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Mexican American High School Dropouts: A Look At Nine Personal Attributes That Place Students At Risk

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MEXICAN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS:
A LOOK AT NINE PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES THAT PLACE STUDENTS AT-
RISK

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Dedication

To my loving and supporting family that have helped me every step of the way.

To my son Oscar for his unswerving sense of perseverance and his endless success, thank you son for showing me with your love and understanding how important it is to enjoy every little moment. Your strength and dedication pushes me every day to be the father you need me to be. Your perfectionist style of work makes me attempt to emulate your spirit

To my daughter Daphne whose free spirit makes me laugh every day. From the moment I first held you in my arms my need to be the father you deserve has been the driving force necessary to make this work possible. Although you can be challenging at times, I love you, don't ever change baby.

To my wife Sandra thank you honey for putting up with me for the past eleven years and particularly these past few years while completing this doctoral endeavor. Your unconditional love made me keep going when I found it near to impossible to find the strength and time to keep going. You are my rock, the foundation of our family. I am what and where I am today for your support and understanding. Finding my soul mate eleven years ago and marrying you is by far the most impactful journey ever made and it was you that is responsible for this degree and all my accomplishments. Thank you, I love you!

Thank you all for giving up some of our time as a family to make this degree possible. You all have made a lot of sacrifices for me and now we see the fruits of our hard labor.

MEXICAN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUTS:
A LOOK AT NINE PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES THAT PLACE STUDENTS AT-
RISK

by

OSCAR A. RICO, B.S.; M.Ed.

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at El Paso
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of the Requirements
for the Degree of

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Acknowledgements

Several years ago I never believed I would find myself where I am now, as a young teenager growing up in subsidized government housing in South El Paso. The last thing imaginable was that obtaining this terminal degree was possible. I witnessed as many of my peers fall into drug addictions, been convicted of crimes, becoming teenage parents and many of them ended up dropping out of school. Although it was never the life I wanted, I never thought of leaving school prior to graduation, I was not sure where my journey would take me. Somehow or another this journey ended with me as a high school educator.

Many years in this have now transpired since I first set foot in a classroom and I would like to thank all of those for their overwhelming support to get me through hard times. To my brother-in-law, thank you for showing support and encouragement every time I needed it, although when in many instances I could not find the courage to seek it. You have been my mentor in all aspects of the word, spiritually and academically. Thank you for your advice I am forever grateful for all your help and I thank you for pointing me to education as a career that I enjoy deeply. You have done a lot for me, more than you can ever imagine.

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It is hard to believe that it was close to five years ago that I first walked in to my EDAD class on the fourth floor, on a Saturday of all days. Back then it was a wild but inspiring man that promised to show me the ins and outs of this field. Between a Whataburger breakfast burrito, Chicago 'war' stories and talks of the White Sox being world champions, Dr. Daresh you inspired me to pursue this field. Thank you for providing me the inspiration necessary not only to work on a Master's degree but to pursue this degree I am pursuing now and become a doctor of education.

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Dr. Robertson, as a long tenured science educator, I would like to thank you for instructing me on how to inspire children in the science classroom. Today I can say that hundreds of students have reaped the fruits of your hard labor in awakening me as an educator to constructivist instruction. I continue to show my colleagues that lesson plan website that I created under your tutelage that I continue to be greatly proud of. Thank you for showing me how children learn in part due to this fact my lessons are inspiring to many. I wish to continue to follow your example as I have done until today six years later. I can only try to

emulate your approach and attempt to imitate your success. I will never be Dr. Skateboard, but if I guess if I try maybe I can be Dr. Crutches.

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Abstract

In 1988, the National Center of Educational Statistics embarked on a longitudinal study this time taking on the eighth grade class of 1988-1989. This dissertation examines nine attributes pertinent to Mexican Americans and the decision that many of them take to drop out of school prematurely. Millions of Mexican American students drop out of school every year in this country. For many of these students dropping out of school usually represents entering a workforce in a society that they will be unprepared to encounter. Dropouts will face increased levels of poverty, incarceration, unemployment along with many other ailments.

This project presents dropping out not as a single event in which a student decides to endure such conditions inexplicably from one day to the next. Rather this decision is usually an event years in the making in which certain variables are interdependently affecting particularly Mexican American youth. Since the early 90's with the move towards excellence and the policy eras that have followed it many have been the efforts to define a dropout uniformly and tackle the problem by pursuing pertinent variables.

This study attempts to continue on the efforts of many prior research endeavors to find relational variables that influence students. Particular of this study is the tracking of Mexican American youth rather than the larger ethnic categorical umbrella of Latinos. Using NCES collected data from 1988-2000 variables are isolated in this project using multiple linear regression to isolate variables with most statistical significance. By using a stepwise method, variables are included or eliminated based on the impact of them as a whole. The framework of analysis for this study comes from looking at three levels in social ecological theory: microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem.

This study attempts to focus on the Mexican American high school student and describe relationships amongst variants and the decision to drop out of school. Although the

deficiencies of decades of resources cannot be remedied by one lone project, shedding light upon the issue will aid in understanding the complexity of Mexican American culture and the dynamic variables that interplay in a Mexican American teenage journey through public high schools. This study explores nine personal attributes that pertain to Mexican American students and looks to find a correlation between variants and the ultimate decision to drop out of schools. The nine attributes to be analyzed include: Academic performance, educational aspiration, family composition, self-esteem, relationship with peers, relationship with school staff, perception of school, student mobility and English language proficiency. These variables were selected by establishing specific patterns of significance in prior research.

The work derives from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, NELS: 88, and its subsequent follow-ups. NELS: 88 also includes a dropout component in which students that had dropped out of school by the first or second follow-up received a specific survey to identify the reasons for leaving school. This component will prove to be of significance for this project. This quantitative study will rely on regression analysis models to establish significance of variables and look to explain the possibilities of future efforts in reform. Although this study does not employ qualitative methodology, the personal attributes will be presented following Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. Then the purpose of the study will be to test Bronfenbrenner's theory that multiple variables along different levels of culture play a role in human decision making. Personal characteristics at the three levels identified by Bronfenbrenner, which are micro, meso and exosystems, will be analyzed and divided and analyzed individually. The examination of these characteristics will make it possible to identify factors contributing to dropping out of school. The nine attributes to be analyzed include: Academic performance, educational aspiration, family composition, self-esteem, relationship with peers, relationship with school staff, perception of school, and English language

proficiency. These nine attributes were measured by the NELS: 88 quantitatively and will be utilized for analysis. The selection of specific variables will be arrived by specific variables identified by following stepwise linear regression to establish significance.

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Chapter I - Introduction

The time is now to stop and reevaluate the impact of public education on the American way of life, the time is now. The numbers certainly grab our undivided attention. In the past 20 years, 3,767,004 Mexican immigrants have secured legal resident status in the United States and 164,920 Mexican immigrants came to the country in 2009 and 111,630 Mexican immigrants were granted United States citizenship in 2009 (U.S. Department of Immigration Statistics, 2010). These numbers go a long way in dictating the future of American society. What is the story of these numbers? Behind every one of these new Americans is a dream of hope, an enduring payoff to their journey and the tribulations endured. Most of their hopes, like that of the American way, lie on their children and their futures. However American schools fail to perform adequately in providing an education to these thousands of Mexican American children and an overwhelming majority of them fail to complete compulsory schooling and dropout before completing high school (Hess & D'Amato, 1996). For many years the issue of high school dropouts has been a constant focus.

If the high school diploma is the measure of excellence for calculating school success, then U.S. public schools are failing the population disproportionately. The failure of our public school system has been characterized by these numbers which the media has exploded into a national chaos. In the year 2000, about 5% of students enrolled in a public high school dropped out in their last year of high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Although the nation has attempted to correct the problem, no substantial drop in the dropout numbers has been achieved since 1987 also in 2000, 11% of people between the ages of 16-24 did not have a high school

diploma nor were they enrolled in any school (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). This situation has been labeled as a “national crisis” (Kohler & Lazarin, 2007). Latinos have become the fastest growing minority in the U.S. rising to 14% of the population in 2004 and the numbers continue to rise (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). However the achievement gap for this subgroup continues to widen.

The most pressing problem in education today continues to be dropouts with many of those dropout students having a Latino background (Rumberger, 2000). Latinos are the fastest growing minority with a large part of this ethnic category being Mexican American students. The achievement gap is real and varies amongst ethnic groups. One longitudinal study found that ethnic minorities were found to be underperforming academically were being placed in the lowest quartile of achievement in many areas (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). It is said that by the eighth grade only 15% of Latinos will reach the level of competency comparable to their peers. Also grade point averages will be noticeably lower for Latino subgroups (Hill & Torres, 2010).

Statement of problem

Close to 3 million Latinos are enrolled in America’s high schools, which in turns represents close to 20% of the entire high school student population in the country (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004). The issue of Latinos’ graduation completion rates has been thoroughly studied. Most of such studies explain academic precursors to dropping out of school, however very few focus particularly on the Mexican American student population and their particular dynamics. The term Hispanic encompasses a diverse group of individuals that come from as many as 25 different countries and may share nothing more than a common language (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

Aggregating data and research projects into one large heterogeneous group is not helping the fight against school dropouts. Understanding a section of this group, a more homogeneous portion of Hispanics helps to identify similarities in culture that can serve to establish relevant factors to this group: Mexican Americans. Of the U.S. Latino student population, 63% is comprised of Mexican Americans (Hill & Torres, 2010). Nevertheless public schools fail to graduate close to 50% of its Latino population from high school (Rodriguez, 2008). To understand this particular issue, Mexican Americans only 51.9% of the Mexican American student population completed high school. Mexican Americans continue to be the sub-group within the Hispanic population with the lowest educational attainment numbers (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). This problem has received focus at the national legislative level when in 2001 a new educational reform was passed as a revision to educational policy in the form of No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001 (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). However this reform brought stigma to many public schools that service the Latino minority and placed an immense pressure on students to perform on standardized testing therefore effectively marginalizing meaningful academic preparation for many Latinos (Meier & Wood, 2004). Studies fail to effectively point out strategies to correct or identify variables that lead to dropouts among the Mexican American population.

Studies tend to focus their efforts on the Latino community as a whole while ignoring the particular dynamics of each sub-ethnic group. Only a handful amount of studies focus on the Mexican American population and even fewer on identifying cultural and social variants that create a high school dropout. Nonetheless the problem persists and research consistently shows that among all of the ethnic groups in the

United States children of Mexican American descent are least likely to graduate from high school and enroll in a 4 year college (Garcia, 2001; Gandara, 1995; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000).

The dearth of research on the Mexican American student is shocking considering the fact that the Mexican American population is the largest minority and quickly rising. The Mexican American subgroup could become the majority in this country within the next couple of decades (Chavez, 2008). If a Mexican American student's issue that leads to not graduating from high school could be identified along with sufficient resources to correct the problem, then completion rates would go up and with that a preservation of American culture.

Purpose of study

This study attempts to focus on the Mexican American high school student and describe relationships amongst causal factors and the decision to drop out of school. Although decades of resources deficiencies cannot be remedied by one lone project, shedding light upon the issue will aid in understanding the complexity of Mexican American culture and the dynamic variables that interplay in a Mexican American teenage journey through public high schools. This study explores nine personal attributes that pertain to Mexican American students and looks to find a correlation between variants and the ultimate decision to drop out of school. The nine attributes to be analyzed include: academic performance, educational aspiration, family composition, self-esteem, relationship with peers, relationship with school staff, perception of school, student mobility and English language proficiency. These variables were selected by establishing specific patterns of significance in prior research

Much of the prior research portrays a high relevance of socioeconomic status (SES) on dropout status. However, for the scope of this project SES is excluded as a variable due to the nature of the focus. The interdependent factors that produce a high school dropout will be heavily influenced by the SES variable, but feasible recommendations for remediation lie mostly in the political spectrum and difficult to correct. Being that the goal of the project is merely to understand what factors play a significant role in a Mexican American student's journey out of school SES will be excluded.

The work derives from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, NELS: 88, and its subsequent follow-ups. NELS: 88 also includes a dropout component in which students that had dropped out of school by the first or second follow-up received a specific survey to identify the reasons for leaving school. This component will prove to be of significance for this project. This quantitative study will rely on regression analysis models to establish significance of variables and to explain the possibilities of future efforts in reform. Although this study does not employ qualitative methodology, the personal attributes will be presented following Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Then the purpose of the study will be to test Bronfenbrenner's theory that multiple variables along different levels of culture play a role in human decision making. Personal characteristics at the three levels identified by Bronfenbrenner, which are micro, meso and exosystems, will be analyzed individually and in combination. The examination of these characteristics will make it possible to identify factors contributing to dropping out of school. The nine attributes to be analyzed include: academic performance, educational aspiration, family composition, self-esteem,

relationship with peers, relationship with school staff, perception of school, student mobility and English language proficiency. These nine attributes were measured by the NELS: 88 quantitatively and will be utilized for analysis. The selection of specific variables will be arrived by specific variables identified by following stepwise linear regression to establish significance.

Conceptual framework

For this research project two frameworks of analysis are used. Bronfenbrenner's social ecological model and Rumberger's individual/institutional framework are the basis for analysis. Variables are placed into social ecological model for analysis into human development theory. Social ecological theory includes four distinct systems that affect human development, as described in latter paragraphs, only three levels are used for analysis in this research project: microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Nine variables are analyzed for their effect on Mexican American students, particularly for analysis into human development as suggested by social ecological theory (Gregson, 2001). Each of the nine attributes will be placed into the appropriate level of analysis into social ecological model system. The selection of variables and its adequate placement into social ecology is dictated by prior research as listed in Rumberger's framework (Rumberger, 2004).

Both of these frameworks contribute to analysis for this project by using a blended theoretical approach. Chapter 2 explains the merging of both frameworks as analyzed by the project, in such section, figure 1 looks at the blending incorporated for analysis. Throughout this research reference will be made to social ecological model and Rumberger's approach which is explained in detail in Chapter 2.

Research questions

The following three research questions will be analyzed:

1. Utilizing Bronfenbrenner's social ecological model, will a particular set of attributes grouped into a social ecological model have a higher correlation value than the other levels?
2. Are there any relational variables in personal attributes of Mexican-American students that are related to dropping out school?
3. What are the developmental patterns exhibited by Mexican-American dropout students?

Significance of study

Nothing would bring greater satisfaction to the troubled public school system than narrowing the achievement gap amongst all racial groups, particularly Hispanics.

Although the country has worked tirelessly to fix this problem little progress has been made (Laird, DeBell, & Chapman, 2006). The truth is that the playing field is never leveled for Hispanic students, they start school already behind every other racial sub group and are never able to keep pace and much less catch up.

Mexican American student achieve even lower than their Hispanic counterparts from other Spanish speaking countries. Therefore focusing our efforts to find precursors leading to school disengagement will provide beneficial avenues to explore effective interventions. Mexican American culture values education and the upper mobility dream that it provides, however, research indicates that many of these youth will become disillusioned with a school where they perceive they are not supported or cared for by the school staff (Nowicki, Duke, Sisney, Stricker, & Tyler, 2004). Perhaps

understanding the dynamics of these individual students will allow their educational value and actual achievement on the same path.

Chapter II - Literature Review

Introduction

Lowering the student dropout rate in this country is one of the most complex issues facing education today. Each year hundreds of thousands of young Americans leave school without successfully completing a high school program (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). In Texas, according to the annual dropout report produced by the Texas Education Agency in 2010, only 80.6% of high school students successfully completed their high school education, and worse 9% dropped out of school. The United States Department of Education shows a 14% dropout rate for the country (Chapman, Laird, & Kewal Ramani, 2010). Being that the wealth of all nations is closely interwoven with the education of its citizens the country cannot stand for such a low success rate.

It is of particular importance to understand the issue of student dropout amongst the Mexican American student population. Although the plethora of research studies focusing on Latino dropout students is extensive, only a small number of studies exist that analyze Mexican American student population. Mexican American students are the fastest growing minority in U.S. schools today with many states having Mexican American students as the majority in many of their school districts (Johnston, 2000). Therefore the success of this subpopulation takes on monumental proportions. This population has grown tremendously and continues to do so at a rapid pace. The educational future of Mexican American students continues to be cause for concern. Mexican Americans are highly underrepresented in secondary and postsecondary education (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997).

Most teachers all over the country understand the importance of correcting the dropout problem and express a strong support for reforms to address the issue. However, only about one third of teachers believe that all students can meet high academic standards and be ready to do college level work (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Balfanz, 2009). Teachers believe that students' motivation is to blame and that most students just encounter boredom, absenteeism and are unprepared for high school curriculum. In part due to teachers' perspectives about the issue, the problem continues to increase. The fact of the matter is that students perceive teachers' indifference and this has a negative influence on student performance. Students that described their relationships with teachers as negative were more likely to dropout of school (Lan & Lanthier, 2003). Students labeled as "at-risk" are more likely to dropout of high school and become a mere statistic. There are many issues that place a student at-risk and they are important to establish a foundation in order to identify students that will need extra support (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007). Although the research is well established in identifying at-risk predictors, the research is limited on the impact of such predictors specifically on the Mexican American student population. Therefore the research for this study will focus on nine particular student attributes. The nine attributes to be analyzed include: academic performance, educational aspiration, family composition, self-esteem, relationship with peers, relationship with school staff, perception of school, student mobility and English language proficiency.

Mexican Americans in the United States

The terms Latinos, Hispanics, Mexican Americans, and Chicanos are often used interchangeably. The subcultures enclosed under the Latino label are very diverse and

dynamic (Orfield, Hispanic education: Challenges, research and policies, 1986; Strage, 2000). Such is their diversity that the only unifying theme for such culture may prove to be a common language. However the differences are plentiful both in demographic statistics and cultural development of each Latino subpopulation.

For purpose of study, this project will look at Mexican American students specifically. The term Mexican American will encompass several explicit groups within the category to include: first generation Mexican Americans, migrant Mexicans, and subsequent generation students of Mexican American descent. NELS: 88 asked students to state if they considered themselves of Mexican American/Chicano descent and did not differentiate among these groups, therefore the sample in this research will not place any difference in these groups within the Mexican American subcategory (Chapman, Laird, & Kewal Ramani, 2010). When the term Mexican American is used in this piece, it will then be understood that all students answering as having Mexican descent are included regardless of generational status. The term Latino, on the other hand, is more inclusive of multiple groups such as any student that descends from Spanish speaking countries in the Americas. NELS: 88 specifically listed Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Mexican Americans and other Hispanics in their Hispanic subgroups as well as section for refusal to answer this question set (U.S. Department of Education, 2007; McLaughlin, Cohen, & Lee, 1997).

Among all Latino groups, there exists a serious predicament among the Mexican origin population, Mexican Americans, which continues to have one of the lowest educational attainment levels in the country (Bean & Tienda, 1987; Romo & Falbo, 1996). This problem is compounded by the fact that by the year 2030 one in every four

students in the United States will be Hispanic (Johnston, 2000), and within the Hispanic population 64% are of Mexican origin (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). Clearly there is an obvious need to address dropout rates in the Mexican American population.

In 1848, the Mexican and American Governments signed into law the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which provided the United States of America with new territory that would expand the continental United States from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. Among many other components, the treaty also stated that Mexicans who resided in the acquired land for a period of one year were guaranteed “full-fledged” citizenship. These Mexicans would now be recognized as American citizens with equal rights and equal access to society. Now close to two hundred years later, we are able to observe that promise of this treaty was never realized (Hill & Torres, 2010). Today, Mexican Americans continue to struggle to obtain equality in many areas, regardless of their migration status (Elenes, 1997).

Mexican Americans in the United States have struggled to claim linguistic and cultural identity and defining their place in American society since they have been historically viewed as the inferior population (Elenes, 1997). Today Mexicans continue to fit this mold of isolation and discrimination even as the population of Mexican origin individuals continues to rise in the country. There is a common understanding that Mexican origin individuals in the country feel to be *ni de aqui, ni de alla* (not from here, not from there), which creates isolation from both the American culture and the Mexican culture (Hurtado, Rodriguez, Gurin, & Beals, 1993). Thus alienation will tend to occur for the Mexican American student placing them at risk of dropping out of school at a higher rate than their peers (Brown, Higgins, Pierce, Hong, & Thoma, 2003). The

alienation and lack of research into Mexican American dropout students leads to their selection for analysis in this research project.

Identity. The Mexican American student is rather complex and difficult to define. Within this group are immigrant Mexican American students, second generation Mexican Americans, and subsequent generation Mexican American students. With the high fertility rates of immigrants and high number of immigrant families residing in the United States, looking at all three groups is important to identify commonalities in identity and educational experiences in the country (Fernandez-Kelly & Schauffler, 1996; Rumbaut, 1996).

In 1999, Angela Valenzuela first utilized the term “subtractive schooling” to describe the educational practices of the public school system on Mexican American youth. This work went on to portray how students were being removed of a set of cultural assets and literally losing out on their education while effectively being removed from academic success (Valenzuela, 1999). The lack of clarity in Mexican American students develops from a ‘deculturization’ occurring in U.S. schools. Valenzuela (1999) compared the development of Mexican American high school students from first, second and subsequent generation students and found such educational practices to be a subtractive assimilation and detrimental to Mexican American identity (Valenzuela, 1999). This work in the state of Texas portrayed a school system that reproduces social inequality and divested Mexican American students of their social and cultural resources. The practices in schooling, Valenzuela argues, are designed to erase a Mexican American student’s culture (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 10). Subtractive schooling made reference to how Mexican American students expected school staff to be caring

and nurturing in their education. However, the educational practices at the school described by Valenzuela portray the staff as exhibiting a “politics of difference and uncaring for Mexican American youth (Valenzuela, 1999).

United States public school system and Mexican Americans. The issue of inequality then is deeply instilled in American education culture. The growing number of Latino students in schools has provided for a closer look to be taken at how we educate such students. Both internal and external factors must be reviewed to understand the reason behind poor academic performance of, particularly, students of Latino cultures. The issue of language proficiency has also a direct impact on performance by such groups (Schmid, 2001). Orfield (1986) voiced his concerns in regards to the education of the Hispanic population. Orfield expresses his views of the challenges that educating the minority may overcome. For example, the issue of high school performance and the dropout index for Hispanics is portrayed as a problem even many years prior. In addition, the issue of segregation for this population and inequality in higher education is also studied. He relates the views of Hispanics on the basis of education and investigates the major problems of bilingual education and the laws that govern it (Orfield, 1986). Equality goes far beyond integration of races; it is not a black/white issue and cannot be ignored in a multicultural nation. Minority groups integrating to American culture can pose a threat to the dominating culture dictating policies in schools. To solve the issue of equality we must understand culture and their divides, furthermore, how they impact the daily activities of a school (Campbell & Quillian, 2003).

No Child Left Behind has without a doubt created a tougher system of inequalities that although was instilled as the cure for unequal schools has only

perpetuated the problem and created an expectation of failure for Latino youth (Valenzuela, 2005). It has become readily transparent that broken schools are not provided a chance to be successful, but rather an imminent collapse. No Child Left Behind has proven to target minorities and exclude them from the dominant society in which we live. Standardized testing mandates in NCLB have shown deficiencies in many of the schools educating minorities. Tougher sanctions are levied to such schools labeled as unacceptable and placing a stigma on students at those campuses (Valenzuela, 2005). Inequalities are instilled in such system that makes it virtually impossible for social promotion to occur (Hirsch, 1996).

The Mexican American Education Study. During the period of the “Great Society” a series of events brings focus on civil rights. The U.S. commission on civil rights produced an in-depth study into the scholastic lives of Mexican-American students. A baseline was established on education of Mexican American students. Chicano students were struggling severely in the 1970’s many of them were suffering from outright racism. Schools attended by many Mexican American youth were disconnected culturally from their reality. Mexican American students were looked at as being inferior to their peers (USCCR, 1971; 12). The USCCR Report I (1971) shows school districts making a concerted effort to funnel all minority students away from the better performing Anglo-majority schools. Once in culturally homogenous institutions Mexican American majority schools were labeled as being in underperforming schools and served by an ethnically imbalanced school staff (USCCR, 1971; Chapter III).

Student dropouts

It seems a very easy mechanism to identify a high school dropout. To determine who drops out it would be ideal to call those that do not acquire a high school diploma a dropout. However, the issue is not as easy as it sounds. Determining who is a dropout goes far beyond this simple definition and is a very contentious issue. Rumberger (2011) describes dropouts falling into three categories, status, event dropouts or process dropout (Rumberger, 2011). A status dropout refers to an individual that is not enrolled in school or has graduated from high school. What is problematic about status dropouts is that such status can change and status dropouts can re-enroll in school and acquire a high school diploma. Therefore a status dropout can only truly be defined as a current status dropout. This is compared to a current marital or employment status that can change constantly. (Rumberger, 2011).

An event dropout refers to students that drop out of school before they graduate. This process can be done formally and well documented when the legal guardian fills out official student removal documents or an over age students performs a self-withdrawal. However, this can also occur informally when a student simply stops attending school and does not notify the school that they have left the school without re-enrolling in another district. The latter method makes counting event dropouts as very complex and problematic (Rumberger , 2011).

A third method to identify dropouts is to describe them as a process dropout. This is a reality for many high school dropouts around the country. This method implies that the decision to drop out hardly happens in one abrupt decision such as event or status dropouts suggest. A process dropout gradually shows patterns of poor

attendance and academic underperformance before they decide to dropout
(Rumberger, 2011)

Dropout definition

Defining the term 'dropout' is not a single uncontested issue due in large part to the large number of operational definitions used for this single term in all fifty states, educational organizations and the federal government. It is important to find a definition that reflects acceptability and consistency of a student that no longer is pursuing an educational program (Dierkhising, 1996). Many efforts at providing an operational definition have been attempted and most indicate that a dropout will be defined as an individual who leaves school prior to high school graduation before completing a program of study without transferring to a private or public school or any other educational institution (Rumberger, 2011; Dierkhising, 1996; Williams, 1987). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) specifies a dropout as a student in grades nine through 12 who fits any of the following criteria: was enrolled in the district during the previous school year; was not enrolled at the beginning of the succeeding school year; has not graduated or completed a program of study by the maximum age established by the state; has not transferred to another public school district, to a non-public school or to a state-approved educational program; or a student who has left school for reasons other than death, illness, or school-approved absence (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004).

Determining how accurate dropout figures around the country are is a difficult process. Most states do not adequately collect and analyze their dropout data (National Governors Association, 2005). The problem is that every state has a different definition

of the term dropout. For example, in some states students are not counted as dropouts if they happen to enroll in a GED preparation program, or if they happen to become incarcerated (Sanchez, 2011). In part due to this confusion, the National Governors Association adopted a resolution for common reporting of graduation rates to the federal government five states including Texas did not sign the resolution (Swindell, 2005).

The state of Texas in 2003 passed a bill that amended the language on the dropout indicator for the Texas public school Academic Excellence Indicator System or AEIS (Texas Education Agency, 2011). The indicator adopted the definition set out by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the United States Department of Education which states that a dropout is defined as a student that was enrolled in a public school in grades 7-12, but did not return to school in the fall within the school start window, was not expelled, did not graduate, receive a GED, continue high school outside of the state, begin college or die (Texas Education Agency, 2011).

Leavers. Furthermore, a higher category was placed over the term dropout. The term 'leaver' is also utilized as a category for dropouts in Texas where a leaver is a student that is enrolled, in school from grades 7-12 and does not return to Texas public schools on the following fall semester. A student that moves or transfers officially from school is not counted as a leaver. A leaver can be a student who graduates, receives a General Education Development or GED certificate, continues school outside the Texas public school system, begins college, is expelled, dies or drops out (Texas Education Agency, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2004).

For this research project the definition utilized by the state of Texas and the NCES will be the utilized definition for explaining high school dropouts, this definition is: 'a student that was enrolled in a public school in grades 7-12, but did not return to school in the fall within the school start window, was not expelled, did not graduate, receive a GED, continue high school outside of the state, begin college or die (Texas Education Agency, 2011).

Calculating the dropout rate

Most Americans tend to believe that if you add the number of dropouts to the number of graduates that number should equal 100 percent. However this assertion in our country's public schools is almost never true (Orfield, 2004). High school graduation rates have long been used as a measuring stick for public education in our country and have been a predictor of social and economic stability. Today, graduation rates continue to be of importance in our society. These rates measure success and delineate necessary policies adequate to correct the problem along with allocation of resources. However, many statisticians disagree about the veracity of the dropout figures being produced and question their accurate diagnosis of problems facing our public high schools (National Research Council , 2011). Graduation rates should ultimately portray the number of students that complete high school and receive a high school diploma. Inversely we expect dropout rates to reflect the total number of students that do not complete high school and receive a high school diploma. However, there exists no such clarity due largely to the fact that dropout calculations vary in every state.

No Child Left Behind. The presidential administration of George W. Bush in 2002 signed into law the new reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) under the title No Child Left Behind Act or NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). This law intended to portray an adequate picture of the state of public education by including mandatory reporting of adequate yearly progress in areas such as academic performance and graduation rates. How effective this educational policy was in achieving such a goal is debatable, but it is clear that this act although required reporting of dropout rates, failed to establish commonality in reporting methods used by the states in terms of calculating completion rates. Most states calculated this figure utilizing self-reports from high schools across the country on how many students had dropped out and had an immense variation (Swanson, 2004).

New Mexico issue. To illustrate this variance, the state of New Mexico considers students that enroll in school one year and do not return the following year as summer withdrawals and do not affect the dropout rates if the student is in high school and over the age of 16. The definition for graduation rates in New Mexico was allowed under NCLB to calculate the rate by counting the number of enrolled twelfth graders that received a diploma effectively undercounting dropouts that left school before the twelfth grade (Dillon, 2009). In 2002-2003, the first year for the implementation of NCLB, New Mexico had a graduation rate of 89%, which leads to the belief that a dropout rate of 11% should be expected. However, Education Weekly calculated a graduation rate of 57% for that same year. Obviously in terms of adequate yearly progress reporting under NCLB New Mexico utilized its calculated graduation rate of 89% (Vu, 2006).

Average freshmen graduation rate and common calculation. In its implementation, NCLB required states to report dropout rates based on the averaged freshman graduation rate that can be referred to as a cohort rate. This cohort rate yields the highest dropout rate since it assumes that all students in a cohort that start the ninth grade will graduate in four years (Christle, Jolivetter, & Nelson, 2007). If a student fails to complete high school in four years then they are counted as a dropout in accordance with the average freshman graduation rate. Under this definition only 68% of students around the country would graduate in four years (Chapman, Laird, & Kewal Ramani, 2010). Under this Average Freshmen Graduation Rate (AFGR) method high school dropout rates for minorities such as Hispanics surpasses 50% (Swanson, 2004). The AFGR gathers information for determining the freshmen cohort from the United States Census Bureau's Current Population Survey report, the Common Core of Data and the GED testing services reports. This system did not adequately portray figures needed for dropout records as much as the prior systems had (Swanson, 2004).

Understanding the necessity of an accurate reporting system the National Governors Association met in 2005 to form a taskforce and make recommendations for improving the reporting system needed for graduation and dropout rates (National Governors Association, 2005). This task force would eventually persuade all fifty states to make a commitment to voluntarily implement a uniform method to calculate rates of graduation and dropouts more effectively as well as utilizing better data systems for reporting such rates. The graduation formula rate is as follows:

$$\frac{\text{On-time graduates by year X}}{[(\text{first time 9}^{\text{th}} \text{ graders in year X-4}) + (\text{transfers in}) - (\text{transfers out})]}$$

To use this formula accurately states must be able to accurately report the number of freshmen students in a cohort as well as keep adequate records regarding school transfers. The only absolute way of knowing the actual graduation rates of students across the country would be assign every student a lifetime education ID number and follow these students individually as they matriculate through school. Finding students regardless of where they have moved and then ultimately measuring if they received a high school diploma would give us an accurate snapshot of education (Orfield, 2004). However, until such system exists we are truly in the dark about actual numbers, the truth is that high school dropouts present a challenging issue to public high schools, but the enormity of this impact for sure. Additionally, a handful of states are creating more efficient tracking systems in their states but without a federal system, which due to the 10th amendment of the United States constitution would be unconstitutional, the impact is just indistinguishable. The 10th amendment of the United States constitution reserves powers not specifically granted to the federal government to the states. President Jimmy Carter was elected in 1976 and this eventually gave rise to a federal cabinet-level institution that would have oversight of education across the country. Most arguments against federal legislation and judicial rulings in education were made on the basis of states' rights found in the Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. The amendment says that all things not mentioned in the Constitution would be left to the states; since education is not mentioned in the Constitution the burden fell to the states, and the states and local government held tightly to that dictum. Nevertheless, the U.S. government became increasingly involved in education policy-making (Stephens, 1984).

In 2005, the National Governor's Association set out to create such a system. A system that envisioned, at least at the state level, effective methods for tracking the progress of children from elementary school through high school graduation (National Governors Association, 2005).

Who drops out?

Improving graduation rates is imperative for all states around the country. A great number of students dropping out of school today are minority students particularly Hispanics and African American students. Only about half of such students will receive a high school diploma on time (Kelly, 2005). Mexican American students are particularly susceptible to not completing high school (Valenzuela, 1999). Rumberger & Ream (2008) state that about 44 million Latino students are now in U.S. schools making them the largest minority group in the country and about two-thirds of those Latinos are of Mexican origin (Rumberger & Ream, 2008). When looking at the number of students dropping out of school, obvious differences arise among social groups and ethnic minorities around the country (Rumberger, 1987). There exists a demographic trend showing that students from poor, low income, racial and ethnic minorities are placed at greater risks of dropping out (Levin, 1986). The dropout rates for minorities are historically higher for ethnic minorities (see Table 1). Table 1 explains the rates of dropouts for both event and status dropouts for ethnic categories and by gender. The numbers listed are expressed as percent of a given population. Rates are listed from 1980-2009 and are based on data from the United States Census Bureau's current population reports. Furthermore, event dropouts for Table 1 are identified as students dropping out of school at any given year and are listed as percent. Students from

grades 10-12 are used in these figures. For status dropouts in Table 1 the percentage of the population in any given subcategory not having a high school diploma from ages 18-24 around the country are included for calculation.

Table 1: High school dropouts by race and Hispanic origin: 1980 to 2009

Item	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Event Dropouts²												
total	6.0	5.2	4.5	5.4	4.5	3.8	4.4	3.6	3.5	3.3	3.3	3.1
White	5.6	4.8	3.9	5.1	4.3	3.7	4.2	3.1	3.5	2.6	2.6	3.0
male	6.4	4.9	4.1	5.4	4.7	3.9	4.9	3.4	3.9	2.8	2.7	3.3
female	4.9	4.7	3.8	4.8	4.0	3.4	3.5	2.7	3.1	2.7	2.8	2.8
Black	8.3	7.7	7.7	6.1	5.6	4.5	5.2	6.9	3.7	4.3	6.0	4.5
male	8.0	8.3	6.9	7.9	7.6	4.1	4.8	7.5	3.2	4.9	4.6	4.4
female	8.5	7.2	8.6	4.4	3.8	4.9	5.7	6.2	4.3	3.6	7.6	4.6
Hispanic	11.5	9.7	7.7	11.6	6.8	6.5	8	4.7	6.4	5.5	4.9	5.3
male	16.9	9.3	7.6	10.9	7.1	7.7	11.5	5.6	6.3	5.5	4.2	5.3
female	6.9	9.6	7.7	12.5	6.5	5.4	4.6	3.9	6.6	5.6	5.6	5.4
Status Dropouts⁺												
total	15.6	13.9	14.4	13.9	12.4	11.8	12.1	11.3	11.0	10.2	9.3	9.4
White	14.4	13.5	14.1	13.6	12.2	11.6	11.9	11.3	10.8	10.0	8.8	9.1
male	15.7	14.7	15.4	14.3	13.5	13.3	13.7	13.2	12.4	11.7	9.8	10.5
female	13.2	12.3	12.8	13.0	10.9	9.8	10.0	9.4	9.2	8.3	7.8	7.7
Black	23.5	17.6	16.4	14.4	15.3	14.2	15.1	12.9	13.0	10.2	12.0	11.6
male	26.0	18.8	18.6	14.2	17.4	16.7	17.9	14.8	11.2	10.0	10.2	13.9
female	21.5	16.6	14.5	14.6	13.5	12.0	12.7	11.2	14.7	10.3	13.7	9.5
Hispanic	40.3	31.5	37.7	34.7	32.3	28.4	28.0	27.3	26.2	25.3	22.3	20.8
male	42.6	35.8	40.3	34.2	36.8	31.7	33.5	32.1	31.0	29.2	24.3	22.5
female	38.1	27.0	35.0	35.4	27.3	24.7	21.7	21.8	21.0	21.1	20.2	19.1

* Percent of students who dropout in a single year without completing high school for grades 10-12

+ Percent of the population who have not completed high school and are not enrolled, regardless of when they dropped out

Why do students drop out?

The key component in fighting the dropout war resides in understanding and addressing why students decide to dropout yet finding the ultimate causal factor is next

to impossible. The main reason lies in the reality that there exists no one causal factor, rather the decision to dropout is influenced by multiple factors that interplay with one another in the individual students ecological setting (Rumberger, 2000). In 1988 the department of education conducted an eight year longitudinal study that would track 8th graders through the completion of high school and subsequently college. This study was named the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988, and is commonly referred to in research as the NELS: 88. The NELS: 88 students provided researchers with an array of reasons for dropping out and exemplified the complexity of identifying the problem (Berkold, Geis, & Kaufman, 1998). With all these issues in mind a number of theories have been presented to explain why students drop out of school. Also several factors have been isolated as key to why a child decides to drop out of school such as: student performance, educational and general attitudes, academic engagement, and other complementary adverse social behaviors (Rumberger & Ream, 2008). Theories in the field present dropping out of school as a complex and rather confusing phenomenon of social sciences dealing with the larger community surrounding the immediacy of the student's social life (Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992). Nine specific attributes are to be analyzed for this research:

1. academic performance;
2. educational aspirations;
3. family composition;
4. relationships with peers;
5. relationships with school staff;
6. English language proficiency;

7. self-esteem;
8. student mobility;
9. perception of school;

These nine attributes are identified by the longitudinal research project to the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988.

Framework of Analysis

For this research project two frameworks of analysis are used. Bronfenbrenner's social ecological model and Rumberger's individual/institutional framework are the basis for analysis. Variables are placed into social ecological model for analysis into human development theory. Social ecological theory includes four distinct systems that affect human development, as described in latter paragraphs, only three levels are used for analysis in this research project: microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Nine variables are analyzed for their effect on Mexican American students, particularly for analysis into human development as suggested by social ecological theory (Gregson, 2001). Each of the nine attributes will be placed into the appropriate level of analysis into social ecological model system. The selection of variables and its adequate placement into social ecology is dictated by prior research as listed in Rumberger's framework (Rumberger, 2004).

Rumberger's framework presents two systems that affect the development of a student: institutional framework and individual framework. Since social ecology system is dictated by student's participation in specific settings, looking at institutional and individual frameworks allows for grouping of variables into appropriate levels of social ecology. Active participation in specific settings will be dictated by individual framework

and non-active participation will be placed by institutional framework. Figure 1 shows how the grouping of variables into analysis for this research project is achieved. A continuum through the levels is shown here.

Figure 1: Frameworks of analysis

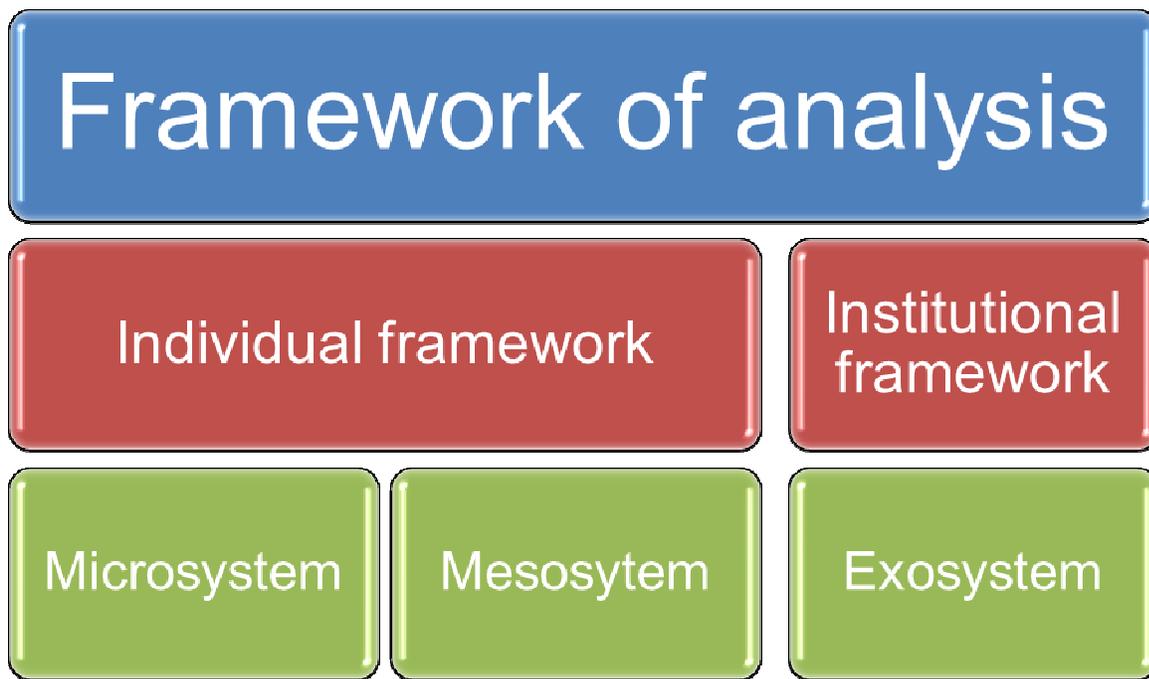


Figure 1 shows how the grouping of variables into specific systems occurs for this project. When Individual framework lists a student as an active participant in a system then the attribute will be placed for analysis in either the microsystem or mesosystem in accordance to level of participation (Rumberger, 2007; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Also when prior research places attributes in the institutional framework, then analysis of these attributes will be grouped in the exosystem.

Drawing on these attributes and the work from NELS: 88, a framework is presented to isolate factors as they play out in a student's decision to dropout not just as individual factors but also as a group of factors. To provide such explanation, the work of Urie Bronfenbrenner provides a framework in which humans develop in an

ecological model that derives from four distinct ecological levels to include a microsystem, a mesosystem, an exosystem and a macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These levels are claimed to provide a larger insight into the decision-making processes of individuals and how the ecological development of such individual influences such process. The microsystem can be explained as experiences with the ecological environment settings of systems where a student has personal interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). Such system will include settings where students have face-to-face relationships and experiences with their community, home, school or peers. Mesosystem refers to interrelations among two or more settings where a student actively develops (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This system involves communication between two active environments that can impact a developing student's decisions. Exosystem refers to a subsystem that includes two or more settings, but at least one of those settings does not include the student (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Activities that influence a student indirectly can include parent's employment, parent's views of education, teachers' perceptions and linguistic ability.

Being that the macrosystem deals with consistencies observed in culture and subculture form, this last system will not be utilized for this research. This research does not implicitly deal with ethnic comparative methods or the influences of class differences in socialization practices analyzing the macrosystem would be rather out of place and not insightful to statistical significance on dropout decisions.

Although Bronfenbrenner's work is the main component of the framework of analysis, the work of Rumberger is also utilized particularly in the grouping of attributes to social ecological model. Borrowing from the work of Rumberger and Larson (1998)

that propose a conceptual framework for analyzing attributes which were divided into sections dealing with family, school and community to be analyzed in Bronfenbrenner's model (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). Rumberger proposes that a student develops in school through two distinct lenses which are described as individual and institutional perspectives (Rumberger, 1983). The nine attributes come from the work of Rumberger that proposes that some of these factors play into the decision of dropping out. However, there is a larger more robust explication potential with utilizing Bronfenbrenner's model which provides an insight into behaviors as a joint function of a person and environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). This model demonstrates that human development occurs in an ecological setting that is interdependent of its systems and it carries over to the other settings.

Both frameworks are necessary to understand the complexity of the dropout phenomenon. After presenting the ecological framework model and reviewing empirical evidence, the nine attributes will be grouped within the frameworks of the social ecological model. An explication to how the three levels on systems used in the analysis will be explained to understand dropout rates among Mexican American students.

Social ecological model

The developmental framework established by Bronfenbrenner places a focus on the evolving person's identity and its ability to grow and alter within systems. Since no one variable can positively be pointed as the sole cause of the decision to drop out of school utilizing the ecological approach views these attributes as interdependent and can be analyzed by the relationships within the settings.

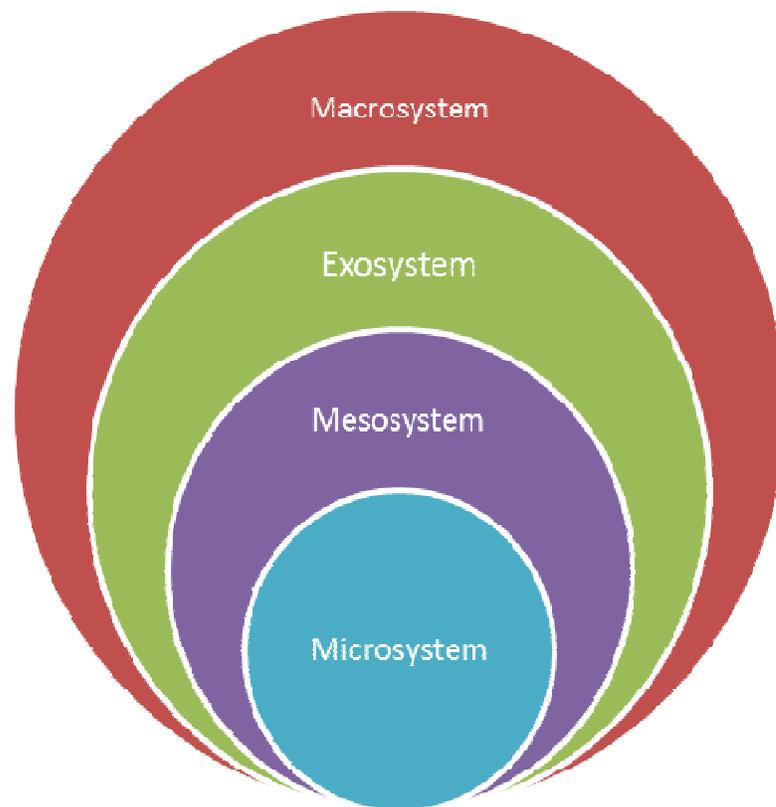
The ecological model proposed by Bronfenbrenner resides on the ideal that humans develop as individuals as a product of the environment that surrounds them. The process of development refers to the interaction between individual and environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A direct quote from Bronfenbrenner's work serves as a forum of making this model explicit to the focus of its use.

The ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive mutual adaptation between an active growing human being, and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives as this process is affected by relationships between these settings and the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 21)

The three levels of social ecological model. The ecological environment of an individual is divided among four levels (see Table 2). The first level refers to the immediate setting of an individual. In schooling terms, this level known as the microsystem, can be the classroom in which the student develops at any given time. The next level involves looking past the immediacy of the setting to identify connections between the immediacy of the setting to its larger context (Spindler & Spindler, 1982). The mesosystem as referred to by Bronfenbrenner's model involves a system of connections between the school and the home. The mesosystem is a set of interrelations between two or more settings in which a person develops and is an active participant. Bronfenbrenner sets mesosystem relationships as four distinct types: multi-setting participation, indirect linkage, inter-setting communication and inter-setting knowledge (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These four relationships will be described fully as

they are grouped accordingly with the attributes. The final system used for analysis is the exosystem which is described as the links and processes taking place between two or more settings, at least one of which does not directly contain the developing person, but such events occur and indirectly influence the process within the immediate settings of the developing person (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). Examples of how the exosystem interplays in a student's immediate environments are such as the effects of central office policies and the effect on classroom activity, parent's employment and student's performance, among others. Appropriate clustering of attributes will be placed into this category and explained in the later framework section and will include dimensions such as those explained previously.

Table 2: Social Ecological level as suggested by Bronfenbrenner



The usage of Bronfenbrenner's approach to analyze the data is beneficial for a project looking at the developmental characteristics of Mexican American students. Although widely used for qualitative work, the ecological system lends itself for analyzing quantitative work such as this project.

Rumberger's framework

Through his work on dropouts Rumberger suggests that a set of contextual factors provide the background setting for a student's decision to dropout of school. He presents two frameworks in which factors are placed that focus on two differing perspectives to understand the phenomenon. One framework is based on individual factors associated with leaving school and the other cements itself on the institutional factors that play a role in a student's decision to leave school. Some of these factors include: the family, community and peers (Rumberger, 2004).

Individual framework

The first framework that Rumberger proposes utilizes several factors that are placed under the umbrella of individual attributes. This framework builds on the idea that dropping out of school is the ultimate manifestation of prior attitudes and behaviors expressed by children earlier in life (Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992; Wehlage G. , Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). The framework also suggests that dropping out represents an aspect of, similar to Bronfenbrenner's model, an interrelated dimension that includes: academic achievement, educational stability and educational attainment. This framework suggests that each of these set parameters influence one another in an ecological interdependence sense.

Institutional framework

Since individual perspectives are shaped by the institutional setting in which an individual interacts, the framework identifies a separate subcomponent which includes the setting in which an individual lives (Rumberger, 2004). Various settings fall to such perspectives which include: families, schools and communities which all shape individual behaviors.

Merging both frameworks

Both frameworks complement each other and create a blended theoretical framework of analysis for this project. Subsequently each of the three interdependent ecological systems to be utilized will be grouped as lists of attributes to include one or more attribute per section. The grouping of the attributes will follow Rumberger's clustering of his dual framework approach however, the individual framework is subdivided as the mesosystem and exosystem in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. In similitude to Rumberger's presentation of frameworks (Rumberger, 2004), This study will present the social ecological model level followed subsequently followed by empirical evidence that highlights important aspects of factors within the level and a discussion of how these frameworks of blended theory explicate attributes and factors of correlation to Mexican American students dropping out of school.

The microsystem and its attributes

A microsystem can be defined as the immediate environments in which a child develops such as the family, school and neighborhood environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1984; 1986; Vander Zanden, Crandell, & Crandell, 2007). These environments are such that the child interacts with at one specific time and have also been observed

as a set of environments in which the child come to perceive himself and make sense of his own interpersonal qualities. The development of cognitive factors within these systems affects the child's personality and intelligence level (Oetzel, Ting-Tooney, & Rinderle, 2006). Here the person develops not only by the environment but also by the way they interact with people at this environmental level (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1979; Gregson, 2001).

Due in part to the direct impact of such an environment on an individual's cognitive and psychological developmental attributes selected under this framework are crucial to an individual's decision to dropout. The following attributes compose the microsystem of an individual student: self-esteem, relationship with school staff, and relationship with peers. Each of these attributes deal with the immediacy of the environment of a student at one particular time. This aspect of social ecology deals with the self as the interaction occurs in the setting. For the attributes placed within this system, their grouping is influenced by how the student interacts with others stakeholders in the environment. This framework will study the relationships in which the student will have some control over the interactions and perceptions. Each of these attributes will be reviewed individually and its use in this portion of the framework justified. Rumberger describes these attributes as part of his individual perspective framework due to the fact it deals with the individual student as he develops (Rumberger, 2011)

Self-esteem

It is important for any student to feel validated, particularly for Mexican American youth, the necessity to overcome the fear of failure is of crucial importance (Galan,

1998). Mexican American youth have to feel confident with themselves and their ability with carrying out their own decisions. Traditionally, Hispanic youth have low aspirations and expectations for themselves. Students who drop out of school constantly report having a lower self-concept of their ability levels (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986). To be successful in school, students need to be able to believe in themselves and know that they have the ability to be engaged in school (National Research Council, 2004). Research studies have looked at the relationship between self-perception and high school completion and found a relation specifically when looking at self-concept as an indicator of self-esteem (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003).

Poor self-perception can eventually lead to demotivation of the student and place them at-risk of dropping out of school. This bad self-perception can be determinant in a student's decision making process particularly for Mexican American students (Romo & Falbo, 1996). Students that encounter success in their first two years of college have a strong self-concept and it becomes the single most significant predictor of school withdrawal (House, 1993). Many dropouts tend to believe that they lack control of their lives and their decisions (Shcwartz, 1995). Among minority youth, many believe that they do not have an equitable chance for employment advances (Obgu, 1978). Many will follow in their parents' occupational path because they are convinced that the educational system, regardless of completion status, will not prepare them for the workforce (Kozol, 1991).

Relationships with school staff

Teacher-student relationships seem to go unseen by many educational reform efforts. In some instances educators tend to believe that if students "care" about their

education the teacher's perceptions will not make a difference. However, the relationship between students and teachers provide a high indication of how successful a student will be in school and ultimately if they will graduate from high school (Englund, Egeland, & Collins, 2008). Strong student-teacher relationships allow for students to develop an understanding of the subject matter and increase the possibility of school completion in at-risk student population (Reio, Marcus, & Sanders-Reio, 2009). The construction of positive relationships with teachers allows for students to enjoy school and complete it in a timely manner. A qualitative study with two at-risk Latino students portrayed how disastrous a negative teacher-student relationship can be on student success. Both students cited how their teachers did not care about their success in school and this played a role in their decision to dropout. In one instance the student mentioned that subject matter was not appropriate for his special education goals and yet he could not talk to a counselor for three weeks. Teachers fail to connect to all students in the traditional setting. This same study cited that after one of the students got in trouble with the law, his teachers labeled him as a criminal and refused to provide academic support (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009).

Students perceive how much their teachers care about their education. Students feel that in order for learning to be substantial in their at-risk condition they must contribute to their academics and have evaluative sessions of their teachers with the teachers themselves (Brown & Soguero, 2011). An interesting point is placed about an at-risk student which shows us the value of personal relationships with their educators. This personal attachment creates an environment conducive to learning (Reio, Marcus, & Sanders-Reio, 2009).

Studies conducted on at-risk students point to how teacher's perspectives and the behaviors guided by these perspectives can account for an important factor dealing with the decision to dropout. Students label teachers as uncaring and complain about curriculum structure and regularly report that one factor for leaving school was a disconnect to the curriculum taught at schools and how this curricula was neither engaging nor interesting (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). A student's decision to dropout of school is affected by a number of factors however these factors end with disengagement from school and student's negative opinions of school and the staff instructing them.

Relationship with peers

The majority of research predicting school dropouts has focused on low academic performance at target time frames, poor school motivation and issues dealing with students demographics. In contrast, research has shown that high school dropouts exhibit average intelligence and suggests that other factors influence such decisions. Students that drop out of school tend to show low academic performance and manifestations of at-risk behavior, however, many of them tie such issues to antisocial behavior. Many students that drop out were constant behavioral problems at school and exhibited aggressive behavior toward other students and school staff. This aggressive behavior leads not only to school disciplinary issues but also to peer rejection. This level of rejection alienates students from school where they seek identity in gangs which causes disinterest in school (French & Conrad, 2001).

Student alienation. Students labeled as "at-risk" have a difficult time dealing with situations in a socially acceptable manner. Research has indicated that

suspensions in school are a clear manifestation of antisocial behavior and students that suffer suspensions are less likely to complete school (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007). Low academic achievement is closely associated with peer rejection and antisocial behavior and directly impacts this decision. Some studies describe this antisocial behavior as social alienation. Alienation is described as a lack of belonging or feeling separated from school. Alienation in school is defined by the work of Seeman and Dean and is explained in four categories: powerlessness, meaningless, normless and estrangement (Brown, Higgins, Pierce, Hong, & Thoma, 2003). Students labeled at-risk are more affected by the impact of school policies and are more likely to become alienated by their environment which would directly impact the performance of students in the educational setting. The perceptions of students about the school become negative and increase the likelihood of a student dropping out of school. The perspectives of students about their setting explain the reasons for the maladaptive behavior exhibited by at-risk students. (Brown, Higgins, Pierce, Hong, & Thoma, 2003).

The mesosystem and the individual attributes

The mesosystem is comprised of multiple connections between immediate environments in which the student interacts (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1984; 1986; Vander Zanden, Crandell, & Crandell, 2007). This system looks at direct connections with two individual environments and at the nature of their interactions. These settings provide interpersonal connections vital to student development such connections that foster behaviors deemed as appropriate to an individual student. Interactions among systems provide the basis for ethics and shape the expectations and perceptions for the

stakeholder (Oetzel, Ting-Tooney, & Rinderle, 2006). Mesosystems form the guidelines for expected behaviors in an organization (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1979; 1984)

For the mesosystem framework analysis the individual's behaviors and aspirations as shaped by the interactions among differing systems such as the family, neighborhood and school are studied. For this study, attributes will be selected as behaviors or perceptions resulting from mesosystem interactions. The attributes placed under review in the mesosystem framework are: perception of school, academic performance and educational aspirations. These attributes are a result of mesosystem type of interactions and directly impact a student's choice to leave school. Each of these will be independently reviewed and justified for their place under the framework.

Perception of school

The overall school organization, policies, climate and culture are a big impact to high school dropouts. A student's school experience is directly correlated with the student's individual decision to drop out of school (Janosz, LeBlanc, Boulerice, & Tremblay, 1997). The National Dropout Prevention Organization took a more in-depth look at this variable and concluded that many individual students dropped out of school due in part to a failed connection to the school and its culture. Some of these failed connections stem from school generated variables such as the inability to form connections with the staff and the schools' disciplinary policies and actions (Smink & Reimer, 2005). When the conditions were such that students perceived the school as uncaring and alienating them, they were more likely to take steps to drop out of such school.

Much of these conditions are placed on students partly due to the size of the campus. If public high schools had a teacher-student ratio that was proportionally high, then students were more likely to experience alienation and discontent (Rumberger, 2000). Dropout students often cite that such large high school organizational approach rarely provides one-to-one counseling services or mentoring programs where the student could find a support mechanism. Student's perception of school policies in regards to disciplinary actions and their rigidity were also found to be instrumental in a student's decision to dropout (Finn, 1993).

Academic performance

Although multiple variables have been established as predicting factors of student dropouts, teacher assigned grades continues to be consistently associated as a useful predictor of future student dropouts. Grade point average in high school is predictive to the extent that 27% of students with low GPA's end up not completing high school (Gleason & Dynarski, 2002). Many current dropouts ages 16-24 reported their academic unpreparedness as a factor for leaving school (Bridgeland , 2006). In a subsequent study leading from the NELS: 88 data set, 39% of students that were classified as dropouts reported failing school as the sole reason for dropping out of school. Thirty-five percent of students surveyed stated they could not keep up with school work. Close to 60% of dropouts in the NELS: 88 found it difficult to pass from one grade to the next in high school. When these same students were asked to describe the reasons why they could not perform academically participants reported testing requirements as too difficult and lack of teacher support (Rumberger, 2003).

Retention. Academic deficiencies invariably lead to students being retained and

having to repeat a grade usually in the elementary school system. Originally retention was designed to be the solution to provide all students continuing to the subsequent grade level with the necessary skills. Retention is believed to allow a student's maturity and intellectual level to develop prior to moving on to the next level, however being retained or held back in school is a strong predictor of dropping out of school (Bridgeland, 2006; Christle, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2007; Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, & Heinrich, 2009). The potential benefits of retention are often minimal and only having a short impact period (Holmes, 2006). Of students retained in elementary school, 64% of them will not graduate high school on time (Alexander, Entwistle, & Kabbani, 1997). Furthermore, when students are retained in middle or high school they are more likely to drop out of school than those that are on track (Dawson, 1998). Retention then is closely linked to the decision to dropping out of school and over-age students are placed at a higher risk of non-completion.

Freshmen year success. The move from middle school to high school is a crucial time in an adolescent student's life (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001). Many factors come into play that can cause a student's decline in academic performance during this academic year. Increased failure rates during the freshmen year causes promotion delay to the sophomore year and results in over-age high school students bulged together in crowded freshmen repeater classes that are hardly beneficial to the student (Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog, 2007). Being more academically engaged in the ninth grade and being successful is closely associated with completing high school on time (Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog, 2007),

By the turn of the century, at the inception of NCLB, seven states reported to

have at least 20% more enrolled 9th graders than were enrolled the previous year in 8th grade. This portrays just how large the retention rate of 9th graders can truly be.

Although there are no clear retention numbers for high school students, numbers such as those mentioned indicate the nature of the problem (Barton, 2006). To combat the issue of freshmen year success, many school districts have adopted summer transitional programs, additional freshmen year support, and freshmen academies to ensure that 9th grade students receive the necessary support (Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog, 2007).

Texas State Legislator, Senator Eliot Shapleigh, has placed renewed emphasis on student course completion at the ninth grade level and labeled schools that fail to perform in accordance to national averages as “dropout factories.” Understanding academic performance of at-risk students at specific academic intervals can prove to be beneficial in prevention strategies. Although focus lies particularly at the high school level, research shows the importance of understanding of looking at the formative middle school years as well to establish a pattern of low academic performance and its importance in factoring the decision to drop out of school (Balfanz, Hezog, & Maclver, 2007).

Educational aspirations

The beliefs that students carry with them throughout his school career help shape their attitudes that directly impact school performance. In such beliefs, students form goals related to their perception of their ability as a student. Now these goals are molded as a child experiences school and biological transformations occur as a child goes through adolescence (Eccles J. , 1999). Jointly, educational aspirations are

directly impacted by a student's academic performance. Mexican American students particularly are influenced by three factors that shape their educational aspirations: academic performance, level of acculturation, and parental expectations (Ramos & Sanchez, 1995). To succeed in school students must have goals, both short and long term, and have a strong sense that such goals are attainable (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

The higher the educational aspirations are for a Mexican American student, the less likely they are to drop out of school. This setting of high educational goals and aspirations makes a sense of commitment to school that becomes similar to the family loyalty (Velez, 1989). Most students and parents alike understand that education is linked to better employment opportunities and subsequently better life options.

However, in some instances teenage high school students fail to place high expectations of their education due in part to their surroundings. Students feel that completing high school in some neighborhoods where jobs are scarce is not going to significantly increase their employment outlook and furthermore they see how other family members are employed without completing high school (Sullivan, 1990). Most students entering high school expect to not only complete high school, but also acquire some sort of post-secondary preparation (Rumberger, 2011). Almost 80% of high school freshmen, post NCLB, stated that they expected to get a bachelor's degree or even further level of education (Dalton, Glennie, & Ingels, 2009). These numbers reflect perceptions of students who have already been promoted to the 10th grade and show the perseverance of students that expect to pursue further education. Students that expect to graduate from college are much less likely to drop out of high school than those

that only aspire to finish high school (Dalton, Glennie, & Ingels, 2009). Therefore, forming goals is of crucial importance for at-risk youth.

The exosystem and its individual attributes

In this framework there is an interplay of multiple environments similar to those exhibited by the mesosystem. However the mesosystem dealt with environments in which the student was an active participant such as his family, school, neighborhood and peers. In the exosystem one of the settings involved deals with the student as an active participant while the other has no direct involvement with the student (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1984; 1986; Gregson, 2001). Examples of such interactions can be a parent's workplace, a teacher's perception of a student, the composition of an individual's family among others. This system establishes norms and standards for the student although there is no direct participation from the individual. These are alternatively described as community factors affecting a person when the person does not directly participate (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1979; Gregson, 2001).

The exosystem will deal with the last framework for analysis in this project due to the inadequacy of fit for the macrosystem in the original design for this research. The attributes listed under this framework will deal with behaviors exhibited by students that are a direct relationship among exosystem as previously described. The attributes listed here include: Family composition, English language proficiency, and student mobility. The latter two are interrelated due to the inability of a student to decide on living conditions and environments. Each attribute will be individually analyzed and described in this section.

Family composition

The core of many Mexican American communities in the United States is the sense of family. Family is a strong determinant for Mexican American student's identity. There is a true and deep sense of loyalty and sense of commitment to the extended family that permeates throughout Mexican American families (Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997; Vasquez, 1998;). This provides a noted difference from competitive American culture where individualism is valued and the nuclear family is the norm. The composition of Mexican American families has facets that need to be explored to provide for student success. Many Mexican American families in the United States are rather large. There exists a duty in the family to care for other family member who may include younger siblings, elderly grandparents or a member fighting disease. Many Mexican American students are relied on by their families to contribute to the family's economy by paying for household expenses. Of those students, many enter the workforce and dropout of school to be able to care for their family (Espinoza, 1998).

Due to the fact that the Mexican American family is so tightly knit, a sense of modeling after their older siblings is not unprecedented. This can be a disadvantage for families where older sibling have already dropped out of high school and set this example for the younger ones. This became a reality for many elementary students that were reported as having lower expectations of completing high school (Hess & D'Amato, 1996).

Parenting styles that are inherent to Mexican American culture also place an educational disadvantage for high school students in the United States. Autonomy as a parenting style is associated with increased academic achievement, adjustment and

success (Strage, 2000). However, Mexican American parenting styles mostly are authoritative in nature with little sense of autonomy. This type of parenting works against school completion. As a matter of fact, this parenting style is associated with lower grades and poor performance (Battle, 1997). Due to the lack of autonomy, students are incapable of making choices and when they do they fail to receive respect to their decisions which erodes student motivation (Vallerland, Guay, & Fortier, 1997).

Language barrier

Many of the afore mentioned factors affect students of all ethnicities and racial groups across the country, however, the issue of English proficiency is one that is a recurring factor in Mexican American dropouts. Much of the increasing diversity in U.S. classrooms arise an increase in the numbers of English language learners in public schools. The U.S. Department of Education portrayed an increase in the English language learner population with a gain of 110% in such population (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). ELL students have the double task of achieving academic performance while also learning a new language and many of them fail to juggle these tasks effectively.

Given this issue, it is not surprising to see that ELL students' chances of dropping out of school are proportionally higher than for other students (August & Shanahan, 2006). To portray the issue, in 2005, 37% of Hispanic students born outside of the United States dropped out of school (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Research has identified that being an English language learner places students at a high risk for dropping out of school (Rumberger, 2007). ELL youth students across the country come from multiple linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, however, Hispanic origin youth

are twice more likely to dropout than any other ELL subgroup (Steinberg, Blinde, & Chan, 1984). The reasons for this phenomenon can be plentiful however there exists one direct parallel to academic performance and the ELL label. It is not that students learning to speak English learn any slower or different than their English speaking peers the problem resides in the issue of performance in academic tasks by ELL due in part to their linguistic proficiency. ELL students receive intense immersion into English to build up proficiency with an emphasis on language comprehension. In the state of Texas according to the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) a child entering United States public education in the state must acquire language mastery in four academic years. During these formative years learning English becomes the priority and academic preparation suffers. The academic language necessary for an English language learner to be successful will take about five to seven years to completely develop and in the meantime if a child is not adequately supported his achievement will suffer (Scribner, 2002). Due in part to this academic subtraction English language learners suffer from low levels of comprehension in the areas of reading and mathematics which exponentially increases the chances of a Mexican American student to dropout (Eamon, 2005).

Student mobility

The issue of student mobility is closely associated with academic failure and eventually leading to school dropouts (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). Student mobility is defined for this project as a student changing schools within their academic years from 8th grade through the senior year of high school as measured by NELS: 88. When comparing mobile to non-mobile students there is a notable difference in academic

performance, mobile students tend to be underperforming in school (Mehana & Reynolds, 2004). Students move for a number of reasons and as described by the exosystem, students have little control over such moves. Factors for student mobility can include academic, personal and family related factors. Those students moving frequently will experience disruption in both their home and school lives. These disruptions can lead to a discontinuity in their academic preparation, and disruption in social ties which lead to student alienation (Egnec, 2006). High rates of mobility destabilize intervention efforts to remediate a student's at-risk status and do not provide the potential benefit of such efforts to meet the needs of disenfranchised students (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Membership to a community, school and group leads to student success therefore school transfers not only cause school interruptions and curricular discontinuity, but also cause the student to not acquire such membership that can lead to success (Lagana, 2004). Students that are mobile encounter frequent discipline issues, are frequently absent, more likely to receive a failing grade and consequently more likely to dropout (Egnec, 2006).

Student mobility then is closely associated with the decision of a student to drop out of school (Rumberger, 2004). Changing school increases the risk of dropping out exponentially and can become a severe factor in student disengagement and withdrawal from their school (Rumberger & Larson, 1998). This factor is indicative of student's success rate in schools and is correlated to dropout figures. Students that dropped out of high school had changed high schools at least once before making the choice of dropping out of school (Rumberger, et al. 1998).

Chapter III- Methodology

Research design

The purpose of this study is to analyze factors that can be established as predictors to the decision of dropping out. Due to its dynamic nature, dropping out of school is not viewed as a single cause-effect phenomena but rather a longitudinal decision that can be examined by the interplay and interdependence of multiple factors. The study takes on a quantitative approach to understand nine attributes or factors that play an intricate role in a Mexican American student's decision to leave school without a high school diploma. This dissertation study will examine the roles of such attributes and understand how these variables work together to influence a child's decision to drop out. By acquiring this information, educators will be better empowered to prevent student dropouts.

Addressing this issue is not a simple approach being that no single factor direct cause and effect mechanism is presumed. Rather a set of several factors impact students in conjunction with each other. Individual variables do not always account for a student's decision to leave school however a combination of factors does increase the likelihood of dropping out.

Most of the data set will be descriptive in nature and gathered from multiple surveys created by the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) and its subsequent years of review. The NELS: 88 tracks middle school eighth graders through their years of high school and for four years after high school. Parents and students answered the survey and produced the data being utilized for this project.

From this data set, research questions and hypothesis will be formulated to shape the study.

Data set

Data for this study is derived from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88). This ambitious longitudinal study is compiled from responses in a nationally representative sample of eighth graders that were initially surveyed in the spring of 1988 and subsequently followed through the year 2000 with baseline data collected at specific intervals of time (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). The data is collected by the National center of educational statistics or NCES and this data set provides an array of direct respondent items as well as survey items for analysis. The NCES is a federal level agency within the United States Department of Education that has the congressional appointed responsibility to analyze and report data related to educational issues around the country. From this responsibility stems the NELS: 88 which the NCES envisioned to be the tool to provide researchers the ability to examine factors associated with educational reform, progress and challenges faced by school children across the United States (Chapman, Laird, & Kewal Ramani, 2010). NELS: 88 began taking in longitudinal data in the 1987-1988 academic school year in which eighth graders, mostly between the ages of 13 and 14, were surveyed for their initial analysis. The study derives its methods from the National Longitudinal Study of the high school class of 1972 (NLS: 72) and the High school and beyond study or HS&B. Methods used in these prior research efforts were re-used and tweaked for the NELS: 88 study and its subsequent follow-ups. The dropout component of NELS: 88 was used specifically for identification of reasons provided by the student for leaving school.

These variables are useful in the analysis of this project. When possible variables were extracted from this component since these questions provided insight into the rationale of a student's decision to leave school prior to completing the necessary requirements to obtain a high school diploma.

The National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988

Utilizing data that can be almost twenty-five years old, in the case of some collections from NELS: 88, may be questionable in an ever changing educational environment that public education in the United States is. However by virtue of its design, NELS: 88 continues to have a high degree of usability and reliability for research with high school students in general and due to its vast research characteristics its use for dropout research is optimal even today more than 20 years after its inception. It continues to be one of the few longitudinal research efforts that examine at-risk populations by looking at multiple variables in a diverse population. Further while the particulars of schooling may change, the basic dynamics of social development change very gradually.

Data population

The site for this study includes the 1,052 public schools that participated initially in the study in 1988. There were originally 24,559 students that were analyzed from their transition from middle school to high school. The period of study ranged from 1988-1994 with subsequent follow-up surveys conducted through 2000. Of this sample, 1,952 reported as being Mexican American and will constitute the sample population for the study. A sample of dropout and non-dropouts will be used as the dependent variable. The event of dropping out of school will be the metric used as a dependent

variable in linear regression. To identify these groups, a dropout will be defined as a student that was enrolled in school during the initial 1988 survey, but reported in the 1992 follow-up study that they were not enrolled in school nor had graduated. On the other hand non dropouts would have indicated in the follow-up year of 1992 to having completed high school that year. Participant selection for this research project occurred randomly as to eliminate a threat to validity. The possible threats to validity identified are the following: history and maturation. Threats to external validity exhibited are an interaction of settings. Being that this data set was obtained using data from close to 20 years prior to this research piece an obvious drawback is identified when generalizability is attempted, however the nature of this project does not provide for such generalization to occur.

Research Questions

To focus the attention on Mexican American population the group of variables was identified as personal characteristics. These personal characteristics are carried as the independent variable of this research project. To analyze the impact of these independent variables, Mexican American student population as a whole, as presented in NELS:88, is studied. The dependent variable is set as those that did not complete high school and those that completed high school. The following three research questions are to be analyzed.

1. Utilizing Bronfenbrenner's social ecological model, will a particular set of attributes grouped into a social ecological model have a higher correlation value than the other levels?

2. Are there any relational variables in personal attributes of Mexican-American students that are related to dropping out school?
3. What are the developmental patterns exhibited by Mexican-American dropout students?

Research Hypotheses

To better comprehend the analysis of the data and guide towards an effective method of comprehending the problem, three research hypotheses have been generated:

1. Placing at-risk variables identified by this study under the Social Ecological perspective will identify one of the three levels as being more influential of student's decision to drop out of high school without having completed their required education.
2. There will be very distinct sets of variables identified as influential in a Mexican American student's decision to drop out of school.
3. A very distinct pattern of interplay by the nine variables will emerge in such a way that set of interdependent factors will be isolated as having a strong correlation to dropping out of school.

Instrumentation

NELS: 88 data was collected every follow-up year by means of surveys, the nine personal characteristics or independent variables derive from such surveys. The surveys included demographic data and a Likert-like scale that ranged from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. Answers to these particular type of questions lead to the identification and definition of independent variable, while factual data provided in the

demographics section of the surveys leads to the identification of the dependent variable. Discrepancies are defined by the survey designers and explained in terms of reliability, validity and communality (McLaughlin, Cohen, & Lee, 1997).

The National Center on Education Statistics, NCES, in collaboration with the National Opinion Research Center developed the instruments used in NELS: 88. The base year of 1988 commenced with a paper-based survey that was field tested to ensure its reliability. Several similar steps were taken by the NCES and the NELS developers to ensure the fidelity of the instrument. Once the instrument was completed NCES mailed introductory letters to all respondents in which the study was thoroughly explained to participants. This notification also informed participants regarding future instrumentation and data collection techniques such as telephone interviewing that would provide NCES with accurate data sets. Contracted personnel were hired and trained to administer the questionnaires, follow-ups and other necessary methods for participating with respondents as necessary.

For this research project the nine attributes to be measured for analysis, which include the following:

1. academic performance;
2. educational aspirations;
3. family composition;
4. relationships with peers;
5. relationships with school staff;
6. English language proficiency;
7. self-esteem;

8. student mobility;
9. Perception of school;

All of these attributes are obtained directly from data in the NELS: 88 that was obtained from student and parent responses. Some of these attributes were directly coded categorically as pertaining to the attribute directly while some were not observed directly. For these latter variables, NELS:88 measured other variables by using multiple responses and these are to be measured as frequencies in NELS: 88 questions.

Survey. In 1988, a nine page survey was administered which included 83 items to be answered. Students filled out these responses manually utilizing a paper-pencil format. The questions covered an array of variables such as school experiences, attitudes, future plans, demographics and language proficiency. The surveys were conducted by contractors hired by NCES and were conducted throughout the country. Based on the guidelines provided by NCES students with special needs, students with severe language proficiency issues or other severe limitations to provide adequate responses and contribute to the validity of the data set were excluded as respondents.

NELS: 88 provides an adequate dynamic in the fact that it traces students longitudinally and captures dropouts as early as the eighth grade. As identified in chapter two, identifying dropouts and adequately capturing all dropouts to count them appropriately is very problematic. Hence counting every dropout or attempting to do so in a longitudinal study provides a more accurate picture. NELS: 88 included a dropout component and rendered a rich data set for issues relating to dropout research.

To obtain data from NELS: 88 a copy of the electronic code book in computerized software was obtained from the NCES and the NELS: 88 data sets were

included in such data sets. These included the responses of close to twenty-five thousand eighth grade students participating in NELS: 88.

Variables and operational definitions

As previously noted, this dissertation study looks to examine nine personal attributes of Mexican American students dropping out of school. The nine attributes to be analyzed include: academic performance, educational aspiration, family, composition, self-esteem, relationship with peers, relationship with school staff, perception of school, student mobility and English language proficiency. These nine factors will serve as the independent variables and will be referred to “at-risk” factors. The dependent variable for each of the research questions is the decision of dropping out of school by Mexican American students. Throughout the project several terms are used to describe a high school dropout. The following operational concepts are defined for this study:

- Dropout rate-refers to percentage of students dropping out during one academic school year (National Research Council, 2011).
- Completion rate-percentage of students who graduate, get a GED, or continue to be enrolled at the time of cohort graduation (National Research Council, 2011).
- Cohort-group of students starting high school on the same year and receiving the same anticipated graduation year (National Research Council, 2011).
- Dropout-a student who is enrolled in school at some point during the school year but leaves school during the school year and does not return (Texas Education Agency, 2011).

- High school completion-refers to completing a high school diploma or equivalent (Texas Education Agency, 2011).
- Hispanic or Latino-a person coming from a Spanish speaking culture or country regardless of race (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004).
- Mexican American-a person born in Mexico or born to Mexican parents, but living in the United States and identifies themselves as either Mexican American or of Mexican descent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004).
- NELS: 88-Longitudinal study carried out by the U.S. Department of Education from 1988-1995 tracking students beginning in the eighth grade on. There is a dropout component that is referred to constantly in the research and provides student responses to reasons for leaving school (McLaughlin, Cohen, & Lee, 1997).

Analysis

A model of stepwise regression is used for analysis to group independent variables as predictor outcomes and the decision to drop out as the dependent variable. In this causal model the decision to leave was regressed using the 'step' system. The basic procedures for analysis in this model involved first identifying an initial model. Then iteratively "stepping," or altering the model at the previous step by adding or removing an independent variable. Variables will be input by using a forward stepwise method in which input of variables will be measured as they affect the decision, subsequent removal of prior variables will be carried out if possible. Termination of analysis will come when input or removal no longer causes a change in the data.

Stepwise regression. Statistical analysis for the project includes such model of multiple regression referred to as stepwise regression. Multiple regression is practiced in many fields of social sciences such as education in particular for its adequacy in providing flexibility to comprehend real world problems (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Within regression, there is a wide array of methods to include standard multiple, sequential, logit and stepwise. Stepwise regression is selected for this project in an effort to provide an understanding of interdependence of variables and to provide for the theoretical framework utilized in this project the social ecological model. The use of stepwise regression is acceptable for this data set due in part to the large number of participants, when sample sizes are rather large stepwise regression lends itself as an effective tool in predictive statistics. The goal of stepwise regression for this study is to provide a set of predictive variables and effectively eliminate those independent variable that do not impact the prediction the dependent variable which is defined as the decision to drop out in this instance (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Stepwise regression allows for the proper identification of variables and takes into account the order of the input of variables rather than accounting all variables of equal importance. Therefore stepwise regression allows for the researcher's hypothesis to be tested in order of importance (Fox, 1999). The method of interpretation for this project will be to examine the regression as a causal effect within the importance of the social outcome which is dropping out of school. Stepwise regression analyses will be produced in two manners, first by placing them into a stepwise relation as they apply to social ecological models of the micro, exo and meso systems, and also by placing all

nine variables individually in order of importance as determined by prior research described in the second chapter of this dissertation.

The use of stepwise multiple regression in statistical analysis of the project will be evaluated using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences or SPSS version 19.0. The use of this statistical method is justified for this endeavor in part due to the nature of the variables. First the dependent variable which measures a student's decision to dropout can be directly influenced by the nine personal attributes that are treated as independent variables and can be treated with respect to their importance in the regression analysis. By conducting this method of multiple regression, independent variables can be entered one at a time or 'stepped' until the addition or deletion of variables no longer contributes to the regression (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

Chapter IV - Results

The purpose of this research study was to evaluate the predictive value of nine personal attributes that can be influential in a Mexican American's student's decision to drop out of high school. Additionally, this study attempted to group the nine variables into the three distinct groups of social ecology model suggested by Bronfenbrenner's work and search to find a statistical relation for any one level of analysis in this framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). A cross comparison of dropouts and their counterparts was examined in this particular study limiting the number of participants to the Mexican American students responding to the national educational longitudinal study of 1988, NELS: 88. This sample size consists of 947 students as identified by the study.

For the research questions suggested in the study, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19.0 was utilized. This chapter will analyze research question individually by outputs in SPSS. Multiple linear regression is utilized throughout to find variables that are conducive to producing a high school dropout. The results of this study will be presented using descriptive and inferential statistics. The tests performed will show statistical significance set as a p-value of less than 0.05 or 5%, if such p-value is not presented by variable after the stepwise method was performed the variables will be rejected as relational to the decision to leave school.

The sample taken from this study comes from the NELS:88 data set of over 12,000 entering high school in the 1988-1989 school year all over the United States. As presented in Table 3, the sample size for analysis comes from the overall number of Mexican American respondents in NELS:88 (n=947).

Table 3: Hispanic subdivision as presented in NELLS: 88 database

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Mexican, Chicano	947	7.8%	7.8	7.8
Cuban	61	.5%	.5	8.3
Puerto Rican	139	1.1%	1.1	9.4
Other Hispanic	289	2.4%	2.4	11.8
Refusal	24	.2%	.2	12.0
Missing	94	.8%	.8	12.8
Legitimate skip/not in wave	10590	87.2%	87.2	100.0
Total	12144	100.0	100.0	

Numbers portrayed in table 3 are derived from base year survey student responses in NELLS:88. Item 31 C, part 3 of the initial survey

Table 3 explains the subsequent population to be used for analysis in this project. NELLS: 88 carried out a demographic analysis of respondents in the base year analysis. The table shows the subpopulations in the “Hispanic” label code. NELLS: 88 categorized students refusing to answer the demographic section into every subdivision coding them as ‘refusal’ and if there was no response by the student ‘missing’ is assigned as a code. If student’s ethnic background is non-Hispanic then a legitimate skip is assigned.

Furthermore, table 4 breaks down this subpopulation by high school completers and dropouts. This target population will be analyzed for this research project.

Table 4: Dropout status of Mexican American Students

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Did not dropout	741	78.2%	78.2	78.2
Not determined	4	.4%	.4	78.7
Dropout, Returned	5	.5%	.5	79.2
Alternative student	56	5.9%	5.9	85.1
Dropout, No return	141	14.9%	14.9	100.0
Total	947	100.0	100.0	

Numbers portrayed in table 4 are derived from student responses to the second follow-up survey and is a status that is self-reported by the student.

Table 4 explains the status of NELS: 88 base group students at the second follow up survey conducted five years after the initial administration of the NELS survey instrument. By year five NELS: 88 cohort students were on the last year of high school. The codes listed on Table 4 come directly from the NELS codebook. For this project the status reported as dropout did not return and did not dropout are utilized as the dependent variable.

Due to the nature of linear regression, both dropout and graduating students will be compared to find a relational factor in this independent variable. The dependent variable then will be the status reported in the second follow-up survey conducted by the National Center for Educational statistics in the 1992-1993 school year given to the base year participants in the initial phase of NELS in 1988. NCES provided students that had a status report of dropout on the first or second follow-up interview with a subsequent survey. This component had the intention of asking questions specific to

identifying factors that had lead a student to make the choice of leaving school prematurely.

Selection of variables

Not all variables will produce a statistically significant relationship for the required analysis under SPSS by utilizing linear regression. Therefore the initial step was to identify the most related to the research questions. Specific variables from the NELS: 88 surveys were selected by their fit to the specific attributes selected for the study. Table 5 shows such variables as listed by their tag in the NELS data base and also their grouping with the variables. The variables obtained initially as listed on Table 5 come from the NELS: 88 codebooks and correspond with the individual variables. The items on NELS surveys were aligned with the individual variables in accordance to prior research. The initial sets of variables are run independently in stepwise linear regression method. For example, the five variables listed under self-esteem are set as independent variables and run against the dependent variable set as dropout status. The purpose for this initial analysis is to eliminate variables that have no significance to dropout status.

Table 5: Initial Variables for Analysis

Self esteem
1. I often felt put down by my teachers
2. I feel good about myself
3. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself
4. I often felt put down by other students.
5. At times I think I am no good at all
Staff Relationships
6. I couldn't get along with teachers
7. Teachers were interested in students.
8. Students got along with teachers.
Perception of School

9. I felt I didn't belong at school.
10. I did not feel safe at school.
Peer Relationships
11. I couldn't get along with other students.
12. My friends tried to keep me in school.
13. I would return to school if my friends went back.
14. I didn't get along with boys
15. I didn't get along with girls
Student mobility
16. I changed schools and did not like the new one.
17. I moved schools for discipline reasons.
Language proficiency
18. I understand spoken English.
19. Enrolled in ESL.
20. How well I speak English.
21. How well I read English.
22. How well I write English.
Family variables
23. I had to care for a member of the family.
24. I had serious arguments with my family.
25. My parents didn't care that I dropped out.
Academic performance
26. I was failing in school
27. I was held back a grade
28. I fell behind.
29. GPA
Academic Aspirations
30. How sure are you that you will finish H.S.
31. How sure are you that you will go further than H.S.
32. How far in school do you think you will get.

To be considered significant, variables had to produce an r-value above .500 and also $\alpha=.005$. Every variable that did not produce either of these outputs or produced a large standard deviation was eliminated and not used for purpose of analysis. For example, although grade point average produced a variability percentage, or r-value, of close to .890, its standard deviation was also about 80 units meaning that its

significance was barred by such high level of uncertainty. Every attribute had variables listed that were found to have relation to the data codebook in NELS: 88. Relation was established by utilizing prior research and prior correlation.

Stepwise linear regression was performed in each attribute and the variable or set of variables most predictive was selected for further analysis. Due to the design of linear regression the comparison between populations of dropouts and graduates was run simultaneously and only portrayed a specific set of variables as they affected the measure of the independent variable as it moves upward. The status of 'did not dropout' was assigned a status of '1' and the 'dropout no return' label was assigned a '2' in SPSS analysis. Therefore as the status moves upward towards the status of dropout predictive factors to this change are analyzed and isolated by stepwise method.

Not all variables proved to be statistically significant and due to issues of validity running 32 variables may prove to be problematic. After stepwise linear regression was performed, 15 variables were identified as having statistical significance, see Table 6 for listing of variables. These fifteen were placed in stepwise regression method to identify their predictive relation and answer the research questions.

From Table 5 to Table the set of variables was significantly reduced from 32 variables to 15. The 15 variables used for final analysis has strong significance to the dependent variable of this project. From the literature review it is explained that the fidelity of multiple linear regression is established when a large population (>100) is used and when a limited number of independent variables are utilized. This is the rationale for reducing the number or independent variables from 32 to 15 and establish significance from this set.

Table 6: Included variables in final stepwise approach

Self esteem
1. I often felt put down by my teachers
Staff Relationships
2. I couldn't get along with teachers
3. Teachers were interested in students.
4. Students got along with teachers.
Perception of School
5. I felt I didn't belong at school.
Peer Relationships
6. I couldn't get along with other students.
7. My friends tried to keep me in school.
Student mobility
8. I changed schools and did not like the new one.
Language proficiency
9. I understand spoken English.
10. Enrolled in ESL.
Family variables
11. I had to care for a member of the family.
Academic performance
12. I was failing in school
Academic Aspirations
13. How sure are you that you will finish H.S.
14. How sure are you that you will go further than H.S.
15. How far in school do you think you will get

The following analysis will be separated in such a way that each research hypotheses will be analyzed individually in accordance with the results produced by the statistical output produced using SPSS software and the results of the multiple linear regression analysis conducted on each independent variable and its individual outputs and variability. To reiterate, the approach of stepwise method is utilized for variable identification and regression analysis.

Research Hypotheses

First hypothesis

Placing at-risk variables identified by this study under the Social Ecological perspective will identify one of the three levels as being more influential of student's decision to drop out of high school without having completed their required education.

The results of this research support the basis of this hypothesis. This research hypothesis was identified clearly following the statistical output placed in which three variables were identified using multiple linear regression as clearly indicative of variability in making the decision to leave school. This research hypothesis shows that variability does occur amongst levels of social ecological framework with the exosystem being the most indicative of having a relational significance to dropping out of high school.

Three variables were originally grouped in the exosystem: student mobility, family dynamics and composition and English proficiency. In the exosystem one of the settings involved deals with the student as an active participant while the other has no direct involvement with the student (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1984; 1986; Gregson, 2001). Examples of such interactions can be a parent's workplace, a teacher's perception of a student, the composition of an individual's family among others. This system establishes norms and standards for the student although there is no direct participation from the individual. These are alternatively described as community factors affecting a person when the person does not directly participate (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1979; Gregson, 2001).

The exosystem plays an intricate role in a child's life although the student is not

actively participating in one of the settings which makes correcting this issue problematic. Two of the afore mentioned variables grouped in this level of the framework proved to be relational to dropping out of school: English proficiency and family composition, their model summary is found in Table 7 and identified as predictor factors 1, for family dynamics and 3 for language proficiency.

Table7: Model Summary^{d,e}

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
	HISPANIC SUBDIVISION = MEXICAN, CHICANO (Selected)			
1	.512 ^a	.262	.261	1.586
2	.522 ^b	.272	.271	1.576
3	.527 ^c	.278	.275	1.571

a. Predictors: (Constant), I HAD TO SUPPORT MY FAMILY

b. Predictors: (Constant), I HAD TO SUPPORT MY FAMILY, HOW SURE R IS TO GO FURTHER THAN H.S.

c. Predictors: (Constant), I HAD TO SUPPORT MY FAMILY, HOW SURE R IS TO GO FURTHER THAN H.S., HELPIN FORM OF ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE

Table 7 explains the model summary for the results. Here the r-squared variables are presented. There is a range of 26%-28% variability on the dependent variable when the three significant independent variables are placed against the decision to drop out. The standard deviation number is insignificant and does not affect the fidelity of the instrument. Variables are listed in accordance to the level of significance: family support, post-secondary plans, English language learner support. The model summary reviews the results from the stepwise approach utilized.

Second hypothesis

There will be very distinct sets of variables identified as influential in a Mexican American student's decision to drop out of school.

The hypothesis was supported by the output in the research. For purposes of linear regression analysis the population of Mexican American students was analyzed as a whole, $n=947$ (see Table 3). However, part of understanding the dynamics of Mexican American cultural values and the interplay of risk factors associated with dropping out involved looking beyond the Mexican American subgroup for comparisons. The entire Hispanic values portrayed by NELS were run accordingly to identify differences amongst Latinos. As portrayed in chapter 2, the terms Latinos, Hispanics, Mexican Americans, and Chicanos are used interchangeably to describe a particular ethnic subgroup. The subcultures enclosed under the Latino label are very diverse and dynamic such is their diversity that the only unifying theme for such culture may prove to be a common language.

However, as explained, the differences are plentiful both in demographic statistics and cultural development of each Latino subpopulation. To test the second research hypothesis, variability due to personal attributes were compared from Mexican American students to the rest of the Latino population. The degree of variability as identified by r -values shows that a 54% chance of variability is displayed by Mexican American students when independent variables are run as influential on the dependent variable set for this project. Meanwhile for the remainder of the population a 41% degree of variability is displayed. Although only a 13% difference exists among Latino subgroups, an obvious difference is portrayed for the larger Mexican American subgroup. Among all Latino groups, there exists a serious predicament among the Mexican origin population which continues to have one of the lowest educational attainment levels in the country (Bean & Tienda, 1987; Romo & Falbo, 1996). Following

with such prior research variability is higher for Mexican American students therefore proving research hypothesis two.

Third hypothesis

A very distinct pattern of interplay by the nine variables will emerge in such a way that set of interdependent factors will be isolated as having a strong correlation to dropping out.

This final hypothesis is also supported by the research. The main scope of this project was set to identify correlations in variables as matched to the dependent variable. Such relationship was isolated using multiple linear regression and a stepwise approach. The three relational independent variables are as follows and are listed in order by significance in table 8: support of family, educational aspirations and English proficiency.

Table 8: Variables Entered/Removed^{a,b}

Var.	Variables Entered	Method
1	I had to support my family	Stepwise (Criteria: Probability-of-F-to-enter <= .050, Probability-of-F-to-remove >= .100).
2	How sure student is to go further than high school	Stepwise (Criteria: Probability-of-F-to-enter <= .050, Probability-of-F-to-remove >= .100).
3	Help in form of English second language	Stepwise (Criteria: Probability-of-F-to-enter <= .050, Probability-of-F-to-remove >= .100).

a. Dependent Variable: DROPOUT STATUS

b. Models are based only on cases for which HISPANIC SUBDIVISION = MEXICAN, CHICANO

Table 8 shows the variables used for analysis for the project in order of significance. The variable entered titles are in line with the NELS: 88 codebooks. The alpha levels are set at $\alpha=.05$ for significance.

A subsequent analysis of variance (ANOVA) proves the three variables to have a statistical significance value of .000. A Beta value of an average of 4.5 was set for all three variables showing the variability per unit of standard in measure.

The results indicate that there is an interplay of predictive variables that can, in some instances, forecast a student's decision to dropout of school. These variables arrive from the NELS data base. Again, 32 original variables were ran with 17 variables initially been removed from analysis by stepwise analysis of individual attributes. Fifteen variables were then placed for analysis with only three proving to be statistically significant. Although most of the 12 excluded variables had some sense of statistical significances, they were eliminated by forward stepwise methodology therefore indicating the three most indicative factors.

This study attempted to focus on the Mexican American high school student and describe relationships amongst variants and the decision to drop out of school. Although the deficiencies of decades of resources cannot be remedied by one lone project, shedding light upon the issue will aid in understanding the complexity of Mexican American culture and the dynamic variables that interplay in a Mexican American teenage journey through public high schools. This study explored nine personal attributes that pertain to Mexican American students and identified three individual factors to have correlation between variants and the ultimate decision to drop out of schools.

Chapter V - Findings and Conclusions

The term crisis produces an indication of panic and quick action in our society. Although this term is hardly scarce in describing the educational predicament that our society in American schools finds itself, when speaking of the issue of dropouts the usage of the word is merited. An estimated 1.3 million students or close to one quarter of the high school class of 2010 will fail to graduate on time (Education Week Editors, 2010). Our completion rate is by far the lowest of all industrialized countries which places American students at a severe disadvantage (Rumberger, 2000). Now, comparing our educational system to any other particular system in the world is rather problematic due in part to our noble endeavor of educating all children and attempting to leave none of them behind. Such attempt promises the American dream to all whom work hard to attain it even though this may not be the reality for all.

As a group Mexican American students in the United States today perform at levels that will relegate them to a permanent underclass in American society. If the situation of Mexican American students is not reversed our very democracy is at peril. The challenge is then enormous with very high stakes and negative devastating effects if we fail (Hill & Torres, 2010). Throwing money at the problem will not necessarily fix the problem, but placing resources in the appropriate places can be effective. This project looks to find the appropriate places to place those resources. In the previous chapter, results have shown that there are three statistically significant variables that can be influential in curbing the dropout concern. America is still the land of hopes and dreams, the birthplace of the idea of the 'American dream.' As we approach yet another presidential election we brace ourselves for yet another invocation of hope for our

country and how our liabilities will be eliminated by focusing our efforts on education and making the American dream a reality. Mexican immigrant students and their families risk their lives every day to acquire the American dream and participate in the cynicism of equality and the promise of a society in which we can all succeed, many of these migrant students will go on to be unsuccessful as those studied in this dissertation research. Fundamentally, Americans want to be the leaders of the free world and at the vanguard of today's world and it is understood that this can only be fostered by creating a society of educated citizens. Then, the 'American dream' is at grasp by drafting a policy agenda that looks to tackle the inequalities in the education of Mexican Americans and curve the dropout problem tormenting our schools.

Project beginnings

Originally the idea for this study stems from a classical study, the Mexican American study project from the 1960's out of UCLA and the work of Edward Telles and Vilma Ortiz. These two principal researchers took on the task of analyzing the education environment in which Mexican American students were being educated in this country. Similarly impactful is the work of Angela Valenzuela and her portrayal of a disproportionate educational system not set up for Latino students, particularly Mexican Americans (Valenzuela, 1999).

This study attempts to focus on the Mexican American high school student and describe relationships amongst variants and the decision to dropout of school. It explored nine personal attributes that pertain to Mexican American students and looks to find a correlation between variants and the ultimate decision to dropout of schools. This nine attributes are commonly researched for all students and are found to be of

influence in a student's decision to dropout, particularly for Latino students. In chapter two the nine attributes are placed and explained in accordance to their effects on young teenage students all around our country. The nine attributes to be analyzed include: Academic performance, educational aspiration, family composition, self-esteem, relationship with peers, relationship with school staff, perception of school, student mobility and English language proficiency.

The work derives from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, NELS: 88, and its subsequent follow-ups. This quantitative study relied on regression analysis models to establish significance of variables and looked to explain the possibilities of future efforts in reform. Although this study does not employ qualitative methodology, the personal attributes were presented following Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Then the purpose of the study was partially to test Bronfenbrenner's theory that multiple variables along different levels of culture play a role in human decision making. Personal characteristics at the three levels identified by Bronfenbrenner, which are micro, meso and exosystems, were analyzed and divided and analyzed individually. The examination of these characteristics made it possible to identify factors contributing to dropping out of school. It was believed during the development of this project that if predictors were established at one particular level, then effective intervention methods could be analyzed and place our resources and efforts where children in our school need it most.

Findings

The results of this research piece were in some instances in line with prior research. We know that there exists certain conditions that place a child at-risk,

however, many research projects identify such at-risk factors as plainly a student's GPA or socioeconomic level (Barton, 2006). First focusing simply on GPA does not place the necessary approach on what children need to be successful and increasing student's GPA proves to be problematic particularly when most are unprepared for the most simply of tasks in school (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Balfanz, 2009). For this project socioeconomic status, or SES was not even analyzed as a predictive factor. Although the plethora of research indicates that this is the most indicative factor of academic success, there is little that can be feasibly done to correct the problem.

The results were somewhat unexpected to the researcher. Although there is a large amount of research that explains the Mexican American family dynamics it was never expected or presented as an expected outcome that the family component could be so telling of Mexican American student success. Three variables were isolated as having a relation to dropping out of school and leaving school to support the family was the second most indicative factor for a Mexican American student with a 54% variability for test subjects found on NELS:88. The remaining two variables included educational aspirations and English language proficiency. Together all three variables were isolated from a group of 32 independent variables as predictors for success, or lack of it. Running stepwise method of multiple linear regression allowed for the isolation of such variables in the Mexican American student population.

The Mexican American family

An analysis of the Mexican American families of entering kindergarteners who entered school during the 1998-1999 school year portrayed that only about 65% of Mexican American children were living in a dual-parental environment with both

biological parents in the household, this is problematic when considering that many of the remaining 45% were likely being raised by single mothers that are more likely to be raised in poverty and being negatively influenced in their development (Jencks, 1993). One of the variables found to be influential in a student's decision to dropout is the sense of loyalty to family and their need to leave school and enter the workforce to contribute to the economic well-being of the family.

Prior research has shown that Mexican American families have uniformly high aspirations for their children and in many instances are viewed as the hope for socioeconomic mobility for many families (Steinberg L. , 1996). Sadly not all parents have equal resources and skills to help their children realize these aspirations. Based on the findings of this research, those aspirations can in turn evolve into the student's choice to leave school. Findings of prior research suggest that Mexican American families lack the cultural and social capitals that are essential in supporting a child's academic achievement (Lareau, 1989). In line with the findings of this project, Mexican American families then although have high indexes of academic aspirations for their children lack the access to public resources that can push high academic standards for their children and accept nothing but success. From the findings, we can assume that somehow, a high school Mexican American teenager finds the decision to leave school and help support their families as an acceptable one and maybe even a noble one.

Parenting styles in Mexican American culture can be conducive to this rationale of logic in a teenager's schema. Mexican American parenting styles are classified as authoritative in nature with firm expectations and warm relations, however, Mexican American culture places inflexible boundaries unable to explore past the reach of the

family and its surroundings (Gandara, 1995). One of the findings of this project then shows that this parenting style does not foster the behaviors of autonomy in a society where such trait is not only valued but expected (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). Without a degree of autonomy teenagers may be pushed into taking a decision, dropping out of school, that otherwise might not have been taken.

Educational Aspirations

This research finds educational aspirations as telling of a child's status of high school completion. Three variables were tested for educational aspirations which included: aspirations to finish high school, having a sense of how far a student's education would go and finally having specific post-secondary plans. The latter has statistical significance and is correlated to a student's decision to leave school prematurely. A high degree of significance is found by stepwise regression approach in this project which leads to the identification of this variable as telling of high school success.

Students with clearly set, high and consistent aspiration are more likely to finish high school and attend college than those whom do not have such aspirations. In line with prior research, this research study finds the relationship between aspirations and success. Consequently, prior research has indicated that Latinos as a whole have lower rates of high aspirations and subsequently graduate and attend college at lower rates than other ethnic subgroups (Gandara, 1995). Revisiting the variables tested in this project shows that only those students with specific and clear post-secondary plans have higher rates of high school completion. What does this mean as interpreted by this project? To point out prior research compiled from the NELS: 88 database, a prior

endeavor found that close to 98% of Latino subgroup students hoped to go to college however only about 55% ever enroll in college showing an obvious disconnect between set goals and behaviors (Kao & Tienda, 1995).

The issue of what aspirations mean was not evaluated by this project, the only measurable variable tested in the final analysis of this project implied perceived specific plans of post-secondary advancement. However, according to other research projects this particular variable can prove to be significant only when we examine not just aspirations but clearly delineated goals. This can point out the reason on why just one of the three variables labeled as educational aspirations was significant. As previously pointed out the other variables included confidence in finishing high school and also hoping to go to college, neither was found to be statistically significant to the dependent variable. However the question for which significance was found was grouped in a question that asked about specific plans and not just hopes.

English proficiency

This research project has found language proficiency as a telling variable of high school completion. There is a widely believed perception that language differences can account for educational difficulties faced by many Mexican American students and this perception is somewhat validated by findings of this research piece. The big dilemma presented by the issue of proficiency focuses on our efforts to educate the English language learner and how the issue of fluency and exit from ELL status becomes the big target. The significant variable found by this project shows that if a child at any point in their educational journey was enrolled in an ESL program then they would be placed at-risk of dropping out of school. Policy efforts are placed on exiting students and

reclassification of status that somehow provides the confidence that children are being successful. Most resources are placed to find the one quick fix to language proficiency the panacea of language programs that will forever eliminate the need for ESL programs around the country.

The history of bilingual education may point out as to the effects of ESL programs on students. Bilingual education has been evolving throughout and many programs are being brought about as effective and proven to work. Much of what we see today is neither novel nor groundbreaking, for example immersion has been around since the colonial period and dual language instruction comes from the 1960's (Gomez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005). Therefore much of what we know today is an evolution of prior knowledge. There are three points that make bilingual education program most effective. First, an effective program needs to be additive in nature. Next, an effective bilingual program must effectively eliminate negative stigmatization of the English language learner before his peers. Finally an effective bilingual program must be able to produce in the standardized testing metric to show its efficiency to the general public.

An effective bilingual program cannot remove a student's identity by removing the first language of the student. This is why dual language instruction has been shown to perhaps help eliminate the negative effects of being an English language learner as shown by the statistical significance found on this research piece (Gomez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005). Many students are bullied and tormented at public schools due in part to their label as an English language learner. There exists some sense that the ELL or "Spanish" child is inferior until they have acquired proficiency (Gomez, Freeman, & Freeman, 2005). Therefore the detrimental effects can be delineated and understood

as why they can prove to have causative effects in dropout research such as this project.

Over the past few decades there has been much dropout research produced and therefore many different programs developed to tackle the problem. In 1990, with the move towards educational excellence under the George H.W. Bush presidential administration, the National Dropout Prevention Center began to analyze the overall programs and approaches utilized to prevent dropouts, the programs analyzed were closed to 400 different approaches. The center found that most if not all programs were ineffective at significantly reducing the dropout rate in the country. Then it is not a different program or intervention package that is either suggested or implied by this project.

However the reality continues to be that high school dropouts will be more likely to live in poverty, be unemployed or even be incarcerated (Bridgeland J. , 2006). They will also live in poor health, have a higher divorce rate and less likely to be successful and become productive citizens (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Balfanz, 2009). Keeping students in school then is imperative. According to reports by the alliance for excellent education, if all dropouts from 2009 would have graduated on time with their respective peers, this would have on average saved this country, already economically strapped, about 335 billion dollars (August & Shanahan, 2006). Policy makers are devoting much rhetoric to the issue and are finding common definitions to the problem and are ready to bring on tougher guidelines for underperforming schools (National Governors Association, 2005).

The preferred framework of analysis for this project comes from Social Ecological model of development and it was portrayed that the exosystem, which includes one setting in which the student is not an active participant as the most predictive of student's decision to drop out. It is our responsibility to protect children from what they cannot battle. It is indicative of this research that family is a strong determinant for Mexican American student's identity. There is a true and deep sense of loyalty and sense of commitment to family that permeates throughout Mexican American families (Vasquez, 1998; Gonzalez & Padilla, 1997). Mexican American students are largely driven by the external force that is the family. This provides a noted difference from competitive American culture where individualism is valued. This is what the analysis of variables for this project portrayed that due in part to their loyalty to family, Mexican American youth will leave school to seek employment and contribute the family and their economical composition. Understandably this country already provides a network of social aids in which low socioeconomic status families can benefit from social assistance. However, this does not seem to provide enough for some Mexican American families.

Recommendations to correct this problem stem from educating the Mexican American family about the impact of leaving school on their children. If parents are educated of the adverse effects that dropping out can have on children they may then be more reluctant to allow a child to drop out of school. Providing incentives for academic success and school completion can also aid in lowering the dropout rate for children in American schools. Bottom line is we cannot allow teenagers to be caught in a decision of having to leave school to provide for their families.

The 1960's brought by major changes to the civil rights and other liberties of minorities and culminated in many new rights and legislation. For decades, it was common to believe that bilinguals were losing out on thinking skills and that the fact of being bilingual was a disadvantage for students. These detrimental effects projected a bilingual student as inferior to their monolingual peers by measure of IQ tests (Baker, 2011). The research moving into the area of positive effects brought upon by bilingualism coming since the 1960's may serve as a proponent for bilingual education. The study carried out by Peal and Lambert shows the positive result in bilingualism and pointed to the fact that the test itself was flawed by not providing adequate settings for such learner (Baker, 2011).

To correct the dropout issue we need to also look at language education programs and evaluate their effectiveness it is truly telling to see that many Mexican American high school dropouts were at one point or another labeled as English language learners. Could it be that subtractive schooling provided for student disengagement and disinterest to the point of turning them away from school? Although it was not the intent of this project to find such connection, this can be further studied and more efficient programs developed.

Finally educational aspirations are instrumental in preparing high school students as found by this project. Educational aspirations are directly impacted by a student's academic performance. Mexican American students particularly are influence by three factors that shape their educational aspirations: academic performance, level of acculturation, and parental expectations (Ramos & Sanchez, 1995). To succeed in school students must have goals, both short and long term, and have a strong sense

that such goals are attainable (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). The higher the educational aspirations are for a Mexican American student, the higher the less likely they are to dropout.

Effective approaches to tackle this issue should then include effective methods of preparing high school students to look beyond their high school days from early in their tenure at the high school perhaps as early as the middle school. Targeting Mexican American students for programs of enrichment can be influential in their goal setting and this can produce effective strategies to correct the dropout concern.

Recommendations

In the current epoch of education we find ourselves citizens demand immediate corrections of societal problems that are measurable and produce definitive results. With the contemporary economic global crisis faced nations of wealth such as the United States are going back to the drawing board and figuring what went wrong. It is not infrequent to find the blame placed on the educational system. Eons of economic downturn in our country tend to be a causative factor in educational reform. With such brewing environment of policy rhetoric and in light of the impending election period in the coming year, Americans can bank on the idea that policy changes in education will be brought to the forefront. As presented in this piece dropout concerns are valid and a pressing issue in revamping our educational system. However, what, if anything, can be done to resolve the issue? Although this piece is not and should not be viewed as a transcendental piece that brings forth the needed changes, it is in line with prior research and continues to find the recurring shortcomings in educating the Mexican American citizenry. In our democratic society change is brought about by policy change

with begins with rhetoric. Stirring up rhetoric in positive change avenues can be beneficial to bring about change for disenfranchised groups such as Mexican Americans studied in this piece.

Changes in policy

College preparation and readiness curricula are not readily available for disenfranchised Mexican American youth (Johnston, 2000). Therefore Mexican American youth have a cloudy view of their choices and options beyond high school which as shown by this project places a student at-risk of dropping out of school. Embedding college access programs and bridge programs from as early as middle school can prove effective as a strategy for success. Programs are in place in some instances in which universities reach out to high school juniors and seniors in an effort to increase enrollment of minorities and extend educational opportunities. However many at-risk youth will not make their educational journey past the ninth grade which nullifies the true effects such programs can have. Policy needs to be drafted in which relevant outreach programs and curriculum is created in such a way that it not only places the goal of going to college in student's minds but it sets a clear path on how to attain such goals.

Many Mexican American youth will become first-generation college when and if they enroll in a post-secondary institution negating them the social capital necessary to be successful and attain a degree. Mexican American students will need to create networks of support from peers and school staff without such support the 'hopes' of going to college will not be realized to their potential. Policy needs to not only identify ninth grade in high school as a telling year of success, but enrich such year by recruiting

and retaining the most efficient faculty to serve this critical time period. School offerings and curriculum needs to be challenging and scaffold to provide for success which can be the motivational factor necessary for our goal of eliminating the dropout crisis. Our current legislators need to focus resources on making the ninth grade a successful year and the first year of college-level/readiness instruction that places emphasis on tracing the post-secondary experiences of students.

Family policy. Poverty seems to continue to be a pestilence amongst Mexican American families. Many youth are seen as the gateways to the American dream by their parents the realization of all their hard work. However due in part to socioeconomic status many of these same youth will dropout of school to become a bread winner for the household. Intergenerational poverty is not uncommon and the ills that come with such stigma continue to preclude educational success. The most significantly impactful independent variable analyzed in this project as causative for leaving school for a Mexican American teenager had to leave to support a family member as described in the previous chapter. The absurdity here is that the same sense of family loyalty and belonging that allows children to persevere in school may work against success of Mexican American youth. From the 115 Mexican American student respondents in NELS: 88 dropout component regarding parental attitudes towards their decision to dropout of school, over 35% answered that parents were indifferent to the decision. Literature shows otherwise, it shows that Mexican American families have high expectations and want their children to be successful (Obgu, 1978; Schmid, 2001). Then there is an obvious disconnect between success and aspirations and the avenue to attain such goals. Policy then needs to bridge this disconnect and

educate Mexican American parents about the importance of education and supplement the economical stature of needy families.

At the risk of placing democratic values in jeopardy, our social policy needs to be adjusted in such a way that Mexican American families in need do not see having their child dropout to support the family and have long-lasting effects. Currently we have education programs in such areas as criminal mischief and divorce which educate stakeholders to attempt to make positive choices. Policy rhetoric needs to focus on parental education and prevention programs. Due to the economic downturn this decade social service agencies have suffered as many governmental agencies from reduced funding. Stable funding needs to be obtained and provided that this occurs the economic uncertainty that many needy families encounter may not be predictive of student success. The economic consequences of dropping out have been pointed out in this piece as having devastating effects. President Barack Obama passed the ARRA funding act in which America was reinvesting in the future of the economy, similar policy efforts to reinvest in America's youth are imperative.

Limitations of study

Generalizability was never the intent of this project. By no means is a label placed that identifies the Mexican American population as a whole and there are specific reasons for this argument. First, generational differences occur in the Mexican American subgroup. Immigrant students or first generation will be much different than a third or fourth generation Mexican American student that has never been out of this country. Educational research is scarcely generalizable in nature, take the fact that this study did not separate students by geographical areas of the country, which due to the

organization of NELS: 88 is possible. Then to say that a child in the South Western part of the country is the same as a child in the North East would be an unfair estimation. The purpose of this project is truly a descriptive approach to understand the population dynamics of eighth grade cohort from 1988 and how understanding these dynamics may help educators service our current educational subjects.

Next the data set utilized is rather ancient in terms of research which provides an obvious shortcoming. This data set is prior to the standardized testing revolution that NCLB has placed on the educational system and also prior to the economic recession at the turn of the decade therefore the variables and their descriptions of variability may be entirely different from today's reality. Currently the NCES is undertaking a revision to the NELS: 88 study in their analysis of a new cohort under the umbrella NELS: 00 which will track students in a similar manner, these results are not currently available but forthcoming.

Another limitation of this study and one that was not anticipated in the planning phase was a gender organizational category. Obviously by the significant independent variables, particularly the family dynamics variable, analyzing the composition and comparing males v. females would be beneficial in understanding a Mexican American student dropout.

Future research

This is the beginning of what is anticipated to be an arduous battle to find significant variables to correct the issue of high school dropouts. For future research, more recent data sets need to be collected. I feel that anticipation of future research into family components of Mexican American students that have already dropped out is

necessary to understand the why of the variable. For this qualitative research methods will need to be employed. As previously mentioned generalizing and providing definite variables is not a feasible possibility in many instances of educational research. A mixed methods approach would prove to be beneficial to understand the issue.

Next, with current legislation against ESL instruction and proponents of English only laws in multiple states around the country, it would prove to be rather interesting to look at how such programs impact dropout figures longitudinally. There are a variety of approaches to ESL instruction that range from immersion to dual language instruction for future projects such programs could feasibly be matched to new datasets to examine new relations and predictive variables. Research-based programs such as AVID and GEAR-UP have been spurring up around the country with the intention of creating clear paths for college success for students, analyzing such cohorts would shed a brighter light in understanding the issue of dropouts.

Conclusions

In the design phase of this project looking at variables to prognosticate the decision of a Mexican American high school student to leave school having not received a diploma seemed rather linear with specific expectations set particularly from prior research. It seemed expected that prior results will have a great influence in analyzing this subsection of the population. Therefore GPA was expected to have a great influence on the data set, however, an unexpected variant such as family components proved to have the highest impact on a Mexican American student's decision to drop out. This provides an understanding of where efforts can be placed to correct the issue of high school dropouts.

The numbers certainly grab our undivided attention in the past 20 years 3,767,004 Mexican immigrants have secured legal resident status in the United States; 164,920 is the number of Mexican immigrants who came to the country in 2009; 111,630 is the number of Mexican immigrants that were granted United States citizenship in 2009 (U.S. Department of Immigration Statistics, 2010). These numbers go a long way in dictating future of American society. What is the story behind these numbers? Behind every one of these new Americans is a dream of hope an enduring payoff to their journey and the tribulations endured. Most of their hopes, just like that of the American way of life, rely on their children and their success.

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Vita

Oscar Rico was born in Cd. Juarez, Chihuahua (Mexico) and raised majorly in El Paso, Texas. The son of Oscar Mirano and Hortencia Rico, he went on to graduate from Jefferson High School in South El Paso. After high school, he pursued a bachelor's of Science degree in Microbiology and completed such degree in 2003. Oscar went on to enroll in the alternative teacher certification program and become a certified high school science teacher in 2004. While at the university he became intrigued with pedagogy and joined the college of education's instructional specialist of Science education in 2004. Currently he holds two Master of Education degrees obtained at the University of Texas at El Paso. Oscar went on to pursue a doctorate degree in Educational leadership in 2008 under the guidance of his mentor Dr. William Johnston. During his preparation as a doctoral student Oscar presented at two international conferences. First presenting his paper, "Many children left behind: Exclusionary practices of the public education system on Latino students," at the International Studies Association's annual conference in 2010. Followed by the presentation of his piece, "The Enemy Within: The Consequences of Educational Policy on the U.S./Mexico Border" presented at the Association of Borderland Scholars in 2010. Currently, his work continues to focus on Mexican Americans with the primary emphasis on the Mexican American dropout crisis and at looking to understand the issue in order to form possible interventions.

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