

**VOICES OF TEEN MOTHERS: THEIR CHALLENGES,
SUPPORT SYSTEMS, AND SUCCESSES**

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ABSTRACT

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Teenage mothers are at a greater risk to drop out of school than their non-parenting classmates. The many and varied reasons for leaving school early are well documented. To examine why some at-risk students remain in school through graduation, this study will utilize three primary and accepted reasons why students drop out: school, personal and economic.

Through qualitative analysis this study will examine why some high-risk teen mothers, faced with the challenges and opportunities of school, personal and economic services, manage to graduate from high school. The study design consists of five interviews with females who were pregnant or parenting as high school students. The narratives provide an insight into the challenges the young women encountered during pregnancy and childrearing at home and in school. The narratives also work as a framework for exploring the school, personal and economic factors that most influenced their ability to remain in school through graduation. Through a detailed qualitative analysis of the data, a quantitative matrix was designed to evaluate and score the impact level of school, personal and economic support.

School-related support and personal support were found to be of near or equal importance to teen mothers actively working toward high school graduation. Economic support appeared least important of the three categories. The study also found that greater support from one category (i.e. school), could compensate for deficiencies in a separate category (i.e. personal). Furthermore, the study found across the board that success in terms of a teen mother graduating from high school hinged to some degree on a personal transformation within the teen mother, often spurred by dynamic leaders within the school or outside agencies that have regular contact with the teen mother.

Further revealed was the significance of familial acceptance and support. The study makes apparent the need for further research of the dynamics of family in regard to nurturing success for a teen mother.

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1.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

1.1 STATISTICS AND BACKGROUND

The last 50 years has seen a dramatic change in the value of a high school education. In the 1950s, a high school degree was a valued asset in the labor market, and through the 1970s, a high school diploma promised many career opportunities. In recent years, however, the advances in technology and global competition have created a demand for a highly skilled labor market, transforming a high school education into a minimum requirement for entry into the labor market (Kaufman, Alt & Chapman, 2001).

Generations ago, the pool of uneducated and undereducated citizens was tolerated, even welcomed, by communities at large. Those individuals with little or no formal education provided what was perceived as an essential unskilled labor pool for an industrial and agricultural economy (Montecal, Cortez, & Cortez, 2004).

The beginning of the twentieth century ushered in a dramatic demographic change, which had a resulting impact on education. The demographic change was immigration. Teenagers were excluded from the labor market as employers turned to adult immigrants for cheap labor. This phenomenon resulted in a surge from 200,000 high school students in 1890 to 1.8 million by 1920. The number of high schools increased during that period by nearly 600 percent (Dorn, 1996).

As high school population increased, so too did the high school “leavers.” Attrition in high school, now more commonly known as “dropouts,” is a relatively recent phenomenon. The dropout problem first appeared in literature in the 1950s and 1960s. “The ubiquitous usage of the term ‘dropout’ today belies its relative novelty, for the socially recognized category of high school dropouts did not exist until 30 or 40 years ago” (Dorn, 1996, p. 66).

The trend of child labor, brought on by immigration, was reversed with the advent of World War II. The squeeze on the American workforce as a result of the war forced children/teenagers back into the workforce. This resulted in a call for universal education following the war. The National Education Association (NEA) commissioned a study on the issue of public education. The educational policy commission recommended compulsory attendance until eighteen years of age for all American students (Dorn, 1996).

Each year our public schools lose nearly one-third of all high school students who fail to graduate with their cohort class. The consequences, individual and social, are tragic. Who are America’s dropouts? Woods (1995, ¶ 3) identified the diverse definitions and data associated with students who drop out of school. “Different definitions of dropouts, different time periods during the school year when dropout data are collected, different data collection methods, different ways of tracking youth no longer in school, and different methods used by school districts and states to calculate the dropout rate, result in unreliable aggregated national dropout figures” (Woods, 1995).

Researchers and school districts have found it almost impossible to clearly define a high school dropout. For example, students are often presumed dropouts if they stopped attending high school and no other district requested their file.

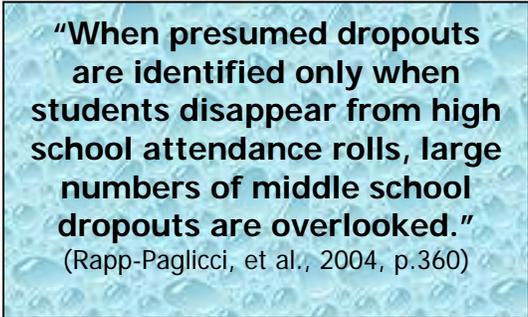
As more adolescents graduated from high school, a high school diploma slowly became an educational expectation. No one can dispute that a high school diploma is now a requirement for most jobs and that socioeconomic stigma follows anyone without a diploma. The need to encourage students to remain in school has led to discussions about the dangers to society if students do not graduate. Dorn (1996) quoted former Rhode Island senator, Lincoln Chaffee regarding the danger inherent in school attrition.

Dropouts disappear from high school corridors, but they do not disappear from society. Rather, their names show up on the welfare rolls: they become drug abuse statistics or they end up in our over-crowded prisons...the dropout exodus is increasing the number of those who live on the margin of society, while our social welfare costs and, too frequently, our penile institutions pay the cost (p. 127).

As early as the 1960s, researchers became aware that leaving school early had the potential to be problematic for more than just the educational system. The growing concern was articulated in the following manner, "The dropout problem also signaled a new mission of high schools, the prevention of urban chaos. Whereas concerns about

attrition early in the century had focused on efficiency, crusaders against dropping out in the 1960s were concerned with the potential for dropouts to become poor, maladjusted, and delinquent" (Dorn, 1996, p. 67).

The authors of the *Handbook of Prevention Interventions for Children* (2004) espoused, "When presumed dropouts are identified only when students disappear from high school attendance rolls, large numbers of middle school dropouts are overlooked" (Rapp-Paglicci, Dulmus, & Wodarski, p. 360). This lack of clear identification of dropouts occurs because no clear standards have been devised to track the school enrollment status of adolescents who drop in and out of school or who leave school without graduating but eventually earn a GED.



"When presumed dropouts are identified only when students disappear from high school attendance rolls, large numbers of middle school dropouts are overlooked."
(Rapp-Paglicci, et al., 2004, p.360)

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is the primary federal entity responsible for collecting, analyzing, and reporting data related to education in the United States and other nations. The NCES utilizes three perspectives in collecting and reporting dropout data (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001).

1. **Event rates**—indicated the number of students who leave high school each year and is compared with previous years. Event rates can overestimate the number of dropouts because they do not account for students who might re-enter school or otherwise earn a GED. For example, beginning with the

freshman class, an event (annual rate) could compound each year, giving the illusion of a dropout rate over eighteen percent.

2. **Status rates**—provided cumulative data on dropouts among all young adults within a specified age range. Status rates are higher than event rates because they included all dropouts in a given age range. Status rates described the percentage of an age group that is *not* enrolled in school and has *not* earned a high school diploma, GED or other certificate.
3. **Cohort rates**—described the number of dropouts from a single grade or specific age of students over a period of time. Cohort rates measured each grade level of dropouts.

In 2004, the U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau reported status and event dropout rates. The status dropout rate for 2004 was 10.3 percent, while the event dropout rate was found to be 4.7 percent—clearly, a significant difference between the two rate calculations.

1.2 U.S. HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS: CONSEQUENCES—SOCIAL AND INDIVIDUAL

Students who drop out of high school have long been viewed by society as a serious problem or social issue. Student dropouts have deficiencies with regard to their education as well as limits on their employment opportunities and social well-being. The individual consequences add up to billions of dollars in social costs (Rumberger, 1987). The Alliance for Excellent Education (Issue Brief, 2006) referred to Muenning's report (2006) when estimating that each student who graduated from high school

rather than dropping out “will save states an average of 13,706 dollars (in 2005 dollars) in Medicaid and expenditures for uninsured care over the course of his lifetime” (¶ 2). The mission of The Alliance for Excellent Education, a Washington-based policy, research and advocacy organization, is to ensure that every child graduates, continues with post-secondary education and reaches success in life.

Our nation suffers as a consequence of increased dropout rates. The loss of productive workers, the higher costs associated with the result of increased incarceration, health care and social services are of significant concern.

Dropouts are much more likely to:

- Be unemployed or have lower-paying jobs;
- Engage in high-risk behaviors such as premature sexual activity, early pregnancy, delinquency, crime, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide;
- Struggle with financial difficulties;
- Utilize public assistance and social services;
- Serve time in jail or prison;
- Be unhealthy (physically or psychologically);
- Become divorced or be single parents;
- Have children who drop out of school themselves;
- Be non-contributing citizens (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Morison, 2006; Rapp-Paglicci et al., 2004 & Woods, 1995).

During the post World War II era, students, particularly males, who did not complete high school, secured jobs in the relatively well-paying manufacturing sector;

however, inescapable change occurred in employment since 1945. The economy switched from manufacturing towards services and technology. With this economic shift, the prospects for those with minimal formal education have deteriorated.

While there have been negative consequences associated with high dropout rates, there have also been significant factors that led to the increased dropout rates. Rumberger (1987) provided the reader with several reasons for increased attention on the dropout rate:

1. **Minority population increasing in public schools.** Minority populations have always had higher dropout rates than the white population.
2. **States raising academic course requirements for graduation.** This may work to the detriment of those students already struggling academically.
3. **Educational requirements for work to increase in the future.** This might suggest that dropouts will be even more disadvantaged.

The literature indicated numerous social consequences caused by the increased dropout rates. The reasons may vary but the social consequences seem to remain. Levin (1972) identified seven social consequences of an inadequate education, which he defined as the failure to complete high school:

1. loss of national income;
2. loss of tax revenues for the support of government services;
3. increased demand for social services;
4. increased crime;
5. reduced political participation;
6. reduced intergenerational mobility; and
7. poorer levels of health.

There appeared to be a strong negative correlation between students who did not graduate from high school and their subsequent academic skills. "While graduating from high school does not ensure that a person has sufficient academic skills for successful employment and

"While graduating from high school does not ensure that a person has sufficient academic skills for successful employment and further education, failing to graduate usually ensures that a person does not" (Rumberger, 1987, p. 113).

further education, failing to graduate usually ensures that a person does not" (Rumberger, 1987, p. 113). Also, students who dropped out of high school were often unable to support themselves. Bridgeland et al. concluded that ". . . high school dropouts were over three times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed in 2004. Dropouts are twice as likely as high school graduates to slip into poverty from one year to the next" (Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. 2).

High school dropouts, on average, earn nearly 10,000 dollars less annually than those who graduate high school. It is estimated that the lifetime difference in income between a high school graduate and a dropout is about 260,000

". . . high school dropouts were over three times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed in 2004. They are twice as likely as high school graduates to slip into poverty from one year to the next."
(Bridgeland, et al., p. 2, 2006).

dollars. As the pool of dropouts grows, the already limited employment opportunities for them continue to narrow, because today's economy requires increased literacy, math, technological skills and lifelong learning. (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006; Bridgeland et al., 2006; & Woods, 1995).

A report by Civic Enterprises (Bridgeland et al., 2006) noted that “the prevalence of high dropout rates not only imperils individual futures but also profoundly impacts our communities and nation due to the loss of productive workers, the earnings and revenues they would have generated, and the higher costs associated with increased incarceration, health care and social services” (p. 2).

Table 1 Lost Earnings for Dropouts

State	9th Grade (2000-01) All Students (#)	Graduation Rate (%)	Non-Graduates in 2004	Lost Lifetime Earnings (\$260,000 / dropout)
AL	60,245	61.4	23,255	\$6,046,300,000
AK	11,348	64.2	4,063	\$1,056,380,000
AZ	70,124	67.3	22,931	\$5,962,060,000
AR	36,055	70.5	10,636	\$2,765,360,000
CA	476,142	68.9	148,080	\$38,500,800,000
CO	61,097	69.0	18,940	\$4,924,400,000
CT	40,423	77.0	9,297	\$2,417,220,000
DE	10,366	64.3	3,701	\$962,260,000
DC	4,207	65.2	1,464	\$380,640,000
FL	238,161	53.0	111,936	\$29,103,360,000
GA	126,793	55.5	56,423	\$14,669,980,000
HI	15,915	66.0	5,411	\$1,406,860,000
ID	19,471	79.6	3,972	\$1,032,720,000
IL	163,806	75.0	40,952	\$10,647,520,000
IN	79,825	72.4	22,032	\$5,728,320,000
IA	40,660	78.2	8,864	\$2,304,640,000
KS	38,780	74.1	10,044	\$2,611,440,000
KY	54,187	65.3	18,803	\$4,888,780,000
LA	53,879	64.5	19,127	\$4,973,020,000
ME	17,134	72.1	4,780	\$1,242,800,000
MD	71,705	75.3	17,711	\$4,604,860,000
MA	59,213	71.0	17,172	\$4,464,720,000
MI	142,663	74.0	37,092	\$9,643,920,000

MN	70,236	78.9	14,820	\$3,853,200,000
MS	39,386	58.0	16,542	\$4,300,920,000
MO	75,173	72.9	20,372	\$5,296,720,000
MT	13,321	77.1	3,051	\$793,260,000
NE	24,122	77.3	5,476	\$1,423,760,000
NV	29,972	54.7	13,577	\$3,530,020,000
NH	17,578	73.9	4,588	\$1,192,880,000
NJ	95,228	86.3	13,046	\$3,391,960,000
NM	28,944	61.2	11,230	\$2,919,800,000
NY	245,311	61.4	94,690	\$24,619,400,000
NC	111,745	63.5	40,787	\$10,604,620,000
ND	9,204	79.5	1,887	\$490,620,000
OH	159,724	70.7	46,799	\$12,167,740,000
OK	49,667	69.8	14,999	\$3,899,740,000
OR	44,574	73.6	11,768	\$3,059,680,000
PA	153,523	75.5	37,613	\$9,779,380,000
RI	12,557	73.5	3,328	\$865,280,000
SC	63,776	50.7	31,442	\$8,174,920,000
SD	10,920	79.4	2,250	\$585,000,000
TN	73,141	57.5	31,085	\$8,082,100,000
TX	355,019	65.0	124,257	\$32,306,820,000
UT	35,538	78.3	7,712	\$2,005,120,000
VT	8,594	77.9	1,899	\$493,740,000
VA	98,062	73.8	25,692	\$6,679,920,000
WA	87,238	62.6	32,627	\$8,483,020,000
WV	23,592	70.7	6,912	\$1,797,120,000
WI	77,683	78.2	16,935	\$4,403,100,000
WY	7,711	72.4	2,218	\$553,280,000
Nation	3,913,738	68.0	1,252,396	\$325,622,960,000

Alliance for Excellent Education, 2006

The Alliance for Excellent Education (February, 2006) reported that “almost 1.3 million U.S. students didn’t graduate from U.S. high schools in 2004.” In reviewing

Table 1 above, that cost is more than 325 billion dollars to our nation in lost wages, taxes, and productivity over their lifetimes. In Pennsylvania alone, the cost is nearly ten billion dollars.

In 2001, forty percent of youth, ages sixteen to twenty-four, without a high school diploma, received some type of government assistance. A dropout was eight times more likely to commit a crime and ultimately be imprisoned than a person who possessed a high school diploma (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The lifetime cost to the nation for each youth who dropped out of school and then moved into a life of crime and drugs ranged from 1.7 to 2.3 million dollars (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999).

“The prevalence of high dropout rates not only imperils individual futures but also profoundly impacts our communities and nation due to the loss of productive workers, the earnings and revenues they would have generated and the higher costs associated with increased incarceration, health care and social services.”

(Bridgeland et al., 2006, p. 2).

Much research supported the fact that students who dropped out of high school were often unable to support themselves and were much more likely to be unemployed. Barton (2005) explained that “In 2003, 1.1 million sixteen to nineteen year-olds and 2.4

million twenty to twenty-five year-olds did not have a high school diploma and were not enrolled in school, for a total of 3.5 million” (p. 40). Most of these youth, at best, experienced sporadic employment and low wages in their lifetime. For them, establishing a stable family and raising children who can become contributing citizens could be problematic, given the long-term decline in the earnings prospects of dropouts.

The lifetime cost to the nation for each youth who drops out of school and then moves into a life of crime and drugs ranges from 1.7 to 2.3 million dollars.
(Snyder & Sickmund, 1999)

Forty percent of sixteen to nineteen year-olds were employed, and less than sixty percent of twenty to twenty-five year-olds—those in the early marrying and family formation period—were employed. Another

forty percent of sixteen to nineteen year-olds were *not even* in the labor force; meaning they were not employed and were not looking for work. Of these, some were discouraged and may have given up looking. This was also true for three in ten twenty to twenty-four year-olds. Some were single parents who were in a welfare support system, and others had found alternative sources of income in a sublegal economy (Barton, 2005).

In direct contrast there were those exceptions; those who succeeded regardless of leaving their high school education prematurely. Linda Lee explained in *Success Without College* (2000) that not all students are school savvy but may succeed nevertheless.

Cooper Small dropped out of high school and began working as a computer programmer earning 175 dollars an hour.

(Lee, 2000)

Lee mentioned one New Yorker, Cooper Small, who dropped out of high school in his junior year because of a poor grade in English. Academically, Small was third in his class. He began working as a computer programmer making 175 dollars an hour. He then enrolled as a freshman in college without ever having received a high school diploma. Another example was that of Gary Wilkinson, who dropped out of high school as a senior with no direction in life. Wilkinson found motivation from within and

enrolled at Salt Lake Community College, telephoned the men's basketball coach and asked for a tryout—even though Wilkinson had never played organized basketball in his life. Wilkinson was named to the Scenic West Athletic Conference First Team, the NJCAA All-American Third Team, and most notably the Academic All-American Team with a 3.96 grade-point average (Ashton, 2007).

Researchers indicated that we are well into the technological age and moving further away from the unskilled job market of generations past. The technological age of the 21st century requires the students of today to possess a high school diploma as well as some level of post-secondary training or schooling. Therefore, as workforce needs and national expectations about school completion have changed, high school graduation or its equivalency has become the expected minimum level of schooling for all (Montecal et al., 2004). Jobs that required advanced skills have begun to increase, and students who attained higher levels of education would have better employment opportunities (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003; & Bridgeland et al., 2006). Also, the gap between dropouts and more educated people continued to widen as opportunities increased for higher skilled workers. In the last twenty years, the earnings level has nearly tripled for college graduates, on average, seventy-two percent more than someone with just a high school degree. Recent dropouts will earn 200,000 dollars less than high school graduates in their lives (Focus Adolescent Services, 2007, & Feller, 2006).

The gap between dropouts and more educated people is widening as opportunities increase for higher skilled workers all but disappear for the less skilled.

Focus Adolescent Services, Jan. 2007

1.3 WHY STUDENTS DROP OUT:

LEADING REASONS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

It was interesting to note in the research that while the signs of those at-risk of dropping out of high school may begin early in their primary school years, an indicator could be utilized in the students' pre-adolescent years which could empower the students more. The Forty Developmental Assets were developed in 2003 by the Search Institute, an independent nonprofit organization whose mission was to provide leadership, knowledge, and resources to promote healthy children, youth, and communities. At the heart of the institute's work was the framework of the Forty Developmental Assets. These assets were positive experiences and personal qualities that young people needed to grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

The Search Institute has identified the following building blocks of healthy development that help young people grow up healthy, caring and responsible (Scales, 1999).

The Forty Developmental Assets for Adolescents

Asset Type	Asset Name & Definition	
EXTERNAL ASSETS		
Support	Family support	Family life provides high levels of love and support.
	Positive family communication	Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parent(s).
	Other adult relationships	Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
	Caring neighborhood	Young person experiences caring neighbors.
	Caring school climate	School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
	Parent involvement in schooling	Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.
Empowerment	Community values youth	Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
	Youth as resources	Young people are given useful roles in the community.
	Service to others	Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
	Safety	Young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood.

Boundaries and Expectations	Family boundaries	Family has clear rules and consequences, and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
	School boundaries	School provides clear rules and consequences.
	Neighborhood boundaries	Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.
	Adult role models	Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
	Positive peer influence	Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.
Constructive Use of Time	High expectations	Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.
	Creative activities	Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
	Youth programs	Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in community organizations.
	Religious community	Young person spends one hour or more per week in activities in a religious institution.
	Time at home	Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.
INTERNAL ASSETS		
Commitment to Learning	Achievement motivation	Young person is motivated to do well in school.
	School engagement	Young person is actively engaged in learning.
	Homework	Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.
	Bonding to school	Young person cares about her or his school.
Positive Values	Reading for pleasure	Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.
	Caring	Young person places high value on helping other people.
	Equality and social justice	Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.
	Integrity	Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
	Honesty	Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."
	Responsibility	Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.
Social Competencies	Restraint	Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.
	Planning and decision making	Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.
	Interpersonal competence	Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.
	Cultural competence	Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.
	Resistance skills	Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.
	Peaceful conflict resolution	Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

Positive Identity	Personal power	Young person feels he or she has control over "things that happen to me."
	Self-esteem	Young person reports having a high self-esteem.
	Sense of purpose	Young person reports that "my life has a purpose."
	Positive view of personal future	Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.

Figure 1 Forty Developmental Assets

Many of the problems faced by young people were a result of their behavior and choices and how they related to each other. The Search Institute took the approach of identifying what was necessary for students to succeed and began to address 'risk reduction' issues. 'Risk reduction' combined 'risk factors', such as poor parenting or disengagement from school, and 'protective factors' (i.e. positive peer pressure and good decision-making skills) (Scales, 1999).

The Forty Developmental Assets (Figure 1) were identified by studying 500,000 students in grades six through twelve. They were broken down into eight categories and two asset areas: The external assets included **support, empowerment, boundaries & expectations, and constructive use of time**. The internal assets included **commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity**. The internal assets were those the students developed to guide and empower themselves to become self-regulating.

It was found that the more assets young people possess, the fewer risk behaviors they were expected to engage in. More importantly, the more assets young people possessed, the more they experienced positive outcomes such as school success, maintaining physical health and helping others (Scales, 1999).

Civic Enterprises posited in *The Silent Epidemic* (2006) that dropping out was a slow process during a student's primary and secondary education. The findings concurred with the Forty Developmental Assets (Scales, 1999).

The process included, but was not limited to, being held back in school, poor attendance, and lack of peer interaction or academic failure. There were many tribulations that were predictive and referred to as early warning signs (Bridgeland et al. 2006; & Scales, 1999). The researchers believed that these early warning signs should be used to help identify students most at risk. The authors espoused that there was no single reason or cause as to why students dropped out but often times students who dropout have struggled with grade retention, academic achievement, and limited social competence (Bridgeland et al. 2006; Rumberger, 1987; & Rapp-Paglicci et al., 2004).

In the following table (Table 2), Rumberger (1987) showcased the various reasons students reported for dropping out. Rumberger also clustered the reasons into school-related, economic or personal.

The information provided in Table 2 identified that nearly fifty percent of students left school for school-related reasons; twenty percent left for economic reasons and more than twenty-five percent made the decision to dropout for personal reasons such as pregnancy or marriage. The remaining nineteen percent left for a combination of reasons.

School-related reasons which included poor performance, a dislike of school, expulsion or suspension and a dangerous school atmosphere could have been

manipulated through the resources available within the school system. Not only did school-related reasons focus on students' behaviors and academic performance, but attention was also paid to the school entity, leadership and teachers to clarify the school-related reason for dropping out (Rumberger, 1987).

Table 2 Primary reason high school dropouts left school

Primary reason high school dropouts left school, by sex, race, and ethnicity: 1979 (percentage distribution)

Reason	Males			Females			Total
	White	Black	Hispanic	White	Black	Hispanic	
School-related:							
Poor performance	9	9	4	5	5	4	7
Disliked school	36	29	26	27	18	15	29
Expelled or suspended	9	18	6	2	5	1	7
School too dangerous	1	0	0	2	1	1	1
Economic:							
Desired to work	15	12	16	5	4	7	10
Financial difficulties	3	7	9	3	3	9	4
Home responsibilities	4	4	13	6	8	8	6
Personal:							
Pregnancy	0	0	0	14	41	15	17
Marriage	3	0	3	17	4	15	9
Other	20	21	23	19	11	25	19
TOTAL	100						

Note. Data are for persons 14 to 21 years of age. Source: "Dropping out of high school: The influence of race, sex, and family background" by R. W. Rumberger, 1983, *American Educational Research Journal*, 20, p. 201.

Woods (1995) concurred with much of Rumberger's (1987) findings that school-related problems such as truancy, absenteeism, tardiness, and disciplinary infractions contributed to the reason students chose to drop out. Woods (1995) also cited student-related risk factors or personal reasons independent of social/family background. These reasons included substance abuse, pregnancy, and legal problems. Economic reasons accounted for twenty percent of the dropout population. Students commented they had to work to help support their families. What was unclear in the research was which came first—the student securing a job or quitting school? Personal

reasons included the lower level of self-esteem dropouts typically possessed and less sense of control over their lives than other students. Seventeen percent of dropouts reported that they left school because of parenthood (Rumberger, 1987).

In Table 2, the personal reason, with sub-category pregnancy, indicated an obviously large difference in pregnancy among white versus black females. Birth rates among all races and ethnicities have declined, with the largest drop among young African-American women but still higher than that of Caucasians. In 2000, the birth rate for White women fifteen to seventeen years of age was 23.6 per 1,000 compared with 50.4 per 1,000 for African-American women. The same year the birth rate for White women eighteen to nineteen years of age was 72.7 per 1,000 compared to 121.3 per 1,000 for African-American women (Siecus Report, 2002).

Additionally, Hogan and Kitagawa (1985) revealed interesting findings in *The Impact of Social Status, Family Structure and Neighborhood on the Fertility of Black Adolescents*. The authors conducted the study in Chicago, Illinois in an effort to gain an understanding of why the rate of teen childbearing among African-Americans is higher than that of Caucasians.

The study compared a number of social factors relating to the childbearing of African-Americans and Caucasians. The factors included, among other things, marital status of parents, social class, number of siblings, parental involvement, career aspirations and neighborhood quality. The results were utilized as a guide to measure the effect these factors have on African-American teenage pregnancies. It was concluded by Hogan and Kitagawa (1995) that "comparisons indicate that the high

rates of pregnancy currently observed among black teenagers are a result of the unfavorable social circumstances in which many of those teenagers are growing up” (p. 852).

The study previously identified, *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts* (2006), was designed to provide a different perspective in ongoing research of high school attrition. Specifically, the report addressed why students leave high school prematurely. The information was gathered after surveying and interviewing young people aged sixteen to twenty-five who identified themselves as high school dropouts in twenty-five different locations throughout the United States. The locations included large cities, suburbs and small towns with high dropout rates. One of the primary purposes of the report was to approach the dropout problem from the students’ perspective. Figure 2 below summarized the findings.

Student responses	Reason(s) or comments (more than one may have been chosen)
Nearly 47%	<i>Classes were not interesting...</i>
Nearly 69%	<i>Not motivated or inspired to work hard...</i>
32%	<i>Had to get a job and make money...</i>
26%	<i>They became a parent...</i>
22%	<i>Had to take care of a family member...</i>
35%	<i>Failing academically....</i>
45%	<i>Started high school poorly prepared...</i>
32%	<i>Had to repeat a grade...</i>
59 – 65%	<i>Missed class often the year before....</i>

38%	<i>They had too much freedom and not enough rules...</i>
59%	<i>Of parents or guardians were involved in child's schooling...</i>
68%	<i>Parents became more involved only when aware that their child was close to dropping out....</i>
81%	<i>As adults said that graduating from high school was important to success in life....</i>
74%	<i>If they could do it again they would have stayed in school...</i>
47%	<i>Agreed that not having a diploma makes it hard to find a good job...</i>

The Silent Epidemic. March 2006.

Figure 2 Student responses for why they dropped out

1.4 PREVENTION PROGRAMS: CHARACTERISTICS AND DETAILS: WHAT DOESN'T WORK

Woods, in *Reducing the Dropout Rate* (1995), reported on a number of *ineffective* school practices that can be detrimental to keeping students in school. These practices included the following:

- **State-mandated promotion policies.** If requirements for graduation are raised without consideration to the varied populations of at-risk students and their individual learning requirements, the effect can push more young people out of school.
- **Ability grouping.** Placement in lower ability groups was associated with lower teacher expectations and reduced learning.
- **Early intervention without follow up.**
- **Work experiences with no other interventions.** Work experiences need to be supervised. The student has a need for individual attention or mentoring.

- **Increasing the number of attendance officers to cut down on truancy.**

1.5 PREVENTION PROGRAMS: CHARACTERISTICS AND DETAILS: WHAT DOES WORK

Student tracking may be the single most important first step in beginning an effective dropout prevention program. It will be difficult to grasp the severity of the problem without first identifying students in need of services. Montecal et al. indicated that "Dropout prevention became important only as policymakers became aware of the significance of the dropout numbers and of their implications for workforce development, revenue generation, and support services" (Montecal et al., 2004, pp. 174-175). There was confusion noted in the variety of tracking methods for different needs of the school. However, the development of low-cost technology could facilitate school data management.

Montecal et al. (2004) authored the report *Dropout-Prevention Programs: Right Intent, Wrong Focus, and Some Suggestions on Where to Go from Here*. The report detailed information on the reasons why students dropped out, the dropout rates and prevention programming. The authors concluded that "The lack of adequate dropout-counting and reporting procedures may be the single most important factor in limiting the dropout-prevention efforts..." (p. 174). They clarified that there was no single all-inclusive program that addressed the dropout issue. Approaches, according to Montecal et al. (2004), must be "...varied to address school, student, and family needs, and all programs should value the student, the family, and the community" (p. 184).

Woods (1995) also cited several elements of a successful or effective dropout prevention program. These elements are broken down into five categories: Organization, School Climate, Service Delivery, Instructional Content, and Staff Culture. Woods (1995) described the categories in the following manner:

1. Organization

It may seem obvious, but the way in which a school or program was administered by its organization was found to impact the success rate. An example was the creation of schools-within-schools. Such schools were found to be effective in the promotion of completion rates.

Other organizational elements of successful programs included: outside agencies administering the program; school-based management of the program; fair discipline programs; flexibility; community collaboration; staff development; transition programs; early intervention efforts; reducing suspensions and retentions; eliminating tracking; involving community mentors; and developing collaboration or articulation agreements with schools and colleges.

2. School Climate

Woods (1995) noted that a location that was accessible and non-threatening often made a large contribution to dropout prevention. A higher level of success was noted when students were actively involved in the design of the program.

3. Service Delivery

Student-centered strategies were a common thread noted among successful dropout prevention programming. Student-centered strategies included early

intervention once warning signs were apparent; involving family as much as possible; intensive individualized attention and instruction (including tutoring and mentoring programs); and clear instructional objectives with close monitoring of student progress.

Woods' (1995) research noted greater success when programs included support services such as day care and opportunities to make up work after the normal school year/hours. Student assistance services were found to be an asset to address areas of substance abuse, teen pregnancy and parenting, suicide prevention and other mental and physical health issues played an integral role in the success of programming.

4. Instructional Content

Preschool and kindergarten instruction was strongly supported for early childhood students. A general mix of academic instruction and real-world learning appeared to be most beneficial. Learning content with real-world application was shown to increase the students' interest and involvement.

With older students, the connections of school with work, or life outside of school, empowered the students and opened their learning about vocational skills, job training, work study, and participation in career counseling.

5. Staff Culture

It was also discovered that in successful programs staff members were committed to the programs' success. Once committed, staff members seemed to have raised expectations for students' behavior and academic success.

Similarly, Montecal et al. (2004) shared information in their research on components that were vital to successful dropout prevention. The authors listed the following components:

- a. All students must be valued—the most successful programs allowed students to be valued and contributed to their success.
- b. At least one educator must be committed to the student's success.
- c. The concept of families as partners who are committed to equity and excellence in a student's life.
- d. Educational institutions must change and be innovative.
- e. Educators must have the tools necessary to ensure their students' success (Montecal et al., 2004).

1.6 PREVENTION PROGRAMS: EXAMPLES

As previously mentioned in this study, *The Silent Epidemic: Perspective of High School Dropouts* (Bridgeland et al., 2006) was conducted in order to “hear” the students' version of the dropout problem. Within the report, it was conveyed that many of the dropouts blamed themselves for their decision-making and took full responsibility, while others pointed out what schools might have been able to do to help them complete their education.

Other research provided the following recommendations based on what the dropouts themselves reported in focus groups (Bridgeland et al., 2006, pp. 11-15).

- A. Improved teaching and curricula to make school more relevant and engaging and enhance the connection between school and work;
- B. Improved instruction and access to support programs for struggling students;
- C. A school climate that fosters academics;
- D. Strong adult-student relationships within the school;
- E. Improved communication between parents and schools;
- F. Additional supports and adult advocates.

Beginning in the 1950s and continuing today, state school-funding was directly connected to the number of pupils enrolled. The average daily attendance became, in effect, an early dropout prevention effort used to motivate schools to keep students enrolled (Montecal et al., 2004).

Program Name	Focus: Dropout Prevention	Served at-risk students	Reported increased completion rates
Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program	X	X	X
Jobs for America (JAG)	X	X	X
Alternative Schools Network	X	X	X
North Medved Child Development Center	X	X	

Figure 3 Prevention Programs

A plethora of dropout prevention programs developed across the United States. For the purposes of this study, a few examples of successful programs have been outlined. The Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program (Rapp-Paglicci et al., 2004; Woods, 1995; Monetcal et al., 2004) was first developed in 1984. Through a valued-youth

philosophy, the program helped keep in school more than 11,500 middle and high school students at-risk of dropping out.

The program placed junior high school students in positions of academic responsibility such as tutors for elementary students. The tutors were paid a stipend for their work, which reinforced the valued-youth component.

Evaluations of the Coca-Cola Valued Youth Program found that students felt better about themselves and their schools. At-risk students participating in the program realized improvement in grades, attendance and discipline.

In 1992, the program was recognized by the Secretary of Education as a model dropout prevention program, meeting the National Education Goal No. 2 of increasing the high school graduation rate to at least 90 percent.

Another example is Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG), which began in 1979 in Delaware and developed as the nation's largest school-to-work transition model for at-risk students. JAG fostered collaboration with the states' entities to develop statewide employment for students to help reduce the dropout rate. The JAG model had the following key elements:

- 1) A specialist who was accountable for thirty-five to forty-five at-risk youth;
- 2) Reduction of barriers that could prevent a JAG participant from graduating, securing employment or pursuing post-secondary schooling;

- 3) Involvement in a highly motivational student organization—the JAG Career Association;
- 4) Classroom instruction using employment competencies identified by the business community;
- 5) Involvement of the business community;
- 6) One-on-one employer marketing for employment leading to a career;
- 7) Minimum of twelve months of follow-up on the job after leaving school;
- 8) Computerized tracking of those served and performance results.

Evaluations indicated that JAG students also had a ninety percent overall graduation or GED rate. There was a cost, however, of approximately 1,200 dollars per participant (Montecal et al., 2004).

A third example of a dropout prevention program was the Alternative Schools Network (Woods, 1995). Based in Chicago, Illinois, the Alternative Schools Network targeted neighborhood school dropouts. Community-based alternative schools provided structured education, GED preparation, job readiness and counseling programs with a reported sixty to seventy percent high school/GED completion rate.

The North Medved High School Child Development Center (Achen, 2007) also served as a dropout prevention program for teen parents. Since motherhood was identified as the leading cause of dropping out of school among teenage girls in the

Medved High School, this school-based program provided students with access to social services.

The goal was to remove barriers that would prevent teen parents from graduating. The success resulted in eight new school-based child care centers providing teen parent services in Oregon between 2003 and 2006.

Additional research suggested that increased high school completion rates are the result of successful dropout prevention programs.

1.7 TEEN PARENTS: THE IMPACT OF EARLY ADOLESCENT PARENTHOOD ON OVERALL HIGH SCHOOL COMPLETION RATES

It has been inferred in the research that attaining some level of academic success is directly linked to earning a living wage. Most notably, a high school diploma was often identified as the basic foundation for students to succeed.

Zellman (1982) suggested that “Mothers who deliver their first child before the age of 18 are twice as likely to drop out before finishing high school as comparable women who postpone childbearing until their 20s” (p. 15). Young mothers were found to impair their future education and employment opportunities, while also greatly increasing the welfare and social costs to the nation.

David Popenoe (1998) presented testimony before the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. entitled *Teen Pregnancy:*

“Mothers who deliver their first child before the age of 18 are twice as likely to dropout before finishing high school as comparable women who postpone childbearing until their 20s.”

Zellman, 1982, p. 15

An American Dilemma. Popenoe stated that most teen pregnancies are considered a curse, not a blessing in these United States. This attitude developed mainly because most of these children, according to Popenoe, would grow up without a father and at high risk themselves for various social and behavioral problems.

In Pennsylvania, there were 26,047 teenage girls who were juggling the challenges of being a young mother (Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, 2005). In the United States, nearly one million fifteen to nineteen year-old young women become pregnant each year (Girls, Inc., 2003; Popenoe, 1998). This is twice the rate found in Great Britain and nearly ten times the rate in Japan. The rate of teen childbearing in the United States has fallen since the late 1950s, from ninety-six births per 1,000 women aged fifteen to nineteen in 1957 to forty-nine births in 2000 (Guttmacher Report on Public Policy, 2002).

Although teen childbearing overall has declined since 1950, the proportion of teen births to single mothers has increased just as dramatically, from thirteen percent in 1950 to seventy-nine percent in 2000 (Guttmacher Report on Public Policy, 2002). Further, Popenoe explained that “less than one third of teens who begin families before age eighteen ever complete high school; the great majority remain single mothers without fathers to help; and half of all teen mothers and three quarters of unmarried teen mothers end up on welfare within five years of the birth of their first child”

...twenty-five percent of students dropout of high school for personal reasons such as pregnancy or marriage.
Bridgeland et al., 2006;
Rumberger, 1987;
Woods, 1995;

(Popenoe, 1998, ¶ 8). As previously stated, twenty-five percent of students dropout of high school for personal reasons such as pregnancy or marriage (Bridgeland, et al., 2006; Rumberger, 1987; Woods, 1995).

1.8 TEEN PARENT DROP OUT PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Throughout the research, females have categorized teen pregnancy and motherhood as the major concern and reason for leaving school prematurely. As a result, researchers have found it imperative that schools provide quality programs for young parents. These programs would, in essence, keep the student in school until completion of a diploma while simultaneously preparing them for their adult role as parents.

Public schools became more involved in the challenges posed by teenage pregnancy often more by need than choice. The reasons schools have assumed this role were noted in a report authored by Gail Zellmen entitled, *Public School Programs for Adolescent Pregnancy and Parenthood: An Assessment* (1982). One reason was that teen pregnancy is less stigmatized, and many pregnant teenagers expect to and often do continue their schooling. A second reason is that Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments provided protection for those who were pregnant or who have a child, regardless of their marital status (Zellman, 1982).

Teen parents often continued to struggle and found it very difficult to complete high school with their cohort of students (Center for Assessment and Policy Development {CAPD}, 1998). The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (Ward, 2007) reported on a legal case involving a sixteen year-old teen mom who claimed to be discriminated

against by the Central Dauphin School District. The complaint, filed on the student's behalf by the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania, accused the school district of discriminating against the young mother because she had a child. The student and her mother sought an injunction to bar the school district from enforcing truancy laws against them for what was listed under Pennsylvania's Compulsory Attendance Law as "urgent reasons." Ward reported that according to the lawsuit, "District officials have tried to encourage home schooling...or have her switch to the Dauphin County vocational technical school because it has day care" (¶ 22). The case is still pending before the Dauphin County Court of Common Pleas.

According to the authors of the CAPD report, it was important to make sure that all parenting students had access to the full range of educational options through a school-based teen parent program (1998). An example of these educational options was reported by Zellman (1982) in a study of twelve special programs for pregnant teenagers and adolescent parents in eleven school districts across the country. The author contended, however, that these programs usually lacked strong administrative support, and many were set up to only comply with the federal law, Title IX.

The twelve school-sponsored programs identified by Zellman (1982) were grouped into three types. Seven were inclusive curriculum programs; two were supplementary curriculum programs, and three were non-curricular programs (Zellman, 1982).

- *Inclusive curriculum programs*—offered pregnant students a general education curriculum and a range of courses pertaining to childbearing,

parenthood, or child development. The common feature in the inclusive program was that student participants did not attend regular classes; rather, they were physically and administratively separate from the regular school. Also, this type of program mainly concentrated on the teenager's time of pregnancy with little or no follow-up coursework or guidance.

- *Supplemental curriculum programs*—provided relevant coursework as well as child care or counseling to those pregnant or parenting students who also attended regular classes. The key feature in these programs was that the students remained in their regular classes for a majority of the day and received credit for participating in the special parenting classes.
- *Non-curricular programs*—provided students with counseling, medical care and referrals with no school credit for participating. Most of the teen parents in these programs attended regular classes, and again this program was administratively separate from the regular school.

Teen parents are protected from discrimination in the educational system based on gender, pregnancy, marital or parenting status under Title IX (CAPD, 1998). School districts may not automatically assign pregnant or parenting students to specific programs or schools without providing the same educational opportunities and experiences as other students. Under Title IX, the school districts may not bar pregnant or parenting students from any program, course or extracurricular activity (CAPD, 1998; Zellman, 1982).

The CAPD (Center for Assessment and Policy Development) listed several reasons why it may be difficult for educational programs to work for teen parents along with some possible solutions (1998).

Challenges of Providing Adequate Education to Teen Parents	Possible Solutions
Only a small percentage of teen parents are served in these programs; other teen parents are not necessarily identified in school records.	Knowing the actual number of parenting students can improve the placement of support services into comprehensive high schools. This can be less costly, reach more students, and provide access to a wider range of educational options.
Site-based programs have the effect of making pregnant and parenting students even less visible within the full student population.	Once the target number of teen parents is found to be considerably larger than those identified, attention can be drawn to this population's needs.
Many pregnant and parenting young adults have educational deficits, and some may have undetected learning disabilities. This further complicates the learning process since they now have to face other needs (child care, parenting education, and more).	Since some educational deficiencies of teen parents are comparable to the educational needs of other at-risk students, varied instructional methodologies may be developed.

Figure 4 Program Challenges and Solutions

According to the CAPD (1998), there were a number of school practices that could assist teen parents at-risk of dropping out to complete their high school education. They included the following:

1. Creation of attendance policies that do not penalize teens who have given birth like any other absence;
2. Making allowances for home study and grant partial credits for course work interrupted by delivery;
3. Development of students' schedule to allow for transportation to and from child care;

4. Afternoon schedule flexibility for doctors' appointments and other parenting responsibilities;
5. Creative use of summers that encouraged teen parents to continue and complete high school.

1.8.1 Arlington Public Schools' Teenage Parenting Programs

Arlington Public Schools in Virginia (2007) addressed the needs of pregnant and parenting students through its Teenage Parenting Programs (TPP). The main mission of TPP was to provide comprehensive services to address the issues of adolescent pregnancy, which included educational needs, pregnancy prevention, teen parenting and healthy families. There were four sub-programs to the TPP:

1. **Family Education Center**—young mothers attended school here throughout their pregnancy and the early stages of parenthood and continued through the completion of the school year. Students who participated in the Family Education Center continued academic studies and obtained assistance in prenatal and childcare services and parenting skills.
2. **Outreach for Parenting Teens**—this program directive was to locate the out-of-school pregnant and/or parenting teens and facilitate their return to school or vocational training.
3. **Alternatives for Parenting Teens**—a collaborative effort between Arlington Public Schools and the Arlington Department of Human Services. Young mothers and their children were served. The teen moms continued their academic studies, learned child

development, and had access to health services; then the children were subsequently nurtured in a licensed Infant Care Center.

4. **Young Fathers Program**—this component provided services to the partners of the teen mothers. Bilingual and bicultural male staff was available to promote male (father) participation. The goal was to prepare the young men for successful fatherhood.

The details each program provided in its approach were balanced by the common objectives noted in the four sub-programs:

- Mothers remain in school;
- High school graduation or earned GED;
- Healthy mothers (through appropriate prenatal care);
- Healthy babies (immunizations, etc.);
- Healthy relationships with fathers of babies;
- Postponing repeat pregnancies;
- Knowledge and skills regarding child development and positive parenting;
- Contributing citizens.

1.8.2 Round Rock Independent School District Teen Parenting Program

Round Rock, Texas had a Teen Parenting Program (2007) at Round Rock Independent School District. The comprehensive program was designed to help pregnant and/or parenting students graduate from high school. There were five components or sub-programs. The sub-programs of Round Rock Independent School District were as follows:

1. **Social Work Services**—A Teen Parent Coordinator (social worker) conducted initial intakes and made an assessment of the student needs. Referrals were made on an as-needed basis. The Teen Parent Coordinator met regularly with students, both individually and in support groups, and taught parenting education. The Coordinator also monitored the student attendance and grades. Students remained in the program through graduation.

2. **Health Services**—The health services, which were provided by a registered nurse, encouraged students to access the nurse’s services if they were not feeling well or needed health related accommodations.

3. **Homebound Instruction**—Students were entitled to six weeks of homebound instruction following the delivery of the baby. The term could be extended if there were health related complications for the student or the baby. The student was scheduled to meet with the homebound instructor for four hours per week. The homebound teacher helped to coordinate the student’s transition back to school.

4. **Parenting Education**—This course was offered in one of the schools within the district. In this course, the young parents learned about basic parenting issues, pre-natal and post-natal self care, child development, child care issues, bonding and attachment, etc.

5. **Child Care**—Round Rock Independent School District had a full-time, licensed child development center for teen parents to utilize. There were no fees for the child care services, but students were expected to attend (and pass) their classes to be eligible.

There was transportation provided for the student and child from their home to the child care center, to high school, back to the center, and back home again.

1.8.3 Education Leading to Employment and Career Training (ELECT) as a drop out prevention effort

In 1985, The Pennsylvania Department of Education introduced a school-based Pregnant and Parenting Teen (PPT) initiative to keep students in school, support their attainment of a high school diploma, and encourage their self-sufficiency to become productive, contributing members of society. This initiative also attached requirements that would provide specific core education and support services.

An extension of the original PPT initiative was developed. A one-of-a-kind partnership was subsequently created between the Pennsylvania Departments of Public Welfare and Education, which resulted in the formation of the ELECT initiative. The Center for Schools and Communities was the centralized point in Pennsylvania for ELECT (Education Leading to Employment and Career Training) funding distribution. Their website, <http://www.center-school.org> (March 2007), outlined the many components of ELECT. The purpose of ELECT was to expand the services of the existing teen parent programs across the commonwealth. The expansion included support services to help the young parents complete their education and become self-sufficient adults.

The primary investigator of this literature review was intimately involved in providing services for the young parent, both male and female, at-risk of dropping out of high school. The primary investigator's involvement stemmed from serving as Lead Coordinator for the ELECT program, which provided educational services for three

western Pennsylvania counties: Lawrence, Mercer, and Butler. The combined student population of the three counties was 73,477 in twenty-seven school districts, three vocational schools, thirty non-public schools, one charter school, one cyber-charter school and one juvenile correction facility.

The ELECT initiative has been an umbrella for several pregnant and parenting sub-programs:

- PPT (Pregnant and Parenting Teens) program—was a school-based initiative of the Pennsylvania Department of Education. The PPT goal was to keep students in school, help students graduate from high school, and encourage self-sufficiency as parents to become productive members of society. Program operation required delivery of specific core education and support services.
- ELECT (Education Leading to Employment and Career Training) program—expanded existing teen parent programs and provided comprehensive support services to those students who met income eligibility requirements. Participation was voluntary with the duration of the program extending to graduation or age twenty-two.
- ELECT Family Works (FW)—allowed services to any custodial or non-custodial pregnant or parenting teen, under the age of twenty-two, enrolled in high school or GED program. Personal income must be less than 235 percent of the Federal Poverty Income Level.

- EFI (ELECT Fatherhood Initiative)—supported the needs of custodial and non-custodial young fathers eligible for services. Efforts focused on the fathers, assistance to complete their education, improvement of their parenting skills and steps to become job ready. While similar to the regular ELECT program, attention was given to provide specific male concentrated materials.
- ELECT Student Works (ESW)—assisted Local Education Agencies (LEA) in developing prevention-focused after school activities for at-risk youth in grades four through eight.

Many of the required services under ELECT included health care and nutrition information for the mother/father as well as their child; parenting education; individual and group counseling; career counseling and planning; child care assistance and transportation; coordination of community services; individualized student plan for goal setting; allowances for child care and transportation through the Department of Public Welfare for those eligible; budgeting and family planning education; vocational and career planning; job readiness and job search.

Some required ELECT program outcomes included the following: high school and GED dropout rate may not exceed twenty-five percent; graduation rate for seniors must be at least seventy-five percent of all participants eligible to graduate; GPAs or earned credits should demonstrate academic achievement or overall progress; maintained or improved annual school attendance rate for all participants.

The ELECT programs offered a variety of educational and support services to help meet the above mentioned outcomes and goals. The services were provided by school staff or community-based organizations.

Montecal et al. (2004) outlined what key program characteristics work for reducing the dropout rate of high school students. The characteristics were taken from the Intercultural Development Research Association's (IDRA, 2001) review of research of effective dropout prevention strategies. Similarities were noted between the ELECT programs and the IDRA's suggested key program characteristics for reducing the dropout rate of high school students. The following similar characteristics were identified:

- a. All students must be valued;
- b. There should be involvement of at least one educator who is committed to the student's success;
- c. The concept of families as partners—committed to equity and excellence in a student's life;
- d. Educational institutions must change and be innovative;
- e. Educators must have the tools necessary to ensure their students' success (Montecel, Cortez, & Cortez, 2004).

Zellman (1982) *Public School Programs for Adolescent Pregnancy and Parenthood: An Assessment*, reported on the types of teen parent programming found to be in existence across the country and the commonalities among them. Again, the non-curricular program provided student counseling and referrals while students

attended regular classes with no additional credit given for participating. The non-curricular programs were also administratively separate from the regular school services.

With each of the programs listed in the Zellman (2005) report, regardless of the program type, the intent was to have a long-term effect on the teens. The most important goal was to assist student participants to finish high school and reduce repeat pregnancies.

1.9 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In the preceding literature review, the issue outlined was how many students leave high school before completion or dropping out. Dropping out of high school has been a growing concern among educators, parents, policymakers and society at large. Our nation suffers as a consequence of increased dropout rates. The loss of productive workers, the higher costs associated with the result of increased incarceration, health care and social services are of significant concern. Levin (1972) identified several social consequences of an inadequate education: loss of income; higher demand for social services; increased crime; reduced political participation; and lower levels of health. The loss of productive workers and the higher costs of more frequent incarceration of dropouts were also of significant concern.

Teenage mothers were noted in the literature to be more "at-risk" to dropout of high school. According to the Guttmacher Institute (2006), in 2002 the U.S. teen pregnancy rate for teens fifteen to nineteen was forty-one pregnancies per 1,000

females. The pregnancy rate includes births, abortions, and miscarriages. With 13,142 teen pregnancies in Pennsylvania (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007), the issue was to provide these young women with a quality education so that they could become contributing citizens.

Rumberger (1987) categorized three reasons why students dropout. They were school-related reasons, economic reasons, and personal reasons. Fifty-percent of students who dropout leave for school-related reasons; twenty percent leave for economic reasons; and more than twenty-five percent leave for personal reasons such as pregnancy or early marriage. For a teen parent, all three of the above-mentioned reasons (school-related, economic and personal) may contribute to their dropping out of high school, putting them at even *higher* risk. The school-related reason to drop out may include a lack of school cooperation with regard to attendance policies, credit for home study, transportation to and from childcare, and liberal leave to allow for general parenting responsibilities.

Economic reasons for dropping out are obvious for a teen parent. Without internal or external teen parenting programs to assist the young parent with social service referrals, the student may feel that he or she *must* work rather than complete high school and plan his or her and the child's future due to the obligatory feeling and self-imposed pressure to earn money.

Personal reasons for dropouts included pregnancy and/or early marriage. Again, a young teen becomes pregnant, but there remains a stigma attached to this discovery. She may feel unaccepted, lose friends she thought she had, and gain unwanted

attention. This is a very difficult time for young mothers and fathers, and they may feel it is best to leave school prematurely to avoid uncomfortable situations.

During the literature review on the topic of high school dropouts, a great deal of information was gathered pertaining to why students drop out.

- Who was at-risk?
- How many students dropped out?
- What programs were in place to keep students in school?
- Even, what might have constituted a successful dropout prevention program?

However, what was not found was why those "at-risk," who were involved in a structured dropout prevention program when they were teen parents in high school, might choose to remain in school.

Dialogues with a small group of students with one or more risk factors for dropping out, yet who remained in school, appeared to be the most efficient method of collecting the intended data. Conversations with the students would allow for personal issues which affected the students' decisions to remain in school to be identified. An alternative would be to survey high school students who graduated high school to determine their risk factors. A survey would have to include information as to why they did, in fact, graduate. Such an effort would be daunting, if not impossible.

This study will provide a forum for the voices of teen parents to be heard. The participating young adults may provide insight into what obstacles and challenges they faced during their high school years. The questions developed will focus around Rumberger's (1987) three categories of dropout reasons: school-related, personal, and

economic. What, in effect, kept teen parents in high school? Was it family support, school-sponsored programs, external teen parent programs, or personal goals? Also, what aspects of programs or support assisted the student matriculate through to high school graduation?

The administrators of local high schools in which teen parents can participate in teen parenting programs will be surveyed to provide their dimension to the framework of the study. The administrators' responses will provide different perspectives about the value of teen parenting programs and other concerns educators have about teen parents. The comparisons between the students' dialogues and the administrators' responses may answer the questions of why teen parent students, who were in a structured teen parenting program, remained in school.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In countless reports there have been exhaustive examinations of the reasons students fail to graduate. Several reasons why students drop out were accentuated. These reasons included boredom, financial responsibilities, school-related negative behavior, academic problems and pregnancy or marriage (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Rumberger, 1987). It was also noted in the research that the decision by students to drop out normally occurred over time, often beginning in elementary school (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Rapp-Paglicci, 2004; Rumberger, 1987). Teenage pregnancy or parenthood was considered an obvious risk factor which could be analyzed. Pregnant or parenting students represented twenty-six percent of all students who left school without graduating (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Rumberger, 1987; Woods, 1995). Through conversations with students who were pregnant or parenting in high school, we may identify factors that caused them to remain in school.

In *The Silent Epidemic* researchers listened to the voices of students who dropped out of high school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). There was a plethora of quantitative research that provided an enormous amount of data utilizing various collection techniques (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001; Montecal et al., 2004; Woods, 1995).

Teaching and learning has become increasingly focused on quantifiable student outcomes (Harvard Educational Review, 2007). In spite of efforts to increase high school completion rates through dropout prevention programs, there has been limited qualitative analysis that focused on a specific group of students who were “at-risk” for dropping out. The teen parents who participated in this study formed a ‘subset’ of sorts, which provided a unique opportunity for the researcher to examine why some students in this “at-risk” group rose above expectations and graduated from high school. Similar data may have been difficult to ascertain from other sources.

Teen pregnancy or parenthood appeared to manifest itself as a risk factor like no other factor attributed to student dropout rates. The risk factors of pregnancy appeared as an absolute quality for teen parents. A childbearing female could not deny or minimize her risk factor in the way that an “at-risk” student may minimize drug and alcohol use, familial responsibility, academic problems, bullying, or lack of interest.

Interviews with students who had a known risk factor for dropping out, yet remained in school was determined to be the most efficient method of collecting the intended data. The alternative would have been to survey every student who graduated high school, determine if any risk factors existed, and inquire as to why they did, in fact, graduate. Such an effort would be daunting, if not impossible.

This research provided an in-depth qualitative analysis of a small group of young adults who were pregnant or parenting in high school and who completed high school in spite of their “at-risk” factor of pregnancy. It is important to consider why the students remained in school and what support systems were in place to keep them in

school. The research provided a voice for teen parents involved in the educational environment who “might not otherwise gain the attention of practitioners, policymakers, and researchers” (Harvard Educational Review, 2007).

2.2 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The literature review revealed three reasons why students dropout (Rumberger, 1983). There were school-related reasons; economic reasons, and personal reasons. Fifty-percent of students left school for school-related reasons; twenty percent left for economic reasons, and more than twenty-five percent left for personal reasons such as pregnancy or early marriage. Teenage mothers were noted in the literature to be at significant risk to dropout of high school.

Girls, Inc. (2003) cited Moore (1998) when reporting that “early parenting limits a young mother’s likelihood of completing an education necessary to qualify for a well-paying job...only 32% of teenage mothers who begin their families before age 18 ever complete high school” (¶ 24). This research reached out to those who completed high school since “young adult mothers are 30% more likely to be neither working or in school” (¶ 25).

Another consideration in the selection of personal interviews of teen parents was the cyclical pattern of teenage daughters who appeared to model their mothers with early high school pregnancies. Researchers noted that daughters of those who were teen mothers have a twenty-two percent greater chance of becoming teen parents themselves (Girls, Inc., 2003). To what do we attribute the cycle of teen parenthood?

It may be beneficial to gain insight into what kept teen parents in school in order to perhaps break the cycle of teen moms having daughters who become teen moms.

There were a variety of teen parenting programs identified in the literature that were designed to assist students who wished to stay in school or those “at-risk” of dropping out. Three major categories of teen parenting programs identified in the research were the inclusive curriculum, supplemental curriculum or non-curricular programs (Zellman, 1982).

Inclusive curriculum programs offered pregnant students a general education curriculum and a range of courses which pertained to childbearing, parenthood or child development. The common feature in the inclusive program was that participating students did not attend regular classes. Instead, most were physically and administratively separate from the regular school. Also, this type of program mainly concentrated on the teenager’s time of pregnancy with little or no follow-up coursework or guidance (Zellman, 1982).

The second type of program identified was the *supplemental curriculum programs*. The supplemental curriculum programs provided relevant coursework, as well as childcare or counseling, to those pregnant or parenting students. The participating students would also attend their regular academic classes. The key feature in the supplemental curriculum programs was that the students remained in their regular classes for a majority of the day and received credit for participating in special teen parenting classes. In the two supplementary programs identified, the

students were administratively separated from the regular school, but the pregnant teens were not isolated from the rest of the students (Zellman, 1982).

The third type of teen parenting program studied was the *non-curricular programs*. These programs provided students with counseling, medical care and referrals with no school credit for participation. Most of the teen parents in these programs attended regular classes, and again this program was administratively separated from the regular school (Zellman, 1982).

All three categories of teen parenting programs were observed to be beneficial to some extent in the research. However, the programs were also noted to lack strong administrative support. Instead, the programs appeared to have been primarily initiated to conform to the basic requirement of federal law Title IX of 1972 (Zellman, 1982). In 1972, Title IX was passed that gave protection to students from discrimination in the educational system based on gender, pregnancy, marital or parenting status.

As reported, this study provided a forum for teen parents to speak out and be heard. It was hoped that the participating young adults could provide insight into what obstacles and challenges they faced during their high school years. Questions were developed by the primary investigator to identify these obstacles and challenges.

- What, in effect, kept teen parents in high school?
- Was it family support, school-sponsored programs, external teen parent programs, or personal goals?

- Also, what aspects of programs or support assisted the students matriculate through to high school graduation?

2.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

What observations and interventions might teen parents share about their pregnancies and subsequent issues of parenthood which occurred while they were in high school? What support and assistance identified by the teen parent participants in the study could be utilized by educators to enhance the participation of teen parents in school-related activities; assist teen parents to overcome economic challenges; and promote an improved quality of their personal lives so they complete high school?

2.4 RATIONALE FOR DATA COLLECTION

2.4.1 Young Female Participants

Retrospective interviews were the major source of data collection used in this study. Fraenkel & Wallen (2006) described retrospective interviews as a researcher who "...tries to get a respondent to recall and then reconstruct from memory something that has happened in the past" (p. 456). Five young females, who were teen parents in high school, were interviewed on a voluntary basis. Patton (2002) explained "Qualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small samples, even single cases, selected purposefully to permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in depth" (p.46). The size of the sample in a qualitative study depends on what the researcher "...wants to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what's at stake, what will be

useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources" (Patton, p. 244). A smaller group study sample was chosen for the interviews as a format to provide the participants' messages verbatim in an attempt to capture the essence of their stories.

The interviews included observations of the participants and non-verbal communications. The primary investigator developed a 'sectioned' interview format with three drop out categories: personal, school-related and economic (Rumberger, 1983). The questions developed also included consideration of the challenges and obstacles throughout the participants' high school years as teen parents. The interviews were tape-recorded, reviewed, and discussed by the primary investigator and the study group participants to ensure validity and clarity of information for each interview. Anecdotal notes and observations were recorded by the primary investigator. Seidman (1998) suggested making notations of nonverbal cues of the subjects and any interruptions that occur during the course of the interview.

The students' quotes were incorporated as often as possible. The researcher often probed the interviewee to "...deepen the responses to a question, increase the richness and depth of a response, and give cues to the interviewee about the level of response that is desired" (Patton, 2002, p. 372).

Although the research questions were provided for the interview, the individual interview sessions were adjusted to provide flexibility to comport with the focus of the study (Seidman, 1998). The interview tapes were transcribed verbatim by an independent transcriptionist to ensure the accuracy and integrity of the responses.

2.4.2 Administrators

Zellman (1982) discovered that many teen parent programs lacked strong administrative support. Instead, the programs appeared to have been primarily initiated to conform to the basic requirement of federal law Title IX of 1972 (Zellman, 1982). For this reason, the primary investigator felt compelled to ask school administrators about their level of involvement and commitment via a structured survey.

Twenty-seven school administrators were surveyed (Appendix B) using SurveyMonkey.com to determine their level of involvement and/or knowledge of the teen parent program currently in place at their respective schools. The survey inquired into the probability of continuing the teen parent programs in the event that existing entitlement funds expired. SurveyMonkey.com was chosen as the collection tool because of the ease of responding to the survey questions, electronic speed, level of confidentiality and tabulated results provided by SurveyMonkey.com. The survey also had two open-ended questions regarding administrators' thoughts on teen parents and teen parenting programs in the schools. The survey results were reviewed and tabulated by Survey Monkey to determine the level of "support" for teen parent-related programs and generally for the continued "support" of the student-parent population.

2.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

School-related
S1. What were the participants' thoughts of themselves as high school students, (i.e. did they feel accepted by peers, teachers, etc?)
S2. What were the participants' goals for the future while attending high school? How did those goals change after becoming a parent?
S3. How did the participants' think they were able to succeed (high school graduation) in spite of becoming a teen parent?
S4. Were there any persons (teacher, administrator) or in-school programs that were most supportive to the participants' needs? If so, who and how.
S5. If there were academic obstacles how did the participants respond to them as a teen parent?
Personal
P1. If there were personal obstacles (family, boyfriend, girlfriend, siblings, extended family), how did the participants respond to them as a teen parent?
P2. Were there any programs outside of school that were most supportive to the participants' needs? If so, what and how.
P3. What or who did the participants believe influenced them most during their high school years?
P4. When did the participants become pregnant—at what age and school year?
P5. How did the partner (or father of the baby) react to the pregnancy news?
P6. How did the immediate family of the participants react to the news of pregnancy or fatherhood?
P7. Was there any history of teen pregnancies in the families of the participants?
Economic
E1. Did the participants receive free or reduced lunch while in high school?
E2. What was the participants' socioeconomic status?
E3. What was the participants' parents' level of education?
E4. Did the participants' families receive any subsidies?
E5. What needs did the participants have as teen parents in high school?

2.6 PROCEDURES OF METHODOLOGY

2.6.1 Pre-Interview Screening

The interview subjects were required to meet the following criteria: 1) The subjects were high school graduates and at least eighteen years of age; 2) The subjects were from the western Pennsylvania counties of Lawrence, Mercer or Butler; 3) Primary investigator accepted referrals of possible young adult study participants via the Mercer and Butler County teen parent coordinators as well as self-referred in her respective county of Lawrence; 4) The study group participants were asked to voluntarily participate in the study with the understanding that interviews were tape-recorded with notes taken and follow-up interviews scheduled for clarification purposes.

Fraenkel and Wallen (2000) noted that the researcher can use previous experience and knowledge when selecting a sample for interviewing. A pre-selected sample of ten study group participants were approached by letter (Appendix A) and narrowed down to include no more than five study group participants based on their obstacles and challenges during their high school years, and who responded as requested within the contents of the letter. The smaller sample aided in providing an improved sense of what support systems were in place that worked to keep the study group participants in school.

2.6.2 Data Analysis: Introduction

Process and steps of analysis

- Step 1: Reviewed collected interview data
- a. Listened, transcribed and took anecdotal notes

- b. Made follow-up telephone calls to study group participants for clarification
- c. Prepared interview details through individual participant stories

Step 2: Analysis of Interviews

- a. Research Questions rubric
- b. Looked for emergent themes and differences

The study group of young adults allowed for detailed descriptions of challenges and obstacles faced during their high school years as a teen parent. The information obtained during the interviews was evaluated quantitatively and qualitatively. Fraenkel & Wallen (2006) believed that "Educational research.....should be a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches" (p. 430). Quantitative data from verbal descriptions obtained from the young adults during the interviews was compiled to give a sense of the age of becoming a teen parent, their level of education, family background, parents' education level, etc. Qualitative data included the analyzing of information obtained throughout the interviews using a matrix as a way of locating common themes among the young adults' responses. As previously described, matrixes were devised for the sectioned categories of school-related, personal and economic research questions. Open-ended questions to the teen parent participants were added to provide opportunities for additional information.

The administrator participants' survey results from SurveyMonkey.com were electronically tabulated as a quantitative form of measurement with regard to administrator support of teen parents and teen parent programs.

The participants' verbal and non-verbal responses to the research questions were provided. The researcher decided on a mixed-methods approach to analysis as a way

to strengthen the results. The rationale for the mixed-methods approach was Greene's (2001) concepts of mixed methods of research analysis. Greene identified how multiple sources of perspectives provided the researcher with diverse views of knowledge that completed the whole view (p. 251). A Research Question Interview Rubric (Figure 5), designed by the researcher, was utilized as a way to quantitatively organize gathered interview data from the participants.

Sample Research Question Interview Rubric for Organizing Data

Questions	#1 Rachel	#2 Diane	#3 Helen	#4 Nancy	#5 Sandra
S1. What were the participants' thoughts of themselves as high school students, (i.e. did they feel accepted by peers, teachers, etc?)					
S2. What were the participants' goals for the future while attending high school? How did those goals change after becoming a parent?					
S3. How did the participants' think they were able to succeed (high school graduation) in spite of becoming a teen parent?					
S4. Were there any persons (teacher, administrator) or in-school programs that were most supportive to the participants' needs? If so, who and how?					

<p>S5. If there were academic obstacles, how did the participants respond to them as a teen parent?</p>					
<p>P1. If there were personal obstacles (i.e., family, boyfriend, girlfriend, siblings, extended family), how did the participants respond to them as a teen parent?</p>					
<p>P2. Were there any programs outside of school that were most supportive to the participants' needs? If so, what and how?</p>					
<p>P3. What or who did the participants believe influenced them most during their high school years?</p>					
<p>P4. When did the participants' become pregnant—at what age and school year?</p>					
<p>P5. How did the partner (or father of the baby) react to the pregnancy news?</p>					
<p>P6. How did the immediate family of the participants react to the news of pregnancy or fatherhood?</p>					

P7. Was there any history of teen pregnancies in the families of the participants?					
E1. Did the participants receive free or reduced lunch while in high school?					
E2. What was the participants' socioeconomic status?					
E3. What was the participants' parents' level of education?					
E4. Did the participants' families receive any subsidies?					
E5. What needs did the participants have as teen parents in high school?					

Key: S = School-related; P = Personal; E = Economic questions

Figure 5 Research Question Interview Rubric

Step 3: Interview scoring matrix

- a. Interview information was used to provide a "score" for each participant and research questions in the respective category (school-related, personal and economic).
- b. Each category was totaled for a final "score."

The researcher decided that a data display model was most useful in compiling the gathered information to determine what component(s)—school-related, personal, or

economic—worked best to assist in the retention of teen parents in high school through graduation. Berkowitz (1997) highlighted a data display as “...an extended piece of text or a diagram, chart, or matrix that provides a new way of arranging and thinking about the more textually embedded data” (Chapter 4).

The data display would require a scoring matrix as well as a scoring criteria guide to corroborate the researcher’s marks. Utilizing the research questions in the three components of reasons why students leave school prematurely—school-related, personal and economic—seemed to be the most logical system of scoring.

Each component section would have one-hundred as the highest possible score and twenty as the lowest possible score. The higher score indicated the greater support and/or assistance the participants’ received in the respective component(s).

The researcher conducted careful and repeated reviews of the participants’ interviews and determined a score for each research question utilized in the data display. Follow-up telephone calls to the participants were also conducted to clarify or extrapolate additional information. The criteria scoring guide used for the data display of research questions, divided into three sectioned categories, were as follows:

S = School-related; P = Personal; E = Economic questions

School-Related

S1. What were the participants’ thoughts of themselves as high school students?

Criteria for scoring: A detailed response from the study subjects mentioning:
a. peers/friends; b. teachers; and/or c. specific activities.

4 = very important; mentioning all three listed above.

3 = important; mentioning two of the three listed above.

2 = not so important; mentioning only one from above.
1 = not important; mentioning none from above.

S2. What were the participants' goals for the future while attending high school? How did these goals change after becoming a parent?

4 = very important; detailed description enumerating academic/career/relationship goals such as marriage or family.
3 = important; generalized academic/work/family.
2 = not so important; mentioning job/relationships.
1 = no important; no mention of goals or hadn't thought about it.

S3. How did the participants think they were able to succeed (high school graduation) in spite of becoming a teen parent?

Criteria for scoring: A detailed response mentioning: a. child care; b. son or daughter; c. family support; d. school support and/or outside agency support.

4 = very important; mentioning at least four from above.
3 = important; mentioning three but not less than two from above.
2 = not so important; mentioning one from above.
1 = not important; none mentioned from above.

S4. Were there any persons or in-school programs that were most supportive to the participants' needs?

4 = very important; mentioning four or more specifically identified programs or teachers.
3 = important; mentioning two or three identified programs or teachers.
2 = not so important; only one identified program or teacher.
1 = not important; no mention of any programs or teachers.

S5. If there were academic obstacles how did the participants respond to them as a teen parent?

Criteria for scoring: mentioning importance of a. studying; b. attendance; c. school discipline.

4 = very important; mentioning all three listed above.
3 = important; mentioning two of the three listed above.
2 = not so important; mentioning one from the three listed above.
1 = not important; none of the three listed above were mentioned.

Personal

P1. If there were personal obstacles, how did the participants respond to them as a teen parent?

Criteria for scoring: personal obstacles successfully dealt with by the study group participant outside of school.

4 = very important; cited three obstacles and dealt with all three.

3 = important; cited two obstacles and dealt with both.

2 = not so important; cited one obstacle and dealt with it.

1 = not important; cited obstacle but left unresolved.

P2. Were there any programs outside of school that were most supportive to the participants' needs?

Criteria for scoring: the study group participants' willingness to participate in outside school programming.

4 = very important; cited three or more programs in which they participated.

3 = important; cited two programs in which they participated.

2 = not so important; cited one program in which they participated.

1 = not important; cited zero involvement in outside school programs.

P3. What or who did the participants believe influenced them most during their high school years?

Criteria for scoring: will measure level of family, friend or adult influences outside of school environment.

4 = very important; cited four or more influential people.

3 = important; cited three influential people.

2 = not so important; cited two influential people.

1 = not important; cited one influential person.

P4. Responses are non-scored, open-ended questions.

P5. How did the partner (father of the baby) react to the pregnancy news?

Criteria for scoring: The more support from the father of the baby the higher the personal score.

4 = very important; accepted responsibility.

3 = important; displayed anger at the situation.

2 = not so important; denied paternity.
1 = not important; abandonment.

P6. How did the immediate families of the participants react to the news of pregnancy?

Criteria for scoring: The more support from the immediate family the higher the personal score.

4 = very important; accepted situation.
3 = important; expressed anger and/or displayed violence.
2 = not so important; became controlling or domineering.
1 = not important; abandonment.

P7. Responses are non-scored, open-ended questions.

Economic

E1. Did the participants' receive free or reduced lunch while in high school?

Criteria for scoring:

4 = No
1 = Yes

E2. What was their families' socioeconomic status?

Criteria for scoring: The higher the family income the higher the personal score.

4 = very important; over \$60,000 total household income.
3 = important; \$45,000 - \$59,999 total household income.
2 = not so important; \$25,000 - \$44,999 total household income.
1 = not important; under \$25,000 total household income.

E3. What was the participants' parents' level of education?

Criteria: The higher the parents' level of education the higher the personal score.

4 = very important; one or both graduated from college.
3 = important; one or both attended some college.
2 = not so important; one or both are high school graduates.
1 = not important; one or both did not graduate from high school.

E4. Did the participants' families receive any subsidies?

Criteria for scoring: The less subsidies received the higher the personal score.

- 4 = very important; no subsidies received in the household.
- 3 = important; one subsidy received in the household.
- 2 = not so important; two subsidies received in the household.
- 1 = not important; three or more subsidies received.

E5. What needs did the participants have as teen parents in high school?

Criteria for scoring: The lower the needs of the teen parent the higher the personal score.

- 4 = very important; cited zero teen parent needs.
- 3 = important; cited one teen parent need.
- 2 = not so important; cited two teen parent needs.
- 1 = not important; cited three or more teen parent needs.

Sample Matrix for School-Related , Personal and Economic Questions Using the Criteria for Scoring from above.

Question Number	Rachel	Diane	Helen	Nancy	Sandra	Total
Total						

Score key – 100 = highest possible score for school-related support received
 20 = least possible school-related support received

Figure 6 Interview Scoring Matrix

Step 4: Administrators' Survey Analysis

- a. Tabulated by SurveyMonkey.com
- b. Reviewed by researcher

As previously noted, twenty-seven school administrators were surveyed using SurveyMonkey.com to determine their level of involvement and/or knowledge of teen parent programs at their respective schools. The survey inquired into the probability of

continuing the program in the event that existing entitlement funds expire. The survey had two open-ended questions regarding administrators' thoughts on teen parents and teen parenting programs in the schools. The survey results, which were tabulated by SurveyMonkey.com, were reviewed by the researcher to determine the level of "support" for teen parent-related programs and generally for the continued "support" of the student-parent population.

Survey questions for administrators using SurveyMonkey.com via electronic mail.

<p>Twenty-six percent of dropouts cite personal reasons such as pregnancy or marriage as a reason to drop out. It is for this reason that it is important to provide services that might empower this population to stay in school and be productive citizens. How supportive do you feel your district is to Teen Parent programs?</p>	
Very	Not at all
Somewhat	Other (please specify)
<p>This study is examining if Teen Parent programs do, in fact, keep students in school to completion. To what degree do you think the programs motivate and support young parents and keep them in school?</p>	
Very	Not at all
Somewhat	Other (please specify)
<p>The Teen Parent program coordinators are on the "front lines" with your school's teen parents, school counselors, teachers and nurses. With that in mind, how informed do you feel you are as an administrator?</p>	
Very	Not at all
Somewhat	Other (please specify)
<hr/>	

If funding should expire for the Teen Parent programs, how likely would it be that your school district would continue specific teen parent services in a seamless transition?

Very

Not at all

Somewhat

Other (please specify)

Comments are appreciated on thoughts of students who become teen parents in high school, (i.e. do you recognize a profile or common thread?)

Comments are appreciated on teen parent programs in high school. Do you feel they support and assist the student, glorify the situation, or no difference in student achievement?

Step 5: Identification of Emergent Themes

a. Identified commonalities and differences

The researcher continued to ponder questions suggested by Berkowitz (1997) when conducting qualitative research:

1. What patterns and common themes emerged?
2. What interesting aspects of the stories surfaced that better illuminated the problem statement?
3. Did discovered patterns or findings suggest the need for additional research?
4. Did discovered patterns or findings corroborate the Literature Review?

Through a cross-referenced approach, the researcher assigned a quantitative value to the participants' interview responses for the purpose of analyses. The quantitative results of the interviews were analyzed apart from the survey data. This separated analyses permitted the researcher to have a clear understanding of what

information was gathered from each group. Ultimately, the two were cross-referenced in an effort to unearth any diverse or similar responses.

2.6.3 Data Analysis: Quantitative and qualitative aspects

McEwan & McEwan (2003) noted that qualitative research could be broken down into four broad categories: a) ethnography; b) case studies; c) naturalistic inquiry and d) life history methodologies (pp. 76-77). While this study fits most naturally in the life history methodology category, the authors noted “any attempt to place most contemporary qualitative studies into one of these four seemingly well-defined categories will only lead to frustration” (p. 77).

2.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitations of the study are as follows:

- 1) The qualitative data obtained from the study group participants was subject to interpretive analysis by the primary investigator.
- 2) The pool of study group participants was referred to the primary investigator by colleagues, current student participants, former student participants and the primary investigator. Therefore, the primary investigator did not obtain study group participants from outside the western Pennsylvania counties of Lawrence, Mercer, and Butler.
- 3) The first contact with ten potential study group participants was initiated by letter (see Attachment A). The number of interview participants was reduced to five based on their challenges and obstacles during their high school years, and on those who responded as requested within the contents of the letter.

4) The study focused on a specific group of young adults who were pregnant and/or parenting teenagers. The participants' age was set at eighteen years of age or older and high school graduates. While there are younger parents with ongoing struggles in high school, the primary investigator did not involve those younger than 18 years due to the fact that they were more difficult to access, and perhaps the younger teen parents may have found it difficult to articulate the challenges they faced while in high school.

4) The primary investigator developed pre-determined interview questions. There was some flexibility in the interview for follow-up, probing questions and to delve further into impressions, expectations and reflections. However, there may have been additional information obtained through other research and interview questions.

5) The study group participants were selected from a larger pool of ten. Ten participants may be considered a smaller sample size for reflection and the field was narrowed even more to provide detailed stories which immersed the researcher and led to more empathetic assessments.

2.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purpose of this study the following definitions will be followed.

Abortion —the termination of a pregnancy.
Cohort rate —described the number of dropouts from a single grade or specific age of students over a period of time.
CYS —Children and Youth Services. This agency investigates all allegations of child abuse and neglect as mandated by state law.

<p>Dropout—students who stopped attending school with no transfer to another school on file.</p>
<p>ELECT—Education Leading to Employment and Career Training is an umbrella for four types of parenting programs—PPT (Pregnant and Parenting Teens); FW (Family Works); EFI (ELECT Fatherhood Initiative); and ESW (ELECT Student Works).</p>
<p>Event rate – indicated the number of students who leave high school each year and is compared with previous years.</p>
<p>Family Center—provided in-home child development education by certified Family Development Specialists.</p>
<p>Federal poverty income level—poverty thresholds are determined annually and take into account the size of the family unit and the number of family members in the home. For example, a family of four who earns a combined income of less than 20,000 dollars is considered poverty level.</p>
<p>High school completion rate—indicated the percentage of all persons ages twenty-one and twenty-two who have completed high school by receiving a high school diploma or equivalency certificate.</p>
<p>IDRA—Intercultural Development Research Association. An independent, non-profit organization that advocates the right of every child to a quality education through educational programs, training and technical assistance.</p>
<p>Life Coach— Individuals dedicated to helping students achieve their goals by developing their decision-making skill and who serve s a guide and caring figure to help address interpersonal issues and build self-esteem.</p>
<p>Nurse-Family Partnership—provided nurse home visitation services to low income, first-time teenage mothers.</p>
<p>Parenting Plan—the birth parents relinquish all parental rights and create a plan for raising their child through adoptive parents.</p>
<p>PAT—Parents as Teachers program offered bi-monthly home visits to pregnant women with a focus on health, nutrition and preparation for the birth.</p>
<p>SES—Social and Economic Status or Socioeconomic Status is reflected by some combination of the household’s adults’ education, occupation and income.</p>

Status rate—provided cumulative data on dropouts among all young adults within a specified age range. Status rates are higher than event rates because they include all dropouts in a given age range.

Success—for the purposes of this study, success is determined by the individual interviewee or to mean high school completion by the interviewer/investigator.

Title IX—this 1972 federal law protects students from discrimination in the educational system based on gender, pregnancy, marital or parenting status.

3.0 DATA ANALYSIS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The research illustrated that despite difficult circumstances, teen parents can successfully complete school. Teen parents often left school for a variety of reasons including a lack of external support, school-related support, or familial support. The loss of productivity from teen parents who did not complete high school was noted to not only affect the student but also their children in numerous ways. The result of not receiving a high school diploma led to increased incarceration, health care dilemmas for themselves and their children, and other social service needs. These issues also provided added strain to state and local fiscal resources earmarked for family support services.

It was posited in the research conducted by Rumberger (1987) that students who drop out do so for three reasons. They included school-related, economic, and personal issues for the students. Teenage mothers were more 'at-risk' to drop out of school when compared with their peers who had similar at-risk factors but who were not also pregnant. It was also identified that teen parents often faced similar struggles with these three facets of their lives, which contributed to their increased propensity to drop out of school. In Pennsylvania there were 26,047 teenage girls who were faced with the challenges of early parenting (Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, 2005). An important question considered by educators was how to assist young parents, especially teenage mothers, with their need to receive a quality education so they might become contributing member of society.

For teen parents, the school-related reasons as to why they drop out included an apparent rigidity by the administrators with regard to their schools' attendance policies; insufficient credit received from home-study, and inability to provide liberal leave for students to complete their general parenting responsibilities. Another school-related reason for teen parents to leave school was lack of transportation between their homes, daycare, and the school.

The economic reasons why teen parents dropped out of school appeared more obvious to researchers. Teen parents were often observed to feel compelled to work rather than complete high school because perhaps they weren't involved in a structured internal (school-based) or external (outside of school) teen parenting program that would assist the young parent with referrals to programs that might guide them in transitioning to adulthood. Many of the teen parents were from lower socioeconomic families where funds are short. Also, teen parents began to realize that with financial security comes freedom of choice.

Personal reasons identified as to why teen parents did not finish high school were their pregnancies, changes in their peer relationships, and also early marriages before they left high school. The families of teen parents, notably the mothers and fathers, reacted in ways that often strongly affected, either positively or negatively, the teen parents' abilities to remain in school. Peer relationships were also changed when the students became pregnant or fathered a child.

The research focused on the issues of teen parents who often had other factors in their lives, which made them "at risk" to drop out of school. The participant group

was composed of five women who had been teen parents and still completed high school. The participants in the study group also obtained some form of outside social service agency assistance related to teen mothers. Interviews were selected as a method of obtaining information so that 'conversations' with the participants allowed for personal issues, as well as school-related and economic issues, to be more fully investigated.

The study sought to address issues beyond the identified subject of high school students who dropped out because of pregnancy or fatherhood. There were ample findings regarding why students drop out, which students were at risk, and what social service programs were in place to assist teen parents while they were in high school. There were also adequate identifications of successful dropout prevention programs for teen parents. However, the question not addressed well in previous research was how students who were: a. involved in a structured dropout prevention program; b. were teen parents and c. were 'at-risk' for dropping out, were able to remain in school. Referring again to Rumberger's (1987) categories of dropout reasons—school-related, personal, and economic—the research focused more specifically on what teen parents expressed as necessary means for them to earn a high school diploma. Another aspect of this question was which categories of dropout reasons were also identified as positive reinforcements towards the students' retention in school.

Five interviews were conducted at various locations in an effort to accommodate the study group participants. The location choice of the participant was either a public library or their home. All five interviews were scheduled independently of the other.

The setting for the interviews between the female participants and the researcher was selected to facilitate a sense of comfort and relaxation, as well as convey genuine interest by the researcher in the thoughts and expressions of the teen parents. All of the participants appeared to be anxious and excited about the delivery of their personal experiences as teen parents through this research. Each participant also expressed hope that their participation may be useful to educators who wish to assist other teen parents to remain in school through graduation.

Patton (2002) espoused that the researcher should consider organizing the analysis with two primary sources the questions developed during the methodological phase of the study and analytic interpretations that would emerge from the data collection or interview findings (p.437). The research questions were used as an organizational tool to identify commonalities or accentuate differences from the data, while researcher interpretations from the interviews and anecdotal notes were gathered to determine which categories of reasons appeared most important in keeping the teen parents in school.

The subjects' responses and body language were noted and contributed to the analytical meaning and determinations made by the researcher. The body language helped the researcher assess the subjects' level of comfort with the question being asked as well as with the flow of the response. Fictional names have been used to protect the subjects but also to provide a realistic understanding that the subjects' stories are real. Their stories were printed from the researcher's perspective with quotes and feedback being provided directly from the subjects.

Administrators of local high schools in which teen parents participated in teen parenting programs were surveyed to provide their dimension to the framework of the study. The administrators' responses offered different perspectives about the value of teen parenting programs in school and also addressed other concerns educators may have about teen parents. The comparisons between the students' interviews and the administrators' responses were made to address questions about why teen parent students who were in a structured teen parenting program remained in school.

3.2 SYNOPSIS OF RESEARCHER AND PARTICIPANTS

The researcher was employed by an educational service agency that provided over one-hundred services to twenty-seven school districts in three counties in western Pennsylvania. The services provided by the agency included, but were not limited to, continuing education, curriculum & instruction, cyber service, homeless initiative, non-public schools, state and federal programs, tutor program, alternative schools, special needs services (i.e, hearing impaired, vision impaired, physical / emotional / academic disabilities), Child Care Information Services (CCIS) for working parents in need of child care, and Teen Parenting programs, to assist pregnant or parenting students with completing their education.

Three teen parenting coordinators were employed by the service agency, one of which was the researcher in this study. The researcher served as the ELECT (Education Leading to Employment and Career Training) teen parent coordinator for a county serving nine junior-senior high schools. She worked in this capacity for more than five

years and has served more than 250 pregnant or parenting teenagers, both males and females. The coordinator worked cooperatively and had a positive professional relationship with the school districts' personnel who interacted most closely with the teen parents. Her experience in working with pregnant and parenting adolescents led her to the research problem identified for the study. For every new ELECT participant, the researcher would gather required data regarding the teen parents' academic, economic and personal situation. Information such as their biological parents' level of education, work status and income, as well as the participants' grades and attendance, was gathered. This required data enabled the researcher to have a "birds-eye" view of what challenges the students' faced from the onset of pregnancy. The researcher had assessed students' situations based on gathered data but, until this study, had been unable to interact with the students in order to gain information from their perspective and compile an assessment based on the data from quantitative and qualitative perspectives.

While the teen parent program consistently reported acceptable rates of graduation at eight to eighty-five percent, the researcher continued to ponder the most significant factor that kept these students focused and working towards their education. The idea of *asking* the teen parents, through interviews, for their thoughts and opinions about their education seemed simultaneously intriguing and powerful.

Five former high school teen parents volunteered for this research study, from a larger pool of ten who were invited. The five participants were female and received support from the ELECT (Education Leading to Employment and Graduation) teen

parenting program, which was an out-of-school program. The teen parents encountered many obstacles and challenges. The participants were chosen from the three service agency's teen parent coordinators based on the participants' history of challenges (academic, personal, emotional) and interest in their contribution to the study. Two of the participants were former students of the researcher, while the remaining three participants were former students of the other teen parent coordinators. The researcher acknowledged that although she was one coordinator of the ELECT program, she also recognized that other similar teen parent programs may have been equally effective at assisting the students' matriculate through high school.

The ELECT program provided comprehensive support services to students receiving an education. It was a school-based initiative of the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Pennsylvania Department of Welfare. This program was first introduced in 1985 to keep students in school, support their attainment of a high school diploma, and encourage their self-sufficiency as parents and productive members of their communities. The program was voluntary, and the duration of program enrollment extended to graduation or until the participant reached the age of twenty-two.

There were nine characteristics considered in an overview of the participants in the study group:

- 1). None of the interview participants were married.
- 2). Four participants became pregnant at sixteen years of age and one at fourteen years of age.

3). Upon learning of their pregnancies, one participant was in the eighth grade; one was a sophomore in high school, and three were juniors in high school.

4). Three of the participants lived in a two-parent household, while two lived in single-parent households.

5). In terms of relationships, four participants lacked a positive father-daughter relationship, and one was close with her father.

6). Three participants were involved in their school through activities and outside organizations, with two not as popular and involved in school.

7). Four participants saw the father of the baby for a short time before their pregnancy, and one had dated the father of the baby for over two years.

8). With regard to activities, two of the participants academically achieved high honors; two had received average grades of B's and C's, and one received very low grades.

9). All five of the participants were involved in the ELECT program.

Additional programs available to the participants included the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), the Family Center, Parents as Teachers (PAT), and Family Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA). The NFP is a voluntary prevention program providing nurse home visitation services to low income, first-time teenage mothers in the area. Specially trained registered nurses began services early in pregnancy and continued visitation through the child's second year. Nurses also provided support, education, and counseling on health, behavioral, self-sufficiency and parenting issues.

The Family Center offered regular home visits to pregnant women to assist with the preparation of labor and delivery. The Family Center continued to work with and support the young mother until the child's fifth birthday. Between birth and age five, the Family Center again focused on proper nutrition, home safety and early childhood development.

The PAT program offered bi-monthly home visits to pregnant women with a focus on health, nutrition and preparation for the birth. PAT also worked with the young mother following birth until the child would reach the age of five. Also provided by the PAT home visitor were periodic health and developmental screenings. This Program option was available for the children of parents who are currently working, attending school, or in a job training program.

The FCCLA was a national student organization that helped young men and women build healthy families, have successful careers, and strengthen communities through family and consumer sciences education. FCCLA members developed and lead projects that addressed important personal, family, career and societal issues related to family and consumer sciences education.

The interviews that follow are the individual stories of five young women and their journey through pregnancy, child birth and child rearing while overcoming the academic and relational challenges of school.

3.3 Step 1 & 2: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS

3.3.1 Sandra's Story

Sandra was an eighteen year-old, African-American female with a four year-old daughter. Sandra graduated from an inner-city high school in June of 2007. At the time of the first interview she was living in public housing with her daughter and her boyfriend, the father of the baby. Sandra and her daughter received federal cash assistance, food stamps and medical assistance. Sandra's daughter attended half-day pre-school, five days a week, while Sandra was a stay-at-home mom. Her plans included becoming a licensed practical nurse, obtaining employment, and eventually continuing her education. Her long term goal was to become a Registered Nurse (RN). Sandra appeared to have transitioned, with economic assistance, from a teen parent to an independent adult who provided appropriate and conscientious care for her four year-old daughter. At first blush, there did not appear to be too much to Sandra's story when compared to impressions noted in the research about teen parents.

The researcher arrived at Sandra's home not knowing what to expect in terms of environment and material items. A clean home with obvious organization in the kitchen and living area was discovered. Most interesting was the fact that upon entering the kitchen, all four chairs were turned up onto the table. When it was inquired as to whether or not she had just completed mopping the floor, Sandra responded with an emphatic "no". The subject of the chair arrangement continued to be explored with Sandra finally stating, "If I keep the chairs up on the table, then people won't stay in my house too long."

The interview was used to explore the period prior to Sandra's pregnancy and her adjustment to her daughter's birth. Questions raised were also formed to promote an understanding of Sandra's experiences as a high school student as well as her circumstances during the interview period(s).

Sandra: Pre-pregnancy

In order to understand more fully what evolved to enable Sandra's pregnancy to occur, it was important to note Sandra's home environment prior to the time of her pregnancy. She described her father as "real quiet," rarely, if ever, divulging anything personal. "He never asked me questions about anything personal....we were close but not talking close," stated Sandra. The father and daughter did not discuss personal thoughts or feelings in any way. Sandra also indicated that her father had always been in her life and provided for her needs. "He worked a lot....had his own house...they (parents) never been married," and her father did not reside with her and her mother.

The household consisted of Sandra and her mother. Her mother received federal cash assistance, food stamps, and medical assistance while Sandra was in school. Sandra described her family in lower socioeconomic terms. She espoused that her relationship with her mother was close but not close enough to discuss the development of her sexual relationship with her baby's father. She had met the baby's father at school in eighth grade; he was in ninth grade.

Sandra recalled how her mother seemed to "...drink a lot of alcohol back then." This caused some confrontations between her and her mother according to Sandra. It was noted that teen parenting was common in her extended maternal family. Sandra's

grandmother had a child at the age of fifteen; a cousin gave birth at the age of eleven, and a second cousin gave birth in her mid-teens.

While attending school, Sandra had experienced discipline problems with teachers and administrators. She was often confrontational with other students. She described herself as a "troubled student....always getting into fights...always in the office...I went to alternative schools."

Sandra: Pregnancy

Sandra shared that the revelation of her pregnancy caused anger and frustration among those close to her. At fourteen, Sandra was not the one who delivered the message to her mother. Instead, the day she found out she was pregnant, Sandra enabled the sister of the baby's father to give her mom the news. They were all together and "Mom was kind of mad and frustrated...she talked about abortion...but she really didn't want me to get one...but we talked about it".

For the next seventeen months, the baby's dad denied responsibility for the pregnancy, Sandra confided. This denial of fatherhood continued until a DNA test proved the paternity.

At school, Sandra "...thought that everybody was going to look at me different, and I felt like going to school was going to be a waste of time because I was a teen parent and people were just going to put me down." Although Sandra attended an inner-city school where teenage pregnancies had been more notable occurrences, it appeared to the researcher that Sandra described herself as an outcast from her peers.

However, once the pregnancy news spread at school, Sandra said it seemed that she suddenly became more popular. “[O]nce you become pregnant everybody wants to be your friend...they wanted to be around me.” Unlike other pregnant students who often have increased discipline problems and poorer grades, Sandra said her school behavior and grades improved with the pregnancy, “‘cause I knew I had to make a choice...either get grades up or fail, and I wanted to finish high school.”

Sandra: Post-pregnancy

As a ninth grade student and a new mom, Sandra was at a different maturation level than most fourteen year-old girls. She indicated that she continued to live with her mother and to battle the question of paternity with the baby’s father. It was during this time that Sandra began to receive help and assistance from agencies that would support and guide her. Sandra also mentioned the impact some of the teachers at her high school made during her adjustment to motherhood. She stated her belief that those teachers cared about her and her baby. Sandra explained their important roles in the following statements. “[E]ven if I was late, I could call her (teacher) and she’d come pick me up for school” or “She’d (teacher) take me to the doctor’s appointment and was even there for my delivery.”

Sandra’s school counselor and concerned teachers had discussed with her how she could work with assorted agencies to gain parenting skills and academic assistance. Sandra said two agencies, the Family Center and the ELECT (Education Leading to Employment and Career Training) program, were most beneficial.

Sandra said her regularly scheduled visits with these agencies kept her focused. Incentives to the teen participants were provided for their participation, which Sandra indicated "definitely helped to keep you working hard." Home visits were also scheduled to enable the agency personnel to observe her interactions with her baby.

For seventeen months Sandra had high levels of stress from the baby's father, who refused to take responsibility for the child, the adjustment of motherhood, and the typical stresses of adolescence. When the baby was eight months old, Sandra said a DNA test was taken that confirmed her boyfriend as the baby's father. "He came around.." after paternity was confirmed and "...when I needed stuff, he gave it to me." She said that is when their relationship began to improve; and they began to work to raise their daughter together.

When asked what needs she had as a teen parent over the next four years (grades 9-12), Sandra replied, "There were so many." She explained that often she found herself in need of a babysitter, money, and various other forms of assistance to keep the home environment safe and help the baby learn and develop.

As Sandra continued her coursework, she continued to accept assistance from the Family Center and the ELECT program. Indications of her improved self-esteem were noted in her improved grades and plans for her future. She imparted that the ELECT program helped her secure funding for post-secondary schooling. Her plans were to begin her post-secondary schooling for nursing.

Sandra was asked to imagine how things might have been different without the support of the agencies or the mentor teachers. She replied, "I probably would have

dropped out...I thought about it." A discussion ensued on the subject of dropping out. Sandra clarified her position by stating that it was her daughter that kept her going back to school. In her words:

Because I knew I had to make right for her at home, and then like I wanted her to be happy when she got older. I didn't want her to be miserable like my mom who can't even help me with my homework. My mom can't read. My dad can't do math. So, it's like, I thought about all of that. I don't want to be there just to help my daughter through adding and subtracting; I wanted to be there to help her through all of it. Then, I finally got my own place and that's what really made me like, if I can do this, get my own house, I could finish school...I don't got anybody talking about me.

3.3.1.1 Sandra: Professional Reflection

What made Sandra unique was her age when she became pregnant. At fourteen Sandra represented an age group younger than the median age for teenage pregnancy.

Sandra had been living independently with her daughter since her senior year in high school, when she turned eighteen. During the interview, it became clear that Sandra had strategically planned to live independently. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2007) reported on Pennsylvania's teen births by age. According to the report, in 2005 there were 8,742 females who gave birth between ages eighteen and nineteen; 4,168 females ages fifteen to seventeen; and only 232 females under the age of fifteen. While her immediate needs were met at home with her mother, she looked forward to the day she turned eighteen when she could make decisions that pertained to her needs and desires. Sandra knew that once she was no longer a minor she could

apply for cash assistance, food stamps, housing assistance, and Medicaid to help support her and her daughter.

She had lived in a single-parent household all of her life. Her father had little involvement in her life. She had seen him on occasion but personal matters or decisions were not discussed. Oz and Fine (1991) studied how teen mothers' and teen non-mothers' life experiences differed, "For the adolescent mothers, their fathers were perceived particularly negatively; in contrast, the non-mothers regarded fathers in a very positive light, feeling closer to him than to their mothers." Sandra did not overtly discuss her relationship with her father. She kept that aspect of the interview to a minimum and only answered questions about her father as necessary.

Her strategic planning began after she gave birth, when she realized how much this child depended on *her*. Sandra described this connection to her daughter in a very proud tone, indicating some void being filled in her life. Her baby may have filled a void of unconditional love either on the receiving end or the displaying end. While Sandra was bonding with her new daughter, she was also simultaneously being personally transformed into early adulthood. This transformation was a necessary part of early parenting, as it would enable Sandra to accept assistance while taking on new responsibilities and goals.

Living independently was not easy for Sandra. She did appear to understand what she *didn't* want for her daughter. She didn't want her daughter to live in an unorganized home, an unsanitary home, or an unloved home. She also didn't want her

daughter to grow up with a mother who gave up on herself and didn't graduate high school. Sandra wanted to support her daughter in all aspects of life.

She had a clean home with definite signs of structure throughout. The kitchen was orderly with organized countertops and a refrigerator that showcased her young daughter's artwork. The living room was also neat with a coffee table, sofa, chair and television. Extraneous items were not strewn throughout. She exuded confidence beyond what was expected of a young lady her age. She *earned* that confidence through nearly two years of living on her own. This confidence appeared to have been built over time through Sandra's experiences leading to independence—again, the personal transformation. She came to realize that the school-based teen parent programs, home visit programs and the county assistance office were all there to assist her in becoming self-sufficient. The programs' personnel served as Life Coaches for Sandra and for other teen parents. Career Life Coaches have a stated aim of helping clients determine and achieve personal goals (Kauffman Scholars, Inc., 2008). Unbeknownst to either the teen parent or the program personnel, a great deal of "life coaching" was being implemented.

Even though the participant was willing to discuss her high school years as a teen parent, the researcher found it difficult to aggregate information about her life and the good and/or bad experiences she encountered. Her body language, which often appeared uncomfortable with the questioning, indicated to the researcher that perhaps there was more to Sandra's challenges than she initially presented. She seemed to

speak a great deal about agency help and support, but she was not so forthcoming with information of her relationship with or help received from her mother.

What was observed as a usual circumstance was the fact that her mother's household was supported with cash assistance, food stamps, and Medicaid. This type of household support was also found to be more common among teen parents according to the researcher's experience. Miller, Benson & Galbraith (2001) reported, "In neighborhoods that are characterized by high residential turnover, poverty and crime rates...adolescents tend to have early onset of sexual intercourse, low use of contraception, and high adolescent pregnancy rates."

Based on information provided by Sandra, her most difficult hurdles related to the confirmation of the paternity of the baby and improving her grades to above-average. The availability of outside agency support, as well as teacher-mentors, were key factors that contributed to Sandra's graduation. Both of Sandra's hurdles were overcome with the assistance of school and outside program support. It was a combination of the two influences—teacher-mentors and program coordinators—that enabled Sandra to seek assistance in pursuing a paternity test. Those factors along with hard work and dedication helped Sandra improve her grades. The mentors and coordinators were there for Sandra when all else around her may have appeared to have been falling apart. As described in the interview, Sandra had teachers and school-related program advisors that believed in her and committed themselves to helping her achieve the high school diploma that both her parents lacked.

The researcher utilized a Research Matrix to “evaluate” the degree of impact school-related, personal, and economic support had on the end result of high school graduation. A scoring criteria guide was established and used to score each research question as a way of “evaluating” interview responses. For Sandra, it was, in fact, discovered that the school-based and personal components were equal with regard to support and assistance from home and school with the economic component score calculated well below. This is based on the researcher’s own reflection and interpretation of information provided by Sandra during the interview phase.

3.3.2 Diane’s Description

Diane was a twenty year-old Caucasian in her third year of college (first year of nursing school) and the mother of a three-year-old daughter who was recently diagnosed with autism. Diane’s plans included the completing of nursing school to become a registered nurse (RN), secure work in the field, continue her education to earn her Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), and then on to become an anesthesiologist.

She appeared to be in a stable home relationship. Her partner was not the father of her child. He was employed and took his responsibility as a father figure very seriously. Diane’s story was a complicated one from pre-pregnancy throughout her high school years. The interview encompassed three components related to her teen pregnancy—school-related, personal and economic. An effort was made to highlight which of the three components was most crucial in keeping Diane in school. During the interview, many personal obstacles Diane faced were discovered. These obstacles

could have impeded Diane from continuing her secondary education. As the researcher would learn, these obstacles may have been the impetus that kept Diane focused on her goals.

Diane: Pre-Pregnancy

Diane lived with her mom and her stepsister until the age of fifteen. Diane described her life at home as “different.” Her mom was the “cool mom” who partied and hung out with her two daughters’ friends. Diane’s stepsister, who was three years older, was also a “partier” and very close to their mother. Diane and her step-sister shared the same mother but had different fathers.

Diane did not meet her biological father until she was twelve years-old. The encounter was very brief. Her father attended one of her high school volleyball games. Following that encounter, Diane did not see her father again for three years. The “father figure” in Diane’s life was non-existent. She stated, “I never knew my dad growing up.”

Diane was very involved in school and extracurricular activities. She “loved school and my friends.” She played basketball for six years and was on the volleyball team. She began thinking about college and exploring career options. Diane excelled in mathematics and a career in the field of architecture seemed appealing. By tenth grade, Diane knew that she wanted to be able to take care of herself, and she viewed a college education as one way to ensure that possibility.

Soon after her fifteenth birthday, life took a tragic turn. Diane received the horrible news that her mother was severely injured in a car accident and lapsed into a

coma. After undergoing several surgeries, Diane's mother tragically succumbed to her injuries. The loss of her mother was difficult for Diane, but she described it as "Even more difficult for my sister, who was very close to our mom."

Very soon after the death of their mother, the two girls went to live with an aunt and uncle, their mother's oldest brother and his wife. They had never met their new guardians prior to residing with them. Things did not go well at the house. There were often disagreements between the adults and the girls. Diane lived there for nearly a year before she saw her father again by happenstance at a community event. He and his girlfriend invited her to move in with them. Diane accepted their offer and moved in with her dad and his girlfriend. Later she would say, "He only wanted me to move in for my social security check from the death of my mother."

Diane lived with her father for four months describing it as "a horrible situation—living with him." He would return home after a night of drinking and be loud and verbally abusive towards Diane. He would often threaten to strike her. In fact, Diane admitted to witnessing her father strike his girlfriend on more than one occasion. In the short time that she lived with her father, she discovered that he was an alcoholic and he "would do anything so that he didn't have to work." It was during this period that she became pregnant and her step-sister was also in a serious car accident.

Diane's sister had been drinking, and she and her boyfriend were high on drugs when they got into an argument in the car. Diane described the incident as "No one will really ever know what happened in that car." There was an accident, and ironically, her stepsister was treated for the same conditions their mother had previously

experienced. Her mom was in a coma for five days, her stepsister for six. Diane was able to whisper in her stepsister's ear that she was going to be an aunt. Unfortunately, she did not survive to see her niece.

Diane: Pregnancy

Diane had been spending time with a boy who was a friend of her cousin. She described him as nice and willing to listen and console her. During the interview, Diane paused, then said, "I had no one to talk to or anything. I think that, it (living with dad) may have been a part of it. I never really thought about it that much...." When asked to clarify if living with her father may have contributed to her pregnancy, (i.e., her living arrangement and her father's behavior) she replied, "Yea, 'cause it was just me, by myself. Like I never talked to him. I would just get up, go to school."

Three months after her relationship with her cousin's friend began, Diane discovered she was pregnant. Diane indicated that delivering the news of her pregnancy to close members of families was a difficult task. The father of the baby was excited but did not want Diane to live with her father while she was pregnant. They discussed their options of keeping and raising the child, termination of the pregnancy, or to prepare a parenting plan (giving the child up for adoption) for the child. Diane described their choice of options as a "no brainer." They never considered the latter two choices and were eager to begin making plans together.

Both Diane and the father of the baby had to inform their parents of the pregnancy. This proved to be a unique experience for both of them. She recalled that the paternal grandparents were told the news first. Diane described her boyfriend's

parents as very understanding and supportive of whatever choice the expectant parents would make. Diane was concerned about her father's possible reaction to the news of her pregnancy. The paternal grandparents offered to assist Diane with the contact. She mentioned to the researcher how a telephone call was made to invite Diane's father over to their (paternal grandparents) house to discuss the circumstances. He insisted on knowing what the call was about and ultimately was told the news over the telephone. Diane stated that he seemed drunk at the time, and her father dismissed the news as "no big deal."

Later, he and his girlfriend would try to convince Diane to have an abortion. They even made an appointment at a clinic to have the pregnancy terminated. This scared Diane and made her feel forced to run away and seek help. She went to the local police department to learn of her rights. At the same time, she explored options with regard to where she would live for the duration of her pregnancy.

It was about six months later that the family of her baby's father relocated to a rural town sixty miles north. They offered Diane a place in their new home and she accepted the offer. She left her father's house when he was not home and only saw him several months later when she filed a lawsuit against him (and won) for not providing for her in his home while he used her social security money for his personal needs.

At seven months pregnant, Diane enrolled in a new high school and secured employment. She said she had always worked. In the past, she worked two jobs and

helped her stepsister out financially. She adjusted well to the new school but retained very fond memories of her previous school.

She delivered her daughter in the summer between her junior and senior year. The summer birth did not interfere with her classes and Diane began her senior year on time.

Diane: Post-Pregnancy

Diane recalled entering her senior year in a new city with a new baby and no friends in the school. She was easy to talk to and appeared to the researcher as a very personable young lady who might make friends quickly, both at school and at work. For the next nine months, she immersed herself in her schoolwork, raised her daughter, and worked hard to earn money to support both of them.

While living in the home of the father's parents, she was able to create a schedule for her and the baby. Diane described the help she received from the father's parents, "They were always there (father's family). They helped me when she was little, even at night. If I didn't hear her, if I was too tired, they would get up with her." Family support was expressed by Diane as the number one item that helped her complete her high school education. The baby's father, who had left school early, would watch the baby while Diane attended school, and his parents would help out in the evening when Diane worked. She said she would dedicate as much time as possible to the baby but her time was really stretched during her senior year. Her persistence and dedication paid dividends; she graduated with a 4.0 grade point average.

Diane was able to tap into social service programs for teen parents. These services were referred to her by the school counselor. Diane described her involvement with the Nurse-Family Partnership program as a very positive relationship between her assigned nurse and her. Diane contended that this program was beneficial in helping her transition to motherhood.

Diane also reflected on the ELECT program. She credits the program counselors with assisting her through regular school visits comprised of academic discussions and goal-setting.

When asked of some final thoughts of what kept her focused on completing high school as a teen mother, Diane replied:

...it was family support and a little bit me. Me, just never wanting to be like my family. I always wanted to be able to take care of myself and when Emily (her daughter) came around, it was just...her. I just wanted to her to live a long, healthy, happy, successful life, and I wanted her to have what I never had.

3.3.2.1 Diane: Professional Reflection

Diane participated in the researcher's ELECT program during her sophomore through senior years of high school. She agreed to participate in the study in order to make a contribution toward measuring whether school-based programs assisted teen parents in graduating high school.

Diane was easy to talk to and more than willing to disclose personal and academic information to the researcher. In fact, she overtly described her mother's shortcomings and her father's inappropriate behavior and lack of responsibility. Throughout the interview process, when discussing life prior to pregnancy and

immediately after, there was nothing typical about Diane's life. She had what one might call a disruptive and disjointed home life. In one year, her mother died; her only sister died; she was introduced to her alcoholic, abusive father and moved three times before she finally felt safe and secure enough to focus on motherhood and her education.

There was a strong moment of self-reflection in the interview when Diane looked back on the beginning of her relationship with the baby's father. While explaining how she felt about him at the time, she self-discovered that it was her father's lack of parenting that ultimately "drove" her to find a young, supportive man to help her with her own emotional trials. This lack of paternal love and support was often found by the researcher to be somewhat common among pregnant teens that she worked with. Many pregnant teens seemed to lack a solid adult male relationship, albeit a grandfather, uncle, older brother, stepfather or father. Miller and Benson (2001) cited more than twenty studies regarding parental support and connectedness with regard to adolescent sexual behavior and found that all but a few of the studies indicated that "Parent/child closeness is associated with reduced adolescent pregnancy risk through teens remaining sexually abstinent, postponing intercourse, having fewer sexual partners, or using contraception more consistently."

The researcher surmised that the final relocation in her last weeks of pregnancy was what enabled Diane to complete high school. Like Sandra, this was Diane's time of personal transformation—when she came to realize how her life's choices had to be planned for her and the baby. The new living arrangement with the baby's paternal

grandparents permitted Diane and her daughter to have a safe and secure environment while she completed her schooling.

The Research Matrix provided an equal score for Diane in the areas of school-based and personal support. Sandra's equal scores emphasized the importance of both the school-related and personal aspects of teen parenting. For example, if one component scored low, it would be expected that the other would score higher to compensate for the missing piece. Diane's economic area fared well but second to school-based and personal. Her economic support was of her own work and effort and not that of parents or guardians.

3.3.3 Nancy's Narrative

Nancy was a nineteen year-old Caucasian. She was the mother of a twenty-two-month-old son. She attended and graduated from the Professional Skills Career Academy (PSC). Her certification area was cosmetology.

Nancy's story was compelling in that initially she dropped out of high school. She appeared destined to be a statistic. Against all odds, she re-enrolled in high school one year later after being formally withdrawn to complete her education.

Nancy was raised in a military family. Both her parents were in the Air Force Reserves. Her parents instilled in her the value of patriotism, which she fervently displayed through her adolescence. In fact, she got into an altercation in elementary school with a fellow student who did not stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

The researcher observed dedication, drive, and self-confidence in her description of future plans for Nancy and her son.

Nancy: Pre-pregnancy

Nancy described herself as having a few close friends in school. She was, however, very involved in the art of music. She always enjoyed singing and felt she was “rather good at it.” She called herself a “choir nerd” and described how she was bullied in high school. Nancy explained that for her, bullying was not just physical but also verbal. She further elaborated on how she was verbally abused by other students and how, over time, it lowered her self-esteem and impeded on her general interest in life.

Nancy described her grades as average, receiving B's, C's, and a couple D's. She explained that studying did not come easy for her and that she needed to study to maintain her grades at a passing level. Nancy transferred to the local vocational school for her junior and senior years of high school and decided to concentrate on the study of cosmetology; yet, her dreams, she espoused, continued to be about music. She planned a career in music education, first by joining the Air Force, then by attending Julliard.

Nancy: Pregnancy

Nancy shared with the researcher that she was sixteen years-old and a junior in high school when she learned that she was pregnant. She indicated that she and the father of the baby had not been dating long and clearly expressed that they “were stupid and irresponsible,” but that it had happened and they were going “to deal with it.” She continued, “I became pregnant in April, and unfortunately, that was the day I

lost my virginity." Nancy said that she and the baby's father both wanted to keep the baby and chose not to terminate or to prepare a parenting plan (place for adoption).

Nancy described the way in which her parent's learned of the pregnancy. "I had confided in a friend and her dad overheard us...I had gone over to my boyfriend's at the time (the baby's father)...and my mom called me and said, 'You need to come home'...she sat me down on the couch and said, 'Is there anything you need to tell me?'" Nancy recalled how she felt and described her mother's and father's reactions as "anger...disbelief...disappointed." As Nancy recounted that period in her life, she appeared remorseful and disappointed. She recalled how her father had to leave the room because of his anger towards her and the baby's father. She suggested what had hurt her parents most was that her mother had gotten pregnant at seventeen years-old. She felt her mother did not want her own daughter to have to go through the many trials and tribulations that she had endured as a teen mother. She described how her mother dropped out of school for a year and re-enrolled to graduate a year later. Her mother had married the father of the baby who, according to Nancy, mistreated her mother until she finally left the relationship to protect and provide a more secure environment for Nancy.

When asked what her relationship was like with her parents, Nancy described her relationship with her mother as "best friends." She appeared very sincere when she responded that her mother was her "angel." Nancy appeared to have a very close mother-daughter relationship. She often shared her thoughts of her mother and how she doesn't "know what I'd do without her."

She referred to her biological father as her mother's "donor." He was not a part of her life growing up. Nancy further described her biological father as a "cheater" who gave her mother an STD, provided "no child support," and "wasn't a very good father." Nancy explained that her mother re-married when she was young, and her step-dad was who she called "father." She described their personalities as very similar, both "stubborn and strong-willed but at the end of the day he's really the one who...sticks up for me. He's actually going to finally teach me how to change my oil in my car."

Nancy recounted how she reacted to the pregnancy—"I thought that just because I got pregnant I had to marry the dad. So, I moved in with the dad and dropped out (of school)." She also remembered having a "falling out" with her parents, which she said influenced her decision to move in with the baby's dad. Since he lived outside of her school district, she did not return to school. Nancy described her actions (getting pregnant) as an adult decision and felt that God was punishing her. She said she believed God wanted her to do things herself without assistance from others, not even her mother. For six months, Nancy lived with the baby's dad. She said the living arrangements "didn't work out at all." She would explain how difficult life was during those months.

Nancy: Post-pregnancy

Nancy and the baby lived with the baby's dad because Nancy wanted "to do what was best for my son." Nancy was candid about the baby's dad being abusive. For six months, he was physically and emotionally abusive towards her. She described the

last abusive act was when he forced himself on her sexually. The following week she moved out.

Following her sexual assault, she came to realize that help from family or outside agencies may have been what she and the baby needed. She confided in her parents about her difficulties. Nancy's parents made an agreement with her. The agreement included that she would re-enroll in school and graduate. She agreed, not reluctantly but rather eagerly, because she admitted that she had missed high school. Nancy felt that she had seen the "real world without having a high school diploma. One morning I just woke up, I said, 'You know what? I refuse to be another statistic.'"

Nearly one full school year later, in August, Nancy was readmitted to her academic school, not the vocational school, to complete her senior year. After returning to school Nancy described seeing the world from a different perspective and was ready to accept help and support. Although Nancy's parents were a big support to her, she admitted that she had the self-discipline to return to school.

Nancy also credited one particular teacher, Mrs. S., for the huge influence as to how she would plan her future. She recalled how many students, including herself, had disliked Mrs. S. for no apparent reason. As it turned out, Mrs. S. was the mentor that helped guide Nancy. Nancy detailed a class she took that was led by Mrs. S. and said as a result of that class, she became well-informed about how to budget, invest, complete college applications, and learn job-related skills. Mrs. S. "prepared you for the outside world," said Nancy. Nancy chuckled when she commented, "The teacher that everybody hates was my biggest support system."

Nancy stated she wasn't popular in high school, but she displayed great pride when she announced to the researcher that she had earned the Arian Award for the high school senior most vocally proficient. The researcher surmised winning the Arian Award made quite an impact on Nancy.

After Nancy and her son moved back in with her parents and she returned to school, she began to open up and accept help and support from high school faculty. Nancy recalled that at about the same time school personnel introduced her to the ELECT (Education Leading to Employment and Career Training) and Parents as Teachers (PAT) programs. She expressed how pleased she was to be able to talk regularly with someone from the ELECT program about decision-making, establishing goals and planning for the future. The PAT program personnel helped her understand her role as a mother as well as her son's developmental needs. Nancy said she continued to meet with the PAT personnel until her son would be five years old; however, Nancy "graduated" from the ELECT program upon high school graduation.

When probed about what kept her in school after re-enrolling for her senior year Nancy commented:

Being a single mom is what got me up in the morning... I didn't want to be like a statistic...I still don't.... I didn't want to be the one that everybody pointed at saying, 'oh, she's living off the welfare system. She was a teenage mom.' I don't want to do that. When you hold your child in your arms for the first time, you know it's just this weird feeling inside of you. It's a very powerful feeling and you're like I'll do anything for this child. Everything I do is for my son, and a little bit was for me.

3.3.3.1 Nancy: Professional Reflection

The researcher discovered some unique findings throughout Nancy's interview. Based on the researcher's prior experience, it was unusual for a teen parent to have two supportive parents in the home. Nancy indicated that she was relatively close and open with both her mother and stepfather but referred to her mother with significantly higher regard. As previously mentioned, the study conducted by Oz and Fine (1991) provided some insight into teen mothers' and non-teen mothers' relationships with their parents. Fathers of teen mothers received fewer positive qualities, while the mothers scored significantly higher in terms of positive qualities expressed by the teen mothers. It is also significant to mention that Nancy's stepfather had been a part of her life since her toddler years. She became animated when she mentioned her biological father and without hesitation referred to him as her mother's "donor." This obviously derogatory reference to her biological father clearly indicated Nancy's feelings of disappointment and discontent to the researcher. Diane shared some of the same feelings about her father as Nancy; a palpable resentment of her biological father.

Nancy was a very frank interviewee. She was candid in her discussion of how she thought she did not need any help from family or the school. Nancy also admitted she came to realize that she needed the assistance of others in order to have a better life for her and her son. The researcher had seen other students with similar "independent" personalities and they, too, have returned to accept assistance. Were the "independent" personalities innate, or were the teenage mothers making a personal transformation into the responsibilities of motherhood? Similarly, Sandra and Diane

made the transformation with the realization that assistance was needed but that their own personal drive must lead the way. Assistance the teen parent often sought was out of desperation with perhaps nowhere else to turn. Often it was the realization of just how difficult it was to begin the journey of motherhood without preparation. Through the researcher's experience, this had been only the second case of a student who had dropped out of school with the thought of "doing it on their own," only to re-enroll the next school year eager to accept assistance.

A typical reaction from Nancy was that of reviewing her options upon becoming pregnant. The researcher acknowledged that many teen parents discuss the options of either keeping the baby, choosing an adoption plan, or terminating the pregnancy; however, none of the participants, at the time of speaking to the teen parent coordinator, had chosen anything other than to keep the baby. It appeared that the teen parents had reviewed their options prior to accepting assistance through programs. Research indicated that fewer teen mothers are choosing to place their children for adoption or to terminate their pregnancy. In forty states a mother who is a minor may legally place her child for adoption without the consent of her parents (Guttmacher Institute, 2007). More than fifty years ago, ninety-five percent of unmarried teen mothers placed their child for adoption (Resnick, 1992). Most recently, only three of every one-hundred teen pregnancies lead to adoption (Planned Parenthood Association of America, Inc., 2008).

Teen abortion rates have also declined. In 1990, forty out of every 1,000 young women aged fifteen to nineteen had abortions. In 2002, twenty-two out of every 1,000

young women in the same age group had abortions. The reason for the decline has been attributed to fewer teen pregnancies, as well as the difficulty in obtaining an abortion (Planned Parenthood Association of America, Inc., 2008).

Nancy's biggest asset was the realization that life with the baby's father wasn't progressing well and her subsequent choice to leave him and return to school. This decision enabled her to take advantage of supportive teen parent programs and develop a strong relationship with a mentor teacher. This decision moved her into the personal transformation stage of teen parenting. The personal transformation stage began when a teen parent realized that success and freedom for her and her child does not come without personal drive, unselfish dedication, and a commitment to succeed.

Another one of Nancy's assets revealed to the researcher was her mother's willingness to be firm, yet caring enough to give Nancy another chance. The only trepidation noted by the researcher was that when Nancy spoke clearly and succinctly about her life plans, she appeared nearly over-confident. The displays of over-confidence could have been interpreted as a false veneer to indicate to others that "things were going well."

Nancy scored highest in the economic component and lowest in the school-related component on the Research Matrix. Economically, Nancy appeared to have her needs met with two wage-earning parents, who both had some post-secondary schooling. Her second highest score was in the personal component where she praised the use of out-of-school teen parent programs and the support received from her parents.

3.3.4 Rachel's Recitation

Rachel was a nineteen year-old Caucasian. She lived with her parents and her two-year-old son. She was a freshman at a satellite campus of Pennsylvania State University (PSU), where she majored in Human Development and Family Studies.

Rachel appeared to the researcher to have had a good grasp of the commitment needed to succeed in college as well as post-college. Her plans centered around her son and how she would utilize her degree to give him "the best life she could provide." She was noticeably calm and spoke methodically to make sure she answered each of the researcher's questions with precision and clarity.

Rachel: Pre-pregnancy

Rachel described herself as "outgoing" with a few close friends. She generally enjoyed school. She was a member of the Ski Club from fifth grade which she continued throughout her high school career. She continued to pursue her interest in skiing when she joined PSU's Ski Club and served as the club's vice-president.

During her school years, she remembered always earning "good grades." When asked what she referred to as "good grades," she replied that she had always carried a 4.0 grade point average (GPA) but it "didn't come easy for her...she had to really work at it."

At home, Rachel was an only child who resided with her biological parents. Both parents worked; however, as a result of her family's social and economic status (SES), the family was not eligible for any federal subsidies. The SES is calculated and federally based on a combination of the adults' education, occupation, and income (Miller &

Benson, 2001). Her mom held a master's degree and was an elementary teacher in the same school district that Rachel attended. Her father completed some college work and was employed in sales. Miller & Benson reported, "There is abundant evidence that parents' SES is related to adolescent pregnancy; adolescents whose parents have higher education and income are more likely both to postpone sexual intercourse and to use contraception" (Miller & Benson, 2001). Rachel's situation was contrary to this report.

Together her family attended Sunday mass, and she described them as being "fairly religious." She attended Youth Sunday School regularly and was involved with church activities; however, Rachel recalled religious associations stopped after learning of her pregnancy. The family no longer attended church, and she did not attend Youth Sunday School. Rachel did not elaborate on reasons for the halted attendance at Sunday services.

As a family, she described her relationship with her mom as a "normal mother-daughter relationship but that she did not know personal things." Her parents, according to Rachel, did not speak openly about teenage issues and temptations, nor was Rachel comfortable bringing up unusual subjects with her mother.

Rachel said she was "...daddy's little girl until she was about fourteen years-old...we just drifted a bit...things changed between us...we began to speak less." By the time Rachel reached ninth grade and in high school, she said she began to "hang around people that were older." She espoused that this group of friends would drink alcohol and "smoke pot," and before long she, too, was doing the same until she

became pregnant. Rachel paused and reflected at this moment and then commented, "I definitely think that one of the reasons that kind of got me into a situation, that I did get pregnant, was kind of the people I was hanging around with."

The researcher took a moment to inquire what life for Rachel would have been like for Rachel had she not gotten pregnant. She said that she had contemplated that scenario many times and "I honestly have no idea where I would be right now. I might not be in college, or I might not even be alive. It turned my life around, and you would normally think that it's a bad way (getting pregnant)." Rachel stated that she stopped leading that type of lifestyle (drinking alcohol and smoking "pot") immediately upon learning of her pregnancy and has not reverted back. Instead, new friends were made.

Rachel reflected on the goals which she established in the tenth grade. She had wanted to attend a big college or university and major in interior design. She also said that she wanted to be independent (away from her parents) and participate more in the social scene of college.

Rachel: Pregnancy

Rachel recalled the summer before her sophomore year of high school as an enjoyable summer of hanging out with friends. She returned to school and discovered she was pregnant. She was sixteen and would ultimately spend her entire high school career parenting. She remembered how she and her boyfriend at the time, the father of the baby, immediately knew they wanted to keep and raise their child together.

They told the father's parents first. They were not happy about the timing of the pregnancy, but as Rachel described, "they were there for us." Rachel recalled her

parents' response as somewhat reactive in that they immediately forbade her to see the baby's father, go out with friends, or talk (or answer) the telephone. Even though they were devout Christians, they tried to force Rachel to have an abortion, which she vehemently opposed. She painfully remembered how angry her father was and how her mother tried to understand how Rachel must have been feeling. She continued to explain that her mother ultimately stood by her father's decision to keep Rachel under "house arrest." The "house arrest" continued for the next three years.

Rachel and the baby's father sought legal assistance and fought for their right to keep the child and not succumb to the parental pressure of abortion. She continued to attend school regularly and kept her 4.0 grade point average.

It was around this time that Rachel confided in a school counselor and two teachers. She described how these specific members of the faculty helped her keep her "sanity" through the ordeal of teen parenting. She also utilized outside resources such as the ELECT and the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) programs. ELECT representatives visited Rachel regularly at school to discuss personal issues and barriers to her education and assisted with additional agency referrals to help her meet immediate needs.

The NFP was one of those referrals from ELECT, recalled Rachel. She described the NFP program as one for low-income new parents. The services were available from pregnancy through the child's second birthday. As a teen parent, Rachel qualified as low-income while she attended school. A registered nurse from the program was

assigned to Rachel and visited the home regularly to assist with immediate needs and serve as a liaison between Rachel and her parents.

Rachel recalled two teachers who helped her with personal issues and were generally supportive. One was a consumer science teacher, and the other was a math teacher. Rachel made it a point to emphasize that not all teachers were supportive. She guessed that "Some teachers were just not comfortable with a pregnant student in their class....it's like they didn't know what to do with a pregnant girl behind the desk...it seemed to get better after the baby was born."

Eventually, Rachel stated that her friends quit calling her, and the only friends she had were a few at school. She admitted to finding secret ways of communicating with the baby's father throughout the pregnancy. She would give his cousin, who attended the same school, a written note to give to him, and he would write back. There were a few occasions where they would have an opportunity to see each other at a community or school event, but these were rare, she added.

Rachel's sophomore year went by with her keeping her academic standing at sixth in her class but admitted that since she was on "house arrest," she had plenty of time to study. Once the baby was born, things would, once again, change with regard to her relationship with her parents and the baby's father.

Rachel: Post-pregnancy

Rachel had a healthy baby boy in the summer before her junior year, and she began the school year on time. She described how difficult it was to keep her grades up with a new baby in the house. Academics did not come easy for her. She said she

had to work “really hard at it” and continued to strive to be a good mother as well as a good student.

When asked by the researcher what her schedule was like with the new baby, she replied that she would often study throughout the night taking only short naps before getting ready for school again the next morning.

She explained that life at home with her parents got “a little better after the baby was born,” but it was still difficult. Her father “would not look at the baby and would get angry when he cried.” The idea of restricting her continued, according to Rachel. Six months after the birth of her son, she was still not allowed to go out with friends. Her contact with the baby’s father was limited to only concerned issues about the baby. He eventually was awarded regular visitation through the courts and began to pay child support. Late in her junior year, Rachel contended to the researcher that she gave some thought to dropping out of school and relocating with her son. The child support went directly to her parents since Rachel’s parents successfully sued for custody of the grandchild. The court awarded shared custody between the grandparents and the baby’s father. Rachel described this time as “devastating” and “deflating.” For the next eighteen months, she rigorously studied, attended school, and was a responsible parent, all the while counting down the days to her eighteenth birthday when she would no longer be considered a minor by the court system.

Rachel’s mother suggested she get more involved in a particular club at school called Family Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), because she thought this group would help her as a new parent. As it turned out, the instructor of FCCLA

was one of the key teachers who supported Rachel and taught her a great deal about life outside of school. She turned 18 during her senior year in high school. By this time, so much strain had been put on the relationship between her and the baby's father that they the drifted completely apart and only shared parental responsibilities. "He cheated on me, and I knew that I could do better," said Rachel. Their son was eight months-old when they broke off their relationship.

Rachel, once again, sought legal assistance to regain custody of her son. She was awarded custody shortly before her first year of college and continued to live at home with her parents and her two-year-old son.

When asked to reflect on the actions of her parents, Rachel stated, "I realize it would have been harder without them but still it was not the parent relationship I would have wanted." She credited her parents with finally supporting many of her decisions as she neared her eighteenth birthday. In retrospect, Rachel contended it was a lot to go through, but somehow she was able to rise above, excel in school, and raise her child.

The researcher asked for some final thoughts on what Rachel thought might have kept her motivated through graduation. She replied as follows:

A combination of several things really....my own personal drive to do it for my son and give him the best life I possibly could. The Nurse-Family Partnership was a huge help in guidance and support and the ELECT program hooked me up with other teen parents to talk and learn together. Without programs I think it would have been very difficult. I would have been lost without all the programs and how they were all interconnected...I still had fun in school... after the baby was born I had more fun because I appreciated time with friends. Also, the time at school was my time

away...with no spit-up or baby talk...I also wanted to prove everyone wrong about teen parents. I want to be able to say....I'm a teen parent it doesn't mean that I'm a bad parent and it doesn't mean that I can't make someone of myself.

3.3.4.1 Rachel: Professional Reflection

As the ELECT teen parent coordinator, the researcher provided professional services to Rachel. These services were provided to Rachel for three years between her sophomore and senior year in high school. The researcher recalled her first impression of Rachel as a quiet, subdued young lady with an adventurous manner. Rachel dressed in gothic-style attire that seemed to be incongruous with her introverted demeanor.

It was during the interview that the researcher made the connection between Rachel's pre-pregnancy companions and her choice of attire. The clothing was symbolic to Rachel and her contemporaries of drug use and risky behavior. As the years passed, her friends changed and so did Rachel's choice of clothing. She began to dress in a more casual way, often in jeans and a t-shirt. The transition in attire was a physical manifestation of the change within Rachel and also a time of personal transformation. It appeared that the time between Rachel's sophomore and junior years was when she realized that she was the only one who could ultimately help herself by allowing others to guide and advise her.

Rachel took advantage of the ELECT and NFP programs and utilized their personnel as navigational tools to assist in her methodical preparation for the future. Nancy and Sandra also used the programs as a way to navigate through the many challenges and obstacles they encountered.

The researcher postulated that Rachel's relationship with her father was not close or loving, again a common occurrence among teen pregnancies. As previously mentioned, Miller and Benson (2001) cited more than twenty studies that supported the fact that parent/child closeness reduced teen pregnancy risk. At a crucial time for Rachel, during her formative years of adolescent development, she began to grow apart from her father. As a result, her biggest obstacle or challenge during her high school years as a new mother was the relationship with her parents. While her parents provided food, shelter, and clothing, the personal restrictions they imposed may have had the most influence on Rachel's desire to continue her schooling in an uninterrupted manner.

The motivation to succeed in school wasn't necessarily because of the positive nature of her parental influence, but rather the fact that her home life, with all its restrictions, was so onerous. Rachel's intellect and willingness to assist others prompted her to become a mentor for other teen mothers. As a result of her situation and interest in others, she later chose to pursue a college major in Human Development and Family Studies in college.

Upon reviewing the Research Matrix, Rachel scored equal in the school-related and economic components. She scored a high nineteen out of twenty in both component areas. This indicated that the school-related support was welcomed with assistance from teachers and programs. Economically, she was supported simply by the fact that both her parents worked and had an education beyond high school.

3.3.5 Helen's History

Helen was an eighteen year-old attractive, quiet, non-assuming young Caucasian. She had a fourteen month-old daughter. Based on Helen's description of her daily life, she seemed to possess a good work ethic with enough drive to pursue self-written goals. Helen and her sisters are all the natural born children of same parents, she is the youngest of three sisters.

Helen graduated from high school and pursued post-secondary schooling to become licensed in real estate. She worked at a convenience store while she raised her daughter and completed her studies. Helen disclosed some goals for herself and her baby with some interesting objectives along the way.

Helen: Pre-pregnancy

Helen described herself as somewhat active in school and perceived herself as a popular student with many friends. She was a cheerleader for several years and played the alto saxophone in the high school band. Additionally, she participated as a member of the school softball team. Participation in sports was also an unusual circumstance for a teen mother. Research indicated that athletic participation indirectly improved a young female's self-esteem, which was found to contribute to a lowered risk of teen pregnancy (Sabo, Miller, Farrell, Melnick & Barnes, 1999). Sabo et. al's findings supported the contention that "Female athletic participation is associated with lower rates of sexual activity and pregnancy" (1999, p. 213).

According to Helen, she attended school regularly and received A's and B's in her academic courses. Her main interest before pregnancy was to become a veterinarian.

She was animated about her love of animals dating back for as long as she could remember.

When asked what her home life was like and to describe her parental relationships, Helen took some time to reflect and carefully put her thoughts into words. Helen described her mom as supportive and there when she needed her. Her mother was a stay-at-home mom but had a disability of blindness in one eye. She had been blind since birth, Helen explained.

The researcher noticed some anxiety and tenseness when Helen spoke of her father. She recalled how she and her father were "...always butting heads...arguing back and forth...he hits me when he's angry...sometimes for no good reason." Helen said that her father did not treat her other two sisters the same way. "He doesn't hit them," she said. She described her father as a hard worker. "He always worked...he was never around," Helen said. Several years ago Helen's father injured his back at work and has been disabled ever since. He could no longer work and was home most of the time. Helen told the researcher that she was fourteen years-old at the time of his injury, and from that point forward, their relationship continued to disintegrate in terms of arguing and physical abuse.

Helen informed the researcher that her father had been reported to the police and Children and Youth Services (CYS) and was given limited time with her for three months. "After that, it was back to mistreating me again," Helen sadly disclosed. When the researcher asked if her mother was present during the above periods of mistreatment, Helen said "yes" but she, too, would get abused. She said her mother

tried to intervene, but then Helen would end up trying to protect her mother, and the three-way altercation would only escalate.

Helen: Pregnancy

Helen had been seeing a young man who was in ninth grade since she was in eighth grade. He would become her steady boyfriend. According to Helen, he understood her and would listen and console her when times were difficult at home. Three years later, Helen and her boyfriend became intimate. Soon after, she discovered she was pregnant. She was a sixteen year-old junior in high school.

Helen and her boyfriend have maintained their relationship. She said that the news of the pregnancy was a “bit of a shock” to her and her boyfriend but that they both “accepted it.” Helen chose not to tell her parents for over six months. She described to the researcher her apprehension in telling her parents, as she was “afraid dad would hit me or do something...he’s hit me before.” She described her father as “hitting any way he could with his hand...there was a big scene when we told them the news.” Throughout her pregnancy, Helen said her father continued to mistreat her and subjected her to continued denigration.

Helen’s active social life was drastically altered with the pregnancy news. “Pregnancy changed everything,” said Helen. She recalled, “I had a lot of friends before I became pregnant. Now, all of a sudden, they were ashamed to be with me, and then others wanted to be my friend because they were curious about pregnancy.”

Other painful changes came with pregnancy, namely her inability to participate in band, cheerleading, or softball, all of which she loved. She continued to attend school

regularly and maintained her grades at a respectable level. It was at this time that her dream of becoming a veterinarian seemed to have faded. She realized that she could not attend a large university away from home but rather had to refocus on a smaller school with a short-term commitment. That was when she said she began to explore real estate as a career.

Helen began to seek help from her school counselor, who referred her to the ELECT (Education Leading to Employment and Career Training) program. Helen indicated that the school-based component of ELECT provided her the opportunity to talk things out in a safe environment. She explained that if she needed help with her studies or parenting issues, the ELECT coordinator would advise or refer her to the proper agencies. Helen also took advantage of the home visitor component of the ELECT program. The home visitor of ELECT assisted Helen with understanding pregnancy issues and preparing her for labor and delivery. Following the delivery, the home visitor assisted her with parenting skills, child development, and bonding with her newborn.

Helen: Post-pregnancy

Helen was in school the day before she went into labor while shopping at a local Wal-Mart. She was rushed to the hospital and later delivered a healthy baby girl via cesarean section. Within two weeks, the high school senior returned to school eager to catch up on her academics.

The researcher inquired as to whether or not there were any particular teachers or administrators that helped her upon her return. Helen indicated that many of the

teachers were supportive and assisted her with the required homework that was missed; however, Helen was also quick to point out that not all teachers were supportive, that some were just the opposite. "One particular teacher was harder on me...my applied physics teacher made it hard for me...that class was my only problem my senior year," said Helen. She continued to attend school regularly maintaining A's and B's except for Applied Physics, in which she said she struggled to get a C.

The researcher asked Helen what needs she had as a teen mother in high school, and she highlighted the basic needs of diapers and formula; although she had taken advantage of the Women, Infant and Children (WIC) program and received a good deal of clothing as gifts.

When asked by the researcher if having a new baby in the home had changed her father's behavior, Helen indicated with an emphatic "no." She said that her father "still exploded and would hit her...he once hit me and tried to strangle me when I didn't pick up the baby immediately when he told me to...this was in front of my four month-old daughter."

Helen shared some final thoughts on what it was that kept her in school through the trials and tribulations of pregnancy and parenthood.

I never even thought about dropping out. I didn't want to drop out and have my baby think 'why don't you have a high school diploma?'...I also knew that I wanted to get my own place and my own future. Maybe it was my father's behavior that kept me going to school where I felt safe.

3.3.5.1 Helen: Professional Reflection

Helen exuded self-confidence and poise throughout the interview, which was encouraging to the researcher based on the domestic issues faced by Helen. The domestic issues were that of her physically abusive relationship with her father. Helen was not emotionally close to her father, which is consistent with the other interviewees, namely, Sandra, Rachel and Diane. Like Rachel, Helen and her father began to grow apart from each other during her adolescent development. This lack of paternal support often times leads the daughter to search for an alternative emotional connection. That void could be filled by a premature intimate relationship with male contemporaries.

What was also a surprise to the researcher was the fact that Helen, unlike many other teen mothers, was involved in several school activities, namely, the high school band, cheerleading and softball. More commonly, teen parents were less involved in after-school activities, which in turn, meant less structure to their lives and lower self-esteem.

The most challenging aspect of Helen's interview was her vagueness and her failure to provide detailed responses regarding her home life and familial relationships. She was, at first, less than forthcoming about her abusive relationship with her father. Again, Oz and Fine reiterated "Fathers were perceived more negatively and mothers more positively by teen mothers than by non-mothers" (1991). When the researcher continued with follow-up questions, however, Helen did not disguise the issue of domestic violence in her home.

Helen had one significant challenge to overcome—fear of her father and/or the fear for the safety of her daughter. This fear may have had some underlying benefit regarding Rachel's decision to protect herself and her child. Her only way to overcome this was what prompted her to become self-sufficient and to transition from a dependent adolescent into a young adult who realized the importance of an education. Helen saw her personal transformation during her senior year. This is when she realized that with an education came self-respect, and that no one, not even her abusive father, could take either away from her. The researcher also surmised that Helen attended school regularly and participated in the programming because these activities were, perhaps, safer than her life at home. The ELECT program was the sole support system in place for Helen other than the few supportive teachers that she mentioned during the interview. Again, the ELECT counselor guided and coached Helen through the trials of her teen parenting years.

The Research Matrix scores for Helen indicated close results between the school-related score of fourteen, the economic score of fifteen, and the personal support score of thirteen. No one area stood out as assisting her through graduation. She had a balanced triangle of support in each of the three study components. The stability of Helen's support contributed to her success.

3.4 Step 3: ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The researcher developed a matrix to evaluate the degree of impact school-related support, personal support and the family's economic status had on the

graduation rate of teen parents. The matrix permitted the researcher to create a scoring criteria for her own reflection and analysis of the participants' interview responses. The matrix "scores" were the researcher's interpretation of the gathered interview information and served to quantify the three components outlined in the research.

Each section would have a range of possible score with one-hundred points on the high end and twenty points on the low end. A high score indicated a greater degree of support or assistance each of the study group participants' received from the three research components of school-related support, personal support, and economic status.

The researcher conducted meticulous reviews of the study group participants' interviews and determined a score for each research question utilized in the data display. Follow-up telephone interviews were also conducted to provide the study group participants with the opportunity to clarify or add information.

The researcher developed the following criteria for scoring the school-related (S1 through S5) research questions:

S1. What were the participants' thoughts of themselves as high school students?

Criteria for scoring: A detailed response from the study subjects mentioning:
a. peers/friends; b. teachers; and/or c. specific activities.

- 4 = very important; mentioning all three listed above.
- 3 = important; mentioning two of the three listed above.
- 2 = not so important; mentioning only one from above.
- 1 = not important; mentioning none from above.

S2. What were the participants' goals for the future while attending high school? How did these goals change after becoming a parent?

- 4 = very important; detailed description enumerating academic/career/relationship goals such as marriage or family.
- 3 = important; generalized academic/work/family.
- 2 = not so important; mentioning job/relationships.
- 1 = no important; no mention of goals or hadn't thought about it.

S3. How did the participants' think they were able to succeed (high school graduation) in spite of becoming a teen parent?

Criteria for scoring: A detailed response mentioning a. child care; b. son or daughter; c. family support; d. school support and/or outside agency support.

- 4 = very important; mentioning at least four from above.
- 3 = important; mentioning three but not less than two from above.
- 2 = not so important; mentioning one from above.
- 1 = not important; none mentioned from above.

S4. Were there any persons or in-school programs that were most supportive to the participants' needs?

- 4 = very important; mentioning four or more specifically identified programs or teachers.
- 3 = important; mentioning two or three identified programs or teachers.
- 2 = not so important; only one identified program or teacher.
- 1 = not important; no mention of any programs or teachers.

S5. If there were academic obstacles how did the participants' respond to them as a teen parent?

Criteria for scoring: mentioning importance of a. studying; b. attendance; c. school discipline.

- 4 = very important; mentioning all three listed above.
- 3 = important; mentioning two of the three listed above.
- 2 = not so important; mentioning one from the three listed above.
- 1 = not important; none of the three listed above were mentioned.

Table 3
Interview Results for School-Related Research Questions

	Rachel	Diane	Helen	Nancy	Sandra	Overall Totals
S1- Thoughts of themselves as high school students...	4	4	2	1	1	12
S2- Goals for the future...did they change?	4	4	3	3	1	15
S3- How were they able to succeed?	4	4	3	3	4	18
S4- What persons or programs were most supportive?	4	3	3	3	4	17
S5- How did they respond to academic obstacles?	3	3	3	3	3	15
Individual Participant Totals	19	18	14	13	13	77

Individual participant score key – 20 = highest possible score for school-related support received
 5 = least possible school-related support received

Overall *total* score key – 100 = highest possible score for overall school-related support received
 20 = least possible score for overall participants' school-related support received

The school-related component, which was outlined in the research as one category of reasons why students drop out, seemed to serve as an equally important reason that teen parents remained in school. As mentioned in the Literature Review, school-related reasons for dropping out included academic failure, boredom, lack of cooperation by the administrators, lack of transportation between their homes, lack of daycare at the school, and school discipline issues, to mention a few.

Conversely, the school-related reasons why a teen parent would remain in school included peer relationships, educational goals, supportive programs, and overcoming academic obstacles.

Those participants who scored the lowest overall were Sandra and Nancy. They both shared similarities in that they spoke negatively about themselves as high school students not having many friends and had limited goal setting.

The highest scoring participant was Rachel, with a score of nineteen. Rachel took full advantage of school support with goals for after high school.

The lowest overall score was S1, how the participant viewed themselves as students. Three of the five participants reported not being very “popular” in school and not involved in school activities.

The highest overall score was S3. Every participant mentioned at least three items that they felt kept them focused on completing school. All five mentioned their son or daughter as a driving force for continuing school.

The criteria scoring guide used for the personal research (P1 through P7) questions’ category was as follows:

P1. If there were personal obstacles, how did the participants’ respond to them as a teen parent?

Criteria for scoring: personal obstacles successfully dealt with by the study group participant outside of school.

4 = very important; cited three obstacles and dealt with all three.

3 = important; cited two obstacles and dealt with both.

2 = not so important; cited one obstacle and dealt with it.

1 = not important; cited obstacle but left unresolved.

P2. Were there any programs outside of school that were most supportive to the participants’ needs?

Criteria for scoring: the study group participants’ willingness to participate in outside school programming.

- 4 = very important; cited three or more programs in which they participated.
- 3 = important; cited two programs in which they participated.
- 2 = not so important; cited one program in which they participated.
- 1 = not important; cited zero involvement in outside school programs.

P3. What or who did the participants' believe influenced them most during their high school years?

Criteria for scoring: will measure level of family, friend or adult influences outside of school environment.

- 4 = very important; cited four or more influential people.
- 3 = important; cited three influential people.
- 2 = not so important; cited two influential people.
- 1 = not important; cited one influential person.

P4. Non-scoring interview question.

P5. How did the partner (father of the baby) react to the pregnancy news?

Criteria for scoring: The more support from the father of the baby, the higher the personal score.

- 4 = very important; accepted responsibility.
- 3 = important; displayed anger at the situation.
- 2 = not so important; denied paternity.
- 1 = not important; abandonment.

P6. How did the immediate family of the participants react to the news of pregnancy?

Criteria for scoring: The more support from the immediate family, the higher the personal score.

- 4 = very important; accepted situation.
- 3 = important; expressed anger and/or displayed violence.
- 2 = not so important; became controlling or domineering.
- 1 = not important; abandonment.

P7. Non-scoring interview question.

Table 4
Interview Results for Personal Questions

	Rachel	Diane	Helen	Nancy	Sandra	Overall Total
P1 -If there were personal obstacles how did you respond to them?	3	4	1	2	1	11
P2 -Were there any external programs that were supportive to your needs?	4	4	3	4	4	19
P3 -What or who influenced them most during high school?	3	3	2	2	3	13
P5 -How did the father of the baby react to the pregnancy news?	4	4	4	4	2	18
P6 -How did the immediate family react to the pregnancy news?	2	3	3	4	3	15
Individual Participant Total	16	18	13	16	13	76

Individual participant score key – 20 = highest possible score for personal support received
5 = least possible personal support received

Overall *total* score key – 100 = highest possible score for overall personal support received
20 = least possible score for overall participants' personal support received

The second of three components, personal, which was outlined in the research as a reason why students drop out, seemed to serve as an equally important reason for why teen parents remain in high school. The researcher posited that pregnancy or marriage was the primary personal reason that teen parents leave school without graduating.

Overall, P1 scored lowest on the matrix. This question addressed personal obstacles and how the participants responded to them. The low score indicated that the teen mothers successfully dealt with a significant number of personal obstacles.

The overall highest score was P2 where outside school programs were addressed. Four of the five participants scored a four in this area citing three or more programs in which they participated.

On a more individualized basis, Diane scored the highest with eighteen out of twenty. She found a good balance in responding to obstacles, utilizing outside resources, and having support from the father of the baby and his family.

Two individuals scored the lowest at thirteen. Both Helen and Sandra scored lower as a result of the low number of personal obstacles they successfully dealt with.

The scoring criteria for economic (E1 through E5) research questions were as follows:

E1. Did the participants receive free or reduced lunch while in high school?

Criteria for scoring:

- 4 = No
- 1 = Yes

E2. What was their family's socioeconomic status?

Criteria for scoring: The higher the family income, the higher the personal score.

- 4 = very important; over \$60,000 total household income.
- 3 = important; \$45,000 - \$59,999 total household income.
- 2 = not so important; \$25,000 - \$44,999 total household income.
- 1 = not important; under \$25,000 total household income.

E3. What was the participants' parents' level of education?

Criteria: The higher the parents' level of education, the higher the personal score.

- 4 = very important; one or both graduated from college.
- 3 = important; one or both attended some college.
- 2 = not so important; one or both are high school graduates.
- 1 = not important; one or both did not graduate from high school.

E4. Did the participants' families receive any subsidies?

Criteria for scoring: The less subsidies received, the higher the personal score.

- 4 = very important; no subsidies received in the household.
- 3 = important; one subsidy received in the household.
- 2 = not so important; two subsidies received in the household.
- 1 = not important; three or more subsidies received.

E5. What needs did the participants have as teen parents in high school?

Criteria for scoring: The lower the needs of the teen parent, the higher the personal score.

- 4 = very important; cited zero teen parent needs.
- 3 = important; cited one teen parent need.
- 2 = not so important; cited two teen parent needs.
- 1 = not important; cited three or more teen parent needs.

Table 5
Interview Results for Economic Questions

	Rachel	Diane	Helen	Nancy	Sandra	Overall Total
E1 -Did the participants receive free or reduced lunch in high school?	4	4	4	4	1	17
E2 -What was their families' socioeconomic status?	4	2	2	4	1	13
E3 -What was the participants' parents' level of education?	4	3	2	3	2	14
E4 -Did the families receive subsidies?	4	3	4	4	3	18
E5 -What needs did they have in high school?	3	2	3	3	1	12
Individual Participant Total	19	14	15	18	8	74

Individual participant score key – 20 = highest possible score for family economic support received
5 = least possible family economic support received

Overall *total* score key – 100 = highest possible score for overall family economic support received
20 = least possible score for overall participants' economic support received

Economic issues were also outlined in the Literature Review as a reason for dropping out. Economic support was addressed in terms of household income and familial or guardian assistance received at the time of pregnancy. The most significant economic reason provided in the literature for dropping out of school was the need to earn money in order to support the household.

With an overall total of seventy-four, economic scored the lowest of the three components. The researcher concluded that economic support was not as significant as the personal or school-related support in terms of assisting teen parents.

The highest overall score for the economic category was E4 with a score of eighteen. The more economically secure a family was, the higher the score. Only two teen parent families received one subsidy in the house.

The lowest overall score was E5 with a score of twelve. All of the participants reported having one or more teen parent needs while in high school.

The highest individual score was Rachel, who scored only one point below the maximum score of twenty. Rachel's family scored higher due to the fact that both her parents had post-secondary schooling with a higher family income.

The lowest individual score was Sandra, who scored only eight in the economic component. This indicated that while Sandra's household income was low and her parents had little formal education, she succeeded with whatever economic support and assistance she could. Sandra scored higher with respective scores of thirteen in personal and thirteen in school-based components to compensate for the lower economic score.

3.5 Step 4: ADMINISTRATOR SURVEY ANALYSIS

The researcher solicited the input from twenty-seven school district superintendents (Appendix B) in a three county area of western Pennsylvania. Forty-percent of those solicited responded to the researcher’s survey. The survey consisted of six questions. Four of those questions listed four possible answers, while two required a written response. Listed below are the four multiple choice questions with the responses provided in Figures 7 through 10.

1. Twenty-six percent (26%) of dropouts cite personal reasons such as pregnancy or marriage as a reason to drop out. How supportive do you feel your district is to teen parent programs?

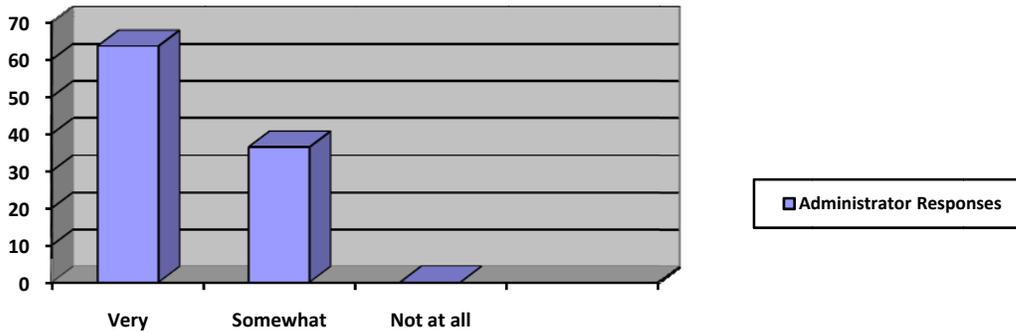


Figure 7 Administrator Responses to Question 1

Just over sixty-three percent of the respondents believed that their school district was *very* supportive to teen parent programs, while thirty-six percent stated their district was only *somewhat* supportive. No administrator indicated that their district was *not at all* supportive of teen parent programs. One respondent shared an optional comment—“I feel administration is supportive, but the board (conservative) could be a bit reluctant to be wholly supportive.”

2. To what degree do you think the teen parent programs motivate and support young parents and keep them in school?

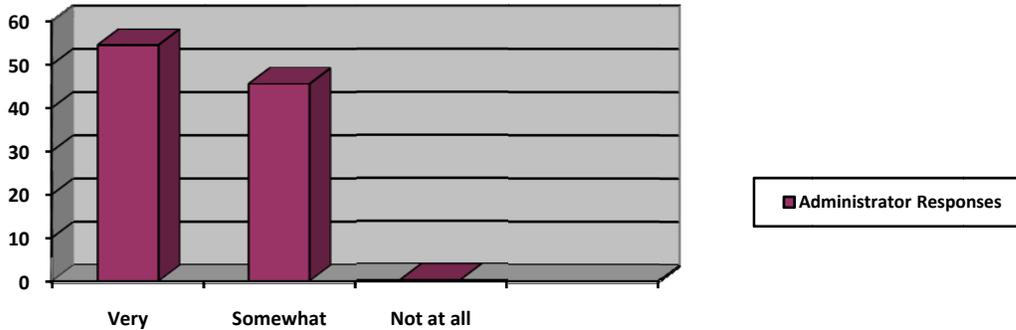


Figure 8 Administrator Responses to Question 2

The administrators who responded indicated that 54.5% believed teen parent programs motivate and assist teen parents in an effort to keep them in school through graduation. Over 45% felt that the programs are only *somewhat* supportive to the teen parent student.

3. With regards to teen parent programs, how informed do you feel you are as a school administrator?

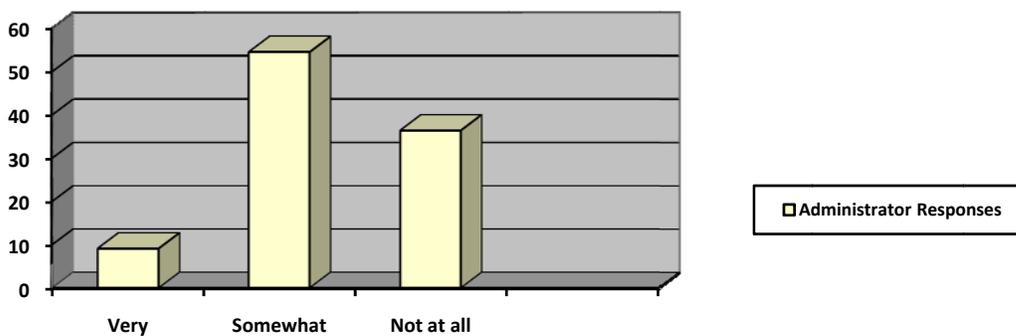


Figure 9 Administrator Responses to Question 3

The results displayed in this figure revealed how ill-informed the administrators were with regard to teen parent programs in the schools. Only 9.1% denoted that they were *very* informed on teen parent programs in the schools, and 36.4% answered that

they were *not at all* informed. This left over half of the respondents, 54.5%, being *somewhat* informed about teen parent programs.

4. If funding should expire for teen parent programs, how likely would it be that your school district would continue specific teen parent programs in a seamless transition?

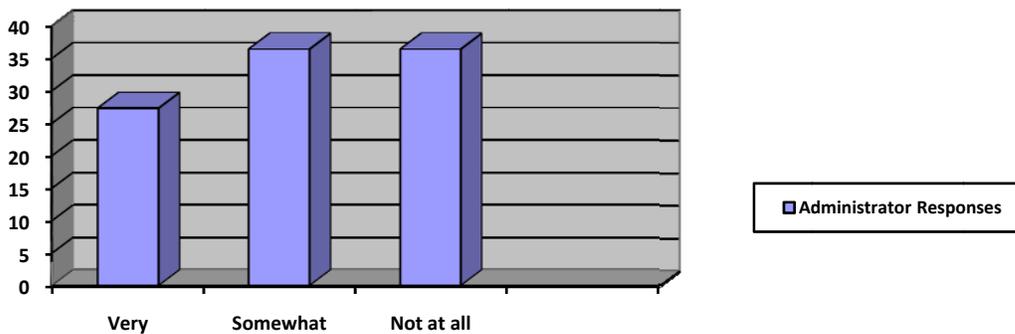


Figure 10 Administrator Responses to Question 4

The issue of financial obligations was of great interest to the respondents. The results of whether teen parent programs would be included in the general operating budget should outside funds expire was equal between *somewhat* and *not at all*, at 36.4% each, although, 27.3% indicated their district would explore options to continue teen parent programs. One comment added by a respondent was "...depends on the amount of funding necessary," which might indicate a *somewhat* response of a district that would be willing to investigate the issue further.

5. Comments were appreciated on thoughts of students who become teen parents in high school. Do you recognize a profile or common thread?

The following were some comments made by the administrators with regard to the above question.

"Lower SES (socioeconomic status) seems to be more prevalent. Generally, not doing as well as they could be in school, but some are involved in activities, etc. Mother may have had same problem...perhaps a lack of familial supervision."

"I think low self-esteem is common in teen parents."

"Most teen mothers seem to have low self-esteem issues and absentee father figures."

6. Comments are appreciated on teen parent programs in high school. Do you feel they support and assist the student, glorify the situation, or no difference in student achievement?

A smaller percentage of the respondents (25%) gave feedback on the above question with the following:

"The programs do support and assist students."

"I feel they are designed to support and assist, but am not familiar with what is done to do so..."

"I believe that it is important to support teen parents so that they are able to reach graduation. These programs do provide a systematic support system for these students so that they receive encouragement and a person that believes that they can finish their schooling."

3.5.1 Administrator Survey: Professional Reflection

One disappointment to the researcher was the small response sample from the administrators in twenty-seven school districts. Understandably, administration is already stretched in terms of their time and appointments; however, the survey was

designed in such a way as to simplify the response and shorten the response time. It was estimated that it might consume three to five full minutes of an administrator's time from the beginning of the survey to completion. The researcher was, however, appreciative of the time the respondents took to contribute to the study.

A majority of the respondents (63.6%) were of the opinion that their districts' were very supportive of teen parenting programs. More than half of those surveyed (54.3%) suggested that teen parenting programs motivated and supported young parents in their quest to remain in school.

The responses referenced above must be reconciled with the findings that more than one in three of school administrators (36.4%) had no familiarity with teen parenting programs. In fact, less than one in ten of respondents (9.1%) was very familiar with programming that was being utilized in their respective districts.

A majority of the respondents could not comment on the program other than to write that they were not familiar enough, if at all, with the teen parenting program available to their students.

More than thirty-six percent of the district superintendents would not have their districts fund existing teen parenting programs if external funding lapsed. That number corresponded with the percentage of district superintendents that were unaware of current teen parent programs.

It appeared that the survival of teen parent programs in nearly forty percent of school districts required a rigorous effort to inform and educate school administrators about the program. Those administrators aware of teen parenting programs had a

grasp of some of the underlying factors that contribute to teen parenting, (i.e., low self-esteem, absentee fathers and a familial cycle of teen pregnancy). Also, those aware of programming enthusiastically support it. One respondent aptly commented that, "These programs do provide a systematic support system for those students (pregnant or parenting teens) so that they receive encouragement and a person that believes that they can finish their schooling."

3.6 Step 5: IDENTIFICATION OF EMERGENT THEMES

The researcher relied heavily on the prepared interview transcripts, recordings and notes to allocate numerical scores to the categories of school-related, personal and economic support. The research questions were prepared and created with the intent to search for which component of support was most helpful to the teen parent while in high school. This served as a form of evaluation with regard to the interviewees' primary support system. Through the interviews, as well as the development of the matrix and the professional reflections, a number of commonalities emerged that were shared by a majority of the participants. The emergent themes are as follows:

- I. Personal Transformation
- II. Teen Parent Counselors as Life Coaches
- III. Chaos on the Home Front
- IV. The Male Void Syndrome (MVS)
- V. A Triangle of Support

3.6.1 Personal Transformation

All five interviewees delivered personal details about their familial relationships, boyfriends, peers, teachers and counselors. It became apparent that somewhere between the birth of their child and the babies' first six months, a transformation occurred within each teen mother, a transformation which the researcher was not searching for but that had emerged from the interviews. Sandra experienced her personal transformation when she began to improve her behavior, grades, and attendance at school. Simultaneously, she began to plan to live independently with the assistance of teen parent counselors and agency support. Her transformation was fueled by a desire to provide a stable home for her daughter. She understood what she didn't want for her daughter.

Diane saw her personal transformation when she realized that she needed to make better choices in life and began strategizing for a future with her daughter. This was also the time when she began accepting help from teen parent counselors and social service agencies. Diane's maturity was evident in her intelligence to relocate with her daughter's paternal grandparents while she finished her schooling.

Nancy may or may not have realized her personal transformation, but it occurred when she understood the need to leave the home of an abusive boyfriend and return to school to complete her senior year. Again, this was when she welcomed the assistance and support from teachers and teen parent counselors. The transformation of Nancy was complete when she left the "dead end" relationship with her son's father.

Rachel observed her own transformation not long after her son was born. Her choice of clothing and friends changed as she sought more positive influences. In turn, she, too, began to set short term goals, attain them, set new goals, attain them and so on throughout her high school years. Rachel used the restrictive nature of her parents as motivation to get her education and move on to an independent life with her son.

Finally, Helen, too, witnessed a personal transformation through her unwavering strength against an abusive father and strategizing with her teen parent counselor about life after high school. A transformation occurred in Helen as she realized only she could protect herself and her daughter from her violent father.

These young mothers all experienced a personal transformation where they were able to raise their self-confidence, understand their abilities, and create a future that was filled with hopes and dreams.

3.6.2 Teen Parent Counselors as Life Coaches

Life Coaches became recognized for facilitating the development of skill sets for everyone from CEO's of major corporations to teen parents. Life Coaching within the scholastic setting was dedicated to helping students achieve their goals by developing their decision-making skills and assisting in resolving personal, emotional, and lifestyle issues.

It became apparent throughout the interviews that all of the teen parents spoke of at least one teacher, teen parent counselor, or program director that helped them navigate through the "system." These individuals served as the teen parent Life Coaches. Perhaps unbeknownst to these Life Coaches, they were providing life

changing assistance that would ultimately help the teen parents graduate. A high school diploma was a key factor in their ultimate success.

Specifically, Sandra, Rachel, and Helen all indicated very strong feelings about the assistance they received from Life Coaches. In Helen's case, the Life Coach influence at school may have even served as a surrogate parent. Some participants mentioned teachers as mentors, and others recognized the counselors' support and insight into their needs at the time. The Life Coach served many roles in the teen parents' life. Whether it was to "coach" as a motivator, cheerleader, positive influence, counselor, confidant, conduit or facilitator, their role went beyond any job description or agency mission statement.

3.6.3 Chaos on the Home Front

The lack of continuity in a household or a disorganized manner of family living could be stressful and difficult for a young female in the midst of the turmoil of adolescence. Several of the interviewees, when discussing their home life, portrayed to the researcher a family that was somewhat disjointed or that was comprised by life course adversity. Life course adversity for the purposes of this study included divorce, poverty, inconsistent family relationships, or an erosion of parental monitoring and control.

For example, Diane was introduced to her father during her early adolescent years, only to later realize that he was an abusive alcoholic. Diane's home life clearly became disjointed with the passing of her mother and her sister shortly thereafter. She

relocated several times within one year, searching for some semblance of order for her life.

Rachel, too, experienced some life course adversity in the area of inconsistent family relationships. She stated that she and her father were close until she reached the age of fourteen. The stress from her alienation from her father may have caused her to rebel. Her conduct in terms of dress and choice of friends may have been a manifestation of her rebellion.

Helen described her home life as one filled with much dispute and tension on a regular basis with her physically abusive father, who was often times not satisfied with the household. Helen's disruptive home life went beyond rebelliousness and actually amounted to fear, which caused her to look outside the norm for support and even refuge.

3.6.4 The Male Void Syndrome

Throughout the course of the interviews, one common thread among the teen parents was the absence of a male father figure. The researcher referred to this as the Male Void Syndrome (MVS), which denotes either a real or apparent separation between father and daughter. The researcher deduced that the MVS permeates the lives of the interviewees. All five of the interviewees indicated some void of paternal responsibility in their primary and adolescent years.

As previously mentioned, Oz and Fine (1991) studied the differences in how teen mothers and teen non-mothers referred to their fathers. The teen mothers viewed their fathers in a much more negative way than the teen non-mothers who described their

fathers in a very positive nature, almost feeling closer to their fathers than their mothers.

Diane eluded in her interview that perhaps it was her very poor relationship with her father that led her to search for someone who could fill the void. This was particularly significant for Diane, who lost her mother and her only sister. Although he was present, Diane's father was not there for her; therefore, the male void, though less obvious, was indeed present.

Sandra explained how her father had never married her mother and had never lived with them. She stated, however, that he supported her and visited her but that she would not classify their relationship as emotionally close. The male void was apparent in that Sandra did not reside with her father.

As previously stated, Nancy spoke of her biological father as her mother's "donor" and used very negative words to describe his relationship with her mother. Nancy's situation lends itself to the classic MVS.

Rachel could not hide some of the discontent she was feeling toward her father, most of which seemed to occur following the pregnancy. Pre-pregnancy, however, Rachel described the relationship with her father as one that slowly dissolved. Rachel's relationship with her father was further complicated after the pregnancy when her parents imposed oppressive restrictions on her life outside of the home. The strained relationship was a leading factor in her goal of independence.

Finally, Helen, who experienced the physical abuse of her father and witnessed it against her mother as well, literally had the MVS thrust upon her. The fear of

continued physical abuse and the concern that her child would be abused pushed her to leave her father at the first opportunity.

3.6.5 Triangle of Support

The triangle of support represented the services available to teen mothers from the three areas of inquiry in this study. The three components of the study were school-related, economic and personal. School-related support included in-school programs, academic adjustments, peer relationships, and educational goals. The economic support included the families' income, parents' level of education, subsidies received and economic needs of the teen parents. The final component was that of personal support. Personal support included the support from the father of the baby, parents, external programs or services, and personal obstacles faced by the teen parent.

Through the qualitative analysis and Research Matrix, the triangle of support appeared to be strongest in the areas of school-related and personal reasons. An intervention was strongest when all three components equally provided support to the teen mother. Although the presence of two components may have been adequate to help a teen mother succeed, the absence of two components may well have doomed an at-risk teen mother to failure. The researcher learned that success is contingent upon the active contributions of the school, personal, and economic components.

4.0 SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND FINAL REFLECTION

4.1 SUMMARY

The intent of this study was to analyze and discuss what worked to keep teen parents in high school. The literature review (Chapter 1, p. 17) focused on accepted reasons why students drop out—school-related, economic, and personal challenges. It was the intent of the researcher to analyze whether these same three components, when bolstered by resources and support, would also be effective at keeping parenting students in school.

The research indicated that high school dropouts were more likely to:

- Be unemployed or have lower paying jobs;
- Struggle with finances;
- Utilize public assistance and social services;
- Be non-contributing citizens;
- Have children who drop out of school;
- Serve time in jail or prison (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Morison, 2006; Rapp-Paglicci et al., 2004 & Woods, 1995).

In addition to the above mentioned items, teen mothers do not fare as well as teens who delay childbearing. Their family incomes are lower; they are more likely to be poor; they are less educated; they are less likely to be married; and their children fall behind in early development (Breheny & Stephens, 2007; Hoffman, Reid, & Mott, 2001). Teen parents are more likely to not only receive more public assistance, but

they also receive the assistance longer than women who delay childbirth (Hoffman, 2006).

For the first time in fourteen years, the teen birth rate increased in 2006. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention based their findings on ninety-nine percent of all births in 2006. "The biggest increases for 2006 were among African-American teens, where the rate rose five percent, followed by four percent for American-Indian teens, three percent for white teens and two percent for Hispanic teens" (Reinberg, 2007).

The largest teen birth increase was for girls between eighteen and nineteen years of age. The increase in births for this age group was more than three times higher than the rate for teens fifteen to seventeen (Reinberg, 2007). This new information on teen birth rates reinforced the purpose of this study. This study portrayed, through the voices of teen parents, what efforts worked to keep teen mothers in school even though they were at greater risk of dropping out than their non-parenting counterparts.

The use of the interview technique proved to be both stirring and inspirational for the researcher. The teen mothers' acts of reflection allowed for the researcher to immerse herself in the narrative in order to gain an understanding of the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of the teen mothers. Prior to this study, the participants, and many teen mothers, did not have the opportunity to be heard. Throughout the course of this process, the teen mothers were queried, listened to, heard, reported on and analyzed in an effort to share their message of what worked. Throughout this process,

the researcher, not unexpectedly, also got a glimpse into what was not working at school, at home and in the community.

4.2 CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion Statement

Success, as defined by this study, was a teen mother graduating from high school. This study revealed through the thoughts and words of five young mothers that a balanced combination of school-based and community support were essential to effectuate a transformative change in young mothers.

This study sought to couple qualitative and quantitative research to provide a framework for enhancing the schools' role in assisting young mothers. The narratives were also useful in analyzing the dynamics between school, family, and economics. As the research reflects, the chances of a teen mother graduating high school are greatly enhanced by strong support from the school, personal, and economic components.

This study provided evidence that deficiencies in one component can be compensated for by greater support from another component, however, the complete absence of support from one or more components would make success extremely difficult.

An effective intervention for teen parents is best analogized to the seat of a three-legged stool. The intervention is smooth, seamless, and balanced on three legs. Those three legs of support were studied throughout this research. Each leg represented a component of the study: school-related, economic, and personal.

School-related support included in-school programs, academic adjustments, peer relationships, and educational goals. The economic support included the families' income, parents' level of education, subsidies received, and economic needs of the teen parents. The final leg was that of personal support. Personal support included the support from the father of the baby, parents, external programs or services and personal obstacles faced by the teen parent.

Through the qualitative analysis and Research Matrix, the triangle of support appeared to have its strongest legs in the school-related and personal areas. A stool is strongest when all three legs equally support weight upon it. A stool with two strong legs may be enough to carry the day. No one can sit on a one-legged stool, just as, apparently, no teen mother can succeed with only the support of one component of this study. The researcher has learned that success is contingent upon the active contributions of school, personal, and economic components.

Statement of the Problem

What observations and interventions might teen parents share about their pregnancies and subsequent issues of parenthood which occurred while they were in high school? What support and assistance identified by the teen parent participants in the study could be utilized by educators to enhance the participation of teen parents in school-related activities; assist teen parents to overcome economic challenges; and improve the quality of their personal lives so that they can complete high school?

To answer these questions, one-on-one interviews were conducted with teen parents who graduated from high school. Research questions (Appendix C) were

developed and organized into three separate categories related to teens and teen parents in high school—school related questions, personal questions and economic questions. The responses by the participants in each of the three categories provided insight into what interventions and strategies were most useful to teen parents. The responses also presented information on the level of support and assistance needed to empower the young mothers.

In an effort to supplement the research, school administrators of twenty-seven school districts in western Pennsylvania were sent an electronic survey (Appendix B) using SurveyMonkey.com. The survey questions were designed to solicit administrator opinions on teen parents' needs in high school as well as services provided by the districts. The administrative survey also provided some insight into school support for teen parenting programs.

As a result of the valuable interview information, which was analyzed using the researcher's Scoring Matrix and Research Rubric, several themes emerged. The five themes included Personal Transformation, Teen Parent Counselor as Life Coach, Chaos on the Home Front, The Male Void Syndrome, and Triangle of Support. The latter theme connected directly to the Research Questions, while the other three were discovered through the provided responses.

School-Related Findings

The interviews revealed that school support was an essential component to the teen parents' success in the classroom and ultimate graduation from high school. The in-school teen parent programs or outside parenting programs proved to be one

connector that all the participants of this study utilized and benefited from both academically and personally.

While school-related reasons were found in the research to be one of the major factors contributing to at-risk teen parents dropping out of school, it was also determined to be a key component in keeping at-risk teen parents *in* school. This finding further emphasized the importance of school-based teen parenting programs. Research made clear that schools that fail to stimulate at-risk students often failed at keeping those students in school. This study has demonstrated the opposite. Meaningful school-based programming provided by charismatic educators and program counselors had a positive effect on at-risk students, and in effect, promoted high-school graduation by those at-risk students.

The mentor-like relationship with teachers and program counselors satisfied various needs of the teen parents. Teachers and program counselors, it appeared, were a very strong indicator of student success. Having caring and compassionate leaders in teen parent programs, as well as teacher-mentors, not only provided support to the teen parent but assisted them in navigating through parenthood, school, employment, and future goals. Motivated teachers and program counselors worked to empower the young females to make a personal transformation. Every participant in this study spoke of a point in time, often with the encouragement of a teacher, program counselor or mentor, when they made a commitment to succeed. For some it included the influence of a newborn child; for others it was the commitment of a concerned

adult, but for all it was that moment of transformation that made a significant difference.

Personal Findings

The personal support questions presented to the participants centered on personal obstacles at home, influences in and out of school, relationship(s) with the father of the baby and their parents, and the reaction to their pregnancy. All five of the participants had personal obstacles at home that needed to be addressed, but all five of the participants were generally provided shelter, food, and clothing. While their immediate needs were met, many emotional needs were left unattended by the participants' parents or guardians.

What emerged from personal support was that the teen parents were willing to take on the responsibility of motherhood but would be significantly inhibited without some home support system in place. At a minimum, that support included meeting the teen mothers' immediate needs and providing some encouragement to attend school and finish their education. In some situations, the encouragement from home was lacking. In those situations, the researcher found that it was essential for teachers or program counselors to step in and provide that encouragement. In these particular situations, deficiencies in one component could be compensated for by additional support from another component, namely school-related. The researcher doubts that, for instance, additional economic resources would compensate for a lack of encouragement or support at home. Again, the in-school teen parent programs or

outside parenting programs were found to serve as liaisons between the school, the teen parent, and her parents in an effort to keep the flow of communication positive.

While the narrative revealed some teen mothers yearned for a better relationship with a parent, better communication, and the absence of physical abuse, the fact that the teens' parent provided the essentials of food, shelter and support was essential to the welfare of the teen parent and newborn.

Economic Findings

The economic aspect of the interviews focused on socioeconomic status (SES), parents' level of education and employment status. The study participants and their families represented varying levels of SES which assisted in determining the level of importance SES played in keeping the teen parents in school. It was concluded that there was not much difference in support between the higher SES teen parent and the lower SES teen parent. Many of the economic needs were met through social service referrals from teen parent counselors. As a whole, the young mothers were not plagued by any significant economic hardships. The researcher expected the reverse to be true when embarking on this study. Apparently, teen parents thrive more on the emotional support of family, friends, teachers and counselors in an effort to complete their education.

The support provided by social service agencies again emphasized the influence that a teacher, counselor or social service agency representative can have on a teen mother. The research concluded that strong school or personal support could have a stabilizing effect on the economic challenges one might expect for a teen mother.

It should be noted that in all three components—school-based, personal and economic—teen parent program counselors or teachers were always mentioned as a significant factor in terms of teen parents graduating from high school. Although economic independence played a role in easing the anxiety of a young mother, for example, an economically well-off teen mother could afford an automobile and thus allay the concern for transportation to work, daycare or school; however, the researcher was reluctant to suggest that economic stability would ensure that a teen mother excelled in school in the absence of encouragement or support from a school-based program.

Montecal, Cortez & Cortez (2004) outlined key program characteristics that work for reducing the dropout rate of high school students. The characteristics were taken from the Intercultural Development Research Association's (IDRA, 2001) review of research of effective dropout prevention strategies. The following characteristics were identified:

- a. All students must be valued;
- b. There should be involvement of at least one educator who is committed to the student's success;
- c. The concept of families as partners—committed to equity and excellence in a student's life;
- d. Educational institutions must change and be innovative;
- e. Educators must have the tools necessary to ensure their students' success (Montecal et al., 2004).

The findings of this study confirm those characteristics; however, what was most compelling was the study's findings were deduced from the reflections and words of young mothers.

The study raised some concerns, particularly in the area of the administrators' survey. Upon reflection, the researcher would have solicited the input of front-line administrators instead of school district superintendents. Based on the responses adduced from the superintendents, they appeared too far removed from the day-to-day programming to fully appreciate the significance and impact of teen parenting programs. This may also explain the low survey response rate from the superintendents.

The superintendents' comments, though well thought out, were generic in their characterization of the unique needs of teen mothers. Although teen mothers are at-risk students, their challenges are not the same as other at-risk students and cannot be thought of or addressed in the same manner. Front-line administrators may have had a better appreciation for the emotional, relational, and home life dynamic of a pregnant or parenting student.

The researcher does not minimize the influence of a district superintendent in the success of teen parenting programs. The influence was vividly portrayed in the study's findings. Superintendents who were not aware of teen parenting programs were not inclined to support continued funding for teen parenting programs. The failure to educate superintendents who were unaware of the importance of teen parenting programs may result in the loss of such programming.

4.3 IMPLICATIONS

There are significant consequences that come with dropping out of school. Those consequences not only relate to the individual but also reveal themselves as a serious national social problem. As previously mentioned in the literature review, the research indicated high school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed or have lower paying jobs; struggle with finances; utilize public assistance; have children who drop out of school; and are more likely to serve time in jail or prison (Bridgeland, Dilullo, Morison, 2006; Rapp-Paglicci et al., 2004 & Woods, 1995). Teen parents are twice as likely to drop out as their non-parenting cohort. The young mothers are found to impair their future education and employment opportunities while also greatly increasing the welfare and social costs to the nation (Zellman, 1982).

With the teen birth rate on the rise (Reinberg, 2007), educators would do well to equip their institution with teen parent programs and support systems for those at-risk of dropping out. Approaches to programs must be “varied to address school, student, and family needs, and all programs should value the student, the family, and the community” (Montecal et al., 2004, p. 184). Programs for teen parents or any student at-risk of dropping out should increase the opportunity for students to remain in school through graduation.

After meticulous analysis several components of teen parent programs emerged as key elements of success. Teen parent programs need not be expensive or grant-funded in order to thrive; however, the school district must make some economic commitment to teen parenting programs. School-based teen parenting programs also

need good organization, leadership, and compassionate role models to assist the young mothers through the ever-changing challenges they face while schooling. The key elements based on this research are as follows: selecting the right person to lead the program, life coaching, home outreach, peer interaction, and sex education.

A program is only as good as the individual who leads the program. School districts and community organizations must make the effort to find the right fit for teen parenting programs. The researcher has found that program participants thrive on the enthusiasm and inspiration of a dynamic, charismatic leader. Charismatic leaders achieve an extraordinary level of motivation by focusing on building self-esteem and self-worth. This is accomplished by expressing high expectations and instilling great confidence in others to meet those expectations (Conger & Kanungo, 1998). School districts and community organizations who want top notch teen parenting programs would do well to search their district or organization for a leader not just a caretaker.

Program counselors who assume the role as life coach appear to raise their programs to a higher level. The young females may look to the program counselors for advice, assistance, attention, and agency referrals. The unexpected support from teachers, who also function as life coaches, is a major factor in the participants' moving forward in their education. More importantly, the support and encouragement of a life coach is also a major factor in the teen mothers' personal transformation. The researcher found that personal transformation is essential to the teen mothers' success.

Home outreach includes home visits to discuss child development and parent/child attachment as well as serve as a liaison to break down barriers at home.

The home outreach element is extremely useful in addressing the unusual dynamic of home life for a teen mother. The teen mothers' parent or parents are in the unenviable position of being a concerned parent responsible for the care of their child as well as the doting grandparent. They want their child to be a responsible parent, have some semblance of family unity, and yet permit their child, the teen mother, to enjoy the pleasantries of youth.

The researcher proposes that home outreach could also be addressed through a series of out-of-the-home workshops to orient the parents or guardians to their daughters' evolving social relationships, her new and often daunting child care responsibilities and the high academic demands of being a student.

The peer interaction element is one that is all-too-often overlooked. Positive interactions with in-school peers are an integral part of group learning. From the interviews it was found that many teen parents had limited peer relationships and school involvement. At-risk students often seek peers of similar backgrounds. The researcher proposes that teen parent programs could be coordinated in small group discussions as one way to assimilate this at-risk support group. "Schools have limited power to change the out-of-school relationships that place students at risk of dropping out, but they have a duty to do whatever they can to ensure that every student who has the potential to graduate will do so" (Terry, 2008).

Sex education for teen parents may seem trite or unnecessary, but it *is* quite necessary to reduce or eliminate repeat pregnancies. Teen parents may not understand the reproductive process or respect their bodies. For example, the

Guidelines for Comprehensive Sexuality Education (2004) provided six key concepts for grades K-12 that include human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behavior, sexual health and society, and culture. The six key concepts were then broken down into several topics with age-appropriate levels to further assist the facilitator. It was reported that teens were as young as thirteen or fourteen years of age when they first had intercourse (teenpregnancy.org, April 2008). Therefore, sex education for teens may be best introduced in late grade school. The material may also need to include more specific information about the male and female anatomy.

Teenpregnancy.org also outlined that teens were ready to listen to their parents about sexual behavior and sex education; however, "Seventy-eight percent of white and seventy percent of African-American teenagers reported the lack of communication between a girl and her parents is often a reason teenage girls have babies" (p. 2). With this concept in mind, sex education programs should consider addressing not only teenage sexual activity issues but also encourage more parental involvement with the teens as they receive vital information.

The ongoing education debate continues to be which is more effective—abstinence-only or comprehensive sex education programs? To address teen parents with abstinence-only would certainly insult the participants who may already be in a "solid" relationship; however, teen parent programs could include comprehensive sex education as a component to reduce repeat pregnancies. A recent study was published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* concluding that adolescents who participated in comprehensive sex education had a "lower risk of pregnancy than adolescents who

received abstinence-only or no sex education” (April, 2008). While there were federal funds available for sex education, all required the delivery of abstinence-only to the participants (*Journal of Adolescent Health*, April, 2008); however, if comprehensive sex education was included in a structured teen parent program as one component, the restrictions of abstinence-only may be exempt depending on the funding source.

Finally, administrator support is imperative. From the analysis, it appeared that the survival of teen parent programs in nearly forty percent of school districts required a rigorous effort to inform and educate school administrators about the program. Those administrators aware of teen parenting programs had a grasp of some of the underlying factors that contribute to teen parenting, (i.e., low self-esteem, absentee fathers and a familial cycle of teen pregnancy). Also, those administrators aware of programming enthusiastically support the program and pledged the continued funding of teen parenting programs.

As previously related in this study, there is an alarming aspect to the feedback from the administrators. Those who were not well informed about teen parenting programs did not support its continued funding. Particular emphasis should be geared toward educating all administrators, not only about the importance of teen parenting programs, but that success for teen mothers rests heavily on the availability of effective school-based programs.

4.4 FINAL REFLECTIONS

The chosen methodology included interviews that, in turn, served as a framework for collecting quantitative data. The group of interview participants was limited to five. Their stories, when woven together, evoked a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by the teen parents; however, the teen parents who participated were from varied backgrounds, socioeconomically and academically.

There exists an enormous body of research regarding why some at-risk students failed to graduate from high school. This study took that research and turned it on its head. Instead of examining why at-risk students drop out, the researcher sought the reflections of at-risk teen mothers who remained in school until graduation. Are the participants special because they sought out programming? Does the fact that the participants reached out for help make them different at the outset than other at-risk students? Perhaps some additional research on resiliency patterns would have been beneficial to the study. Does the resiliency factor come with program involvement or are those who choose to participate in teen parenting programs already exhibiting a certain level of resiliency?

The researcher dedicated herself to teen parent program planning and implementation. Through this process, the researcher discovered that it is not so much the program components but rather the opportunity for the teen parents to participate and begin to make connections to life outside of high school. This is not to diminish the importance of the structure and content of programming. It was an observation that programming itself was not what spurred success. There are many well-researched

and defined programs that failed to motivate teen parents to graduate from high school. Programs must be presented with passion and dedication. A student “buys in” when she senses that the provider cares. The researcher further surmised that a marginal program would succeed in helping students graduate from high school if it is led by a charismatic teacher or program counselor. The researcher proposed that the content of the program is not as important as the character and commitment of the individual presenting the program.

However, school-based programs provided the greatest opportunity to have a positive intervention in a pregnant or parenting teen’s life. Society cannot ensure that all teens have equal access to economic means; or that all teens grow up with nurturing, caring and supportive parents. Schools represent the last best hope for at-risk teen parents. A school is no substitute for wealth or love, but is unquestionably a dominant influence in a student’s life. Research has shown us that the influence can be negative and result in a student leaving school without graduating. This study has shown that school influence could also be enormously positive. School-based teen parenting programs are essential. Programs with dynamic leaders are best.

The researcher served as teen parent counselor to two participants while they were in high school. The remaining three participants met the researcher professionally through tri-county teen parent programming in months past. This prior acquaintance with the participants served as an asset to the research. The unique situation may have provided the interview participants with a sense of trust and understanding with the interviewer. With some independent knowledge of two of the interviewees, it was

anticipated that this would be a challenge for the researcher to portray their stories without bias. In retrospect, it served as a positive feature. Additionally, the flow of the interviews, as well as the emergent themes, appeared to solidify as a result of the researcher's professional experience and knowledge of the at-risk teen parent population.

Before the interviews, it was expected that those who had a professional relationship with the researcher would provide the most detailed and useful information; however, it was soon discovered that all five participants were eager to share and provide details of their experiences. In fact, new information materialized from the former clients during their interviews. There was also, as expected, some reluctance among the participants to be completely candid about sensitive matters relating to intimate family relationships.

The researcher began this study with the idea that a better insight into why at-risk teen mothers drop out of school might be deduced not from those who drop out, but from those who stay in school. The researcher has learned that an approach that seeks to prevent dropouts is flawed on its face. Starting with the premise "How do we prevent an at-risk teen mother from dropping out?" connotes an inevitability of failure without intervention. The inspiring narratives provided a framework to move forward, not with the idea of preventing failure, but rather a more positive approach that promoted continued success that ultimately led to high school graduation. School-based programming provided the young mothers with the tools to succeed, but charismatic leaders provided the inspiration to succeed.

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INFORMATION TO THE STUDY GROUP PARTICIPANTS

The purpose of this research study is to gain an understanding from young parents' perspectives (feeling and thoughts) on what interventions worked to keep the teen parents in high school. What challenges were faced—personal, academic, and economic? This research will help educators better comprehend whether external support is necessary to help teen parents stay in school.

- A. If you choose to participate, you will participate in one pre-interview meeting to present the information about the research project to the subjects. There will be one 90-minute tape-recorded interview (notes may also be taken) and two phone or e-mail contacts prior to the interview. There may also be follow-up conversations with the subjects to clarify (better understand) information obtained from the interviews. The interviews will be conducted at the public library or your home.
- B. You will be asked to reflect back to your high school years of pregnancy or fatherhood. Generally, questions of challenges and obstacles during your high school years will be queried—specifically, what support systems were in place that may have helped you stay in school until completion of high school.
- C. Those who choose to participate will be high school graduates from Lawrence, Mercer, or Butler counties and at least eighteen years of age.
- D. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study, nor any benefits to you. There are no payments associated with the study, except for the fact that the study may contribute a better understanding of the teen parents' needs. The information obtained from interviews or surveys will not be identifiable in any way in the research. Fictitious names will be provided. All tape-recorded responses or interview notes will be kept in a locked cabinet.

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time. This study will be conducted by Juliann Mangino, who can be reached at 724-971-6514 or by e-mail at juliannmangino@yahoo.com. Please contact Juliann Mangino within ten days of the date of this letter if you are interested in participating.

APPENDIX B

SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

<p>Twenty-six percent of dropouts cite personal reasons such as pregnancy or marriage as a reason to drop out. It is for this reason that it is important to provide services that might empower this population to stay in school and be productive citizens. How supportive do you feel your district is to Teen Parent programs?</p>	
Very	Not at all
Somewhat	Other (please specify)
<p>This study is examining if Teen Parent programs do, in fact, keep students in school to completion. To what degree do you think the programs motivate and support young parents and keep them in school?</p>	
Very	Not at all
Somewhat	Other (please specify)
<p>The Teen Parent program coordinators are on the "front lines" with your school's teen parents, school counselors, teachers and nurses. With that in mind, how informed do you feel you are as an administrator?</p>	
Very	Not at all
Somewhat	Other (please specify)
<p>If funding should expire for the Teen Parent programs, how likely would it be that your school district would continue specific teen parent services in a seamless transition?</p>	
Very	Not at all
Somewhat	Other (please specify)

Comments are appreciated on thoughts of students who become teen parents in high school, (i.e. do you recognize a profile or common thread)?

Comments are appreciated on teen parent programs in high school. Do you feel they support and assist the student, glorify the situation, or no difference in student achievement?

APPENDIX C

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

School-related
S1. What were the participants' thoughts of themselves as high school students, (i.e. what extent did they feel accepted by peers, teachers, etc)?
S2. What were the participants' goals for the future while attending high school? How did those goals change after becoming a parent?
S3. How did the participants' think they were able to succeed (high school graduation) in spite of becoming a teen parent?
S4. Were there any persons (teacher, administrator) or in-school programs that were supportive to the participants' needs? If so, who and how?
S5. If there were academic obstacles, how did the participants respond to them as a teen parent?
Personal
P1. If there were personal obstacles (family, boyfriend, girlfriend, siblings, extended family), how did the participants respond to them as a teen parent?
P2. Were there any programs outside of school that were most supportive to the participants' needs? If so, what and how?
P3. What or who did the participants believe influenced them most during their high school years?
P4. When did the participants become pregnant—at what age and school year?
P5. How did the partner (or father of the baby) react to the pregnancy news?
P6. How did the immediate family of the participants react to the news of pregnancy or fatherhood?
P7. Was there any history of teen pregnancies in the families of the participants?

Economic
E1. Did the participants receive free or reduced lunch while in high school?
E2. What was the participants' socioeconomic status?
E3. What was the participants' parents' level of education?
E4. Did the participants' families receive any subsidies?
E5. What needs did the participants have as teen parents in high school?

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