

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF EFFECTIVE PREVENTION PROGRAMS THAT ARE
SUCCESSFUL IN REDUCING HIGH-RISK BEHAVIORS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL
STUDENTS.

by

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to provide school administrators with effective programs that are successful in lessening high-risk behaviors among students. Qualitative research methodology was used to collect data through personal interviews and document analysis. The sample population consisted of five senior high school principals administering in Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania.

The research questions investigated key components included in senior high school prevention programs to address high-risk behaviors among students. The methods and indicators of success utilized to determine the effectiveness of the high schools' prevention programs were also examined.

As a result of the study, it was found that all of the senior high schools implement preventative and reactive programs to address drug, alcohol and tobacco use and violent activity among students. Specific programs to reduce sexual activity among students were only implemented in one of the five senior high schools participating in this study. Key components included in the programming efforts to reduce high-risk behaviors include increasing student academic achievement, engaging students in their school community, strategies to develop restraint and resistance skills, conflict resolution skills and efforts to build meaningful student-adult relationships.

Only one school objectively measures its' program's effectiveness in reducing high-risk behaviors among students. The remainder of the schools utilize subjective evaluations to support the effectiveness of the programming efforts.

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1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

School administrators are faced with a variety of issues and concerns pertaining to students. With the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, signed into law in January 2002, the principal's role has been expanded in very specific ways. For example, NCLB adds substantially to the principal's responsibilities and makes him or her more accountable for student achievement, staff quality, and the quality of the school's curriculum and instruction (Educational Research Service for the National Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals, 2003, p.2). As a result of this added accountability for student achievement, school districts across the nation have placed a major emphasis on devising programs to accelerate students who have not met the level of proficiencies required by NCLB.

Many students who appear to have the ability, and possess the academic skills to be successful, are still not reaching proficiency levels outlined in NCLB. It may be possible that many of the students who are failing to meet these academic standards are also facing and/or struggling with a variety of other social or personal issues, which are inhibiting their success. These issues may include drug, alcohol and tobacco use, as well as sexual and violent activity. If students are engaging in these high-risk behaviors, it may interfere with them attending school on a regular basis, meeting academic standards, or scoring proficient on high stakes tests.

The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act is a critical part of President Bush's national effort to ensure academic success for all students (U.S. Department of Education Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, December, 2002). The Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act supports programs that prevent school violence, as well as the illegal use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco. The Act also promotes the involvement of parents and communities to foster a safe and drug-free learning environment that promotes student academic achievement. (U. S. Department of Education & Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2002).

It appears that there are an increasing number of individuals in our schools who are exposed to high-risk behaviors. Students and staff are often exposed to tobacco, alcohol, and other drug use, as well as violence, near school buildings and at school events (Ross, Einhaus, Hohenemser, Grene, Kann, & Gold, 1995, p. 333). Along with the on-going challenge of students meeting the requirements of NCLB, school administrators are increasingly concerned about their students engaging in high-risk behaviors. For example, drug, alcohol, and tobacco use, sexual activity and violence pose a threat to their health and safety. According to the most recent survey conducted by the Center for Disease control, over 74% of students in grades 9-12 reported using alcohol, and over 40% of the students participated in illegal drug use. Also, it is very alarming that over 50% of the students surveyed had already engaged in sexual intercourse (Grunbaum, J., Kann, L., Kinchen, S., Ross, J., Hawkins, J., Lowry, R. et. al 2004).

School districts are continually searching for programs to implement in order to decrease these high-risk behaviors among students. In fact, there have been a number of programs developed and marketed toward reducing high-risk behaviors among youth. When evaluating these programs, some contain components that are research based and driven, while others focus on relationship building and overall positive youth development.

Statistical information from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention substantiates a need for evidence-based programs designed to decrease high-risk behaviors among students. Understanding the causes and reasons for students' involvement in high-risk activities helps inform school leaders as they evaluate and select prevention programs (Center for Disease Control, 2004). If school leaders are able to decrease youth involvement in high-risk behaviors through the implementation of effective prevention programs, it may be possible for more students to meet academic standards and reach proficiency on high stakes exams.

1.2. ORIGIN OF THE PROBLEM

The researcher is currently a high school principal pursuing a Doctor of Education (Ed D) degree in School Leadership. As a result of serving as a secondary school administrator for 10 years, the researcher has developed a keen interest in positive youth development. As a former assistant principal and current principal, the researcher deals with a vast amount of disciplinary issues. Therefore, she interacts with students on a regular basis who are failing academically as a direct result of participating in high-risk behaviors. For this reason, the author has decided to research and conduct a study on secondary senior high school prevention programs that are currently being implemented to reduce high-risk behaviors among students.

After reviewing the literature on the increasing number of students engaging in high-risk behaviors, it is important to look at a local region to determine how senior high schools address this pertinent issue.

1.3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study is to provide school administrators with effective programs that are successful in lessening high risk-behaviors among students. The following problem statement will be addressed throughout this dissertation:

What type(s) of programs are school districts currently implementing to decrease high-risk behaviors among students and does the implementation of these programs reduce high-risk behaviors?

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What does the current literature say about the prevalence of high-risk behaviors in secondary students?
2. What key components are included in senior high programs to address high-risk behaviors?
3. What indicators of success do high schools use to determine the effectiveness of their programs in reducing high-risk behaviors?

1.5. OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

A qualitative study was conducted of five secondary suburban senior high schools in Westmoreland County that implement programs to reduce high-risk behaviors among youth. The five senior high schools selected are demographically similar to the employer of this

dissertation's author. The names of the schools were obtained through the Westmoreland Intermediate Unit and the Pennsylvania Department of Education.

The researcher gained permission from each school district's superintendent to conduct interviews with the senior high school principal. Through the personal interviews, the researcher garnered information pertaining to the schools' prevention programs and the key components included in each of the programs. During the interviews, the researcher also gathered information pertaining to the methods that are utilized to determine the effectiveness of the prevention programs implemented.

Chapter 3 of this dissertation provides a detailed description of the methodology that the researcher utilized in this study.

1.6. DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

For the purpose of this study, key terms will be defined as follows:

High-risk behaviors-behaviors such as the use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco, and the engagement in sexual or violent activity, which may negatively impact the social or emotional well-being and success of an individual.

Risk factors-a condition that, if present increases the likelihood of a person developing an emotional or behavioral problem (Stevens & Griffin, 2001, p.311).

Resiliency-focuses on what factors contribute to the "successful" and "well adjusted" child, in spite of great stresses or risk factors in their lives (Stevens & Griffin, 2001 p. 311).

Prevention programs-initiatives or interventions that utilize specific methods and/or strategies to reduce various high-risk behaviors.

Perceptions-to become aware of through the senses or understanding.

2. CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This review of literature will begin by presenting information pertaining to current high school reform initiatives that target student achievement. Collaborative Leadership/Professional Learning Communities, Personalizing the School Environment, and Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment will be reviewed to set the stage for improved student performance. The researcher will focus on the connection between Personalizing the School Environment to improve student achievement, while also reducing high-risk behaviors among students.

The review of literature will then focus on three primary bodies of literature pertaining to high-risk behaviors. The first body of literature contains statistical information gained from surveys and studies pertaining to the number of youth participating in high-risk behaviors and the causes and factors that may impact youths' participation in these behaviors. Secondly, research pertaining to the classifications and components of effective prevention programs to reduce high-risk behaviors will be presented. Finally, current marketed prevention programs, and other prevention initiatives aimed at decreasing high-risk behaviors among youth, will be addressed.

2.2. PART I

2.2.1. High School Reform Initiatives

According to *Breaking Ranks II*, high schools of the 21st century must be much more student-centered and above all much more personalized in programs, support services and intellectual rigor (2004, p.1) *Breaking Ranks II* frames the stage for increased student performance and overall student success. It is a working document that clusters recommendations around three key components that are necessary for secondary schools to be effective. *Breaking Ranks II* titles these three components or touchstones: “Collaborative Leadership and Professional Learning Communities,” “Personalization,” and “Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment,” (*Breaking Ranks II*, 2004).

“Collaborative Leadership and Professional Learning Communities” involve the principal, as a principal teacher who has a clear vision, direction and focus. He or she works in collaboration with the staff to make decisions that promote student learning and provide an atmosphere of participation, responsibility and ownership. The principal works to involve parents and the entire school community to build partnerships and forge alliances to enhance the education and performance of all students (*Breaking Ranks II*, 2004).

Through “Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment”, the school’s mission should be to provide teaching and assessment strategies that reflect individual students’ strengths, weaknesses, learning styles and special needs. Each student should be “well known”, by his/her teachers. The term “anonymity” is no longer acceptable in America’s high schools (*Breaking Ranks II*, 2004).

The third component of high school reform that is most relative to this study is “Personalization.” As stated in *Breaking Ranks II*, if high achievement for all students is the goal of reform, then personalization and a rigorous curriculum are two essential ingredients (p.67). “Personalization” can mean different things to different individuals. However, there are a few common principles associated with “Personalization”. These common principles include, students having a sense of ownership over the direction of their own learning, the ability to recognize options and make decisions and choices based on personal experiences, and providing students with opportunities to develop a sense of belonging to their schools (*Breaking Ranks II*, 2004).

A major practice of “Personalization” is relationship building. According to *Breaking Ranks II (2004)*, the need to build relationships rests on the premise that many students require a supportive relationship with the school or someone at the school who understands them personally. Youth are developing academically, socially, emotionally and physically while they are at school. Research supports the notion that personalized learning initiatives that include relationship building can increase attendance, decrease drop out rates, and lessen disruptive behavior. If schools can get students to attend on a regular basis by providing support from a caring adult, and personalizing and engaging them in their learning, research supports that higher student achievement will occur.

The previous paragraphs support the premise that relationship building is a vital component in increasing student achievement. Later in this study, the researcher will present literature that supports the notion that relationship building is also a key component in lessening high-risk behaviors among youth. The author of this study will now present statistical information pertaining to youth engaging in high-risk behaviors, followed by classifications and

key components of effective prevention programs. The final portion of the literature review will pertain to current marketed prevention programs and other prevention initiatives to reduce high-risk behaviors among youth.

2.3. PART II

2.3.1. Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance 2003 Survey Results

Every two years, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention conducts a survey of public and private school students to determine the prevalence of health risk behaviors. *The youth risk behavior surveillance system (YRBSS)* was developed in 1990 to monitor priority health risk behaviors among youth that contribute markedly to the leading causes of death, disability and social problems (Center for Disease Control 2004). The most recent survey was conducted in 2003 (Grunbaum, J., Kann, L., Kinchen, S., Ross, J., Hawkins, J. Lowry, R. et. al 2004). The 2003 survey was a national survey, which consists of 9-12 grade students from across 32 states. The results of the survey indicate that during 30 days preceding the survey, numerous students engaged in behaviors that increases their likelihood of death. Out of the students surveyed in grades 9 through 12th, 17.1% of the students had carried a weapon, while 33.0% of the students had been in a physical confrontation more than once during the 12 months preceding the survey. It is also alarming to discover that almost half, or 46.7% of the students had already engaged in sexual intercourse at the time they completed the survey. Along with sexual and violent activity, students were surveyed regarding their participation in drugs, alcohol and tobacco. It was found that heavy drinking, which is defined as at least five drinks on any occasion during the month preceding the survey, was reported by 28.3% of the students, while 74.9% of the students

surveyed reported they had at least one drink in their lifetime. In regards to illegal drug use, over 40.2% of the youth reported that they had used marijuana over their lifetime, while 22.4% had used it more than one time in the 30 days preceding the survey. Also nationwide, 8.7% of the students surveyed had used some form of cocaine, while 3.3% used heroine. Cigarette smoking was also measured, and it was reported that 58.4% of the youth had tried smoking cigarettes and 15.8% of students had smoked more than one cigarette daily in the 30 days preceding the survey.

Even though these statistics may be alarming, high-risk behaviors among our youth have been a concern for years. Ten years prior to the results of the latest *YRBSS*, the Phi Delta Kappa/Gallop Poll on education (1994) reported that the American public perceived drug abuse, lack of discipline, fighting, violence, and gangs to be among the most significant problems facing public schools (Elam, Rose, Gallup, 1994, p. 42). “One opinion poll after another shows that youth-related issues top people’s lists of concerns and priorities. People consistently ask politicians and other leaders to improve education, reduce youth violence; prevent young people from using alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs; or declare “war” on some other youth-related problem” (Benson, Scales, Leffert, & Roehlkepartain 1999, p. v).

2.3.2. Causes and Factors That May Impact High-Risk Behaviors

The question remains, “What causes youth to participate in high-risk behaviors?” According to Stevens & Griffin (2001), there are two substantial bodies of literature that offer insight into what processes or factors exist that may affect individuals and their involvement in risk behaviors. One particular body of research focuses on risk factors, or deficits that may have an impact on the likelihood of individuals engaging in high-risk behaviors, while the second body of research focuses on the concept of resiliency.

A risk factor can be defined as “a condition that, if present increases the likelihood of a person developing an emotional or behavioral problem” (Stevens & Griffin, 2001, p. 311). Risk factors can increase a person’s chances for drug or alcohol abuse or their likelihood to become involved in violent activities (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2004). Risk factors can influence drug abuse in various ways. The more risks a child is exposed to, the more likely the child will abuse drugs or alcohol (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2004, p. 2). Some risk factors may be more powerful than others at certain stages of development, such as peer pressure during the teenage years. An example of risk factors, which are associated with youth violence, may include the location where an individual lives or severe parental mental illness (Stevens & Griffin, 2001).

It is obvious that schools have very little, if no impact on the aforementioned types of environmental risk factors. However, schools can greatly impact the development of resiliency in students. The concept of resiliency, which is unlike risk, focuses on which factors contribute to the “successful” and “well adjusted” child, in spite of great stresses or risk factors in their lives (Stevens, & Griffin, 2001, p.311). Benson (1997) describes these factors as developmental assets. These are the attributes of the individual and their environment, which serve as protection between that person and stressful life situations. Several key features can be seen in children and adolescents who are resilient. Adolescents and children who are resilient are often described as hopeful, optimistic and as having a sense of personal control (Stevens & Griffin, 2001). These individuals draw support from others and tend to form relationships with significant adults in their social environments. It is the involvement in, and maintenance of, supportive and sustaining relationships with adults that seem to significantly buffer children from stress.

Aside from risk factors and resiliency, Mendler (2002), states that “many youth use substances and engage in other high-risk behaviors in an attempt to allay the emptiness accompanying broken belongings and schools can play an important role in fostering connections and creating the natural high that comes from success” (p.162).

Upcoming in this literature review are programs and initiatives that address high-risk behaviors and utilize resiliency and relationship building as key components to lessen high-risk behaviors among youth.

2.4. PART III:

2.4.1. Classifications of Prevention Programs

There are an immeasurable number of programs that are marketed toward reducing high-risk behaviors in youth. In addition to the regular health curriculum, many schools have implemented additional programs and/or initiatives to specifically prevent, minimize or delay the onset of high-risk behavior. Most programs have been developed to achieve the previously mentioned goals by focusing on a particular behavior for short-term, typically ranging from 1 to 20 sessions. This approach tends to fall into three broad categories or classifications. (Stipek, Sota, & Weishaupt, 1999, p. 437) The first category is the *Informational Approach*. These early school-based programs provide information that is focused on technical information. One example of the information presented in these sessions would be data that is relevant to diseases caused by tobacco, drugs and alcohol. The information provided to the students is usually selected to create a sense of personal vulnerability. Thus, concrete cases are presented and typically accompanied by graphic verbal and visual materials. Even though the *Informational Approach* provides

students with information to which they may not have been previously exposed, it provides little, if no opportunity for student centered activities.

The second category of prevention programs includes, a *Life Skills Training Approach (LST)*. These programs are designed to help youth develop skills that have a direct and/or indirect effect on their behavior and psychological well-being. In the *LST* approach, youth participate in activities to develop skills in social competencies, decision-making, and emotional and stress management. By participating in these activities it is hoped that youth will develop emotion and stress management strategies, and build greater self-esteem and a sense of control. A benefit of the *LST* approach is the students' active involvement in skill building activities that will be used throughout life.

The third classification of approaches used in prevention programs utilizes a mix of information, *LST* strategies, and strategies that are relevant *only* to the targeted specific behavior. Most of the *LST* strategies and goals that are observed in substance abuse prevention programs are also found in programs that are designed to prevent violent behavior, which includes a focus on increasing social competencies, social problem solving, emotion management, conflict resolution and anger and impulse control (Stipek, Sota, & Weishaupt, 1999). A benefit of this approach is the activities and information presented addresses a targeted specific behavior. Therefore, the focus is specifically on the problem behavior the student possesses.

Programs that promote abstinence only, and are designed to decrease and/or delay sexual activity, utilize a variety of instructional approaches. The programs include assertiveness training and responsible decision-making strategies, but most often the focus is on values (Stipek, Sota, & Weishaupt, 1999).

With the plethora of programs, activities, instructional approaches, and initiatives available for schools to implement, which strategies are best to reduce high-risk behaviors among our youth? Evaluation studies strongly support *LST* over the information approach and the approaches that stress values (Dusenbury & Falco, 1995, Tobler & Stratton, 1997). A study conducted by Tobler and Stratton (1997) illustrated that interactive programs, which involve students actively participating by interacting with each other, brainstorming, and sharing ideas had substantially greater effects than didactic programs where students play a relatively passive role in the learning process. Interactive programs are statistically superior to non-interactive programs in preventing high-risk behaviors among adolescents. Interactive programs involve peer-to-peer communication based on face-to-face interaction. Peer interactions may involve planned activities where students can role play in order to provide a real world, age appropriate experience (Black, Tobler, & Sciacca, 1998). It was also found in Tobler and Stratton's (1997) study, that programs that include media influences, goal setting, decision-making and social skills produce stronger effects on the youth participating in the program.

2.4.2. Components of Effective Prevention Programs

A study conducted by Dusenbury and Falco (1995) identifies the most important components of prevention programs. In order to ascertain how success is most likely to be achieved through prevention programs, extensive interviews occurred with a panel of 15 leading experts in the field of prevention. Through a review of literature, and an in-depth discussion with a panel of 15 leading experts, Dusenbury and Falco (1995) identify eleven key components that are essential for prevention programs to be effective and successful. The following eleven components were identified to be present in effective prevention programs. Successful and effective prevention

programs should possess the following: (1) research-based and theory driven, (2) developmentally appropriate information, (3) social resistance skills training, (4) include normative education, (5) broader-based skills training and comprehensive health education, (6) interactive teaching techniques (7) teacher training and support, (8) adequate coverage and sufficient follow-up, (9) cultural sensitivity, (10) family, community and media components and, (11) evaluation procedures.

In addition to the aforementioned components of effective prevention programs, the *National Institute on Drug Abuse* also recommends principles to increase program effectiveness (NIDA, 2004). The following principles are intended to help educators, parents and community leaders think about, plan for and deliver research-based drug abuse prevention programs (NIDA, 2004 p.11). Some of the principles include the following strategies to increase the effectiveness of prevention programs.

A primary principle emphasizes the importance of prevention programs enhancing protective factors, and reversing or reducing risk factors. Previously in this literature review, a risk factor was defined as “a condition that, if present increases the likelihood of a person developing an emotional or behavioral problem” (Stevens & Griffin, 2001, p. 311). According to the *National Institute on Drug Abuse (2004)*, early intervention with risk factors (e.g. aggressive behavior and poor self-control) often has a greater impact than later intervention by changing a child’s life path away from problems and toward positive behaviors. Along with the strategy of decreasing risk factors, prevention programs should enhance protective factors such as parental support and positive environments. According to the NIDA families can provide protection from drug abuse when there is a strong bond between children and parents. Parents

need to be active in their child's life, and set clear limits with consistent enforcement of discipline.

Prevention programs should also address *all forms* (legal and illegal) of drug use including tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, heroin, inhalants, prescription medication and over-the-counter drugs. When prevention programs are offered in schools, they can be designed to intervene as early as preschool in which the focus may be reducing risk factors for drug abuse, such as aggressive behavior, poor social skills and academic difficulty. However, when prevention programs are offered in the secondary schools (middle and high school), an emphasis should be on increasing academic and social competencies. Some of the skills taught at this level should include drug resistance skills, communication, peer relationships, self-efficacy and assertiveness, study habits, and reinforcement of anti-drug attitudes and personal commitments against drug abuse.

Regardless of the grade level that prevention programs are introduced, proper delivery is extremely important. Prevention programs should be long-term with repeated interventions to reinforce the prevention goals. Teachers delivering the program should have training in good classroom management practices, which may include, rewarding appropriate student behavior and implementing classroom management techniques that will foster student achievement, academic motivation and school bonding.

Finally, prevention programs are most effective when interactive techniques are employed such as peer discussion and role-playing, which promote active student involvement in the learning process. Student involvement in prevention programs is essential because a student's most immediate exposure is to other students.

2.4.3. Part III: Current Marketed Prevention Programs and Other Initiatives to Decrease High-Risk Behaviors

Quite a lot is currently known about the effective ingredients of promising prevention curricula. It is therefore discouraging to note that most of the money spent in this country on drug education has not been spent on promising programs. (Dusenbury & Falco, 1995, p. 428). According to Dusenbury & Falco, (1995), in 1991 a Government Accounting Office reported that approximately a quarter of the \$500 million spent annually on drug education programs was spent on aggressively marketed programs that have not been evaluated or have been shown not to be effective. DARE, QUEST, and Here's Looking at You 2000 are the three largest marketed programs. Other programs that are marketed aggressively included BABES, Project Charlie and Project Adventure, and Project Alert. Out of the aggressively marketed programs mentioned, only DARE has been evaluated adequately. DARE is one of the oldest and unquestionably the largest prevention program in the United States that has been designed to reduce violence and the use of tobacco, alcohol and drugs. Even though DARE has been very successful in dissemination and diffusion, the program is not any more effective in reducing substance abuse behaviors than standard curricular approaches (Dusenbury & Falco, 1995). Drug prevention programs in schools are a critical element of the anti-drug effort, yet only 9% of school districts are using programs whose effectiveness has been demonstrated through rigorous research (U.S. Department of Education & Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, 2002).

The preceding information presented in this study focuses on high-risk behaviors among our youth, along with strategies and programs that have been implemented to prevent high-risk problem behaviors. Classifications of prevention programs, and components for effective prevention programs have also been identified, but neither includes concepts or a focus on “caring for kids” or “relationship building.” Mendler (2002) asks, “Could it be that we would

have more emotionally healthy kids in our schools if we made caring for and about others as important to school success as achieving high scores on our high-stakes tests?” (p.162). Would students less likely drown their sorrows in drugs and alcohol if they experience positive caring relationships and feel a sense of “connectiveness” to their schools? (Mendler, 2002, p.162). For example, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health reported that “school connectedness--students’ sense of being treated fairly at school, feeling close to people at school, and feeling as if they are a part of their school-protected them from a range of health risks, including depression and loneliness, substance use, violence, and sexual intercourse” (Resnick, M., Bearman, R., Blum, K., Harris, K., Jones, J., Beuhring, R., et. al, 1997).

In 1996, the 40 Developmental Assets framework was developed to serve as a comprehensive framework for school districts and communities to determine what their youth need to thrive. (Background and history of Search Institute’s research efforts, 2004). The 40 Developmental Asset Framework may also be considered as a viable approach to lessen high-risk behaviors among youth.

Scales & Leffert (1999) state, “when adults talk about youth, they talk mostly about problems-alcohol and other drugs, adolescent pregnancy, and school dropout” (p.1). Unfortunately, many Americans have a distorted view of our youth. For this reason, they have an inaccurate picture of what youth need to succeed. Throughout the past two decades, policies and programs have been developed to focus on preventing specific behavior problems (Scales & Leffert 1999). However, research has shown that this approach to programming has had limited impact on preventing the problem behaviors (Dusenbury & Falco, 1995).

Since 1989, Search Institute has conducted in-depth research on prevention, resiliency, and positive youth development. They closely studied the correlation between positive

relationships, values, opportunities and youth success. Their research involved over 500,000 6th-12th-grade youth in more than 600 communities across the country. Through this research, Search Institute developed a framework and identified 40 concrete, positive experiences and qualities that have a tremendous influence on young people's lives (Scales, 1999). Search Institute has found that these assets are powerful influences on adolescent behavior-both protecting young people from many different problem behaviors and promoting positive attitudes and behaviors. The relationships between assets and youth well-being are fairly consistent for adolescents across different socioeconomic backgrounds, race and ethnicity, community size and region (Scales 1999).

Simply stated, the 40 developmental assets are building blocks. The more assets young people possess, the less likely they are to engage in risky behaviors (such as drug and alcohol use, sexual activity and violence) and the more likely they are to engage in positive behaviors (such as succeeding in school or volunteering time to help others) (Scales & Leffert, 1999). The focus on the 40 developmental assets suggests that the assets together have the potential to weave a strong fabric that supports and guides positive youth development, even in the face of multiple adversities; that is, the assets can promote resiliency (Scales 1999). Resiliency refers to a "class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development" (Masten, 2001, p. 228). Research on resiliency aims to understand the processes that account for these good outcomes. One theory supports the idea that if enough assets or resources were added to a child's life, there would be a counterbalance between the assets and negative effects of high adversity. Asset building interventions are based on the theory that supports the idea that positive assets can offset the burden in a child's life from one or many risk influences.

The 40 developmental asset framework developed by Search Institute includes eight categories representing broad domains of influence in young people's lives. The framework consists of external and internal assets. The external assets are grouped under the categories of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations and constructive use of time. Commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies and positive identity are categorized as internal assets. There are a total of 40 developmental assets included in the asset framework (Starkman, N., Scales, P. L., & Roberts, C., 1999).

Out of the 40 developmental assets, there are five assets that seem to protect youth from high-risk behaviors such as substance abuse, antisocial behavior and violence, school problems, depression, suicide and sexual intercourse. The five assets that work to protect youth from these high-risk behaviors include assets # 15 positive peer influence, #36 peaceful conflict resolution, #20 time at home, #22 school engagement and #35 resistance skills (Scales, 2000). Collectively these assets describe students who do not use substances or engage in sexual intercourse, do not resort to violence, are able to say no to unwanted pressures, and spend time at home as opposed to going out with nothing special to do. These students also care about their school and their academic success. Students who possess these assets describe their friends in a similar fashion (Scales, 2000). Out of these five assets, schools can have a positive influence on, and work to promote asset #22 school engagement, #35 resistance skills and #36 peaceful conflict resolution. Schools can provide opportunities for students to build resistance skills, conflict resolution strategies and become engaged in their school environment.

There are also 11 developmental assets that appear to promote a range of thriving indicators (e.g. school success, helping others, delaying gratification, overcoming adversity and maintaining physical health). They include assets number # 18 time spent in youth programs,

#34 cultural competencies, #38 self-esteem, #32 planning and decision making skills, #21 achievement motivation, #22 school engagement, #3 other adult relationships, #25 reading for pleasure, #35 resistance skills, #23 time spent on homework and the positive value assets of #26 caring, #27 equality, and #28 integrity.

Together these assets describe youth who spend several hours a week in organized after school programs, feel comfortable with themselves and others, work hard at their schoolwork, and have several adults other than parents who care about them. These students also read for fun, espouse key positive values, and again are able to say no to unwanted pressures (Scales, P., Benson, P., Leffert, N., Blyth, D., 2000).

Unfortunately, out of the assets listed above, there are some assets that schools can do very little to promote. However, there are actions that schools and educators can take to promote as many as 12 of the assets listed above. Specific actions can be taken by educators in school organization and structure, curriculum and instruction, support services and community partnerships in order to assist youth in building several of the assets that have been identified to decrease high-risk behaviors and increase youth success. Some of these ideas may include keeping the school open for activities in the evening and on weekends, providing times within and outside of the school day for tutorial assistance from peers and adults, using teacher- based guidance to foster closer teacher-student relationships, broadening student input to classroom and school rules and consequences, establishing or expanding student mediation or student court systems, and/or utilizing interdisciplinary “care teams” of school adults who are responsible for getting to know specific students more deeply (Scales 2000). Additional ideas for building these developmental assets can be found in Starkman, Scales & Roberts book (1999), *Great places to*

learn and Taccogna, J., (2003) *Powerful teaching: Developmental assets in curriculum and instruction*.

In conclusion, the 40 Developmental Assets can be utilized as a “framework” to help lessen high-risk behaviors among youth. The asset approach is not a “prevention program” but a way of living and building relationships with youth. If schools can focus on engaging youth in their school environments, and building meaningful student-adult relationships, students may become more motivated to achieve academically. This premise and approach of relationship building is consistent with the research presented earlier in this study pertaining to *Breaking Ranks II*, which focuses on strategies for leading high school reform. Current research makes it apparent that relationship building should be a key component included in high school reform. Therefore, the 40 Developmental Asset framework can serve as a key initiative in reducing high-risk behaviors among youth, as well as an integral component in high school reform initiatives.

2.5. CONCLUSION

High-risk behaviors among high school students, is a continual concern for schools and communities. Research has identified key components, strategies and effective programming techniques to address this serious issue. However, we cannot underestimate the power of making our schools and classrooms welcoming, safe places for students to enjoy and succeed. Even though some students will continue down a destructive path despite our best efforts, we must make an ongoing effort to build and foster healthy, caring relationships with our youth, and provide them with opportunities to succeed. It is through the sense of belonging and feeling connected to others that makes youth have positive experiences. When students feel good,

chances are they will succeed and experience the *natural* high that success provides (Mendler 2002).

This study has presented several approaches and programs that are currently being utilized to lessen high-risk behaviors among youth. Not one approach or program has been identified as the sole answer to lessening the high-risk behaviors in which youth engage. However, the purpose of this study is to identify programs, initiatives, strategies and approaches that secondary schools are currently utilizing to reduce their youth's participation in high-risk behaviors. By providing valid and usable information pertaining to these programs, initiatives, and strategies, it is hoped that secondary schools can use the results of this study to further address the needs of their youth, reduce high-risk behaviors, and focus on overall positive youth development. If schools are able to offer prevention programs that are research driven, while concentrating on youth development, it is possible that students will build resiliency skills that allow them to experience success, in spite of risk factors and difficulties in their lives.

3. CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

A qualitative study was conducted of five secondary suburban senior high schools in Westmoreland County that implement programs to reduce high-risk behaviors among youth. This chapter details the procedures and methodology used in this study, including the participants, study design, instruments, procedures, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

The researcher gained permission from each school's superintendent to conduct interviews with the senior high school principals.

Through partially structured personal interviews, the researcher garnered information pertaining to the schools' prevention programs and each program's key components. During the interviews, the researcher also gathered information pertaining to the methods that are utilized to determine the effectiveness of the prevention programs implemented

3.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The purpose of this study is to provide school administrators with effective programs that are successful in lessening high risk-behaviors among students.

What type(s) of programs are school districts currently implementing to decrease high-risk behaviors among students and does the implementation of these programs reduce high-risk behaviors?

3.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What does the current literature say about the prevalence of high-risk behaviors in secondary students?
2. What key components are included in senior high programs to address high-risk behaviors?
3. What indicators of success do high schools use to determine the effectiveness of their programs in reducing high-risk behaviors?

3.4. PARTICIPANTS

The target population of this study was senior high school principals in Westmoreland County who have implemented programs in their schools in order to reduce high-risk behaviors among their students. The names of the schools were obtained through the Westmoreland Intermediate Unit and the Pennsylvania Department of Education

Throughout this study, a letter coding system will identify the participating schools. Listed below are brief descriptions pertaining to the schools' demographics.

3.4.1. School A

School A is a suburban senior high school with an approximate enrollment of 1,276 students in grades nine through twelve. The student population consists of approximately 4.6 percent low income students. There are 92 professional staff members employed in the school.

The senior high school met annual yearly progress for the criteria established by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. For the 2004 school year, Senior High School A's proficiency rate on the Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA) in the area of mathematics was 76.6 percent and 82.5 percent in the area of reading. The student graduation rate was 97.5 percent.

3.4.2. School B

School B is a suburban senior high school with an approximate enrollment of 1,163 students in grades nine through twelve. The student population consists of approximately 29.9 percent low income students. There are 68 professional staff employed in the school.

The senior high school met annual yearly progress for the criteria established by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. For the 2004 school year, Senior High School B's proficiency rate on the Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA) in the area of mathematics was 64.8 percent and 72.3 percent in the area of reading. The student graduation rate was 89.5 percent.

3.4.3. School C

School C is a suburban senior high school with an approximate enrollment of 1,708 students in grades nine through twelve. The student population consists of approximately 14.7 percent low income students. There are 100 professional staff employed in the school.

The senior high school met annual yearly progress for the criteria established by the No Child Left Behind Act 2001. For the 2004 school year, Senior High School C's proficiency rate on the Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA) in the area of mathematics was 56.1 percent and 71.2 percent in the area of reading. The student graduation rate was 96 percent.

3.4.4. School D

School D is a suburban senior high school with an approximate enrollment of 1,567 students in grades nine through twelve. The student population consists of approximately 6.5 percent low income students. There are 82 professional staff members employed in the school.

The senior high school met annual yearly progress for the criteria established by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. For the 2004 school year, Senior High School D's proficiency rate on the Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA) in the area of mathematics was 64.7 percent and 71.3 percent in the area of reading. The student graduation rate was 97.9 percent.

3.4.5. School E

School E is a suburban senior high school with an approximate enrollment of 901 students in grades nine through twelve. The student population consists of approximately 58.8 percent low income students. There are 58 professional staff members employed in the school.

The senior high school met annual yearly progress for the criteria established by the No Child Left Behind Law. For the 2004 school year, Senior High School E's proficiency rate on the Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA) in the area of mathematics was 64.3 percent and 75.3 percent in the area of reading. The student graduation rate was 91.7 percent.

3.5. INSTRUMENTS

Qualitative data were collected through personal interviews with five senior high school principals. In consideration of the problem statement and research questions for this study, a partially structured interview best met the needs of the researcher. A partially structured interview involves selecting preformatted questions, yet the researcher has the option to add or modify questions when she deemed it necessary to gain additional information. The senior high principals were asked both closed and open ended questions.

The interview questionnaire was designed by the researcher.

3.6. PROCEDURES

First, the researcher contacted the schools to speak with the senior high principals for agreement to participate in the study. After the principals agreed to participate in the study, a letter was sent to the superintendent of each school district seeking permission to conduct the interviews.

With permission of the participants, the researcher recorded the personal interviews through the use of a cassette tape recorder. The field notes consisted of the interview highlights and some direct quotations.

3.7. DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected from the interviews were reported in narrative form. In addition, a content analysis was conducted of the data pertaining to the questions posed to each principal. Charts were also used to exhibit data. An analysis of themes also occurred to determine major, minor, similar, and non-similar themes.

3.8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The proposal for this dissertation was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Pittsburgh. In addition, the researcher also completed the required modules on research ethics required by the University of Pittsburgh.

4. CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1. OVERVIEW

The senior high principals of five Westmoreland County suburban school districts were interviewed to determine the key components included in their prevention programs to address high-risk behaviors among students. Each principal in all five high schools spent approximately 60-90 minutes answering both open-ended and closed-ended questions during an interview with the researcher.

Chapter four of this dissertation will utilize the results of these interviews with the building principals to explore the problem and answer the research questions. Chapter IV will:

- a. describe the current prevention programs and key components of the programs implemented in each of the participating high schools
- b. indicate which high schools measure the effectiveness of their prevention programs
- c. present the indicators of success that high schools utilize to determine the effectiveness of the prevention programs

4.2. DATA PRESENTATION

Responses to the interview questions were tape recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The descriptive data were organized by the researcher and analyzed through the use of descriptive narratives and charts. The qualitative data were reduced by selecting, summarizing, and paraphrasing. The summarizing and paraphrasing was used to investigate the research questions.

The interview data for each question is presented in a reduced format. All data have been garnered from the principals' responses to the questions. In an effort to maintain the confidentiality of the principal and school district, a letter system has been utilized to record the data from each interview.

Responses to some interview questions warrant presentation of the data in the form of charts. The purpose of presenting data in charts is to provide data in a format that is organized, compact and accessible to the reader.

4.3. SIGNIFICANT RESULTS

4.3.1. Research Question 2: What key components are included in senior high programs to address high-risk behaviors?

4.3.1.1. School based prevention programs

School A's prevention programs aimed at reducing high risk behaviors

After interviewing the senior high school principal from School A, the following data were garnered pertaining to the current prevention programs offered in his/her school. School A offers three programs to reduce high-risk behaviors among students. The *Student Assistance Program*, *School Resource Officer*, and *Alternative Education Program* all address the risk-

behaviors of drug and alcohol use and violent activity. In addition to the risk-behaviors of drug and alcohol use and violent activity, the *Alternative Education Program* also focuses on assisting students who have school avoidance issues, which may lead to a decrease in academic achievement. None of the programs offered in School A focus on the risk behavior of sexual activity.

Explanation and key components of School A's prevention programs

The *Student Assistance Program* consists of a team of professionals who have been trained to identify students who are "at-risk." The *Student Assistance Team* is a resource team whose primary function is to provide immediate and long term help for students who are considered "at-risk." The team identifies students and assesses their current high-risk situation(s). The team also refers students who are experiencing problems with drug and alcohol use and/or violent activity to outside agencies in order to provide the students with additional assistance to help lessen the risk behaviors. Members of the team serve as mentors for the students and work to "connect" with those "at-risk" to provide a student with an adult relationship.

Key components that are utilized to lessen high-risk behaviors through involvement in the *Student Assistance Program* include; forming meaningful adult relationships, strategies to deal with conflict peacefully, and providing options to build resistance skills to restrain from participating in high-risk behaviors.

The second program the principal from School A explained involved assistance from the local police department. In School A, the local police department provides the school district

with a *School Resource Officer*. According to the principal from School A, “The *School Resource Officer* works as a proactive arm to reduce high-risk behaviors among students and is stationed at the high school two days a week.” The *Resource Officer* communicates with the District Justice to identify “at-risk” youth who could benefit from assistance in anger management, drug and alcohol prevention and decision making skills. The *School Resource Officer* works closely with the student, teachers, administrators and parents to provide support for the “at-risk” youth. The *School Resource Officer* may also assist in referring the “at-risk” youth to the appropriate agencies that can offer additional assistance.

Key components that are utilized to lessen high-risk behaviors through involvement with the *School Resource Officer* include; forming meaningful adult relationships, developing strategies to deal with conflict peacefully, and providing options to build resistance skills to restrain from participating in high-risk behaviors. Another key component that the *School Resource Officer* focuses on is reduce high-risk behaviors among students by engaging them in their school community. The principal from School A stated, “Students are less apt to become involved in high-risk behaviors when they are engaged in their school community.”

The final prevention program that the principal from School A discussed was the *Alternative Education Program*. This program targets youth who are not only at risk for drug and alcohol use and violent behavior, but also students who suffer from school avoidance and are not motivated to achieve academically. Once students are identified for the *Alternative Education Program*, they attend school for one half day with one instructor who not only focuses on improving academics and/or attendance, but provides counseling to address the needs of the students. The high-risk behaviors of the students are addressed through one on one counseling. Decision making skills, life skills training and relationship building are strategies that are

implemented during classes in the *Alternative Education Program*. Enrollment is limited to eight students. However, there may be as few as three students in the program at one time. If the student demonstrates improvement in the areas of concern, he/she may return to the regular school setting. According to the principal from School A, “*The Alternative Education Program* has kept the drop-out rate from climbing.”

Some of the key components that are utilized to lessen high-risk behaviors through involvement with the *Alternative Education Program* include; forming adult relationships, strategies to resolve conflict peacefully, and working to develop restraint and resistance skills. However, the *Alternative Education Program*, clearly focuses on motivating the students to achieve academically, while becoming more engaged in their school environment.

Chart 4.1 shows the key components that are included in School A’s prevention programs to address high-risk behaviors. An **X** indicates the key component(s) that are included in the prevention program.

CHART 4.1 KEY COMPONENTS INCLUDED IN THE PREVENTION PROGRAMS OFFERED IN SCHOOL A

School Program(s)	Achievement Motivation #21	School Engagement #22	Restraint/Resistance Skills #31 & #35	Peaceful Conflict Resolution #36	Other Adult Relationships # 3
Student Assistance Program			X	X	X
School Resource Officer		X	X	X	X
Alternative Education Program	X	X	X	X	X

School B's prevention programs aimed at reducing high risk behaviors

At the conclusion of the interview with the senior high principal from School B, the following data were collected pertaining to the current prevention programs offered in her school. School B offers three key programs to reduce high-risk behaviors among students. The three programs that the principal from School B explained were the *After School Suspension Program*, *Freshmen Seminar*, and the *Attendance Make-up Program*. The *After School Suspension Program* and the *Freshmen Seminar Course* focus on the risk behaviors of drug, alcohol, and tobacco use and violent activity. While the *Attendance Make-up Program* addresses students who have habitual attendance problems, which lead to a decrease in academic achievement, none of the programs specifically address sexual activity.

Explanation and key components of School B's prevention programs

The *After School Suspension Program* is geared toward addressing students who have behavioral problems in school. Students who are identified at-risk are required to participate in the program. The *After School Suspension Program* contains a strong educational component which is specific to the behavior and/or offense exhibited by the student. Students are referred to the program for drug and alcohol violations, violent activity and other discipline issues that are deemed as "major" or have occurred repetitively. The program is utilized more as a "reactive" measure as opposed to a "preventative" measure.

There is a strong counseling component included in the *After School Suspension Program*. Therefore, a main component included in the program is forming adult relationships. Building restraint and resistance skills, along with peaceful conflict resolution strategies, are key components introduced to the students through the program. The educator and certified counselor concentrate on those key components most related to the students' needs.

The second program described by the principal from School B is the *Freshmen Seminar* course. This course is required of all freshmen students. The class meets for 90 minutes every other day and the students are granted ½ of a credit for successful completion of the program. If a student does not pass the course, they are required to retake it. The course covers life skills training, positive decision making, social issues, anger management, diversity, career exploration, and relationship building.

Two key components addressed in the course include achievement motivation and forming other adult relationships. However, components such as conflict resolution, restraint and school engagement are also important concepts covered in the curriculum. The instructors of the course work hard to build trust with the students. According to the principal from School B, “the key to having the *Freshmen Seminar* program be successful, is having the right teachers teach the programs. Building trust with the students is the most important concept of relationship building.”

The *Freshmen Seminar* program is designed to be similar to a mentoring program that works to build leadership skills among the students. The principal from School B stated, “It is hoped that if students build relationships with the adults teaching the class, and at the same time build leadership skills, they will be motivated to achieve in school and will engage in fewer high-risk behaviors.” The course targets drug and alcohol use, sexual activity and violence.

The final program described by the principal from School B was the *Attendance Make-up Program*. This program addresses habitual attendance problems and was put into place as a result of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation which addresses school attendance and graduation rates. In School B, if a student misses more than four days in a nine week period without a

doctor's excuse, he/she is required to make-up the days of school missed. The make-ups occur during after school hours and on Saturdays.

The key components of the *Attendance Make-up Program* include school engagement and achievement motivation. Through participation in the program it is hoped that students become more motivated to attend school, therefore academic achievement should increase. Also, it is believed if the students become more engaged in their school environment, the chance of them becoming involved in high-risk behaviors decreases.

Chart 4.2 illustrates the key components included in the prevention programs offered in School B. An **X** indicates the key component(s) that are included in the prevention programs

CHART 4.2 KEY COMPONENTS INCLUDED IN THE PREVENTION PROGRAMS OFFERED IN SCHOOL B

School Program(s)	Achievement Motivation #21	School Engagement #22	Restraint/Resistance Skills #31 & #35	Peaceful Conflict Resolution #36	Other Adult Relationships # 3
After School Suspension Program			X	X	X
Freshmen Seminar	X	X	X	X	X
Attendance Make-up Program	X	X			

School C

School C prevention programs aimed at reducing high risk behaviors

As a result of an interview with the principal, the researcher obtained the following information pertaining to School C's prevention programs. School C offers four main programs to reduce high-risk behaviors among youth. The programs include the *Student Assistance Program*, a *School Based Social Worker*, *Communities in School*, and the *Voluntary Instruction*

Program (VIP). The *Student Assistance Program* and the school based *Social Worker* concentrate on reducing the high-risk behaviors of drug and alcohol use, as well as violent activity. The *Communities in Schools and VIP Programs* concentrate on improving attendance and graduation rates.

Along with the aforementioned programs, the principal explained that the health curriculum addresses high-risk behaviors as well. The health curriculum concentrates on the component of sexual activity. The majority of education pertaining to the prevention of sexual activity occurs through the health curriculum with the assistance of the school nurse.

Explanation and key components of School C's prevention programs

The *Student Assistance Program* was the first program the principal from School C explained. The key components and explanation of this program are previously stated in this dissertation. The explanation and key components of the *Student Assistance Program* remain consistent for School C.

In addition to the *Student Assistance Program*, School C has a school-based *Social Worker* who is available for the students three days a week. This individual works closely with the school guidance staff to identify students who have experienced problems pertaining to anger management, attendance, drug and alcohol use or abuse issues. Once the students are identified or referred, the *Social Worker* meets with the students to help them develop skills in conflict resolution, decision making, and resisting high-risk behaviors. Many times, the *Social Worker* also communicates closely with the students' probation officer. According to the principal from School C, "The goal is to provide another opportunity and resource for students to connect with

an adult to form a meaningful and trusting relationship.” Through this connection it is hoped that the students will become less involved in the high-risk behaviors in which they are engaged.

The third prevention program that School C’s principal described was the *Communities in Schools Program*. This program is state funded and provides an out of school adult who has been trained to counsel students who are at risk for dropping out of school. Students who are failing academically or have a high absentee rate are identified to participate in this program.

The adult representative for the *Communities in Schools Program* focuses on motivating students to become engaged in their learning and to achieve academically. The program focuses on mentoring and building relationships with students who are at risk for graduating and/or students who are engaging in high-risk behaviors that may be preventing them from achieving academically.

The final prevention program that the principal from School C explained was the *Voluntary Instruction Program (VIP)*. The principal from School C described this program as being offered to students as a “last call to succeed and graduate from high school.” This program is a voluntary program offered to junior and senior high school students who have chronic attendance problems, been involved in severe disciplinary infractions, or are wishing to drop out of school. The program is also available to students who have withdrawn from school, but wish to re-enroll.

Students who choose to become involved in this program are required to attend the program from three o’clock in the afternoon to six o’clock in the evening. A strict tardy and attendance policy is enforced. Enrollment is limited to twelve students and five credits are granted to the students who complete the program. The curriculum consists of English, science, math, social studies and health and physical education. There is also a counseling component

that focuses on life and decision-making skills. The primary goal of the program is to provide at-risk students an opportunity to achieve academically without having to attend the traditional school day.

Chart 4.3 illustrates the key components included in the prevention programs offered in School C. An **X** indicates the key component(s) that are included in the prevention programs.

CHART 4.3 KEY COMPONENTS INCLUDED IN THE PREVENTION PROGRAMS OFFERED IN SCHOOL C

School Program(s)	Achievement Motivation #21	School Engagement #22	Restraint/Resistance Skills #31 & #35	Peaceful Conflict Resolution #36	Other Adult Relationships # 3
Student Assistance Program			X	X	X
School Based Social Worker			X	X	X
Communities In School	X	X			X
Voluntary Instruction Program	X		X		X

School D

School D's prevention programs aimed at reducing high risk behaviors

After interviewing the senior high principal from School D, the following data was garnered pertaining to the current prevention programs offered in his high school. School D offers three programs to reduce high-risk behaviors among students. The *Student Assistance Program* and *School Resource Officer* address the high-risk behaviors of drug and alcohol use and violence. The *Communities in Schools Program* focuses on students who are at risk for dropping out of school or who are failing to achieve academically. None of the programs in School D address the high-risk behavior of sexual activity.

Explanation and key components of School D's prevention programs

As previously explained for Schools A and C, the *Student Assistance Program* consists of a team of professionals who have been trained to identify students who are “at risk.” The key components that are utilized to lessen high-risk behaviors through involvement in the program include, forming meaningful adult relationships, strategies to deal with conflict peacefully, and providing options to build resistance skills to restrain from participating in high-risk behaviors. These key components are consistent in all schools who implement the *Student Assistance Program*.

The second program that the principal from School D explained involved assistance from the local police department. In School D, the local police department provides the school district with a *School Resource Officer*. The *School Resource Officer* visits the school once a week to walk the halls and eat with the students in the cafeteria. Along with the socialization component, the *School Resource Officer* co-teaches in the Health and Independent Living classes. The emphasis of the lessons pertains to drug and alcohol prevention. In addition to the content covered pertaining to drug and alcohol use, the *School Resource Officer* also covers laws and implications as they pertain to driving under the influence, and the possession, use, and sale of illicit drugs. According to the principal from School D, “The *School Resource Officer* emphasizes the importance of the students having positive relations with law enforcement officials and the need to communicate with adults when fellow students are at-risk or participating in high-risk behaviors.” The *School Resource Officer* became a component of School D's prevention programs after the Columbine tragedy.

Key components that are utilized to lessen high-risk behaviors through involvement with the *School Resource Officer* include; forming meaningful adult relationships, providing students

with strategies to deal with conflict peacefully and building resistance skills to assist them in refraining from participation in high-risk behaviors.

The third and final prevention program that School D’s principal described was the *Communities in Schools Program*. As previously stated in this dissertation, the program is state funded and provides an out of school adult who has been trained to counsel students who are at risk for dropping out of school. The key components of the program are consistent with those stated in School C.

Chart 4.4 shows the key components that are included in School D’s prevention programs to address high-risk behaviors. An **X** the key components included in the prevention programs.

CHART 4.4 KEY COMPONENTS INCLUDED IN THE PREVENTION PROGRAMS OFFERED IN SCHOOL D

School Program(s)	Achievement Motivation #21	School Engagement #22	Restraint/Resistance Skills #31 & #35	Peaceful Conflict Resolution #36	Other Adult Relationships # 3
Student Assistance Program			X	X	X
School Resource Officer			X	X	X
Communities In Schools	X	X			X

School E’s prevention programs aimed at reducing high risk behaviors

After interviewing the senior high principal from School E, the following data were garnered pertaining to the various prevention programs offered through the school. There were a total of six organized programs offered to students pertaining to prevention. In addition to the organized programs, School E has implemented several prevention initiatives throughout the years to help prevent students from engaging in high-risk behaviors. The researcher will first list

and describe the organized programs, then provide information pertaining to the on-going prevention initiatives. School E implements a *Student Assistance Program, School Based Mental Health Therapist, Mentoring Program, Community in School's Dropout Prevention Program, and Pregnant, Adolescent, Child Care Training (PACT)*.

Explanation and key components of School E's prevention programs

The *Student Assistance* and *Communities In Schools* Programs have been explained previously in the study. Schools A, C, and D implement the *Student Assistance Program*, while schools C and D implement the *Communities In Schools Program*. Both programs possess the key component of forming meaningful adult relationships. The *Student Assistance Program* also provides strategies for students to develop restraint and resistance skills and ways to resolve conflict peacefully, while the *Communities in Schools Program* focuses on achievement motivation and engaging students in their school environment.

The *School Based Mental Health Therapist* involves a professional *Mental Health Therapist* in the senior high school two days a week. The *Mental Health Therapist* focuses on students who are dealing with mental health issues which may lead to various types of violent activity. The students who are referred to the *Mental Health Therapist* are students who have participated in the *Student Assistance Program* and as a result, were referred to the *School Based Mental Health Therapist*.

There are many key components that the *Mental Health Therapist* utilizes to reduce high-risk behaviors among students. The *Mental Health Therapist* works to provide a meaningful adult relationship with the student. The therapist may work with the student on developing

restraint and resistance skills and/or positive conflict resolution skills. Each student is different, therefore the key components of the session change with each students.

The *Mentoring Program* involves 29 teachers who have been trained to identify students who are exhibiting at-risk behaviors. The mentors provide the students with support and a caring adult in the school who communicates with them on a regular basis. The key component in the *Mentoring Program* is to provide an opportunity for a student to connect with an adult and build a meaningful relationship.

The fifth organized prevention program offered in School E is *PACT*. *PACT* is the acronym for *Pregnant, Adolescent, Child Care Training*. This program provides education to adolescent students who have become pregnant and have children. The program is designed to provide support for the adolescent mother in order to reduce attendance problems and the drop-out rate. *PACT* also focuses on preventing future pregnancies.

The key components included in *PACT* to reduce high-risk behaviors include, achievement motivation, school engagement, and building restraint and resistance skills. This program is both reactive and preventative in reducing the high-risk behavior of sexual activity among adolescents.

The final prevention initiative was explained by School E's principal as the 40 Developmental Assets. The 40 Developmental Assets are building blocks. The more assets students possess the less likely they are to become involved in high-risk behaviors, such as drug and alcohol use, sexual activity and violence. The principal from School E stated, "The 40 Developmental Assets are an on-going initiative that concentrates on relationship building with students." The focus of the asset initiative is to provide students with opportunities to build external assets, such as forming meaningful adult relationships, so they can build internal assets

on their own. Internal assets may include integrity, responsibility, or restraining from high-risk behaviors. Last year, School E adopted the 40 Developmental Assets as a prevention strategy. However, according to the principal from School E, the framework of the assets is being utilized throughout the entire school.

In addition to the aforementioned prevention programs, School E has embraced several initiatives to reduce high-risk behaviors among students. Grade level team meetings are held on a regular basis for teachers to discuss at-risk students and strategize efforts to provide support and programming to address the students' needs. Staff development sessions are provided during teacher seminar time to train teachers on how to identify students who are at-risk for failing academically or who may be participating in high-risk behaviors.

Another initiative that School E implements to reduce high-risk behaviors among students is random drug tests. Any student who participates in sports, band or cheerleading is subject to random drug testing. If a student tests positive for drugs, the student is not disciplined, but provided with a program for rehabilitation. The student is suspended from the sport or activity until he/she tests negative for the substance(s). Regardless of the prevention program offered, the principal from School E made the following statement, "Trust is the key....students must trust an adult in order to have a meaningful relationship. That is what prevention is all about."

Chart 4.5 illustrates the key components that are included in School E's prevention programs to address high-risk behaviors. The **X** indicates the key component(s) that are included in the prevention program.

CHART 4.5 KEY COMPONENTS INCLUDED IN THE PREVENTION PROGRAMS OFFERED IN SCHOOL E

School Program(s)	Achievement Motivation #21	School Engagement #22	Restraint/Resistance Skills #31 & #35	Peaceful Conflict Resolution #36	Other Adult Relationships # 3
Student Assistance Program			X	X	X
Mental Health Therapist			X	X	X
Mentoring Program	X	X			X
Communities In Schools	X	X			X
Pregnant, Adolescent, Child Care Training (PACT)	X	X	X		
40 Developmental Asset Initiative	X	X	X	X	X

Summary of findings

All of the principals interviewed stated that their schools implement programs to address high-risk behaviors among students. The five schools that participated in this study offer both prevention and reactive programs to address the use of drugs and alcohol. The programs that are geared toward reducing the risk-behavior of drug and alcohol use include the strategy of teaching the students restraint and resistance skills. Another key component included in the drug and alcohol prevention programs is relationship building. All of the programs implemented to reduce drug and alcohol use focus on students developing meaningful relationships with adults.

School E is the only senior high school that has a program implemented to specifically address sexual activity among students. The *PACT Program* addresses the high-risk behavior of sexual activity, with a focus on preventing future pregnancies. However, this program is only offered to adolescent mothers. The program is not offered to adolescent fathers.

The principal from School C was the only one who reported that the prevention of sexual activity is addressed through the health curriculum. The principals from Schools A, B and D did not offer any information pertaining to programming efforts to reduce the high-risk behavior of sexual activity.

All five senior high schools implement programs to lessen violent activity among students. Conflict resolution skills and strategies to manage anger are key components taught through various programming efforts. The schools all offer prevention and reactive programs to address the high-risk behavior of violent activity.

Through the combination of various programs, the key components of achievement motivation, school engagement, restraint and resistance skills, peaceful conflict resolution and forming meaningful adult relationships are addressed in all five senior high schools. Out of the twelve different prevention programs implemented in the five senior high schools, there is only one initiative that individually addresses all of the aforementioned key components. The *40 Developmental Asset Initiative* is implemented in School E to reduce the high-risk behaviors of drug, alcohol and tobacco use, as well as sexual and violent activity. The *40 Developmental Asset Initiative* also promotes academic achievement and the overall positive development of youth.

4.3.2. Research question 3: What indicators of success do high schools use to determine the effectiveness of their programs in reducing high-risk behaviors?

School A

When interviewing the principal from School A, the researcher was informed that there is only one of the three prevention programs that have data to support the effectiveness of the program.

The principal from School A is aware that data must be submitted to the state pertaining to the

Student Assistance Program, but he is unaware of any specific data pertaining to program effectiveness. He also stated that the local police department may have data that supports the effectiveness of the School Resource Officer, but again he is unaware of the school district having access to any data that support the effectiveness of the program.

However, the Alternative Education Program does have data that support the effectiveness of the program. The Alternative Education Program is supported by a grant. Therefore, data must be collected and analyzed on an annual basis. When interviewing the principal from School A, he stated, “Our overall graduation rate and student attendance has improved since the implementation of the Alternative Education Program. Also, the students who have been involved in the program have had fewer overall discipline problems.”

Chart 4.6 illustrates the indicators of program effectiveness for School A’s *Alternative Education Program*. The researcher was given no specific numbers or percentages of indicators of success pertaining for the *Alternative Education Program*. However, the principal from School A, supports that students involved in the *Alternative Education Program* have demonstrated improvement in the following indicators.

The principal did not give the researcher any subjective or statistical data that supported the effectiveness of the *Student Assistance Program* or the *School Resource Officer*. Therefore, the chart below only depicts information pertaining to the effectiveness of the *Alternative Education Program*.

Chart 4.6 illustrates the indicators of program effectiveness for School A’s *Alternative Education Program*. The researcher was given no specific numbers or percentages of indicators of success pertaining for the *Alternative Education Program*. However, the principal from

School A, claims that students involved in the *Alternative Education Program* have demonstrated improvement in the following indicators.

**CHART 4.6 INDICATORS OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS FOR SCHOOL A'S
ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAM**

An **X** indicates the specific indicator of effectiveness and the change as a result of the implementation of the program. **NA** indicates that the key component was not addressed in the prevention program. Therefore, a level of effectiveness cannot be measured.

Key Component-Achievement Motivation

Indicator of success pertaining to achievement motivation	Measurement technique	Results
Increased high school completion	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased enrollment in college	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Better grades	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased effort at school	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-School Engagement

Indicator of success pertaining to school engagement	Measurement technique	Results
Increased homework completion	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Improved attendance	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased involvement in school activities	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater feelings of support at school	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Indicator of success pertaining to peaceful conflict resolution	Measurement technique	Results
Less verbal student confrontations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less physical fights	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less inappropriate/derogatory comments	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less disciplinary situations relating to conflict	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater personal control	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Restraint/Resistance Skills

Indicator of success pertaining to restraint/resistance skills	Measurement technique	Results
Less drug and alcohol use	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less student problems due to peer pressure	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less adolescent pregnancy	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less disciplinary situations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less suspensions/detentions	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Less students becoming involved in dangerous situations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater self control	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Other Adult Relationships

Indicator of success pertaining to other adult relationships	Measurement technique	Results
Increased number of students involved in mentoring programs	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students involved in athletics	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students involved in activities led by adults (ex: clubs, student aides, etc.)	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students seeking adult advice	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students making self-referrals for assistance (tutoring, counseling, etc.)	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

School B

When interviewing the principal from School B, the researcher was informed that no concrete data has been collected to support the effectiveness of the programs. However, there have been subjective evaluations of all three programs. The principals in School B have stated that students who have participated in the *After School Suspension Program* have a decrease in behavior problems which result in detentions and suspensions. This observation has been confirmed by the number of discipline referrals that the principals have handled, but the principal could not provide any quantitative data.

In the *Freshmen Seminar* and *Attendance Make-up Program* teachers met with students who participated in the program to illicit their opinions regarding the effectiveness of the programs. Both teachers and students felt the programs were effective in decreasing high-risk behaviors among students. The subjective evaluation pertaining to the *Attendance Make-up Program* was that student attendance improved as a result of the program's implementation. Students and teachers also offered input pertaining to the *Freshmen Seminar Course* and the decrease in high-risk behaviors among students. The specific high-risk behavior of violent activity was discussed. The teachers and students felt that there has been a definite decrease in

the number of racial issues that lead to violent activity. The teachers and the students felt that the decrease in racial issues was due to the conflict resolution and relationship building skills included in the *Freshmen Seminar Course*.

However, the principal from School B was cautious to make a general comment about the effectiveness of the programs. Her reluctance was due to the fact that many changes occurred in the school that could have had an effect on reducing high-risk behaviors among students. The principal from School B stated,

I am cautious in making a comment pertaining to the decrease in high-risk behaviors by students as a result of the programs. Many things have changed in our school since the implementation of the programs. One key change has been in the secondary administration. Three new principals have been hired who take a vested interest in building relationships with the students. This change in administration could definitely of had an effect on the behavior of students.

CHART 4.7 INDICATORS OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS FOR SCHOOL B’S AFTER SCHOOL SUSPENSION PROGRAM

An **X** indicates the specific indicator of effectiveness and the change as a result of the implementation of the program. **NA** indicates that the key component was not addressed in the prevention program. Therefore a level of effectiveness cannot be measured.

Key Component-Achievement Motivation

Indicator of success pertaining to achievement motivation	Measurement technique
Increased high school completion	NA
Increased enrollment in college	NA
Better grades	NA
Increased effort at school	NA

Key Component-School Engagement

Indicator of success pertaining to school engagement	Measurement technique
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Increased homework completion	NA
Improved attendance	NA
Increased involvement in school activities	NA
Greater feelings of support at school	NA

Key Component-Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Indicator of success pertaining to peaceful conflict resolution	Measurement technique	Results
Less verbal student confrontations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less physical fights	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less inappropriate/derogatory comments	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less disciplinary situations relating to conflict	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater personal control	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Restraint/Resistance Skills

Indicator of success pertaining to restraint/resistance skills	Measurement technique	Results
Less drug and alcohol use	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less student problems due to peer pressure	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less adolescent pregnancy	Not Measured	None
Less disciplinary situations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less suspensions/detentions	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less students becoming involved in dangerous situations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater self control	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Other Adult Relationships

Indicator of success pertaining to other adult relationships	Measurement technique	Results
Increased number of students involved in mentoring programs	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students involved in athletics	Not Measured	None
Increased number of students involved in activities led by adults (ex: clubs, student aides, etc.)	Not Measured	None
Increased number of students seeking adult advice	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students making self-referrals for assistance (tutoring, counseling, etc.)	Not Measured	Improved

**CHART 4.8 INDICATORS OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS FOR SCHOOL B'S
FRESHMEN SEMINAR**

An **X** indicates the specific indicator of effectiveness and the change as a result of the implementation of the program. **NA** indicates that the key component was not addressed in the prevention program. Therefore a level of effectiveness cannot be measured.

Key Component-Achievement Motivation

Indicator of success pertaining to achievement motivation	Measurement technique	Results
Increased high school completion	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased enrollment in college	Not Measured	None
Better grades	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased effort at school	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-School Engagement

Indicator of success pertaining to school engagement	Measurement technique	Results
Increased homework completion	Not Measured	None
Improved attendance	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased involvement in school activities	Not Measured	None
Greater feelings of support at school	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Indicator of success pertaining to peaceful conflict resolution	Measurement technique	Results
Less verbal student confrontations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less physical fights	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less inappropriate/derogatory comments	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less disciplinary situations relating to conflict	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater personal control	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Restraint/Resistance Skills

Indicator of success pertaining to restraint/resistance skills	Measurement technique	Results
Less drug and alcohol use	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less student problems due to peer pressure	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less adolescent pregnancy	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less disciplinary situations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less suspensions/detentions	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less students becoming involved in dangerous situations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater self control	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Other Adult Relationships

Indicator of success pertaining to other adult relationships	Measurement technique	Results
Increased number of students involved in mentoring programs	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students involved in athletics	Not Measured	None
Increased number of students involved in activities led by adults (ex: clubs, student aides, etc.)	Not Measured	None
Increased number of students seeking adult advice	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students making self-referrals for assistance (tutoring, counseling, etc.)	Not Measured	None

CHART 4.9 INDICATORS OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS FOR SCHOOL B'S ATTENDANCE MAKE-UP PROGRAM

An **X** indicates the specific indicator of effectiveness and the change as a result of the implementation of the program. **NA** indicates that the key component was not addressed in the prevention program. Therefore a level of effectiveness can not be measured.

Key Component-Achievement Motivation

Indicator of success pertaining to achievement motivation	Measurement technique	Results
Increased high school completion	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased enrollment in college	Not Measured	None
Better grades	Not Measured	None
Increased effort at school	Not Measured	None

Key Component-School Engagement

Indicator of success pertaining to school engagement	Measurement technique	Results
Increased homework completion	Not Measured	None
Improved attendance	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased involvement in school activities	Not Measured	None
Greater feelings of support at school	Not Measured	None

Key Component-Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Indicator of success pertaining to peaceful conflict resolution	Measurement technique
Less verbal student confrontations	NA
Less physical fights	NA
Less inappropriate/derogatory comments	NA
Less disciplinary situations relating to conflict	NA
Greater personal control	NA

Key Component-Restraint/Resistance Skills

Indicator of success pertaining to restraint/resistance skills	Measurement technique
Less drug and alcohol use	NA
Less student problems due to peer pressure	NA
Less adolescent pregnancy	NA
Less disciplinary situations	NA
Less suspensions/detentions	NA
Less students becoming involved in dangerous situations	NA
Greater self control	NA

Key Component-Other Adult Relationships

Indicator of success pertaining to other adult relationships	Measurement technique
Increased number of students involved in mentoring programs	NA
Increased number of students involved in athletics	NA
Increased number of students involved in activities led by adults (ex: clubs, student aides, etc.)	NA
Increased number of students seeking adult advice	NA
Increased number of students making self-referrals for assistance (tutoring, counseling, etc.)	NA

School C

The principal from School C informed the researcher that the school does evaluate the effectiveness of their programs. The principal stated, “As a result of the combination of our prevention programs, high-risk behaviors in freshmen and sophomore students have dwindled. As seniors, there are fewer discipline referrals and fewer students who are engaging in high-risk behaviors.”

School C’s principal was able to provide statistical information that supports the effectiveness of the *VIP* program. Since the implementation of the *VIP* program, there has been an increase in the graduation rate by 3%. This percentage was obtained from analyzing the graduation statistics at School C. This is the only statistical data that was presented to the researcher in regards to effectiveness of programs.

The chart below depicts the concrete data that supports the effectiveness of the *Voluntary Instruction Program*.

CHART 4.10 INDICATORS OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS FOR SCHOOL C’S VOLUNTARY INSTRUCTION PROGRAM

An **X** indicates the specific indicator of effectiveness and the change as a result of the implementation of the program. **NA** indicates that the key component was not addressed in the prevention program. Therefore a level of effectiveness can not be measured.

Key Component-Achievement Motivation

Indicator of success pertaining to achievement motivation	Measurement technique	Results
Increased high school completion	Objective Evaluation	3 % Increase
Increased enrollment in college	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Better grades	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased effort at school	Not measured	None

Key Component-School Engagement

Indicator of success pertaining to school engagement	Measurement technique
Increased homework completion	NA
Improved attendance	NA
Increased involvement in school activities	NA
Greater feelings of support at school	NA

Key Component-Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Indicator of success pertaining to peaceful conflict resolution	Measurement technique
Less verbal student confrontations	NA
Less physical fights	NA
Less inappropriate/derogatory comments	NA
Less disciplinary situations relating to conflict	NA
Greater personal control	NA

Key Component-Restraint/Resistance Skills

Indicator of success pertaining to restraint/resistance skills	Measurement technique	Results
Less drug and alcohol use	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less student problems due to peer pressure	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less adolescent pregnancy	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less disciplinary situations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Less suspensions/detentions	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less students becoming involved in dangerous situations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater self control	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Other Adult Relationships

Indicator of success pertaining to other adult relationships	Measurement technique	Results
Increased number of students involved in mentoring programs	Not Measured	None
Increased number of students involved in athletics	Not Measured	None
Increased number of students involved in activities led by adults (ex: clubs, student aides, etc.)	Not Measured	None
Increased number of students seeking adult advice	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students making self-referrals for assistance (tutoring, counseling, etc.)	Not Measured	None

The principal also gave the researcher subjective data, that supports the effectiveness of the combination of the *Student Assistance Program*, *School Based Social Worker* and *Communities in Schools Program*. This data will be presented in a single chart.

CHART 4.11 INDICATORS OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS FOR SCHOOL C'S COMBINED EFFORTS OF THE STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, SCHOOL BASED SOCIAL WORKER AND COMMUNITY IN SCHOOLS PROGRAM

An **X** indicates the specific indicator of effectiveness and the change as a result of the implementation of the program. **NA** indicates that the key component was not addressed in the prevention program; therefore a level of effectiveness can not be measured.

Key Component-Achievement Motivation

Indicator of success pertaining to achievement motivation	Measurement technique	Results
Increased high school completion	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased enrollment in college	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Better grades	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased effort at school	Not Measured	None

Key Component-School Engagement

Indicator of success pertaining to school engagement	Measurement technique	Results
Increased homework completion	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Improved attendance	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased involvement in school activities	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater feelings of support at school	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Indicator of success pertaining to peaceful conflict resolution	Measurement technique	Results
Less verbal student confrontations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less physical fights	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less inappropriate/derogatory comments	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less disciplinary situations relating to conflict	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater personal control	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Restraint/Resistance Skills

Indicator of success pertaining to restraint/resistance skills	Measurement technique	Results
Less drug and alcohol use	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less student problems due to peer pressure	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less adolescent pregnancy	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less disciplinary situations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less suspensions/detentions	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less students becoming involved in dangerous situations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater self control	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Other Adult Relationships

Indicator of success pertaining to other adult relationships	Measurement technique	Results
Increased number of students involved in mentoring programs	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students involved in athletics	Not Measured	None
Increased number of students involved in activities led by adults (ex: clubs, student aides, etc.)	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students seeking adult advice	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students making self-referrals for assistance (tutoring, counseling, etc.)	Not Measured	None

School D

When interviewing the principal from School D, the researcher was informed that subjective measurement techniques are the only way that the effectiveness of the prevention programs have been measured. The principal from School D stated, “Board policy prohibits surveys of any kind that deal with the attitudes and beliefs of the student body.”

Positive comments from parents, students and teachers in the form of informal feedback have been the only method for evaluating the effectiveness of School D’s prevention programs.

The principal had no specific details to report regarding the positive informal comments reported by the students, parents and faculty.

There is no concrete or subjective data to report in chart form regarding the effectiveness of School D's prevention programs.

School E

The principal from School E provided subjective evaluations regarding the effectiveness of the *Mental Health Therapist*, *Mentoring Program*, *PACT* and the *40 Developmental Assets*. Information pertaining to the effectiveness of the *Student Assistance Program* was also not provided. In addition, the principal informed the researcher that the *Communities in Schools* program is funded by a grant. This is the first year for the implementation of the program. Therefore, the principal from School E was unable to give any statistical or subjective feedback regarding the *Communities in Schools Program*.

In School E, the *Mental Health Therapist* is also funded by a grant. Therefore, statistical measurements must be kept to maintain the grant monies. The principal stated that she does not have specific statistics to share. However, subjective evaluations from the staff can attest that high-risk behaviors have lessened in students who became involved in counseling with the *Mental Health Therapist*. The principal from School E stated:

The *Mental Health Therapist* has provided students with multiple coping and decision making skills. The *Mental Health Therapist* also has a great rapport with the students and there is a strong sense of trust that exists among the therapist and students.

The *Mentoring Program* has received much positive feedback from both students and teachers. After graduation, students who had mentors during their high school years have come

back to the school to speak with the student body regarding their positive experiences. The principal from School E stated, “There has been a decrease in course failures and drop outs. Last school year (2004-05), there was a zero failure rate among the ninth grade class. Every ninth grader was promoted to tenth grade.”

School E’s principal reported that she was unaware of any statistics pertaining to the effectiveness of the *PACT* program, but felt confident that the county possessed statistic that supported the effectiveness of the program. Her subjective evaluation was that teen pregnancy was on the decrease. She also made the observation that students who had a child and participated in the program were less likely to become pregnant with a second child during their school years.

The principal from School E commented on the *40 Developmental Asset Initiative*. The principal felt the asset framework provides many strengths in reducing high-risk behaviors among youth. Being that the initiative is an on-going way of building relationships and working with youth, the principal observes the effectiveness of the program on a daily basis. The principal said, “It is all about connecting with kids. Saying hi, how are you? How did your game go last night? So many times it is the small things that staff members do or say to students that make a difference.”

When asked the about the effectiveness of random drug screenings, the principal informed the researcher that it was only the third school year for the random testing and she could not provide statistics to support its effectiveness. The principal’s personal opinion is that random drug screening helps prevent the students who may be “on the fence”, from participating in drug and alcohol use. The principal from School E posed the following question in support of

random drug screening, “How can you measure the number of students who choose not to use drugs due to the fear of being randomly tested?”

Charts 4.12-4.15 illustrate the indicators of program effectiveness garnered from subjective observations and evaluations for School E’s programs which include the school based *Mental Health Therapist, Mentoring Program, PACT, and the 40 Developmental Asset Initiative.*

CHART 4.12 INDICATORS OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS FOR SCHOOL E’S SCHOOL BASED MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST

An **X** indicates the specific indicator of effectiveness and the change as a result of the implementation of the program. **NA** indicates that the key component was not addressed in the prevention program. Therefore a level of effectiveness cannot be measured.

Key Component-Achievement Motivation

Indicator of success pertaining to achievement motivation	Measurement technique
Increased high school completion	NA
Increased enrollment in college	NA
Better grades	NA
Increased effort at school	NA

Key Component-School Engagement

Indicator of success pertaining to school engagement	Measurement technique
Increased homework completion	NA
Improved attendance	NA
Increased involvement in school activities	NA
Greater feelings of support at school	NA

Key Component-Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Indicator of success pertaining to peaceful conflict resolution	Measurement technique	Results
Less verbal student confrontations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less physical fights	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less inappropriate/derogatory comments	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less disciplinary situations relating to conflict	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater personal control	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Restraint/Resistance Skills

Indicator of success pertaining to restraint/resistance skills	Measurement technique	Results
Less drug and alcohol use	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less student problems due to peer pressure	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less adolescent pregnancy	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less disciplinary situations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less suspensions/detentions	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less students becoming involved in dangerous situations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater self control	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Other Adult Relationships

Indicator of success pertaining to other adult relationships	Measurement technique	Results
Increased number of students involved in mentoring programs	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students involved in athletics	Not Measured	None
Increased number of students involved in activities led by adults (ex: clubs, student aides, etc.)	Not Measured	None
Increased number of students seeking adult advice	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students making self-referrals for assistance (tutoring, counseling, etc.)	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

CHART 4.13 INDICATORS OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS FOR SCHOOL E'S MENTORING PROGRAM

An **X** indicates the specific indicator of effectiveness and the change as a result of the implementation of the program. **NA** indicates that the key component was not addressed in the prevention program. Therefore, a level of effectiveness can not be measured.

Key Component-Achievement Motivation

Indicator of success pertaining to achievement motivation	Measurement technique	Results
Increased high school completion	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased enrollment in college	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Better grades	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased effort at school	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-School Engagement

Indicator of success pertaining to school engagement	Measurement technique	Results
Increased homework completion	Not Measured	None
Improved attendance	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased involvement in school activities	Not Measured	None
Greater feelings of support at school	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Indicator of success pertaining to peaceful conflict resolution	Measurement technique
Less verbal student confrontations	NA
Less physical fights	NA
Less inappropriate/derogatory comments	NA
Less disciplinary situations relating to conflict	NA
Greater personal control	NA

Key Component-Restraint/Resistance Skills

Indicator of success pertaining to restraint/resistance skills	Measurement technique
Less drug and alcohol use	NA
Less student problems due to peer pressure	NA
Less adolescent pregnancy	NA
Less disciplinary situations	NA
Less suspensions/detentions	NA
Less students becoming involved in dangerous situations	NA
Greater self control	NA

Key Component-Other Adult Relationships

Indicator of success pertaining to other adult relationships	Measurement technique	Results
Increased number of students involved in mentoring programs	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students involved in athletics	Not Measured	None
Increased number of students involved in activities led by adults (ex: clubs, student aides, etc.)	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students seeking adult advice	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students making self-referrals for assistance (tutoring, counseling, etc.)	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

**CHART 4.14 INDICATORS OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS FOR SCHOOL E'S
PACT PROGRAM**

An **X** indicates the specific indicator of effectiveness and the change as a result of the implementation of the program. **NA** indicates that the key component was not addressed in the prevention program. Therefore, a level of effectiveness can not be measured.

Key Component-Achievement Motivation

Indicator of success pertaining to achievement motivation	Measurement technique	Results
Increased high school completion	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased enrollment in college	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Better grades	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased effort at school	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-School Engagement

Indicator of success pertaining to school engagement	Measurement technique	Results
Increased homework completion	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Improved attendance	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased involvement in school activities	Not Measured	None
Greater feelings of support at school	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Indicator of success pertaining to peaceful conflict resolution	Measurement technique
Less verbal student confrontations	NA
Less physical fights	NA
Less inappropriate/derogatory comments	NA
Less disciplinary situations relating to conflict	NA
Greater personal control	NA

Key Component-Restraint/Resistance Skills

Indicator of success pertaining to restraint/resistance skills	Measurement technique	Results
Less drug and alcohol use	Not Measured	None
Less student problems due to peer pressure	Not Measured	None
Less adolescent pregnancy	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less disciplinary situations	Not Measured	None
Less suspensions/detentions	Not Measured	None
Less students becoming involved in dangerous situations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater self control	Not Measured	None

Key Component-Other Adult Relationships

Indicator of success pertaining to other adult relationships	Measurement technique	Results
Increased number of students involved in mentoring programs	Not measured	None
Increased number of students involved in athletics	Not measured	None
Increased number of students involved in activities led by adults (ex: clubs, student aides, etc.)	Not measured	None
Increased number of students seeking adult advice	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students making self-referrals for assistance (tutoring, counseling, etc.)	Not Measured	None

CHART 4.15 INDICATORS OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS FOR SCHOOL E'S 40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSET INITIATIVE

An **X** indicates the specific indicator of effectiveness and the change as a result of the implementation of the program. **NA** indicates that the key component was not addressed in the prevention program. Therefore, a level of effectiveness cannot be measured.

Key Component-Achievement Motivation

Indicator of success pertaining to achievement motivation	Measurement technique	Results
Increased high school completion	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased enrollment in college	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Better grades	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased effort at school	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-School Engagement

Indicator of success pertaining to school engagement	Measurement technique	Results
Increased homework completion	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Improved attendance	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased involvement in school activities	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater feelings of support at school	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Indicator of success pertaining to peaceful conflict resolution	Measurement technique	Results
Less verbal student confrontations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less physical fights	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less inappropriate/derogatory comments	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less disciplinary situations relating to conflict	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Greater personal control	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
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Key Component-Restraint/Resistance Skills

Indicator of success pertaining to restraint/resistance skills	Measurement technique	Results
Less drug and alcohol use	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less student problems due to peer pressure	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less adolescent pregnancy	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less disciplinary situations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less suspensions/detentions	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Less students becoming involved in dangerous situations	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Greater self control	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Key Component-Other Adult Relationships

Indicator of success pertaining to other adult relationships	Measurement technique	Results
Increased number of students involved in mentoring programs	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students involved in athletics	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students involved in activities led by adults (ex: clubs, student aides, etc.)	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students seeking adult advice	Subjective Evaluation	Improved
Increased number of students making self-referrals for assistance (tutoring, counseling, etc.)	Subjective Evaluation	Improved

Summary of findings

Out of the five principals interviewed, only the principal from School C was able to offer quantitative data that supported the effectiveness of one of his school's prevention programs. The remainder of the programs in School C were evaluated subjectively.

The principals from School A, B, and E presented subjective evaluations pertaining to the indicators of success regarding the implemented programs. The subjective evaluations were based on observations made by administrators, teachers and students. All of the programs that were subjectively evaluated were perceived to show improvement in lessening high-risk behaviors among students.

The principal from School D did not present any subjective data supporting the effectiveness of the programs implemented in his school.

4.4. SUMMARY

The fourth chapter discussed the research findings that were garnered through personal interviews with high school principals regarding prevention programs that are implemented in their schools to reduce high-risk behaviors among students. The research findings also present information regarding the strategies that secondary schools utilize to determine the effectiveness of the prevention programs. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, descriptive narratives and charts were utilized to represent the data as related to the two research questions. Chapter five of this dissertation will complete the study by presenting significant findings, reflections of the researcher, and conclusions that were drawn as a result of the study.

5. CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter five reviews the key findings of the research study as it was reported in chapters two and four. In addition to a summary of the findings, the chapter derives major themes evolving from the research. The author also presents reflections from the study and how these reflections relate to her home school's prevention programs. Finally, the chapter will make recommendations for further research on the topic of prevention programs that are implemented in secondary schools to reduce high-risk behaviors among students.

5.2. CONCLUSIONS

5.2.1. Research Question 1: What does the current literature say about the prevalence of high-risk behaviors in secondary students?

5.2.1.1. Summary of Significant Findings

Chapter two begins by providing the reader with information pertaining to current high school reform initiatives that target student achievement and that are related to reducing high-risk behaviors among students. The researcher concluded the chapter by presenting three primary bodies of literature pertaining to high-risk behaviors.

The first body of literature contained statistical information gained from surveys and studies pertaining to the number of youth participating in high-risk behaviors and the causes and

factor's that may impact youths' participation in these behaviors. In the second body of literature, the researcher presented classifications and components of effective prevention programs. The third and final body of literature contained current marketed prevention programs and initiatives that decrease high-risk behaviors among youth.

In short, increasing numbers of youth are engaging in high-risk behaviors which are affecting them emotionally, physically and academically. These high-risk behaviors include drug and alcohol use, sexual involvement and violent activity. Many factors may contribute to youth becoming involved in these high-risk behaviors. One key influence on youth becoming involved in high-risk behaviors is the number of risk factors that they possess. A risk factor can be defined as "a condition that, if present, increases the likelihood of a person developing an emotional or behavioral problem" (Stevens & Griffin, 2001, p.311). Risk factors can increase a person's chances for drug or alcohol abuse or their likelihood to become involved in violent activities (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2004). The concept of resiliency, which is unlike risk, focuses on what factors contribute to the "successful" and "well adjusted" child, in spite of great stresses or risk factors in their lives (Stevens & Griffin, 2001, p.311).

Regardless of the prevention programs chosen by schools to reduce high-risk behaviors, there are key components that should be included in the programs. Some of these key components include; social resistance skills training, decision-making strategies, relationship building, conflict resolution skills, and strategies to engage youth in their own learning. Most of all, programs should be research-based and evaluated for effectiveness on a regular basis (Dusenbury & Falco, 1995).

In the summary of findings for research questions two and three, the review of literature will be utilized to determine the consistency between the qualitative data or themes resulting from the study and the existing research on effective prevention programs.

5.2.2. Research Question 2: What key components to address high-risk behaviors are included in programs that senior high schools implement?

5.2.2.1. Summary of Significant Findings

The senior high school principals all indicated that they implement programs to reduce high-risk behaviors among students. All of the senior high schools offer programs to address drug and alcohol use among students. Out of the programs reviewed, some programs are implemented to strictly prevent drug and alcohol use, while other programs are implemented as a reactive measure to address students who have become involved in the high-risk behavior of drug and alcohol use. As a result of the study, it was found that all of the five schools offer both prevention and reactive programs to address the use of drugs and alcohol.

Two of the five senior high schools, School A and D, utilize a *School Resource Officer*, to lessen the chances of youth becoming involved with drugs and alcohol. The *School Resource Officer* works with the students to develop relationships and provide information regarding the dangers and legal implications of drug and alcohol use. The *School Resource Officer* also assists students in developing restraint, resistance and decision-making skills. These skills can also be used by students to lessen the chance of them becoming involved in violent activities.

School B requires students to complete a *Freshmen Seminar Course* as a prevention measure for drugs and alcohol. The *Freshmen Seminar Course* includes opportunities for students to interact with one another and become actively engaged in their own learning. This course also teaches students restraint, resistance and decision-making skills.

School C utilizes a *School-Based Social Worker* to work with students to prevent drug and alcohol use, while School E has implemented a *Mentoring Program* and the *40 Developmental Asset Initiative* to lessen the chances of students becoming involved with the use of drugs and alcohol. The focus and key component in all three aforementioned programs is relationship building. The main goal of the programs is for students to form meaningful relationships with a caring adult. If students have a caring adult to turn to in difficult times, it is more likely that they will not become involved in risk-taking activities.

Four of the five principals spoke about utilizing the *Student Assistance Program* as a reactive measure to drugs and alcohol. Even though the principal from School B did not state that the *Student Assistance Program* was utilized in her school, the researcher is aware that the *Student Assistance Program* is a county-based program that is implemented in all Westmoreland County senior high schools.

Other programs that are implemented as a reactive measure to drug and alcohol use include School A's *Alternative Education Program*, School B's *After School Suspension Program*, School C's *Voluntary Instruction Program* and School E's *Mental Health Therapist*. All prevention and reactive drug and alcohol programs implemented in the five senior high schools include the key components of restraint and resistance skills and building relationships with other adults. Some of the programs also contain the key components of school engagement and achievement motivation. As previously stated in the research, students who become engaged in their schools are more like to achieve academically and less like to become involved in drug and alcohol use.

None of the five principals interviewed presented prevention programs that are geared specifically towards the prevention of tobacco use. However, the prevention of tobacco use is incorporated into the content of various programs offered.

School E is the only senior high school in this study that provides a program to reduce the high-risk behavior of sexual activity. The *Pregnant, Adolescent, Child Care Training (PACT)* is both reactive and preventative. Female students who become pregnant participate in the program. However, content in the program focuses on the prevention of further sexual activity and future pregnancies. Key components included in the *PACT Program* include restraint and resistance skills, as well as achievement motivation and school engagement. One principal did make mention that the prevention of the high-risk behavior of sexual activity, is “covered” in the health curriculum. The principal provided no information pertaining to the key components of the health curriculum, except that the curriculum was abstinence-based.

All of the five schools implement programs to address the high-risk behavior of violent activity. Both prevention and reactive programs are offered to students to reduce the high-risk behavior of violent activity. Programs offered throughout the five schools to prevent violent activity include the *School Resource Officer, Freshmen Seminar Course, Mentoring Program, Mental Health Therapist* and the *40 Developmental Asset Initiative*. All of the programs provide students with strategies to resolve conflict peacefully, build restraint and resistance skills and form relationships with adults.

Programs that have been implemented to react to students involved in violent activity include the *After School Suspension Program* and the *Student Assistance Program*. The key components of peaceful conflict resolution, building restraint and resistance skills and forming adult relationships are included in the reactive programs as well.

In addition to the aforementioned programs that address drug and alcohol use, and sexual and violent activity, the principals from all five schools explained programs that address the high-risk behaviors of school avoidance and attendance issues. School A utilizes the *Alternative Education Program* to address students who possess school avoidance or attendance issues. The key components included in the *Alternative Education Program* to address this risk-behavior include achievement motivation, school engagement and forming adult relationships. School B utilizes an *Attendance Make-up Program* to address school avoidance issues. The *Attendance Make-up Program* is a reactive program that consists of the key components of achievement motivation and school engagement. Even though the program is “reactive”, the principal from School B hopes that knowledge of the program actually works as a “preventative” measure to lessen school absenteeism as well. Schools C, D and E all have implemented the *Communities in Schools Program* as a prevention method to reduce school absenteeism and senior high school drop-out rates. The key components included in the *Communities in Schools* program include forming adult relationships in order to improve school engagement and achievement motivation. School E also utilizes the *40 Developmental Asset Framework* as a prevention measure for reducing school avoidance and attendance issues. The *40 Developmental Asset Framework* also utilizes the key components of forming adult relationships and engaging students in school to lessen the chance of student developing habitual attendance issues.

5.2.2.2. Themes that evolved regarding the key components included in programs to lessen high-risk behaviors among students

The first theme regarding the key components in prevention programs is the need for students to “connect” and develop “meaningful relationships” with adults in their schools. Regardless of the program, the principals stated the importance of the students building

relationships with the adults that are either teaching or participating in the prevention programs. Students need to be able to trust the adults in order for a meaningful relationship to develop. As stated from the principal in School E, “Trust is the key....students must trust an adult in order to have a meaningful relationship. That is what prevention is all about.”

The principal from School B voiced the same opinion regarding the importance of trust in relationship building and how it is related to the effectiveness of the school’s *Freshmen Seminar Course*. As stated by the principal from School B, “The key to having the *Freshmen Seminar* program be successful is having the “right” teachers teach the programs. Building trust with the students is the most important concept of relationship building.”

Mendler supports the importance of building relationships with students to lessen the chance of them becoming involved in high-risk behaviors. Mendler (2002) asks, “Could it be that we would have more emotionally healthy kids in our schools if we made caring for and about others as important to school success as achieving high scores on our high-stakes tests?” (p.162) Would students be less likely to drown their sorrows in drugs and alcohol if they experience positive caring relationships and feel a sense of “connectiveness” to their schools? (Mendler, 2002)

Another theme that evolved among schools was the importance of actively engaging students in the learning process when teaching prevention strategies. All of the schools include the teaching of decision-making, restraint and resistance, as well as conflict resolution skills in its prevention programs. However, there is a greater chance of the programs being effective when students are actively involved and interact with their peers during the delivery of the content. As previously stated in chapter two, a study conducted by Tobler and Stratton (1997) illustrated that interactive programs, which involve students actively participating with each

other, brainstorming, and sharing ideas had substantially greater effects than didactic programs where students play a relatively passive role in the learning process.

An additional theme that evolved was the need for students to be engaged in their school environment. School engagement can be viewed as a sense of “belonging” or possessing a “sense of ownership” in the school community. According to *Breaking Ranks II*, a term similar to school engagement is “personalization.” The common principles in “personalization include, students having a sense of ownership over the direction of their own learning, the ability to recognize options and make decisions and choices based on personal experiences, and providing students with opportunities to develop a sense of belonging to their schools” (*Breaking Ranks II*, 2004).

Another theme that evolved was the lack of instruction and education pertaining to the high-risk behavior of sexual activity. Three of the five schools never mentioned programming to address this at-risk activity. Only School E implements a program geared specifically toward reducing sexual activity among students. In addition, School C stated that sexual activity was addressed through the health curriculum. However, the principals from Schools A, B, and D did not present any programming efforts to reduce the high-risk behavior of sexual activity.

The final theme that evolved from this study was that all of the schools concentrate their efforts in reducing drug and alcohol use among students. The majority of the programs implemented are to address the high-risk behavior of drug and alcohol use.

5.2.3. Research Question 3: What indicators of success do high schools use to determine the effectiveness of their programs in reducing high-risk behaviors

5.2.3.1. Summary of Significant Findings

Four out of the five principals interviewed, could not present concrete, statistical data regarding the effectiveness of their prevention programs. The only statistic reported to the researcher regarding program effectiveness was from the principal in School C. The principal from School C reported a 3 % increase in his school's graduation rate as a result of implementing the *Voluntary Instruction Program*. However, four of the five principals reported subjective evaluations pertaining to the effectiveness of the programs in reducing high-risk behaviors among students. The principal from School D reported no subjective evaluations pertaining to program effectiveness.

In regard to the key component of achievement motivation, four of the five principals stated that they utilized increased high school completion as an indicator of success pertaining to the effectiveness of the programs. Four of the five principals also reported that student attendance improved as a result of providing prevention programs or initiatives that promoted school engagement. However, none could provide quantitative statistics to support this perception.

With the implementation of conflict resolution strategies, four of the five principals reported that physical confrontations decreased, as well as disciplinary situations relating to student conflict. The implementation of programs that included restraint and resistance skills, as well as relationship building strategies, proved to be the most effective in reducing high-risk behaviors among students. The principals reported that there was a decrease in disciplinary infractions involving drug and alcohol use and fewer students appeared to become involved in dangerous situation.

A crucial indicator of success regarding the effectiveness of programs involving a relationship building component is that more students appear to be seeking adults for advice and

support. Students are now making self-referrals for adult assistance when becoming involved in high-risk behaviors or struggling with academics.

5.2.3.2. Themes that evolved regarding the indicators of success that are used to determine the effectiveness of programs in reducing high-risk behaviors among youth

A key theme that evolved regarding principals measuring the effectiveness of programs in reducing high-risk behaviors among youth was the use of subjective evaluations. None of the five schools had any organized method for evaluating all of their programs. As previously stated, only one principal provided the researcher with statistical data supporting the effectiveness of a program implemented to improve achievement motivation and increase graduation rates.

A theme did evolve regarding the process for subjectively measuring the effectiveness of the implemented programs. Three of the five principals stated that they spoke with students and staff members to measure the indicators of program effectiveness. Informal, casual conversations were utilized to garner both students' and staffs' subjective evaluations of the effectiveness of the programs.

A final theme pertaining to the measurement of program effectiveness was a subjective evaluation of the decrease in student discipline referrals pertaining to high-risk behaviors. Principals voiced that when discipline referrals decrease, it usually supports the notion that some high-risk behaviors among students are declining. These high-risk behaviors include drug and alcohol use and violent activity pertaining to verbal and physical confrontations.

5.3. REFLECTIONS

As the researcher reviewed the findings of this study she reflected on the programs her school implements to decrease high-risk behaviors among students. Preventative and reactive programs are both offered to students in the researcher's high school. Specific programs are offered to decrease drug, alcohol and tobacco use. There are also programs specifically geared toward reducing violent activity through the implementation of conflict resolution strategies. The various prevention programs included in the researcher's senior high school are the *Student Assistance Program*, *Mentoring Program*, *Academic Resource Program*, *St. Vincent Prevention Projects*, *School-Based Mental Health Therapist* and the *Pregnant, Adolescent, Child Care Training Program*. The high-risk behavior of student sexual activity is also addressed through the health curriculum.

In addition to the aforementioned programs, the school district in which the researcher is employed has embraced the *40 Development Asset Initiative* as a key strategy to decrease various high-risk behaviors among youth. As previously stated in this dissertation, the *40 Development Assets* focus on relationship building as a key component in reducing high-risk behaviors among youth. It is through forming meaningful relationships with caring adults that students are more apt to be engaged in their school community, achieve academically, and participate in fewer high-risk activities. It is interesting to note that research pertaining to the *40 Developmental Assets* was presented in chapter two that supports the implementation of the initiative to decrease high-risk behaviors among youth and increase positive youth development. School E, and the researcher's school, are the only two schools included in this study that implement the *40 Developmental Asset Initiative*. It is surprising to the researcher that none of the additional

current marketed prevention programs presented in Chapter two are being implemented by any of the schools who participated in this study.

As a result of the researcher reflecting on this study, she identified one area in which her senior high school lacks in programming. The school does not have a school resource officer or a local law enforcement officer that is available at the senior high to assist in the educational and relationship building components of prevention. However, the senior high school is in the process of working with the Federal Bureau of Investigation to implement the *Adopt a School* program, which is organized and delivered by law enforcement personnel.

It was surprising to the researcher that only one school objectively measured the effectiveness of their prevention programs. It appears that schools continue to implement various prevention programs and initiatives without objectively evaluating the programs' effectiveness in reducing high-risk behaviors among students. However, a great deal of the data needed to measure the effectiveness of the programs could be obtained through various sources in the school district. It is the belief of the researcher that schools need to make data collection and analysis a priority in order to fully make an impact on reducing high-risk behaviors among students.

In regard to measuring program effectiveness in the researcher's school, the prevention programs and initiatives are measured subjectively. However, the researcher's senior high school does objectively measure high-risk behaviors among students through the implementation of the *Pennsylvania Youth Survey*. The data obtained from the survey is utilized to educate students, teachers, parents and the Board of Education regarding the percentage of youth in the senior high school who are engaging in high-risk behaviors. The survey has been given to students in the years of 1999, 2001 and 2005. There was an increase in high-risk behaviors

among students from 1999-2001. The increase in high-risk behaviors among students included the use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco. The results of the 2005 survey have not yet been obtained. It is hoped with the implementation of the aforementioned programs and the *40 Developmental Asset Initiative*, that there will be a decrease in high-risk behaviors among our student body. The researcher's school is currently in the process of organizing strategies to collect data in order to fully evaluate the effectiveness of the implemented programs and initiatives. Currently, the administration continues to subjectively evaluate the effectiveness of the programs implemented to reduce high-risk behaviors at the senior high school.

The administrators at the researcher's school are uncertain as to whether there has been a decrease in the high-risk behaviors of drug and alcohol use, and sexual activity among students as a result of program implementation. However, the administrators do feel that there has been a decrease in violent activity pertaining to verbal and physical confrontations among students. The number of physical fights and confrontations among students has been subjectively measured by the principals. There appears to be a decrease in discipline referrals pertaining to violent activity among students.

The administrators have also commented on the increase and/or improvement in academic achievement among the students participating in the *Academic Resource Program*. This perception is based on subjective observations. However, no quantitative data have been gathered to support this perception.

Finally, it is believed that through the implementation of the *40 Developmental Asset Initiative*, teachers are making a concerted effort to "connect" with students and build meaningful student-adult relationships. It appears that more students are seeking adults for guidance and assistance when dealing with difficult situations, which may lead to the

participation in high-risk behaviors. As a result of the relationship building efforts, it is also the teachers' and administrators' perception that students are feeling more connected to their school. Therefore, students are also feeling a sense of ownership in their school community.

In conclusion, the researcher always questions how one can measure the number of students who *do not* become involved in high-risk behaviors as a result of the programming efforts. This question may support the justification for further research.

5.4. SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The researcher suggests that on-going studies continue to address the relationship between positive youth development and high school reform.

5.5. CONCLUSION

When the researcher began writing the conclusion for this study a few key thoughts would not leave her mind. First, theory and reality are different, yet similar concepts. Theoretically, the principal's main role in a school is to serve as an instructional leader to the faculty, while concentrating on school reform initiatives that are integral in increasing student achievement. A large part of a principal's day should be spent visiting classrooms to validate effective instruction. Along with classroom observations, an on-going task of the principal is to analyze student data and review curriculum, instruction and assessment strategies, in order to make decisions that best meet the needs of students. In reality, a principal strives to accomplish the aforementioned tasks, but is periodically interrupted by life threatening situations that are a result

of students engaging in high-risk behaviors. Student drug overdoses and reports of a student bringing a weapon to school are real situations that a principal must respond to immediately. These situations involving high-risk behaviors command just as much attention as high stakes exams and student achievement. If principals use data to drive decisions pertaining to instructional practices for students, why do they not use data to drive decisions regarding the implementation of prevention programs? In the era of school reform, and the need to be data driven, principals must begin to objectively measure the effectiveness of their schools' prevention programs.

As previously stated, an increasing number of youth are becoming involved in high-risk behaviors. These behaviors not only affect the students' physical and emotional health, but can have a negative impact on the students' academic achievement. It is imperative for schools to continue to implement prevention programs and initiatives to reduce the chances of students engaging in high-risk behaviors. However, it is equally important for schools to have procedures to objectively evaluate the programs to determine the level of effectiveness in reducing high-risk behaviors among students.

APPENDIX A

SCHOOL DISTRICT PERMISSION LETTER

May 2, 2005

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am currently a doctoral student in the Department of Policy and Administrative Studies at the University of Pittsburgh and a high school principal within the Greater Latrobe School District. The purpose of this letter is to request your assistance with this dissertation study.

The purpose of this study is to provide school administrators with effective programs that are successful in lessening high risk-behaviors among students. Through this study I will examine the type(s) of programs that are currently being implemented to decrease high-risk behaviors among students. I will also examine if the school districts measure the effectiveness of such programs. The identity of each school district and individual participants will remain confidential. I am focusing on programs implemented at the senior high level. Therefore, I am seeking the opportunity to conduct personal interviews with your high school principal.

I would spend one day conducting a 30-40 minute interview with your high school principal. It is my hope to contact you within the next week to secure your approval and schedule a convenient time to conduct these interviews.

Please feel free to contact me at school (724) 539-4225 or home (724) 539-2444 should you have any questions or concerns regarding this study. Upon your request, a copy of the findings will be made available to you upon completion of this study. I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Georgia Teppert
Principal
Greater Latrobe Senior High School

APPENDIX B

Interview Instrument

Effective prevention programs that are successful in reducing high-risk behaviors among secondary school students

For the purpose of this study, *high-risk behaviors* will be defined as behaviors such as the use of drugs, alcohol and tobacco, and the engagement in sexual or violent activity, which may negatively impact the social or emotional well-being and success of an individual.

Participant _____ Position _____
 District _____ Date _____

1. What is the title of the program(s) your school is currently implementing?
2. Do your programs address the high-risk behaviors of drug, alcohol and tobacco use as well as sexual and violent activity?
3. Are there other high-risk behavior(s) addressed through prevention programs?
4. Within the prevention program(s) you currently implement, what key components does the program(s) address?

Key Component(s) that are addressed in the prevention program

School Program(s)	Achievement Motivation #21	School Engagement #22	Restraint/ Resistance Skills #31 & #35	Peaceful Conflict Resolution #36	Other Adult Relationships # 3

5. Does your school district measure the effectiveness of the implemented programs?
6. If yes, what indicators of success do you utilize to determine the effectiveness of your program in reducing high-risk behaviors?

Indicators of Program Effectiveness

Key Component-Achievement Motivation

Indicator of success pertaining to achievement motivation	Measurement technique	Results
Increased high school completion		
Increased enrollment in college		
Better grades		
Increased effort at school		

Key Component-School Engagement

Indicator of success pertaining to school engagement	Measurement technique	Results
Increased homework completion		
Improved attendance		
Increased involvement in school activities		
Greater feelings of support at school		

Key Component-Peaceful Conflict Resolution

Indicator of success pertaining to peaceful conflict resolution	Measurement technique	Results
Less verbal student confrontations		
Less physical fights		
Less inappropriate/derogatory comments		
Less disciplinary situations relating to conflict		
Greater personal control		

Key Component-Restraint/Resistance Skills

Indicator of success pertaining to restraint/resistance skills	Measurement technique	Results
Less drug and alcohol use		
Less student problems due to peer pressure		
Less adolescent pregnancy		
Less disciplinary situations		
Less suspensions/detentions		
Less students becoming involved in dangerous situations		
Greater self control		

Key Component-Other Adult Relationships

Indicator of success pertaining to other adult relationships	Measurement technique	Results
Increased number of students involved in mentoring programs		
Increased number of students involved in athletics		
Increased number of students involved in activities led by adults (ex: clubs, student aides, etc.)		
Increased number of students seeking adult advice		
Increased number of students making self-referrals for assistance (tutoring, counseling, etc.)		

APPENDIX C

40 Developmental Assets *TM*

1. **Family Support**-Family life provides high levels of love and support.
2. **Positive Family Communication**-Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.
3. **Other Adult Relationships**-Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
4. **Caring Neighborhood**-Young person experiences caring neighbors.
5. **Caring School Climate**-School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
6. **Parent Involvement in Schooling**-Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.
7. **Community Values Youth**-Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
8. **Youth as Resources**-Young people are given useful roles in the community.
9. **Service to Others**-Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
10. **Safety**-Young person feels safe at home, school, and in the neighborhood.
11. **Family Boundaries**-Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
12. **School Boundaries**-School provides clear rules and consequences.
13. **Neighborhood Boundaries**-Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.
14. **Adult Role Models**-Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
15. **Positive Peer Influence**-Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.
16. **High Expectations**-Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.
17. **Creative Activities**-Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
18. **Youth Programs**-Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.
19. **Religious Community**-Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.
20. **Time at Home**-Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.
21. **Achievement Motivation**-Young person is motivated to do well in school.
22. **School Engagement**-Young person is actively engaged in learning.
23. **Homework**-Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.
24. **Bonding to School**-Young person cares about her or his school.
25. **Reading for Pleasure**-Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.
26. **Caring**-Young person places high value on helping other people.
27. **Equality and Social Justice**-Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.
28. **Integrity**-Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
29. **Honesty**-Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."
30. **Responsibility**-Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.
31. **Restraint**-Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.
32. **Planning and Decision Making**-Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
33. **Interpersonal Competence**-Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
34. **Cultural Competence**-Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.

- 35. Resistance Skills**-Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
- 36. Peaceful Conflict Resolution**-Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.
- 37. Personal Power**-Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."
- 38. Self-Esteem**-Young person reports having a high self-esteem.
- 39. Sense of Purpose**-Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."
- 40. Positive View of Personal Future**-Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

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