that influence school success, such as social and emotional risk factors (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). There are critical junctures and milestones in student's lives—from early childhood all the way through high school—that allow for the identification of students who are at risk of school failure (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007; Nevarez & Rico, 2007).

Utilize the Data

Understanding the trajectory that students are on is only part of the task required to keep students in school. Once the data is collected and at-risk students are identified, strategies must be developed to intervene (African American and Latino Male Dropout Taskforce 2007; Nevarez & Rico, 2007). In addition, this data should be disseminated in reports that are clear, easy to read, and helpful to those making decisions (Nevarez & Rico, 2007). Reports that are too cumbersome or not timely provide little value to those who are trying to help students. And then simply analyzing the data is not enough; programs must be put into place to address the needs that are identified.

While identifying students early is the first goal of preventive programs, it is then critical to re-engage students already off track.

It is important to help both family members and school-aged children to understand the implications of staying in school and the promise of their options when they do (Nevarez & Rico, 2007; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011).

Re-engage Students

While identifying students early is the first goal of preventive programs, it is then critical to re-engage students already off track. Working with these students often involves skill remediation, alternative school options, and school planning (Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2009). An African American and Latino Male Task Force (2007) suggested that some key ways to accomplish this re-engagement is to enlist the help of key stakeholders and get students back into education through communication and connections with community leaders, local businesses, and increased outreach efforts.

Staff Training and Cultural Competence

Another crucial task is training school staff to identify and engage those Latino male students with a disability who are most at risk before they drop out. This involves working with administrators, staff, and other key stakeholders to help interpret the risk data and implement the appropriate intervention and preventions strategies (Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, 2009). In addition to providing supports to students to improve academic performance (Dynarski et al., 2008), there is a need to increase cultural competence among teachers, staff, and administrators. Culturally competent personnel serve as cultural brokers by bridging the gap between students, parents, and schools. They can help ensure that students are placed in the appropriate classes, and they can mediate the cultural understanding of educational involvement (Nevarez & Rico, 2007).

Family Involvement

Families play a vital role in the lives of Latino males. Yet the common trajectory among many families is for young adults to enter the workforce as early as possible and not complete school. As a consequence, family members may not know about the educational options open to their children. It is important to help both family members and school-aged children to understand the implications of staying in school and the promise of their options when they do (Nevarez & Rico, 2007; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011). If their children are the first to go to college, families may also need guidance in understanding the processes and pathways to college and in learning how to help their children be successful in school (Santiago, 2009). Getting families involved in their children's educational experiences includes providing outreach to families and encouraging families to participate in school activities and committees and in their child's education (African American and Latino Male Dropout Taskforce 2007).

Summary

Researchers and practitioners call for the infusion of cultural competence into all aspects of educational practice—teacher training, interventions, instructional practice, and organizational systems—in order to reduce the dropout rates of

Latino males with disabilities (American Psychological Association, 2003; Barrera, Castro, & Steiker, 2011). Interventions that are culturally adapted have shown some evidence of improving outcomes (Beach et al., 2005; Griner & Smith, 2006; Sue, Zane, Nagayama Hall, & Berger, 2009; Whaley & Davis, 2007). When existing programs are being adapted to suit the needs of this student cohort, considerations of culture must be part of the very foundational stages of programs redesign (Barrera et al., 2011; Bernal, Jiménez-Chafey, & Domenech Rodríguez, 2009). The first goal of intervening is to understand which interventions work best for whom, under which conditions, and in which settings. By focusing an approach on these key areas, programs and interventions can then be adapted to address the unique needs of Latino male students with disabilities in a way that maximizes the educational impact while getting the most of available resources—and ultimately to successfully support students in completing school. In order to do this, educators and policymakers must understand the context in which students come to learn and must translate research in order to meet the specific needs of students.

Table 6.

Studies exploring the relationship between Latino's with a disability and academic achievement in terms of risk and protective factors

Reference	Risk or Protective Factors	Age or Grade	N	Males	% Latino	% Latino Male	% Disability	Findings
Aloia, Maxwell, & Aloia (1981)	Race-Ethnicity	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Teachers looked at pictures and found that behavioral potential was perceived as lower for Mexican and Black students.
Arcia & Fernández (1998)	Cultural Factors	7–10 years-olds	7	100%	100%	100%	100%	It was found that in this sample of Cuban mothers cultural model for normal growth and development did not include hyperactivity or inattention, making it difficult for mothers to recognize this as a disorder rather than an innate attribute of their child. Once the mothers understood the problems as ADHD they sought help from professionals and teachers.
Barry & Santarelli (2000)	School Behaviors	10 year-old	1	100%	100%	100%	100%	A behavioral support plan for the tantrum behavior in both the home and school settings reduced these negative behaviors.
Bauermeister, Matos, Reina, Salas, Martínez, Cumba, et al. (2005)	Behavioral Disorder	6–11 years-old	98	59%	100%	59%	59%	This study suggested that the Combined Type and Inattentive types of ADHD were distinct disorders, and that the impact of ADHD on achievement crosses at least into the Latino community.
Blacher & Baker (2007)	Supportive Adults	20	496	56%	36%	Not Reported	75%	When looking at children with development delays Latino fathers and mothers reported higher levels of the disability having a positive impact than White parents.
Christensen, Young, & Marchant (2007)	Academic Engagement, School Behaviors	8 year-old	1	100%	100%	100%	100%	In a single subject design, it was found that academic engagement had a positive effect on work completion.
DuPaul, Pérez, Kuo, Stein, & Sedberry (2007)	Emotional & Behavioral Disorders	9 year-old	1	100%	100%	100%	100%	This single case study was used to elicit feedback on how to deal with a difficult case involving not only ADHD but also cultural and linguistic issues. In addition, any treatment options that are presented must fit within the cultural explanatory model of the disorder.

Table 6. (cont.)

Studies exploring the relationship between Latino's with a disability and academic achievement in terms of risk and protective factors

Reference	Risk or Protective Factors	Age or Grade	N	Males	% Latino	% Latino Male	% Disability	Findings
Lizardi, O'Rourke, & Morris (2008)	Environment	7th grade	48	46%	100%	42%	100%	Exposure to Organophosphate (OP) pesticides lowered the cognitive and behavioral functioning of children.
MacMillan, Gresham, Lopez, & Bocian (1996)	Gender, School Behaviors	6-9 years-old	150	59%	34%	19%	19%	A study of pre-service referrals looked at 150 students, of which 35% were Latino; it was found that males displayed more problem behaviors than females.
Milian (2001)	Parent Involvement	7-17 years-old	183	55%	100%	55%	100%	Latino families thought schools did a good job of providing information about their children and inviting families to school programs. However, it was also felt by parents that schools were not very good about encouraging families to volunteer at the school or providing assistance to help families in helping their children with self-care activities.
Prieto & Zucker (1981)	Race-Ethnicity	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Using fictitious case examples, it was found that when the case depicted the child as Mexican American, children were more likely to be deemed appropriate for special education services.
Whitworth (1988)	IQ	12 years-old	80	100%	50%	25%	50%	Among students with learning disabilities, the Mexican American students scored significantly lower than the Anglo students on verbal and full-scale verbal IQ scores.
Zavala, & Mims (1983)	Language	11 years-old	20	80%	100%	80%	40%	Students with learning disabilities scored below their non-learning disabled peers on 75% of the academic measures that were given, including reading and writing. When students whose primary difficulty was with English comprehension were placed in classes for individuals with learning disabilities, the stigma of being placed in these classes put the students even further behind academically.

Table 7.
Factors Influencing School Completion

Child Factors		
Aggression	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual	Pro-Social Behaviors
Anxiety	Gender	Race/Ethnicity
Attitude Towards School	Growth and Development	Self Esteem
Birth Order	IQ	Self-Regulated Learning
Birth Season	Learning Disability	Sleep Time
Birth Weight	Locus of Control	Social Competence
Birthday	Mental Health Factors	Social Skills
Delinquency	Motivation	Student Smoking
Emotional/Behavioral Disorders	Personality Type	Student Substance Use
English Fluency - ESL	Pregnancy	Societal Rejection
Future Orientation	Physical Health Status	
School Factors		
Academic Engagement	Grade Retention	School Safety
Academic Expectations	Homework	School SES
Academic Self-Efficacy	Music Instruction	School Size
Discrimination in Schools	School Behaviors	School/Residential Mobility
Attendance	School Belonging	Supportive School Environ.
Class Size	School District Size	Teacher Relationships
Educational Support	School Minority Rates	High Challenging Classes
Ethnocultural Support	School Activities	Over age for Placement
Parental School Involvement	School Quality	Teacher Support
Family Type - School	School Relevance	
Peer Factors		
Bullying (Victimization) (MFC)	Peer Acceptance	Peer Religion
Peer Academic Performance	Peer Behaviors	Peer Support
Peer Academic Expectations		
Family Factors		
Absent Parent Involvement	Family Stressful Events	Parental Education
Acculturation	Family Structure (1 parent)	Parental Involvement
Adoption	Family Support M)	Parental Monitoring
Age of Mother at Birth	Family Trauma	Parental-Child Attachment
Assets/Income	Generational Status	Parent-Child Conflict
Basic Needs	Home Educational Resources	Parenting Style
Breast Feeding	Homelessness	Perceived Safety
Child Support	Life Stressors	Poverty or Economic Status
Counseling	Maltreatment/Abuse	Relationships and Dating
Cultural Factors	Maternal Depression	Religiosity
Employment - Student	Maternal Employment	Residential Father
English Fluency	Maternal Health	Social Support
Ethnic Identity	Number of Siblings	Supervision of Homework
Family Cohesion	Parent's Social Resources	Supportive Adults
Family Management	Parental Academic Expect.	Sibling Relationship
Family Violence	Parental Distress	Sibling Academic Success
Family Dropped Out	Parental Efficacy	Television and Computer Use
Neighborhood		
After-school Programs	Immigrant %—Community	Neigh. Violence
Crime (Neighborhood)	Mentors	Neigh. Youth Behaviors
Daycare and Preschool	Neighborhood SES	Urbanicity (Rural/Urban/City)
Extra-Curricular Activities	Neighborhood Quality	School/Community Partnership
Foster Care or Public Care	Neigh. Resources	

The first goal of intervening is to understand which interventions work best for whom, under which conditions, and in which settings.

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