Personal, Family, and Curriculum Variables Among High School Dropouts with Mild Disabilities

By

Teresa Whitt

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Administration and Supervision of Special Education Programs.

Approved:
Diane Newkirt Gillespie, Chair

Mark Benson                James Hoerner
Cosby Rogers               Dick Salmon

April 1998
Blacksburg, Virginia
Personal, Family, and Curriculum Variables Among High School Dropouts with Mild Disabilities

By

Teresa Whitt

(Abstract)
The purpose of this study was to examine personal, family, and curriculum variables among high school dropouts with mild disabilities. The review of research literature on dropouts from general and special education assisted in the selection of the variables.

The outcome variable (high school dropouts with mild disabilities) and the relationship to the following variables: personal (age, attendance, gender, and ethnicity); family (parents' economic level, parents' educational level, and one vs. two-parent households) and curriculum (academic credits, vocational credits, support credits, and work experience credits) were examined. The research examined the relationship of selected variables to dropouts.

Dropout status among students with mild disabilities was found to be 29 percent. When age was examined, increased age was weakly associated with a higher likelihood of becoming a dropout. Increased absenteeism was moderately associated with a higher likelihood of dropping out. However, the strength of the relationship between gender and the dropout status was not significant across any of the three categories of mild disabilities.

The analysis of ethnicity found that African-Americans with learning disabilities were more likely to drop out. In addition, the drop out rates for Caucasian youth were statistically significantly lower than drop out rates for other groups. Higher economic level was associated with a lower likelihood of dropping out. Increased educational level and households with two parents were also associated with a lower likelihood of dropping out among students with learning disabilities or mental retardation.

The higher the number of credits, the lower the likelihood of dropping out. Dropouts took fewer credits which is not surprising since dropouts by nature have fewer credits.
Acknowledgments

The utmost appreciation and gratitude is expressed to the members of the dissertation committee for their effective assistance and guidance during the research process.

Dr. Phil Jones, former chair and advisor was instrumental in my decision to enter the doctoral program at Virginia Tech during the summer of 1992. He fully supported my decision to complete my internship at the U.S. Department of Education and was responsible for my placement in the Division of Innovation and Development. I missed his guidance and support during the remainder of the doctoral program.

Grateful acknowledgment is extended to Dr. Diane Gillespie, Chairperson and advisor for her encouragement and unwavering support and feedback during the dissertation process. Her support has meant a great deal. Appreciation is also expressed to other members of my committee: Dr. Mark Benson, who assisted with the first draft of the proposal; Dr. James Hoerner, who understands and shares my passion for job ready graduates; Dr. Cosby Rogers, whose teaching methodology has been an inspiration and Dr. Dick Salmon, who has been a supportive committee member since my qualifying exam. Above all I thank my committee for their assistance and support during the dissertation process.

Appreciation is also extended to the number of statisticians who were instrumental in preparing the data tape for analysis. Thanks to:

P. Abrams
B. Boling
D. Burton
L. Cross
B. Frary
J.R. Harvey
G. Kroll
B. Syder
K. Valdes
M. Wagner
Many thanks are extended to my friends for their moral support and assistance, especially Katleen who has been there for me during the entire graduate journey.

Finally, but not least, I express gratitude to Gabriel, whose exceptional patience, understanding, and support made this study a reality.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviations &amp; Acronyms</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE -- INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Drop Out Rates</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Drop Out Rates</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overview of Reform Efforts</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Database</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Limitations..........................................................52

CHAPTER FIVE -- SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS..........................................................54

Summary of the findings..........................................................54

Conclusions..........................................................59

Recommendations..........................................................61

REFERENCES..........................................................64

Appendix A -- Key Definitions..........................................................73

Appendix B -- Description of Credits..........................................................75

Appendix C -- Description of NLTS Sampling Procedure..........................................................78

Appendix D -- Method: NLTS Components and Data Collection Results, Wave 2..........................................................84

Appendix E -- Data Collection Questions & Collection Components..........................................................92

Appendix F -- T-tests & Chi Square..........................................................95

Appendix G -- Range of Variables..........................................................98
Appendix H -- Number, Mean and Standard Deviation of Selected Independent Variables ........................................... 100

Appendix I -- Frequencies of Selected Independent Variables .................................................. 101

Vita ........................................................................................................................................... 110
List of Tables

Table 1: The Economic Dependence on Society by Dropouts.................................................11

Table 2: Frequencies of "Other" Disabilities .........................................................32

Table 3: Wave 2 Database Organization.................................................................33

Table 4: Steps in the Formation of MDS.................................................................34

Table 5: Frequencies for Overall Group & Dropout Group......................................35

Table 6: Cumulative Frequency & Percentage of Dropouts by Grade......................42

Table 7: Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients....................................44

Table 8: Correlation between Dropouts and Personal Variables.............................44

Table 9: Correlation between Dropouts and Ethnicity...........................................46

Table 10: Correlation between Dropouts and Family Variables..............................48

Table 11: Correlation between Dropouts and Curriculum Variables.......................50

Table 12: Standardized Discriminant Function Coefficients..................................51
Table 25: The Number, Mean and Standard Deviation of Selected Independent Variables ........................................ 100

Table 26: Frequency of Age ............................................... 101

Table 27: Frequency of Absences ............................................... 101

Table 28: Frequency and Percentage of Gender ............................................... 102

Table 29: Frequency of Age Among Males. ............................................... 102

Table 30: Frequency of Age Among Females ............................................... 103

Table 31: Frequency of Ethnicity ............................................... 103

Table 32: Frequency of Economic Level ............................................... 104

Table 33: Frequency of Educational Level ............................................... 104

Table 34: One vs. Two-parent Households ............................................. 105

Table 35: Frequency of Curriculum Variables Relative to Total Curriculum ............................................... 106

Table 36: Frequency of Academic Credits ............................................... 107

Table 37: Frequency of Vocational Credits ............................................... 108

Table 38: Frequency of Support Credits ............................................... 108

Table 39: Frequency of Work Credits ............................................... 109
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CRS................................. Chilton Research Services
ED................................. Emotional Disturbance
ETS................................. Educational Testing Service
FERPA................................. Family Rights & Privacy Act
GED................................. General Equivalency Diploma
IDEA................................. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP................................. Individual Education Program
JTPA................................. Job Training Partnership Act
LD................................. Learning Disability
LEA................................. Local Education Agency
MDS................................. Mild Disability Study
MR................................. Mental Retardation
NCES................................. National Center for Education Statistics
NLS................................. National Longitudinal Survey
NLTS................................. National Longitudinal Transition Study
OSEP............................................ Office of Special Education Programs
QED.............................................. Quality Education Data
SES.............................................. Socio Economic Status
SOP.............................................. State Operated Programs
STWOA........................................ School-to-work Opportunities Act