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Daniel J. Rushton
*Concordia University - Portland*

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

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# The Perceived Needs of Teachers of At-Risk Students

Daniel J. Rushton

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Higher Education

Barbara Weschke, Ph.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Portland, Oregon

2017

**Abstract**

The objective of this dissertation was to determine the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students in regard to *strategy*-based professional development and *supports* for teachers to perform better within the classroom. Of secondary interest within this dissertation was whether differences exist between the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and the perceived needs of teachers of non-at-risk students. This was accomplished through a quantitative survey and data analysis that examined the perceived needs of teachers. Participants completed a survey in which they ranked their interest in specific *strategy*-based professional development and additional *supports*. The data was then analyzed using frequency statistics to determine the level of interest in the specific *strategies* and *supports*. A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was also performed to determine if differences existed in the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk students. The study concluded that teachers of at-risk students had specific interests in participating in *strategy*-based professional development as well as interest in each of the potential *supports* that were included in the survey. The *strategy*-based professional developments that were shown to have high interest (2/3 or 66% of the teacher showing an interest greater than neutral were decrease in class behavior issues, increasing student engagement, differentiation of learning, student motivation, working with student with mental health and personal issues, academic problems, working with special needs students, student critical thinking, varying grade level readiness, and behavior problems. The *supports* that were shown to have high interest (two-thirds or 66% of the teacher showing an interest greater than neutral were additional guidance counselors, social workers, positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), school psychologists, behavior specialists, in-home visits from school based teams, increased online educational offerings for students,

technology training, dedicated technology support, and increased access to technology hardware. Furthermore, findings found that there were significant differences ($p < .05$) in the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and the perceived needs of teachers of non-at-risk students. Significant differences were found in the areas of communication with staff regarding behavior issues ($p = .05$), interacting with students with mental health issues ($p = .005$), interacting with students of varying socioeconomic (SES) statuses ($p = .002$), student behaviors ($p = .026$), additional guidance counselors ($p = .034$), added social workers ($p = .000$), PBIS supports ($p = .043$), added school psychologist ($p = .007$), behavior specialists ($p = .047$), and in-home visits from school staff ($p = .000$). These findings suggest that differentiation should occur in the *strategy*-based professional development and the *supports* that are presented to teachers and schools based upon their at-risk or non-at-risk status.

## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful wife Melissa and my amazing parents Peter and Nancy. Mom and Dad you have instilled in me a strong desire to always be my best and always to strive and achieve my goals, and I thank you. Melissa, throughout this entire process you have provided me with the utmost support, love, and encouragement. I am so grateful that you are my wife. Thank you for absolutely everything you do for me.

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I would like to thank all of the people who took part in this research project. Without your time and interest this would not have been possible. I would also like to express my appreciation for the faculty and administration at all of the schools I have had the pleasure to work at during this process. You all took such an interest and were so supportive of my journey as a doctoral student that it made this journey that much more fulfilling.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

## Introduction to the Problem

In 1983, the A Nation At-Risk report exposed weaknesses within the American public education system (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report argued that the system was not globally competitive, while at the same time student performance was in a continual decline. A Nation At-Risk (1983) criticized the performance of the American public education system by presenting data regarding a decline in standardized test scores, a lack of strong results based curriculum, and a dearth of well-trained and prepared educators.

In addition to reporting the paucity of quality education occurring within American public schools, A Nation At-Risk also made many recommendations to improve the weak performance of the public education system. These recommendations included minimum requirements that should be fulfilled by high school students for graduation as well as the inclusion of rigorous standards-based education. Furthermore, to guarantee that enough time was allotted to ensure learning, longer school days and school years were encouraged (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s educational reform continued. Of high notability are the development of testing-based accountability systems and school grading systems that were established within Texas in the 1990's that other states later adopted (Heilig, Young, & Williams, 2011). These educational reforms, which focused on holding schools and districts accountable for the performance of students, formed the basis of the 2001, No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB), that was passed into law in 2002. Within this federal law mandating reform and accountability, provisions were made to help confirm the continued improvement of students. This is especially true for those students who can be considered to be at-risk or

disadvantaged to curb school failure and drop-out (Vesely, 2013). These reform mandates have continued and been extended through the signing of the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

As accountability demands continue to grow for schools and districts, the need to support at-risk students is of vital importance. Therefore, it is essential that efforts be made to improve the achievement of at-risk students. These improvements are not critical to ensure funding through a demonstration of positive outcomes based upon ESSA (2015), but instead to ensure the success of those students who will benefit the most from a strong education. This, however, may not be occurring within all schools and districts.

**Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

There are multiple characteristics with which to identify students who are at-risk. The most common characteristic to consider students to be classified as at risk is when they are in danger of failing academically. This measure is the common identifier for these students and can be seen at all levels of education (Peabody, 2011; Walker, Douglas, Stage, Scott, & Blum, 2005). In many instances, research has also shown that at-risk students tend to exhibit negative behaviors and increased challenges within social interactions (Newsome, 2005; Nunn & Parish, 1992; Smithey, 2012). These behaviors are thought to be contributing factors in the academic struggles this student population faces.

In addition to academic and behavioral issues that are found within the at-risk student population, other traits have also been found to be linked with the status of being at-risk. Children who are minorities, within low socioeconomic brackets, and those students who come from families who do not have a strong command of English can be or are considered to be at risk (Ormrod, 2008). The above-mentioned factors tend to increase the likelihood of at-risk

students' failure in school and the potential for dropping out. Nunn and Parrish (1992) found that at-risk students demonstrate traits that were highly distinctive from their non-at-risk peers. Their research demonstrated that students who are considered to be at-risk have differences in locus of control, self-concept, and learning style (Nunn & Parrish, 1992). In addition to these findings, Vesely, (2013) found that the strongest identifiable risk factor was whether or not a student resided within an urban area, followed closely by the rate of poverty. Minorities and those individuals who are considered impoverished tend to more commonly fall into the at-risk category (McGlynn, 2014; Swain, 2006).

Educating at-risk students is of vital importance to curb academic failures and potential increases in negative social behaviors (Corcoran, 1998; Davies & Peltz, 2012). Due to the increased likelihood of poor academic outcomes and increased engagement in activities such as drug abuse and sexual promiscuity, positive academic and social supports must be initiated to curb these occurrences and encourage transformation from negative to positive outcomes (Julian, Young, & Williams, 2012; Newsome, 2005). The primary manner in which at-risk students are identified is through education and the support systems that can be accessed through the educational system.

In many instances, it is teachers who first identify at-risk students. Educators provide much of the support needed by this population. Educators of at-risk students are immediately faced with challenges not commonly present in most classrooms. Commonalities among this population include increased levels of poverty, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse (Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Newsome, 2005). To be successful with at-risk students, teachers must approach this demographic in a manner that is different from more common educational methodologies.

Research has been conducted that identifies the traits, qualities, and approaches of successful teachers of at-risk students (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2011). Teachers of at-risk students build strong relationships with their students in a manner in which both the students' emotional and educational needs are intertwined. Educators of this population also believe that being more supportive of the students' basic needs is critical to student success (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2011).

Heilig et al., (2011) found that although NCLB and ESSA both place an emphasis upon improving the performance of at-risk students, many school administrators see at-risk students as risks to be managed rather than students who need extra support. For many administrators, at-risk students are perceived as threats to state awarded performance ratings. It is these perceptions that can allow a situation in which students are treated using risk management strategies rather than student improvement strategies. Voyles (2012) also found that administrator and teacher assumptions and perceptions regarding poverty and at-risk status can have a negative impact upon the relationships between parents/guardians and the school. These relationships are vital and must be strong to safeguard student success.

Further, findings have also demonstrated the importance of teacher perceptions and beliefs. Peabody (2011) found that the beliefs and perspectives of teachers who encourage the teaching modalities that will be used were vitally important in improving at-risk student performance on standardized tests. Those teachers who had positive outlooks toward their students created educational environments that were student centered. The student-centered environments in-turn helped improve academic outcomes. Teachers with negative feelings and attitudes toward their at-risk students created teacher-centric lessons, which did not foster academic gains for these students (Peabody, 2011).

Adding to the importance of educator insights are the findings of Hughes (2011). Hughes (2011) found that the perceptions of students and teachers in regard to the relationships that existed were significant predictors of performance. When teachers and students felt that a strong relationship existed, engagement and achievement increased in comparison to those students and teachers who did not exhibit strong relationships. Based upon these findings, as well as the need to find new methods in which to improve the performance of at-risk students, it is vital to delve further into teacher perceptions. In this instance, the perceptions that should be examined are the supports, services, and training that teachers perceive are essential to support them in their goals of improving at-risk student performance.

Due to the effect, strength, and importance that teacher and administrative perceptions have demonstrated in educating youth, findings from research that examined the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students may prove to be paramount (Heilig et al., 2011; Hughes, 2011; Peabody, 2011; Voyles, 2012). Bringing to light the resources and support systems teachers perceive are essential for educating at-risk students could provide potential answers to the question of how to achieve success with this challenging population. This in turn could support teachers in the prospect of transforming this population from demonstrating academically, behaviorally, and socially at-risk traits to expressing positive academic, behavioral, and social traits.

To provide the support teachers of at-risk students need, potential *supports* and *strategies* that may aid in the transitions in the outlook, mindset, and methods used should be examined. This will in turn improve the likelihood that progression toward becoming the most effective teachers for at-risk students occurring. This will thereby establish the movement of educators in a direction, leading students toward positive academic and/or behavioral

changes. These outcomes may be motivated by many potential intrinsic and extrinsic factors such as increased desire by teachers to support students and their improved knowledge and ability to do so. To understand the transitions, the intrinsic and extrinsic factors, and the supports required to positively accomplish the transitions, Schlossberg's Transition theory and 4 S System of Transition will be utilized as the conceptual framework of this study (Goodman Schlossberg, & Waters, 2006).

**Statement of the Problem**

It is currently not known what teachers of at-risk students perceive as *strategies* and *support*s needed to be more successful in helping at-risk students to exhibit positive behavioral and academic outcomes rather than negative outcomes. Due to this need, it may prove valuable to identify and examine these perceived needs. This examination may bring to light information that could support teachers in transitioning and growing into to becoming highly successful educators of at-risk students. This in turn will help to improve the quality of education and possibly the quality of life that at-risk students experience.

**Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this quantitative survey study was to determine what the needs of teachers of at-risk students are and if these needs differ from the teachers of students who are not at-risk. By investigating how best to support teachers of at-risk students by using the 4S Theory of Transition, it might be possible to recognize valuable *supports* and *strategies* that may provide educational benefits for at-risk populations. This examination may also help educators in seeking out the most advantageous manner to provide education to at-risk students based upon the teachers' perceptions. The 4S Theory of Transition could also be a more operative manner of framing and evolving better systems to provide professional development (PD) and training for

teachers (Goodman et al., 2006). The examination included survey research to determine teachers' (both teachers of at- risk and non-at-risk students) perceived needs, as well as a comparative analysis of students' socioeconomic status (free and reduced lunch/poverty level status) and academic performance data in the form of standardized test scores. The study then included a comparative analysis to determine if differences in perceived needs exist between teachers of at-risk and non-at-risk students.

**Research Questions**

Specifically, the following research questions based on Schlossberg's Transition theory (Goodman et al., 2006) guided this study:

RQ 1: What are the *supports* and *strategies*-teachers of K-12 at-risk students perceive as essential to be more effective teachers?

RQ 2: What differences exist in the *supports* and *strategies* of teachers of K-12 at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk K-12 students, based on teacher perceptions?

RQ 3: When understood, to what extent can these *supports* and *strategies* be viably fulfilled to support of the transition needs of teachers of K-12 at-risk.

**Hypothesis**

Hypothesis for RQ 2: There were statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk students.

Null Hypothesis for RQ 2: There were no statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk students.

**Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

This study has implications for both research and practice. Researchers may find this study valuable for potentially providing information on methods that support the education of at-

risk students that may not have been available to them before. Additionally, developing increased knowledge on the needs of teachers of at-risk students may allow district and school leaders to provide increased opportunities to enhance teachers' ability to successfully educate this student population. Understanding potential *supports* and *strategies* teachers of at-risk students perceive as valuable could lead to increased success for at-risk students. For administrators and teachers, the results of this study could demonstrate the relevance of teachers' perceptions of need in the areas of *supports* and *strategies* to improve the educational potential of at-risk students. Furthermore, this study may support school-district and building administrators in planning valuable professional development opportunities, as well as providing increased social, psychological and behavioral supports for their teachers based upon the perceived needs of those same teachers.

**Definition of Terms**

**4 s Theory of Transition:** Schlossberg's Transition theory (2006) is a developmental theory that is focused upon the transitions adults experience during their lives and the manners in which they progress and interact with those transitions (Goodman et al., 2006).

**At-risk students:** Can be defined as those students who are at greater risk of academic failure due a record of due to a variety of potentially limiting variables. These variables include underachievement, low socioeconomic status, and a history of behavioral issues (Slavin & Madden, 2004).

**Free and Reduced Lunch:** A federal program which provides meals at a reduced rate or that are free based upon family income. Eligibility for this program is-based upon Federal income poverty guidelines (Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, 2016).

**Low socioeconomic status:** Any student who receives or is eligible for free or reduced lunch falls under this category (Food and Nutrition Service, USDA, 2016).

**Self:** An aspect of the 4 s Theory of Transition that examines demographics of the affected individual along with their outlook, values and psychological resources (Goodman et al., 2006).

**Situation:** An aspect of the 4 s Theory of Transition that examines the critical features of the transition and the possible influence and significance the transition may have (Goodman et al., 2006).

**Strategies:** An aspect of the 4 s Theory of Transition that reflect the actions and manners of coping the individual will express (Goodman et al., 2006).

**Support:** An aspect of the 4 s Theory of Transition that refers to the various resources that are present in the life of the individual that may offer encouragement and benefit to the individual throughout the transition (Goodman et al., 2006).

**Assumption, Limitations, and Delimitations**

It was assumed that all the respondents were current classroom teachers. Additionally, it was also made implicit that all of the responding teachers sought to be successful in educating their students. Furthermore, it was assumed that the responding teachers were interested in actively improving their craft through participation in professional development and/or continuing education.

This study used a modified version of the Education Report on Teacher Needs Survey (American Psychological Association, 2006) and was accessed through Qualtrics (Appendix A.). There were, however, limitations that are inherent in survey studies (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2009). According to Dillman (2007), the following errors can occur with survey research: sampling,

non-response, coverage, and measurement. A sampling error occurs when some and not the entire sample returns the survey. A coverage error occurs when not everyone in the entire sample gets a chance to participate. A measurement error comes from poor questions. Additionally, participants may misunderstand questions or exaggerate their answers. To minimize the risk of sampling errors, the I attempted to provide respondents with an ample amount of time and multiple communication attempts through district email, encouraging survey participation. To minimize the likelihood of coverage errors, the entire district that was chosen to examine was included in the sampling. Furthermore, measurement errors were minimized by utilizing a survey that has been previously validated, as well as having ensured that prompts, descriptions, and directions utilized are as clearly written as possible.

The delimitations of this study included the chosen survey items. I chose each of the survey items for the ability of respondents to answer the research questions. The questions supported my ability to determine the *supports* and *strategies* that teachers of at-risk students believed will help to transform their students from demonstrating negative behavior and academic performance into demonstrating positive behavioral and academic outcomes. Other delimitations included the location from which the respondents are sampled. Only those educators who were in the specific school district within the southeastern state were sampled.

**Summary**

Educational reform is not a new phenomenon in the United States. At the heart of that reform is the quandary of how to better educate at-risk youth (Vesley, 2013). New ground needs to be explored in the arena of at-risk student education. Teachers of at-risk students have experience working with this population and understand the challenges facing the education system with regards to students. Moreover, these teachers may have perceived needs for

*supports* and *strategies* that may aid them in their endeavor to transform this population from demonstrating negative academic and behavioral outcomes to demonstrating positive academic and behavioral outcomes. Therefore, this study examined the perceived needs of teachers to determine potential *supports* and *strategies* that may prove vital in educating at-risk students. The study compared the perceived needs of both teachers of at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk students to determine if there is a difference in the needs of the two groups.

# Chapter 2: Review of Literature

## Introduction

This literature review will present research that examined various aspects of at-risk students and at-risk student education. Additionally, it will probe Schlossberg's transition theory (2006) and the manner in which this theory may be utilized to provide support for educators of at-risk students. The literature review will include a description of the conceptual framework based upon the *4s* theory (Goodman et al., 2006), an examination of research literature and methodological literature, a review of the methodological issues, a synthesis of the research findings, a critique of previous research, and a summary of the literature review.

Due to the many challenges that are presented to teachers of at-risk student populations, they potentially have different resources and support systems, needs, and wants. As the primary intervention in the struggle to improve and transform the at-risk student population, an examination of what these educators perceive is required for them to be successful may be highly valuable research. This research may prove valuable in the effort of improving not only these students' educational status, but also their lives.

## Conceptual Framework

To provide support for teachers of at-risk students, transitions in the outlook, mindset, and modalities utilized may improve the likelihood that growth toward becoming the most effective teachers for at-risk students can become a reality. This will predicate the movement of educators in a direction, leading students to achieve positive academic and/or behavioral improvements. These outcomes may be influenced by many potential intrinsic and extrinsic factors. To better understand these transitions, the intrinsic and extrinsic factors, and the supports required to positively accomplish the transitions, Schlossberg's transition theory (2006)

and 4 S system of transition was utilized as the conceptual framework of this study (Goodman et al., 2006).

Schlossberg's transition theory (2006) is a developmental theory that is focused upon the transitions adults experience during their lives and the manners in which they progress and interact with those transitions (Goodman et al., 2006). Goodman et al. (2006) stated the definition of transition as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). Transitions can therefore be described in one of three primary methods: anticipated transitions (predictable), unanticipated transitions (non-predictable), and non-event transitions (expecting, but not occurring) (Goodman et al., 2006).

When transition occurs, a process takes place within the individual, who allows for the integration of the transition into his or her daily life. This process can be described as having and being affected by four aspects. Each of these aspects will have a direct effect upon the individual's ability to manage the associated change. The four aspects (4 S System) are *situation, self, support,* and *strategies* (Goodman et al., 2006). The *situation* provides an examination of the critical features of the transition and the possible influence and significance the transition may have. The *self* examines the demographics of the affected individual along with his or her outlook, values and psychological resources. *Support* refers to the various resources that are present in the life of the individual who may offer encouragement and benefit to the individual throughout the transition. Finally, *strategies* can be seen as the actions and manners of coping that the individual will express (Goodman et al., 2006).

*Figure 1*. The individual transition process over time (McClaine, 2014).

By framing an examination of how best to provide supports to teachers of at-risk students utilizing the 4 S system, it may be possible to better recognize the effective methods and tools that may benefit at-risk populations. This examination may also aid educators in seeking out the most effective method to provide education to at-risk students based upon teachers' perceptions. Utilizing the 4 S system may also be an effective mode of framing and developing better systems to provide professional development (PD) and training for teachers. This may occur due to the characteristic reported differences that exist between at-risk and non-at-risk students, which include differences in behaviors, academics, motivation, and other traits (Casillas et al., 2012; Moore et al., 2016; Nunn & Parish, 1992; Ormrod, 2008). Accordingly, change from pre-existing mindsets and methodologies of teaching must occur to support students' potential positive academic outcomes. These teachers may transition to using new teaching methodologies to improve the probability of having students demonstrate positive academic outcomes.

The transition for which an educator must prepare is the meeting of the needs and requirements of the at-risks students he or she will be educating (Casillas, et al., 2012; Nunn & Parish, 1992; Ormrod, 2008). Due to the differing needs and requirements of at-risk students, there must be a mindset and methodological transition occurring within the teachers. These teachers need to transition to having a growth mindset and utilizing methods that are supportive of this student population. The students in question may exhibit potential issues and challenges for which the teacher must be prepared without preconceived ideas and notions that may negatively affect these students (Peabody, 2011). The teacher will enter the transition process in which the outcome of that transition will be determined by the teacher's *self*, *situation*, *support*, and *strategies*. Through the four aspects (4 S System), the teacher may exhibit and experience, differences in the outcomes for the students and teacher. These changes can occur within the students' and teachers' behavioral/educational outcomes, the potential learning that may occur, the roles experienced, as well as the academic, social, and behavioral perceptions of both the teachers and students (Goodman et al., 2006).

**Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature**

**Characteristics of at-risk students: Situation.** Educators are faced with a plethora of challenges within the classroom. One of the greatest challenges teachers face, due to the demands of teacher accountability, is improving the performance of at-risk students. The label of "at-risk" usually imparts the idea that the student is less likely than his or her counterparts to complete school successfully, thereby being more likely to drop out (Vesely, 2013). Slavin and Madden (2004) defined at-risk characteristics as "retention in grade level, poor attendance, behavioral problems, low socioeconomic status or poverty, violence, low achievement, substance

abuse and teenage pregnancy" (p. 148). At-risk students and youth may be given this label for a variety of reasons.

The following characteristics, either some or all, tend to be exhibited by academically at-risk students: a history of academic failure, older age in comparison to classmates, emotional and/or behavioral issues, more likely to interact with other underachieving students, lack of attachment towards school, and a lack of involvement in school (Ormrod, 2008). Additionally, those students in lower socioeconomic brackets, as well as minority students, tend to be considered at-risk more frequently than their peers (Buckner, 2012; Masten, Fiat, Labella, & Strack, 2015; Williams, Greenleaf, Albert, & Barnes, 2014). The potential cause for these students to be considered at-risk is the tendency of impoverished and minority students to display many other potential factors that increase the likelihood of at-risk status. "Associated risks included sociodemographic risk factors (e.g., single-parent households, low maternal education, unemployed parents) and adverse life experiences (e.g., child maltreatment, domestic violence, divorce, loss or separation from parents, incarcerated parent, foster care" (Masten et al., 2015, p. 316).

The challenges educators are presented with by at-risk populations occur due to the inherent differences in the behaviors, attitudes, and thought processes of students who are considered to be at-risk (Casillas, et al., 2012; Nunn & Parish, 1992; Ormrod, 2008). Students who are considered at-risk have demonstrated differences in motivation, self-regulation, and social control that can be predictive of student academic performance different from their non-at-risk counterparts (Casillas et al., 2012; Nunn & Parish, 1992; Ormrod, 2008). Additionally, these students may also have a record of negative academic and behavioral performance, which has placed them in danger of either late graduation or the risk of dropping out of school

altogether (Ormrod, 2008). Casillas et al., (2012) examined the psychosocial characteristics and standardized assessment performance of 4,660 middle-school students from 24 schools in 13 districts throughout the United States to determine if trends occurred. The students completed psychosocial factor evaluations (self-regulatory factors, social control, and multiple measures of motivation) and standardized achievement tests during the fall of 2006. This occurred when most of the students were in eighth grade. Cumulative GPA and graduation dates were then compared when the students had exited high school either through graduation or dropping out to determine if a relationship existed. The findings indicated that those students demonstrating positive measures of psychosocial factors had a positive relationship with high school outcomes, including grades and persistence (Casillas et al., 2012).

In many instances, students who are considered to be at-risk demonstrate negative academic and social outcomes early in their academic careers (Menzies & Lane, 2011). Based upon prior literature, Menzies and Lane (2011) suggested that early detection and intervention are preferred to the wait-and-see approach because it is more likely to result in better academic and social outcomes later in students' school careers. Therefore, students who establish early risk of academic failure should be monitored and provided with interventions as early as possible to improve their likelihood of academic success.

Wanzek, Roberts, and Al Otaiba, (2014) examined student responses during in-class instruction, teacher-reported problem behaviors and social skills, and the ability of these factors to predict overall academic performance. Academic performance was determined through end-of-year standardized reading tests of at-risk kindergarteners. Student response to teaching, teacher perceived social skills, and the amount of student-teacher interactions demonstrated a positive correlation with student performance. In contrast, problem behaviors presented a

negative correlation with student reading success. Each of these measures was considered to be a significant predictor of academic performance. These findings suggested that with teacher and administrative interventions with young at-risk students, is it possible to curb both academic and behavioral at-risk propensities, thereby supporting success in these students (Wanzek, Roberts, & Al Otaiba, 2014).

**Relationships.** Relationships of different natures have been demonstrated to have positive effects upon at-risk student behaviors and academic performance. Ayvazo and Aljadeff-Abergel (2014) examined the effects of positive peer reinforcement in at-risk students. They accomplished this by utilizing class wide peer tutoring (CWPT) as a method of supporting students who exhibit at-risk characteristics (Ayvazo & Aljadeff-Abergel, 2014). This strategy involved programmed interactions among peers to support on-task positive behaviors and positive academic outcomes through the use of peer tutoring. Ayvazo and Aljadeff-Abergel (2014) found that CWPT was highly successful in improving performance, both academically and behaviorally within 3rd- and 8th-grade physical education classes. Students in this study demonstrate improvements in both on-task positive behaviors and academic outcomes.

Class wide peer tutoring (CWPT) was used by educators to teach all students to tutor others and in turn creates an environment in which the roles of tutor and tutee are exchanged. Although this is an educational strategy that creates a student-centered environment, it is essential that teachers who choose to utilize this practice be trained appropriately to allow this method to be as effective as possible. Educators must be prepared to train students to utilize peer demonstrations, positive feedback, and error identification as central skills. By training students in the utilization of these skills, the students are better able to support their peers. Additionally, students are given written scoring rubrics and task sheets which define the criteria for success.

This methodology may also prove effective within core academic settings by providing students with the tools required to support and elevate each other's performance in the core subjects if teachers are properly trained.

In addition to the importance of positive peer-to-peer interaction being imperative to the success of at-risk students, student-to-teacher relationships have also demonstrated importance, as indicated in the literature. One method of strengthening student-teacher relationships has been the utilization of dialogue journals. These dialogue journals acted as diaries in which students record their troubles, feelings, challenges they feel are important and affecting their lives (Anderson, Nelson, Richardson, Webb, & Young, 2011). Those journals are then shared with the students' teacher. Due to the challenges of opening verbal dialogues between at-risk students and teachers, Anderson et al., (2011) found that dialogue journals allowed for improved relationship building between students and teachers. Anderson et al., (2011) observed and recorded the behavior of two students to determine whether their disruptive behaviors would decrease, and their desired positive behaviors would increase through the use of dialogue journals. These two students began dialogue journals with the given purpose of increasing the potential relationship between them and their teacher. The teacher utilized guided writing prompts and in turn responded to each of the students in their journals. Results showed that one student improved his positive behaviors (i.e. complying to teacher requests and initiated positive student-teacher conversations), and decreased his negative behaviors (i.e. arguing and refusing to comply to directions). Although the second student's positive behaviors increased to a certain degree, his response to the intervention was somewhat less consistent (Anderson et al., 20011). These increased positive interactions may have created student-teacher relationships that were considered to be caring and supportive by the students engaged in this research. Positive

relationships are thought to be major contributors to positive outcomes for students at risk for academic failure, social isolation, and school dropout (Anderson, et al., 2011).

By improving relationships between teachers and students there appears to be an increase in students' sense of belonging and a possible increase in personal motivation to succeed. Tillery, Varjas, Roach, Kuperminc, and Meyers, (2013) found that by examining current literature, academic and behavioral improvements occurred in at-risk students when strong relationships between students and teachers existed. Tillery et al., (2013) examined literature through the lenses of the Self-Determination theory, Social Capital theory, and Student-Teacher Attachment theory and remarked;

> Self-determination theory, social capital, and student-teacher attachment each emphasize the importance of strong, positive relationships with significant adults during adolescence, although each emphasizes different elements. In many respects, the theories are similar in that at their core they stress relationships that promote positive adjustment and positive adult connections. (p. 138)

These relationships existed when the adults helped to fill psychological needs of the students; educators provided and facilitated resources which were viewed as being supportive by students; and when teachers acted in emotionally close and nurturing manners (Tillery et al., 2013). Strong relationships with adults may supply these students with important tools for navigating school thereby creating the increased sense of belonging.

When the relationships between students and teachers are examined, measures of teacher-student relationship quality (TSRQ) predicted changes in children's engagement and achievement (Hughes, 2011). The basis for TSRQ was determined by drawing from the attachment theory, social support theory, and the self-system models of motivation theory

(Hughes, 2011). Hughes (2011) had 714 at-risk students and their teachers complete TSRQ reports to examine academic self-views, behavioral engagement, and achievement. The data gathered were then analyzed to determine if any predictors of performance and engagement existed. Hughes's (2011) findings suggested that student reports of TSRQ uniquely predicted school belonging, perceived academic competence, and math achievement. Teacher-reported measurements of TSRQ uniquely predicted behavioral engagement and child-perceived academic competence (Hughes, 2011). This offers strong support on the importance of developing preservice and in-service policies and interventions to assist teachers in building supportive, low-conflict relationships with students (Hughes, 2011).

Through further examination into the potential connections between positive student-adult relationships and declines in at-risk behaviors, student-parent, guardian relationships have also been found to support positive academic and behavioral growth in at-risk students. Cameron and Losike-Sedimo (2012) examined the effects of parent-supported reading (PSR) interventions on the academic performance of at-risk seventh-grade readers who failed end-of-year reading tests. Researchers had the adults of the PSR group attend two weekly courses that educated parents in the value of parental support for at-risk readers for a total of 36 hours (1.5 hours per session x two days per week x 12 weeks) within the workshop. During this time, parents were asked to monitor their child's reading homework for one hour per day for a total of 60 hours (1 hour/day x 5 days x 12 weeks) (Cameron & Losike-Sedimo, 2012). The researchers found that when parents participated in the workshops and then performed the reading interventions with their at-risk children, the PSR intervention group performed significantly better on their next year's end-of-year reading test than the students who were not part of the PSR group. Therefore, teacher as well as parent and guardian awareness of needs and

connections may be a key factor in school belonging and school success for at-risk adolescent students (Cameron & Losike-Sedimo, 2012).

**Teacher Characteristics.** Popp, Grant, & Stronge, (2011) researched the traits of those educators who were highly successful with at-risk students by examining two areas of teacher effectiveness: student-teacher relationships and teaching delivery practices. The delivery practices observed in the classrooms of these teachers were highly diverse in their utilization of methodologies and modalities. The educators observed demonstrated high levels of student engagement when teacher-directed strategies such as modeling and scaffolding were utilized. (Popp et al., 2011). Each of the teachers who was documented earned school, district, and/or state-granted awards for his or her classroom successes. Relationships between students and teachers were highly valued by the award-winning teachers because it was through those relationships, and an understanding of their students' needs, that long- and short-term planning were driven, assessment development and selection occurred, allowing educators the ability to directly interact with students to further ascertain their needs (Popp et al., 2011).

Peabody (2011) examined how opinions and beliefs of teachers regarding their students can affect performance on standardized tests. Four urban public schools in Florida were examined, two of which were considered high performing, and two considered as low performing. At each location, one tenth-grade English teacher was observed for five, 50-minute sessions (Peabody 2011). The observers were looking for emergent themes that could be linked among the teachers at the different locations (Peabody, 2011). Findings suggested that teachers who had positive opinions and perceptions regarding the potential and educational ability of their students tended to have the most student-centered learning occurring in their classrooms and in-turn their students demonstrated better performance on standardized tests. It is, therefore,

possible that overall academic performance may also be positively impacted through positive perceptions and student-centered classroom environments.

**Training and Professional Development.** Teachers of at-risk students face challenges based on the characteristics and make-up of their students who are different from teachers of non-at-risk students. Therefore, specialized education, training, and professional development (PD) may be considered as essential supports for teachers of at-risk students. Kraft and Blazar (2014) examined the effects of time-intensive, individualized coaching programs that focused on teaching methodology as well as classroom management in relation teachers' ability to work with at-risk student populations. The participating teachers took part in a 4-day training workshop and a minimum of three week-long intensive observation and feedback cycles throughout the school year. Coaches evaluated expectations of teacher growth. Teacher growth was determined by a rubric developed by the coaching program. In addition to the formal coaching cycles, teachers and coaches communicated every-to every-other week, regarding teacher progress (Kraft & Blazar, 2014). Teacher performance was then determined through an examination of the coach-teacher emails that described the teaching practices teachers were utilizing during that week. Coaching logs were also utilized. Within these logs, coaches identified the tools they were choosing to employ during that coaching cycle. These tools included direct feedback, lesson planning, adjusting of classroom management plans, collecting data, watching videos of the instruction, and reviewing action steps and classroom observation rubric data. Kraft and Blazar's (2014) findings suggested that it is critical to increase the training and education of teachers who work with at-risk populations. The need for dedicated, well-trained teachers is in growing demand in the field of alternative and correctional education as well as all schools in general (Henderson-Sparks, Paredes, & Gonzalez, 2002). Stairs (2008)

made similar statements including the need for special pre-service training to occur with those future teachers who may spend any part of their career within inner city schools.

As the number of students labeled at risk continues to rise within schools, it is essential to prepare teachers adequately to work with this student population (Vesely, 2013). Henderson-Sparks et al., (2002) described a teacher-training system in which teachers were specifically trained to work with at-risk students and support their positive academic and behavioral growth. In this program, 29 student-teachers, were assigned to schools were considered to be at-risk. Each student-teacher was assigned to two master teachers. The student-teachers engaged in teaching practices that were considered to be effective for teaching at-risk populations. In addition to teaching at-risk students, the student-teachers had to create an after-school program to support and enrich students. After training to work with at-risk students, the student-teachers reported feeling much better prepared to educate at-risk students than prior to the training program (Henderson-Sparks et al., 2002). Spear-Swerling (2010) agreed by stating, "the knowledge and skills required to effectively teach at-risk students are extensive, so even the best preservice preparation cannot address all of these competencies thoroughly" (p.7). This demonstrated the need for increased training and additional support for teachers of at-risk students due to the increased perception of preparation to work with at-risk student populations.

At-risk students are not only found within traditional educational institutions. In most cases, students within both correctional and alternative educational institutions can be considered at-risk due to many of their characteristics. These characteristics include a history of poor academic performance, increased number and severity of behavioral infractions, minority status, and low socioeconomic status (Booker & Mitchell, 2011). Booker and Mitchell (2011) suggested, due to the nature of the environment and the different levels of aggression, behavioral

disorders, learning deficits, and learning disabilities expressed within the alternative environment, teachers must be specifically trained to positively interact and manage these students.

Robertson (2015) remarked that those teachers who work with at-risk students require additional training above what a traditional education training program would include. This training should be within the areas of classroom management, crisis prevention and management, additional subject area learning, social skills education, and problem-solving education (Robertson, 2015). Educators who teach in alternative or correctional institution environments need the additional training due to the different environmental demands, as well as the differing student needs within these settings. Because of the potential benefits increased training may have for at-risk students in alternative and correction settings, it is possible this specific, additional training may also benefit the traditional school teacher who works with at-risk populations. This would allow the regular classroom teacher to have and provide additional supports for his or her students that would aid in creating positive academic, behavioral, and social changes within this population.

Although research has supported the need for proper training and continued PD for teachers of at-risk students (Booker & Mitchell, 2011; Henderson-Sparks et al., 2002; Kraft & Blazar, 2014; Robertson, 2015; Spear-Swerling, 2010; Vesely, 2013), the research on the types and value of the current training and PD may be conflicting. Kulinna, McCaughtry, Martin, and Cothran (2011) examined the relationship between inner-city students' knowledge of grade-level-appropriate physical education topics and PD. Researchers divided 30 physical education teachers into two groups. Group one received a single day of professional development in EPEC (Michigan's Exemplary Physical Education Curriculum), while group two engaged in multiple

PD sessions throughout the entire school year. Student performance was based upon the quality and completion of physical activity portfolios. Findings suggested that the students of group two, who engaged in year-long PD, demonstrated a greater knowledge of physical education topics than the students of the single PD session teachers (Kulinna et al., 2011).

In contrast to these findings, Dorhout (2011) examined budgetary expenditures in the areas of technology, instructional resources, and PD and their relationship to at-risk student performance on Texas's 11th grade mandated tests. Dorhout (2011) studied 3 years of budgetary expenditures in the areas of technology, instructional resources, and PD and their variations. The budgetary expenditures and 11th grade-student-passing rates on Texas course exit examinations in English Language Arts, mathematics, science, and social studies were the variables utilized (Dorhout, 2011). In the comparison between budgetary expenditures and performance, no relationship was found between performance and expenditures (Dorhout, 2011). These findings suggested that it is not whether or not PD is occurring, but that the content or topic of the PD is not appropriate for at-risk student needs. In order for the PD to be successful, the content must focus on the needs of the educators of these students. PD that is being offered to teachers of at-risk students should specifically focused upon the needs of this teaching population. These PD opportunities should provide them with the *supports* and *strategies* that aid them in successfully educating the at-risk population.

**Instructional Strategies.** Currently, strategies exist that aid teachers in promoting positive growth and academic and behavioral transformation in at-risk students. Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) is a framework in which interventions and supports are put into place to educate students regarding behavioral expectations (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013). The PBIS supports include, but are not limited to, effective rules and

expectations, effective instructional practices, reinforcing appropriate behavior, and effective practices for discouraging inappropriate behavior (Reinke et al., 2013). PBIS supports have become more commonplace in schools, identifying and supporting students who are at risk of school failure (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013; Walker, Cheney, Stage, & Blum, 2005). Walker et al., (2005) have written that early PBIS interventions through the use of discipline referral monitoring and screenings are essential to success with at-risk students as young as pre-school age and kindergarten. Walker et al., (2005) explained that it is essential to utilize monitoring practices and a proactive approach, to addressing student difficulties, for PBIS to be more effective.

Simonsen and Sugai (2013) examined the potential strategies provided by PBIS programs and how these PBIS strategies may be applied to alternative school settings. Simonsen and Sugai (2013) stated:

> The PBIS framework provides the systems and tools for establishing a continuum of evidence-based practices, regardless of whether the setting is a general or special education classroom in a public school; an elementary, middle, or high school; a lock-down correctional facility; or an alternative program for youth with particular academic and/or behavior support needs. The critical operational feature is a continuum of evidence-based practices that first considers what all youth need from all staff across all settings (tier 1), then intensifies these supports for groups of youth whose behaviors do not respond sufficiently for success (tier 2), and finally intensifies and individualizes further for youth who require highly individualized or personalized supports (tier 3). (p. 10)

At-risk, alternative-education students are more likely to be at-risk due to difficulty in behavior and negative behavioral choices. Simonsen and Sugai (2013) suggested that these students require additional supports and levels of support similar to those in a regular educational setting, but intensified to improve their decision-making process and decrease their at-risk behaviors. By increasing and intensifying the behavioral supports available for those students, at-risk behavior may decline and therefore academic improvements may occur (Simonsen & Sugai, 2013).

Another intervention found to have positive effects on at-risk youth are programs that occur outside of school. Schmidt, Shumow, and Kackar (2012) found that students engaged in community service were less likely to demonstrate at-risk behaviors than those students who did not participate. Schmidt et al., (2012) examined the relationships of the frequency of participation in community service and the likelihood of students being labeled as at-risk. The National Household Education Survey of 1999 was examined to determine if relationships between increased community services activities and decreased at-risk outcomes exist. Their findings suggested that at-risk students are much less likely to engage in community service activities (Schmidt et al., 2012). It is, therefore, possible that participation within these activities may decrease a student's likelihood of falling into the at-risk category (Schmidt et al., 2012). Additionally, Taylor et al., (2015) found that at-risk students who participated in work-based education (WBE) programs performed better and were more likely to graduate than those who did not take part in the work-based educational programs. Taylor et al., (2015) examined academic outcomes (teacher reported in-class engagement and performance) of at-risk students who participated in WBE. Seven students who were successfully engaged in WBE and had demonstrated positive academic changes were interviewed to determine why they exhibited such positive changes in perspective on education and learning (Taylor et al. 2015). Prior to

beginning the WBE programs, these students were reported as being disengaged from learning and the school environment. However, the interviews demonstrated that the students had a renewed interest in being successful within school, improvements in motivational factors, and goal setting and achievement (Taylor et al., 2015). It is thought that through the WBE programs students learned to be more self-motivated and have a greater sense of hope (Taylor et al., 2015).

Another potential strategy for teachers to improve their students' performance may be to have students engaged in an inclusive educational setting to be considered for placement within specialized instruction classrooms. Inclusive classrooms are educational settings that contain a heterogeneous mixture of students (Lastrapes, 2014). Within this setting, academically struggling students are given special accommodations to support their learning alongside the non-struggling learners (Lastrapes, 2014). Fuchs et al., (2015) examined the performance of low-achieving students to determine if inclusive or separate specialized education was more effective in improving performance on common core math (CCM) testing. Fuchs et al., (2015) chose 708 students to participate in the research. Over a 3-year period, the students were randomly assigned to a standard inclusion class for their math instruction or within a specialized setting for their instruction. These students were chosen because they performed below the 35th percentile on a broad-based calculations examination. The specialized intervention occurred with a class-size of two-to-four students per 30-35 minutes in an alternative setting. The instruction that occurred was considered more explicit, focusing less upon calculations and more so on interpretations of the mathematical results and reasoning behind the solutions. The treatment occurred for 12 weeks. Each year of the study the specialized instruction was modified and improved to more closely reflect the district curriculum (Fuchs et al., 2015). The findings suggested that those students who received specialized instruction performed better on CCM

tests than the students who took part in inclusive education (Fuchs et al., 2015). Therefore, it is possible that teachers may be supported by being able to educate at-risk students in smaller homogenous settings.

Schwartz, Schmitt, and Lose (2012) examined class-size adjustments as a potential strategy that can possibly support teachers and students through positive successful transition. Small-group settings of one-to-one (one teacher for every one student), one-to-two, one-to-three, and one-to-five were utilized to determine if significant performance outcome differences would occur among the different class-size groupings. Students within this study were randomly chosen for placement with the different groups and then received similar 30-minute lessons for ten weeks. Small-group conditions did not show significant differences in literacy pre-test/post-test performance. These tests included the six subtests within *An Observation Survey of Early Literacy Achievement* and the Slosson Oral Reading Test (Schwartz et al. 2012). Although no significant differences were found among the groups, a trend for performance to decline as group size increased should encourage the utilization of small-group learning in situations in which at-risk students are educated.

As educators transition from exhibiting traditional views of educating students to implementing alternative methods that may prove to be more successful in educating at-risk students, research as previously mentioned exists regarding the *self*, *support*, and *strategies* that may benefit these teachers. These benefits may be seen as the educators seek to successfully elevate and transform at-risk students from demonstrating negative behavioral, social, and academic outcomes to demonstrating positive ones. Therefore, it would be of value to examine the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students in order to examine the *support* and *strategies* that may support their transition as they advocate change and transformation in their students

from demonstrating negative behavioral and academic outcomes to presenting positive outcomes.

**Review of Methodological Issues**

To support the methodology for the research that was conducted in this study, an examination of research methodologies within the relevant literature was conducted. When literature pertaining to at-risk students and the manners to support at-risk student learning, mixed-methods-research was frequently used. Ayvazo and Aljadeff-Abergel (2014) utilized both qualitative and quantitative methodologies by comparing student opinions of CWPT with changes in performance in academic arenas. A similar methodology was used by Taylor et al., (2015) in examining the effects of work based employment (WBE) programs upon at-risk student academic performance. In both of these studies, findings suggested that the treatments were seen as benefiting the students through the qualitative student perception measure and the quantitative measures of academic performance.

Masten et al., (2015) also utilized a mixed-methods study while attempting to provide supports for educators who work with homeless students. Masten et al., (2015) utilized quantitative measures of academic performance as well as homelessness and impoverished status, and compared these measures with different qualitative measures of student resilience (positive academic outcomes). Landsman (2014) also examined qualitative and quantitative data that pertained to homelessness, assessing at-risk status, and student performance in a similar manner. Evidence in both studies underscored the importance of identification, assessment, administrative data, outreach, and communication to ensure that mandated educational rights of homeless children are met, and coordinating education across schools and systems to provide continuity of services and learning are important (Masten et al., 2015). By examining the subject

matter through a mixed-methods approach, the researchers were able to make appropriate comparisons and draw conclusions that could be linked to both the qualitative and quantitative data. These conclusions suggested that at-risk status can be linked with poverty and minority status dues the increased likelihood of these students to also demonstrate many other factors such as, single parent households, unemployed parents, and occurrences of domestic violence (Masten et al., 2015).

Hughes (2011) examined student and teacher perceptions of in-class relationships and how those perceptions related to different variables found to be essential for student success, utilizing a mixed-methods study. At-risk students and their teachers completed teacher-student relationship quality (TSRQ) reports to examine academic self-views, behavioral engagement, and achievement. Qualitative data were-gathered from teachers in the form of questionnaires. Within the questionnaires, teacher perceptions of student behavioral engagement were determined. Student data collected were both qualitative in the form of student interviews to determine their opinions on TSRQ, as well as quantitative in the form of standardized achievement test scores. Relationships between the data gathered and the factors that may be predicted from this information were then determined (Hughes, 2011). Student reports uniquely predicted school belonging, perceived academic competence, and math achievement. Teacher reports distinctively predicted behavioral engagement and child-perceived academic competence, when compared to quantitative measures of academic and behavioral engagement and performance (Hughes, 2011). By utilizing the mixed-methods approach, Hughes (2011) was able to take advantage of the complementary relationships found between the qualitative and quantitative data. Hughes (2011) was able to demonstrate with this research that both teacher

and student TSRQ data was able to predict student engagement, academic performance, and behavior.

Other mixed-methods research also has been performed to determine if demographic and behavioral differences exist between at-risk students and their not-at-risk counterparts. Nunn and Parish (1992) determined that significant differences exist between at-risk and not-at-risk students in the areas of locus of control, self-concept, and learning style. This was accomplished through the use of observations and interviews with the prospective at-risk students to collect rich qualitative data. These data were then compared to quantitative performance data that allowed relationships between specific student characteristics and at-risk qualities. Ormrod (2008) reported similar findings utilizing a similar methodology. In addition to demonstrating lower ratings of locus of control, self-concept, and learning style, Ormrod (2008) also reported that at-risk students tended to demonstrate a lack of psychological attachment toward school, as well as negative performance as indicated in quantitative measurements of academic outcomes. In both of these instances, the utilization of a mixed-methods approach allowed the researchers to draw valuable conclusions through the observation of at-risk student traits and then validate those observations with the use of quantitative performance data.

Variables were examined by Wanzek, Roberts, and Al Otaiba (2014) that may determine the effects of teacher interactions and perceptions students would have on the performance of students. Quantitative data collected included letter-naming screening measurements, which assesses students' ability to name letters, data from standardized reading skills tests, and observational data regarding the student opportunities for academic responding in class. Qualitative data gathered included the teachers' perceptions of student academic competence, social skills, and problem behaviors (Wanzek et al., 2014). Relationships were then determined

between the quantitative and qualitative measures. The findings within this research advised that students with more academic interactions with teachers were most likely to demonstrate positive social skills and exhibit fewer problem behaviors (Wanzek et al., 2014).

In contrast to the mixed-methods research performed in the area of at-risk student education, Schwartz et al., (2012) utilized a randomized quantitative research design to determine the effects of education class sizing had upon student performance. Groups of students were randomly chosen to determine if class sizes would influence the performance of at-risk reading students. While no significant differences were found between the performance of the different class size treatments, a trend was present that suggested the greater the size of the treatment group, the less academic improvements occurred (Schwartz et al., 2012). Due to the largest treatment group utilized was five students to one teacher, it may be possible that significant differences may be found when examining the variances between a 10-student class in comparison to a 20-student class. Fuchs et al., (2015) utilized a similar methodology in determining whether an inclusive class setting or specialized special-education class setting having teachers trained in special education specifically as well as smaller class sizes, would be more effective in instructing at-risk youth learning fractions for CCM test performance. In this study, findings of academic improvements occurring for the students who were educated in a specialized setting suggested that very low performing students can benefit from being instructed in a specialized environment rather than within an inclusive setting.

Although other research methods have been utilized in the study of at-risk students and their performance, the primary focus of this research was the perceptions of teachers. Additionally, there is a paucity of quantitative research performed in the area of at-risk student educational support. Therefore, survey research may prove to be invaluable in this critical

research area. By utilizing a quantitative survey method approach, it may be possible to determine what the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk may be. Using survey research, it may be feasible to recruit and query a larger sample of educators in comparison to the number of participants that may be acquired through the utilization of qualitative interview-based research. The quantitative survey research methodology may allow the researcher to draw clearer and more precise conclusions through the use of statistical data collected and analyzed regarding the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students, in comparison to the needs of their peers who do not work with at-risk students. By collecting quantifiable data regarding these perceptions and then statistically determining the greatest needs that may exist for this population of teachers, it may be possible to improve the *supports* and *strategies* for these educators in their attempt to improve the academic and behavioral performance of their at-risk students.

A quantitative survey research examination of the perceptions of teacher needs may prove invaluable in improving the manners in which at-risk students are educated. By investigating the perceived needs of a cross section of teachers, and the *support* and *strategies* they remark would enhance their ability to educate their students, it may be possible to determine improved methods of supporting educators in achieving their goals of positively transforming at-risk students into positive academic and behavior models. These data could then be compared to quantitative performance data that could determine at-risk status, thereby determining if distinct perceived needs exist between teachers of at-risk and non-at-risk students.

**Synthesis of Research and Findings**

When examining the research, aspects of situation, the *self*, *strategies* and *supports* can be found. Through an examination of the research, it is apparent there are many types of *supports* and *strategies* that have been examined with regards to supporting the transformation of

at-risk students from demonstrating poor behavioral and academic outcomes to performing up to their potential and expressing positive results (Schmidt et al., 2012; Simonsen & Sugai, 2013; Walker, Cheney, Stage, & Blum, 2005). Additionally, different aspects of the traits demonstrated in successful teachers of at-risk students have also been classified within the literature (Henderson-Sparks et al., 2002; Kraft & Blazar, 2014; Peabody 2011; Popp et al., 2011;Robertson, 2015; Vesely, 2013) . Research has also delved into the situation present within the subject of at-risk student education (Fuchs et al., 2015; Lastrapes, 2014; Reinke et al., 2013: Schwartz et al. 2012; Simonsen & Sugai, 2013; Taylor et al., 2015). This information can shed light upon the factors that set this population of students apart from their non-at-risk peers.

Within the research that encompasses supporting the needs of at-risk students through *supports* and *strategies* for teachers, a common thread can be found. This thread demonstrates that the at-risk student population has special needs beyond those of their non-at-risk peers. Lacour and Tissington (2011) remarked that most at-risk students are lacking in certain resources such as financial, emotional, mental, support systems, and the presence of positive relationships. Ormrod (2008) concurred with these statements, adding that these needs must be met to decrease the likelihood of these students dropping out. Moore et al., (2016) commented that because student risk factors can be identified at an early age, it may be possible to avert future negative outcomes. Additionally, schools can connect students to targeted resources and interventions that can help them improve in areas needing development and thus be less likely to drop out or delay graduation (Moore et al., 2016).

Another area the literature supports throughout is in the area of behavioral management within the at-risk population. Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) is a method of teaching students to exhibit appropriate behaviors and transform negative behaviors into positive

ones (Reinke et al., 2013). Simonsen et al., (2013) explained that PBIS is a highly effective system of behavioral supports, which has been successful with at-risk students. Therefore, to extend PBIS from traditional school at-risk students to alternative education at-risk students is a logical move. This idea is further supported by other works within the literature in support of the idea that at-risk students may demonstrate many negative behaviors and because of these negative behaviors they require additional supports to be successful within the school setting (Reinke et al., 2013; Simonsen & Sugai, 2013).

Commonalities also exist when examining training and professional-development (PD) needs of teachers of at-risk students. Throughout the examined research, there is unity with regard to teachers of at-risk students needing to be supported and trained to utilize different modalities and methodologies that will better address the needs of at-risk students. For example, Henderson-Sparks et al., (2002), Spear-Swerling, (2010), and Robertson (2015) all remarked that to interact positively and successfully in educating this student population, that additional and specific teacher training is a requirement. It should not be considered optional. What that specific training or PD should be, however, may be in question. The research of Kulinna et al's., (2011) research demonstrated that increases in specific standards-based PD improved the demonstration of subject-area knowledge in at-risk students. In contrast, Dorhout's (2011) research regarding expenditures on PD and at-risk student performance on standardized tests found that no relationship was present between the budgetary expenditures on PD and the performance of the students. This conflict may demonstrate a lack of understanding as to what types of training and/or PD should be utilized for teachers of at-risk students.

The concept of the *self* is the description of who will be involved in the transition. In this instance, the *self* describes traits of teachers of at-risk students who will be transitioning into

teachers who are better prepared to support the at-risk student population. The literature described similar qualities within a successful teacher of at-risk students. Positive relationships that begin with a supportive, caring teacher is paramount to reaching at-risk students (Donohoo, 2013; Hughes, 2011; Maye & Day, 2012; Peabody, 2011; Popp et al., 2011; Tillery et al, 2013). In addition to positive relationships being critical, the research is also clear in presenting the need for successful teachers of at-risk students to have positive attitudes in regard to their students' ability to succeed (Peabody, 2011; Popp et al., 2011). Furthermore, the successful teacher of at-risk students is able to bridge cultural, background, and socioeconomic differences with their students, to better achieve success (Maye & Day, 2012; Peabody, 2011).

The situation examined in this research was the characteristics of students who are considered to be at risk. Agreements as to the emotional, behavioral, socioeconomic, ethnic, and academic history of at-risk students are well documented (Buckner, 2012; Casillas et al., 2012; Landsman, 2015; Maten et al., 2015; Ormrod, 2008, Vesely, 2013). Poverty and ethnicity have been documented as important aspects of the at-risk student conundrum. Those students who are ethnic minorities and/or those students who live below the poverty line tend to fall into the category of at-risk students (Buckner, 2012; Landsman, 2015; Swain, 2006; Williams et al., 2014). Overall, at-risk student traits have been categorized within the literature by demonstrating the following: a history of academic failure, being older than classmates, emotional and behavioral problems, frequent interaction with low achieving peers, lack of psychological attachment to school, decreased involvement in schools as well as similar ethnic and socioeconomic traits (Casillas et al., 2012; Moore et al., 2016; Nunn & Parish, 1992; Ormrod, 2008; Vesely, 2013; Weingarten, 2010).

Differences occur within the literature when questions arise as to what supports and strategies are the most effective for teachers to utilize for their at-risk students. Fuchs et al., (2015) demonstrated that improvement in at-risk student performance can occur when those at-risk students are placed into a specialized setting. Schwartz et al., (2012) found that those at-risk students who were placed in smaller educational groupings improved their reading performance. Some research described the need for increases in adult relationships for at-risk students. Anderson et al., (2011) found this to be true when teachers utilized dialogue journals to build student-teacher relationships. Cameron and Losike-Sedimo (2012) found that by incorporating parental support in middle-school at-risk student reading interventions students, improved their performance on end-of-the-year reading exams. Other research supported need for at-risk students to become involved in activities outside of the classroom setting. Schmidt et al., (2012) found that the students who engaged in community service were less likely to demonstrate at-risk academic and behavioral traits than those students who did not participate in community service activities. Taylor et al., (2015) explained that at-risk students who engaged in Work Based Education (WBE) demonstrated renewed interest and performance within the academic setting.

It is clear from the research that at-risk students demonstrate differences from their non-at-risk peers and therefore have differing needs from their non-at-risk peers. It can also be said that because of those differences, teachers of at-risk students need to be trained differently, as well as to have additional training to successfully educate this struggling and challenging population. It is difficult, however, to state for certain how these teachers should be trained and what their needs are to transform the at-risk population from demonstrating negative academic and/or behavioral outcomes to demonstrating positive academic and/or behavioral outcomes.

**Critique of Previous Research**

The goal of this research was to determine what are the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students to best support their transition toward becoming successful at working with this population. A critique of current literature is included to determine if a need exists for an examination of this nature.

The literature reviewed has referred to the defining characteristics of at-risk students (Casillas et al., 2012; Moore et al., 2016; Nunn & Parish, 1992; Ormrod, 2008; Vesely, 2013). Throughout the literature, large sample sizes were utilized to accurately determine the traits and characteristics of at-risk students (Casillas et al., 2012; Moore et al., 2016; Nunn & Parish, 1992; Ormrod, 2008; Vesely, 2013). This literature demonstrates similar traits that can be found within the majority of at-risk students, allowing educators an increased likelihood of appropriately targeting these students with proper supports and services (Casillas et al., 2012; Moore et al., 2016; Nunn & Parish, 1992; Ormrod, 2008; Vesely, 2013). However, within this research, the focus of the investigation has been placed upon student traits rather than potential supports.

In addition to the examinations that described at-risk students, research has been performed that studied teacher perspectives of at-risk student academic potential, relationship quality between teachers and students, and how those perceptions and relationships affect student success (Hughes, 2011; Peabody, 2011; Wanzek et al., 2014). This research focused primarily on determining if relationships and the perceptions of teachers and students could predict the performance of at-risk students (Hughes, 2011; Peabody, 2011; Wanzek et al., 2014). While the research examined the perceptions that the students and teachers had regarding their relationships, there was no examination of the needs of the teachers that may encourage student success within the classroom.

Research has also been examined that examined the need for increased training for teachers of at-risk students (Ashcroft et al., 1998; Henderson-Sparks et al., 2002; Kulinna et al., 2011; Spear-Swerling, 2010). Within this research, additions were made to teacher training to support their working with at-risk students (Ashcroft et al., 1998; Henderson-Sparks et al., 2002; Kulinna et al., 2011; Spear-Swerling, 2010). While this research demonstrated that increased training was effective in improving teachers' ability to educate at-risk students, it did not thoroughly examine the perceptions or opinions regarding to the need for increased training and professional development.

Furthermore, research that examined different strategies that can be utilized to support at-risk student achievement (Ayvazo & Aljadeff-Abergel, 2014; Fuchs et al., 2015; Schwartz et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2015). Studies examined the effects of class size (Schwartz et al., 2012), class setting (inclusion vs. specialized education) (Fuchs et al., 2015), as well as different techniques that could be utilized to increase student-teacher relationships and engagement, including,class-wide peer tutoring (Ayvazo & Aljadeff-Abergel, 2014), the use of work-based education (Taylor et al., 2015), and the use of dialogue journals (Anderson et al., 2011). In each investigation, researchers attempted to determine if any of the included treatments supported improvements in at-risk student academic outcomes. However, in none of these investigations were the perceptions of the teachers examined to determine if they had needs beyond the possibilities presented within these research studies.

While this information is highly valuable in attaining the goal of successfully evaluating, targeting, and educating at-risk students, none of this research has examined the teacher-perceived needs. It may be possible through an examination of teacher perceived needs in educating at-risk students, that valuable information may be garnered above and outside the

scope of current research. Through these potentially valuable findings, it may be possible to support teachers more thoroughly in transforming at-risk students from demonstrating negative academic and behavioral outcomes into students who demonstrate positive academic and behavioral outcomes.

**Chapter 2 Summary**

The review of related literature and research consisted of five sections: 1) the conceptual framework of the research; 2) a review of research literature and methodological literature; 3) a review of methodological issues; 4) a synthesis; and 5) a critique of previous research. Within those five sections, the review of research literature and methodological literature examined five aspects of at-risk students and their education: 1) the characteristics of at-risk students; 2) relationships; 3) teacher characteristics; 4) training and professional development; and 5) instructional strategies.

This review of literature examined current literature through the lens of Schlossberg's Transition theory (2006) to understand how the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students may positively affect those teachers' ability to transform negative at-risk student behaviors and academic outcomes into positive behavioral and academic outcomes. Based upon this review, there is sufficient reason for supporting an investigation examining the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students may yield significant findings. Therefore, it is the claim of this author that the literature review has provided strong support for pursuing a research project to answer the following questions: What are the *supports* and *strategies*-teachers of K-12 at-risk students perceive as essential to support academic improvements and social transformation for their students through their own transition to be more effective teachers? How do these *supports* and *strategies* differ from the needs of teachers of K-12 non-at-risk students? When understood,

can these *supports* and *strategies* be viably fulfilled to determine if they are, in fact, supportive of the transition needs of teachers of K-12 at-risk students to aid the transformation demonstrating academic improvements and social transformation for their students?

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## Introduction to Chapter 3

This chapter explains the research design and procedures that were used during this study. In addition, the discussion will cover the methods for selecting subjects, data collection techniques, and tools that were used. As noted in Chapters 1 and 2, increased research in the area of the teachers' perceived needs for educating at-risk students may prove valuable in educating this population. The lens of Schlossberg's 4S transition theory (2006) was utilized within this quantitative research to support the potential needs of teachers of at-risk students in their transition to become successful educators of those students.

## Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this survey study was to determine what are the needs of teachers of at-risk students and if these needs differ from teachers of non-at-risk students. Through an investigation of the perceived needs of both teachers of at-risk students and non-at-risk students, it may prove possible to determine if a difference in needs exists between the two groups of teachers. This may help to determine the best ways in which to provide *supports* and *strategies* for teachers of at-risk students. By investigating how best to support to teachers of at-risk students using Schlossberg's transition theory (Goodman et al., 2006), it may be possible to recognize valuable *supports* and *strategies* that may provide educational benefits for at-risk populations. This examination may also help educators in seeking out the most advantageous manner to provide education to at-risk students, based upon the teachers' perceptions. Schlossberg's transition theory may also be a more operative manner of framing and evolving better systems to provide professional development (PD) and training for teachers (Goodman et al., 2006). This study used survey research to determine teachers' perceived needs, as well as a

perform a comparative analysis of students' socioeconomic status (free and reduced lunch/poverty level status). The study then made a comparative analysis to determine if differences in perceived needs exist between teachers of at-risk and non-at-risk students.

**Research Questions**

Specifically, the following research questions, based on Schlossberg's transition theory (Goodman et al., 2006), will guide the current study:

**Research Questions**

Specifically, the following research questions based on Schlossberg's Transition theory (Goodman et al., 2006) guided this study:

RQ 1: What are the *supports* and *strategies*-teachers of K-12 at-risk students perceive as essential to be more effective teachers?

RQ 2: What differences exist in the *supports* and *strategies* of teachers of K-12 at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk K-12 students, based on teacher perceptions?

RQ 3: When understood, to what extent can these *supports* and *strategies* be viably fulfilled to support of the transition needs of teachers of K-12 at-risk.

**Hypothesis**

Hypothesis for RQ 2: There were statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk students.

Null Hypothesis for RQ 2: There were no statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk students.

**Research Design**

The study performed was a quantitative survey design study. A survey design was used for quality, quantifiable data to be collected with relative ease because the researcher would not

need to be present when the items were completed. This study required the use of a large population and a survey design allows the use of large populations by not requiring interviews, which would be impractical. In addition to the survey data utilized, school at-risk status was determined, based upon a southeastern state's aggregated student socioeconomic status. Student socioeconomic status, based upon free-and-reduced lunch, was used to determine at-risk status to the predictive ability of poverty (Buckner, 2012; Gorski, 2013; Lacour & Tissington, 2011). Research has demonstrated that one of the strongest predictors of at-risk status is student socioeconomic status (Buckner, 2012; Gorski, 2013; Lacour & Tissington, 2011). Students' at-risk status and the survey results was gathered to determine the needs of teachers of at-risk students, as well as to create a comparison between the perceived needs of teachers of these students in comparison to teachers of non-at-risk students.

**Target Population, Sampling Method, and Related Procedures**

The target population was K-12 teachers within a southeastern state school district. The potential respondents for this study consisted of a convenience sample of teachers from a single school district within the southeastern state during the 2016-2017 school year. Appendix B displays the email that was sent to prospective participants. All of the teachers that work within schools of this district (approximately 4500) were asked to take part in the survey. A GPower statistical sample size calculation determined that at a power of 0.80, 102 participants was the minimum sample size required. There was a total of 331 participants, over three-times the minimum sample size required. All teachers in this study worked within a school district that is a combination of rural and suburban areas. The chosen school district has a greatly varying demographic makeup, including student ethnicity and an English Language Learner (ELL) population. In addition, the schools within this study were of highly varied socioeconomic

status. Although every school does have at-risk students, schools were labeled as being at-risk when they demonstrated a federal free-and-reduced lunch participation rate of 70%. The teachers who were sampled represented all of the pre-K-12 system within the chosen school district. An in-depth breakdown of the participants' positions (grade levels, subject area, experience) within the school district was reported by the researcher. Those respondents who participated accessed the survey via the Qualtrics website (Qualtrics, n.d.) and marked their responses.

**Instrumentation**

To appropriately determine the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students, a survey was utilized. This study used a modified version of the APA's Teacher Needs Survey (American Psychological Association, 2006), that was accessed through Qualtrics (See appendix A.). This survey was developed by the American Psychological Association to determine what the self-reported needs of teachers may be. To ensure reliability and validity, the APA Teacher Needs Survey was compared to a similar national level survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics that contained a sample of 63,000 respondents from throughout the nation (American Psychological Association, 2006). When comparisons of the representation were made, females were represented in greater numbers within the Teacher Needs Survey. Eighty-one point-one percent of the respondents were female in the Teacher Needs Survey in comparison to 75.2 percent in the National Center for Education Statistics Survey. Ethnicity, however, demonstrated equivalent representations (American Psychological Association, 2006). Additionally, public schools were represented more within the Teacher Needs Survey (94.6% vs. 86.2%) as well as an increased representation of inner-city schools (37.7% vs. 29.9%).

Additional open-ended questions were created to further assess the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students. These additional questions were developed to provide additional illumination into the potential *supports* and *strategies* that may aid teachers in their transition in becoming more effective teachers of at-risk students. The APA Teacher Needs Survey was further modified by the researcher to create a new survey (Perceptions of Needs Survey) to ensure that the questions that were posed were aligned to the research questions within this study. Questions were both removed, added, and rearranged to accomplish this. The questions which were removed from the APA Teacher Needs Survey included questions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 were all removed. These questions were all demographically based questions which gathered information that did not pertain to this research such as race and gender. A section was added to the survey which included four questions which examined the *support* needs of teachers regarding technology. Additionally, a section was added to the APA Teacher Needs Survey to exam *supports* that pertained to social and psychological aspects of student needs to examine these potential critical needs areas. Furthermore, the APA Teachers Needs Survey was rearranged from its initial organizational pattern. Originally, the APA Teacher Needs Survey was arranged in the following manner: introduction, classroom management, instructional skills, classroom diversity skills, communication with families and caregivers, and personal preparation. The Perception of Needs Survey was arranged in the following manner: job-related information, personal preparation, *strategy*-based professional development, social and psychological *supports* for students, and technological *support* needs. Job-related information and personal preparation came from questions with the introduction and the original questions regarding personal preparation. *Strategy*-based professional development questions mirrored the APA Teacher Needs Survey. The sections which contain social psychological, social, and

technological supports were crafted by the researcher based upon findings within the research to ensure that the research questions could be fully examined (Ayvazo & Aljadeff-Abergel, 2014; Fuchs et al., 2015; Schwartz et al., 2012; Taylor et al., 2015).

The information from teachers that was examined in this 60-question survey included: 1) job-related information; 2) personal preparation; 3) *strategy*-based training needs; 4) social and psychological *supports* for students and; 5) technological *support* needs.

The scoring of this survey included a variety of methods, including a 5-point Likert Scale for the need for *strategy*-based professional development in the areas of classroom management, instructional skills, classroom diversity, communication with families and caregivers. The respondents answered questions based upon their likeliness to attend *strategy*-based professional development and/or further training in these areas using the following choices: (1) not at all, (2) a little, (3) neutral, (4) somewhat, and (5) very. The segment regarding preparedness in those same areas was measured by a 4-point Likert Scale with the respondents describing how well their teacher training prepared them to work with at-risk students. The choices included the following; (1) none, (2) a little, (3) some, and (4) a lot.

The Education Report on Teacher Needs Survey (American Psychological Association, 2006) was not originally utilized with teachers of at-risk students specifically, but was utilized to determine generalized needs of educators from a sample spread throughout the United States (American Psychological Association, 2006). By creating additions and subtractions to the survey that focused on the needs (*strategies* and *supports*) of teachers of at-risk students this allowed the survey to be used for both teachers of at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk students. It was easily administered and scored. This survey provided useful data that may provide insight into the *supports* and *strategies* needed by teachers of at-risk students to be more

successful in educating this population. This survey provided a comparison with teachers of non-at-risk students to determine if differences exist in the perceived needs of these two groups.

**Independent and Dependent Variables**

The areas in question that became the dependent variables included the following: 1) training needs; 2) personal preparation; 3) social and psychological supports for students and; 4) technological support needs. The definitions of those facets are located within the Operationalization of Variables section of this chapter. The independent variable within this research included the status of teachers as being teachers of at-risk students or teachers of non-at-risk students.

**Operationalization of Variables**

Within this research, the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students were examined through the critical lens of Schlossberg's transition theory (2006). This was done because within Schlossberg's transition theory (2006) that *supports* and *strategies*, when be made available, can aid in the individuals transition. Furthermore, can the supports aid teachers in their transition to successfully educating at-risk students to demonstrate academic and behavioral improvements. The primary variables that were examined include the following: 1) job-related information; 2) personal preparation; 3) training needs; 4) social and psychological supports for students; 5) technological support needs. Within this section of the methodology chapter, each of these variables was made more specific; each was defined, and the manner in which each was measured was described.

**Dependent variable: Job-related information.** This dependent variable examined the basic information regarding their teaching positions. This data included the grade level taught, certification status, years as a teacher, and the manner the teacher received training and

certification requirements. These items were chosen because they act as the *situation* within Schlossberg's transition theory (2006) and help to provide a background for each subject. Each of these measurements was collected in a multiple-choice manner. The respondents were given multiple choices to select which was appropriate for the given question. For example, for the question regarding grade level taught, the respondents were given the range of potential grades that can be taught from pre-K-12.

**Dependent variable: Personal preparation.** ***Professional preparation*.** The professional-preparation variable examined teachers' perceptions regarding their preparation within the following areas: classroom management, instructional skills, classroom diversity, and communication with families and caregivers. These items were chosen because they act as the *situation* within Schlossberg's transition theory (2006) and help to provide a background for each subject. The teachers were asked how well their teacher-preparation program prepared them in the above areas. This variable was measured utilizing a 4-point Likert Scale. The respondents described how well their teacher training prepared them to work with at-risk students that included the following: 1) none, 2) a little, 3) some, and 4) a lot. A choice of "none" indicated the teachers had no preparation within the area; a choice of "a lot" indicated they were very well prepared within that facet of their training.

***Training needs*.** The next variable that was examined was the teachers' perceived need for additional training in a variety of different areas. Each of the training areas chosen act as a manner to provide teachers of at-risk students with strategies which aid in transition based on Schlossberg's transition theory (2006). These areas included classroom management, instructional skills, classroom diversity, and communication with students' families and caregivers. Classroom management can be seen as the day-to-day actions involved in ensuring

that a positive learning environment exists within a classroom. Instructional skills refer to the manners in which a teacher designs instruction in order to potentially reach all of his or her different students. The need for additional training to successfully interact with a wide variety of ethnicities, socioeconomic classes, special educational needs, gender/sexual preferences, preparedness, and immigrant status was assessed through classroom diversity queries. Lastly, communication with families and caregivers assessed teachers' needs for additional training in positive interactions with families and guardians of students regarding behavior, academic challenges, and positive aspects of the students. Each aspect of this variable was examined by using a 5-point Likert scale. Teachers were asked how likely they would be to attend professional development in each of the above areas. The scale included the following: 1) not at all, 2) a little, 3) neutral, 4) somewhat, and 5) very. A selection of "not at all" indicated that there was no chance that the teacher would attend professional development for that subject; a selection of "very" indicated that the teacher would attend that particular subject area professional development if it was offered.

**Dependent Variable: Social and psychological supports for students.** The social and psychological supports for the students' variable examined teachers' perceptions regarding the needs to have additional social and psychological supports for at-risk students. These items were chosen because they act as the *supports* within Schlossberg's transition theory (2006) and help to potentially aid in the transition of the subjects. These supports included school site-based social workers and school psychologists, guidance counselors, counseling sessions, PBIS systems, and home visits. The teachers were asked how much did they perceive the different items would benefit their students. The items within this variable were measured using a 5-point Likert scale. The scale included the following: 1) not at all, 2) a little, 3) neutral, 4) somewhat, and 5) very. A

choice of “not at all” denoted that there was no need for the support and it would have no benefit for students; a choice of “very” denoted that there was a great need to include that particular support for students and that it would be highly beneficial.

**Dependent variable: Technological support needs.** The technological support needs assessed teachers' perceptions regarding the need for increased levels of technological supports for both the teachers and the students. These items were chosen because they act as the supports within Schlossberg’s transition theory (2006) and help to potentially aid in the transition of the subjects. The *supports* included increased training in the usage of educational technology, the potential for a dedicated support person for educational technology, increases in online educational programs, and increases in the availability of educational technology such as computers and tablets. The teachers were asked how valuable the different items may be in supporting student success. The items within this variable were measured using a 5-point Likert Scale. The scale included 1) not at all, 2) a little, 3) neutral, 4) somewhat, and 5) very. A choice of “not at all” denoted that there was no need for the particular support and it would have no benefit for students; a choice of “very” would denote that there was a great need to include that particular support for students and that it would be highly beneficial in providing *strategies* for teachers.

## Data Collection

The data for the study were obtained through the administration of a combination of researcher-created survey questions and questions from the Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education Report on Teacher Needs Survey (American Psychological Association, 2006). Additionally, open-ended questions were presented for the respondents to elaborate upon the choices they made, as well as to add any information they believed was pertinent. The Report on

Teacher Needs Survey was designed to ask teachers about their needs to support learning within their classrooms (Appendix A). Topics addressed on the Teacher Needs Survey, as well as in this study, was as follows: 1) job-related information; 2) training needs; 3) communications with parents/caregivers; 4) potential professional development opportunities; 5) social and psychological supports for students; and 6) technological support needs.

All respondents were asked to answer the questions within the survey to the best of their ability, based upon their personal perceptions of need. Surveys were distributed via Qualtrics, and internet-based data collection website. The data collected were analyzed using IBM's SPSS software.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

Data collected from the survey were analyzed statistically to determine what were the strongest perceived needs for teachers of at-risk students. Frequency statistics were used to examine data collected, regarding the teacher demographics and job-related information. These data included but were not limited to, the number of years taught, the subject(s) taught, the at-risk status of the school etc. Statistical analysis of the survey questions included frequency statistics to determine what needs were perceived as most critical. Furthermore, a MANOVA test was performed to determine if a difference existed in the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students in comparison to teachers of non-at-risk students.

**Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design**

There are limitations that are inherent in survey studies (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2009). According to Dillman (2007), the following errors can occur with survey research: sampling, non-response, coverage, and measurement. A sampling error occurs when some and not the entire sample returns the survey. A coverage error occurs when not everyone in the entire

sample gets a chance to participate. Measurement error can occur due to poorly crafted questions. In addition, participants may misunderstand questions or exaggerate their answers (Dillman, 2007).

To minimize the risk of sampling errors, I attempted to provide respondents with an ample amount of time (eight weeks) and multiple communication attempts through district email encouraging survey participation. The likelihood of coverage errors was minimized by including the entire district that was chosen to examine in the sampling. Measurement errors were minimized by utilizing a survey that has been previously validated (American Psychological Association, 2006). Furthermore, all efforts were made to ensure that prompts, descriptions, and directions utilized are as clearly written as possible, as well as ensuring the researcher created questions were written with the same quality as the rest of the survey.

The delimitations of this study included the chosen survey items. Each of the survey items was chosen for the ability for respondents to answer the research questions. The questions supported the ability of the researcher to determine the *supports* and *strategies* that teachers of at-risk student believed will help to transform their students from demonstrating negative behavioral and academic performance into demonstrating positive behavioral and academic outcomes. Additionally, questions were removed from the Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education Report on Teacher Needs Survey (American Psychological Association, 2006) that were not believed to be helpful in answering the research questions. In addition to removing some questions, the researcher added questions to the survey that delved in the areas of social and technology based *supports* and *strategies* to ensure all potential areas of need were covered. Other delimitations included the specific location from which the respondents are sampled. Only those educators who were in the specific school district within the southeastern state were

sampled thus delimiting the survey to that particular school district. Due to this the information gathered within this research may only prove transferable to other school districts with demonstrate traits similar to the chosen district.

**Internal and External Validity**

To ensure the internal validity of the survey that was utilized, portions of the survey were based on the Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education Report on Teacher Needs Survey that has been validated previously (American Psychological Association, 2006). All efforts were made in creating the added questions to maintain that the quality and standards that were found in the original survey. However, because there were changes made to the original instrument changes may have been produced in the outcomes (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Due to the length of the survey and the time during the school year in which the survey was released, it is possible that those subjects which completed the survey were more motivated to learn and improve to better serve their students thus skewing the results. A final counter to the potential threats to internal validity was that the presentation and administration of the survey strictly adhered to guidelines and instructions received from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Concordia University.

External validity within this research was supported by multiple factors within the research methodology. The power (0.80) and sample size (n=329) were very high for this study. GPower statistical software was used to determine minimum sample size. This was calculated to be n=102. The final sample size was over three times this amount. This research was conducted by examining the perceived needs of teachers and then comparing the needs of teachers of at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk students. At-risk students exist throughout the country and within all types of schools and school districts (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). These students tend

to demonstrate similar traits regardless of their locale (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). The research conducted within this study should be able to be generalized for any teacher who educates at-risk students. There was an attempt to have teachers who teach in all grade levels within the public-school system represented within the sample selection to be chosen. Furthermore, the survey in which teachers of at-risk students were asked to participate had teachers of non-at-risk students as respondents. This determined if there was a difference in the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk and non-at-risk students.

**Expected Findings**

It was expected that new knowledge was obtained from this research study. It was believed that these teachers will seek to increase their skills in classroom management and increasing engagement within the classroom. This may have occurred due to the need for improving student in-class behavior to improve in-class learning. Furthermore, it was believed that there were significant differences between the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk and teachers of non-at-risk students due to the differences that are expressed in each of these groups in terms of socioeconomic status (SES), familial situations, and outside challenges.

**Ethical Issues**

The likelihood of ethical issues arising from this research was minimal. The research design was created to ensure that the participants remained as anonymous as possible and confidentiality was maintained. However, some data that were collected could possibly identify the participants. These data included the name of the school where the respondents taught and the number of years that they have taught. However, only the author, as the principal investigator, has knowledge of these data. Additionally, the data regarding school assignment was not reported on specifically, as no mention of specific school sites was utilized. It was

instead utilized to categorize the individual as a teacher of at-risk or non-at-risk students by determining their individual school's federal free-and-reduced lunch participant count. Additionally, due to only the number of years of service rather than school assignment being reported formally, individual teachers were not identifiable. Furthermore, no deception of any kind was utilized within this research and therefore no debriefing was included. However, informed consent was included within the online format of the survey. Moreover, all efforts were made to ensure participant identities and information remain confidential. This included storage of all data collected on from the surveys on Qualtrics servers and disaggregated data being stored on a secure Microsoft OneDrive of which only the researcher had access to.

Researcher bias may also influence the perceptions of the researcher. As an academic coach at a school that is considered to be at-risk within this school district, I realize that my experiences could have affected the analysis and reporting of data collected. However, because this examination looked at schools from the entire district and only examined school sites for their federal free-and-reduced lunch program participant data, none of the results gathered could direct me toward information that was gathered from teachers within my work site.

**Chapter 3 Summary**

This study sought the perceptions of K-12 teachers of at-risk students and non-at-risk students with regards to any *supports* and *strategies* they may perceive that will aid them in their effort to improve the education of their students. Using Schlossberg's 4s Transition theory (Goodman et al., 2006), the author sought to determine if, by examining the perceived needs of teachers, it was possible to provide improved *supports* and *strategies* for teachers of at-risk students as they sought to transition into educators better able to support at-risk students in the

transformation from demonstrating negative behavioral and academic outcomes to demonstrating positive ones.

The Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education Report on Teacher Needs Survey (American Psychological Association, 2006), with additional questions added by the researcher, served to measure the perceived needs of the respondent teachers (American Psychological Association, 2006). The instrument was considered appropriate, normed, and valid. Statistical analyses of the survey question responses included frequency statistics to determine the ranking of the perceived needs. A MANOVA test was performed to determine if a difference existed in the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students in comparison to teachers of non-at-risk students. The researcher expected the data to demonstrate that teachers of at-risk students would seek increased *supports* within the area of student social and emotional well-being as well as *strategies* in the area of classroom management. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated a difference between the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk and non-at-risk students.

# Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

## Introduction

This chapter contains findings obtained through statistical analysis of the data collected from the Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education Report on Teacher Needs Survey (American Psychological Association, 2006), with additional questions added by the researcher. An overview of methodological aspects of the study will be presented, along with the general sample characteristics, information regarding the instrument that was utilized, and a description the statistical analyses that were used. Additionally, the analyses of the data pertaining to the research question of interest will be presented.

The research that was conducted was a quantitative survey study. In addition to the survey data (teacher needs) that was collected and analyzed, school at-risk status was determined using a southeastern state's aggregated student socioeconomic status. Student socioeconomic status, based upon free and reduced lunch, was utilized due to the predictive ability of poverty (Buckner, 2012; Gorski, 2013; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Rathbun & McFarland, 2017). Research has demonstrated that one of the strongest predictors of at-risk status is student socioeconomic status (Buckner, 2012; Gorski, 2013; Lacour & Tissington, 2011; Rathbun & McFarland, 2017). Students' at-risk status and the survey results were gathered and analyzed to determine the needs of teachers of at-risk students, as well as to create a comparison between the perceived needs of teachers of these students compared to teachers of non-at-risk students. Analyses were performed utilizing IBM's SPSS statistical analysis software. Frequency statistics were performed to determine the needs of teachers. A MANOVA was then conducted to determine if differences existed in the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students compared to teachers of non-at-risk students.

## Description of Sample

The target population of this research was pre-K-12 teachers within a southeastern state school district. The respondents for this study consisted of a convenience sample of teachers from a single school district within the southeastern state during the 2016-2017 school year. The respondent pool consisted of approximately 4500 teachers. Utilizing GPower statistical software, adequate sample size at a power of 0.80 was determined to be 102. Of the 4500 teachers who were contacted, 440 completed in the survey. Of the 440 surveys that were collected, 329 surveys were chosen for analysis. This is over three-times the sample size recommended by the GPower calculation. The 111 surveys that were not used were set aside because they were incomplete and considered invalid. As a result, the responding population was 7.3%, or 329 of the 4500 surveys that were sent. This is over three-times the sample size recommended by the GPower calculation. The survey results were disaggregated and analyzed based upon at-risk status, which was set at 70% of a school's student population or more taking part in the federal government's free- and reduced-lunch programs.

All teachers in this study worked within a school district that is a combination of rural and suburban areas. The teachers who were sampled came from the entire pre-K-12 system within the chosen school district. An in-depth disaggregation of the participants' demographics (levels taught, certification status, and preparation program) within the school district is reported in Tables 1-3 for teachers of at-risk students and Table 4-6 for teachers of non-at-risk students.

Table 1

*Grade Levels Taught by Teachers of At-Risk Students*

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Mixed | 6 | 3.2 | 3.2 | 3.2 |
| | Pre-K | 9 | 4.8 | 4.8 | 8.1 |
| | Middle Grades | 33 | 17.7 | 17.7 | 25.8 |
| | High School | 37 | 19.9 | 19.9 | 45.7 |
| | Elementary | 101 | 54.3 | 54.3 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 186 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 2

*Certification Status of Teachers of At-Risk Students*

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Not yet licensed/certified | 1 | .5 | .5 | .5 |
| | Temporary License/Certification | 12 | 6.5 | 6.5 | 7.0 |
| | Licensed/certified up to four years or less | 33 | 17.7 | 17.7 | 24.7 |
| | Licensed/certified for more than 15 years | 61 | 32.8 | 32.8 | 57.5 |
| | Licensed/certified for five to 15 years' experience | 79 | 42.5 | 42.5 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 186 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 3

*Preparation Programs of Teachers of At-Risk Students*

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | As part of a master's degree program | 31 | 16.7 | 16.7 | 16.7 |
| | As part of an alternative route to certification | 36 | 19.4 | 19.4 | 36.0 |
| | As part of a bachelor's degree program | 119 | 64.0 | 64.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 186 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 4

*Grade Levels Taught by Teachers of Non-At-Risk Students*

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Pre-K | 3 | 2.1 | 2.1 | 2.1 |
| | Mixed | 5 | 3.5 | 3.5 | 5.6 |
| | Middle Grades | 23 | 16.1 | 16.1 | 21.7 |
| | High School | 55 | 38.5 | 38.5 | 60.1 |
| | Elementary | 57 | 39.9 | 39.9 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 143 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 5

*Certification Status of Teachers of Non-At Risk Students*

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | Temporary License/Certification | 17 | 11.9 | 11.9 | 11.9 |
| | Licensed/certified up to four years or less | 24 | 16.8 | 16.8 | 28.7 |
| | Licensed/certified for more than 15 years | 44 | 30.8 | 30.8 | 59.4 |
| | Licensed/certified for five to 15 years | 58 | 40.6 | 40.6 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 143 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Table 6

*Preparation Programs of Teachers of Non-At-Risk Students*

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | As part of a master's degree program | 23 | 16.1 | 16.1 | 16.1 |
| | As part of an alternative route to certification | 37 | 25.9 | 25.9 | 42.0 |
| | As part of a bachelor's degree program | 83 | 58.0 | 58.0 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 143 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

There were more respondents from the schools that were considered at-risk than non-at-risk; 57% of the total respondents were teachers of at-risk students in comparison to 43% of the total respondents being teachers of non-at-risk students. Of the respondents who were teachers of at-risk students 54.3% were elementary school teachers in comparison to 39.9% of the teachers of non-at-risk students from elementary schools. In contrast, only 19.9% of the teachers

of at-risk students taught high school in comparison to 38.5% of the teachers of non-at-risk students who taught high school.

When teacher licensure and certification data were examined, the findings were similar for both teachers of at-risk and non-at-risk students. Most respondents (75.3% teachers of at-risk students, 71.4% teachers of non-at-risk students) had been professionally licensed to teach for more than 5 years. The temporary licensure among teachers of at-risk students was approximately half (6.5%) of that of the teachers of non-at-risk students (11.9%). Furthermore, only one teacher was not yet licensed and that respondent was a teacher of at-risk students.

Based upon the data collected, teachers of at-risk students were prepared in manners similar to the teachers of-non-at-risk students. Both groups had a similar number of respondents who were trained to be teachers through a master's degree program (16.7% teachers of at-risk students vs. 16.1% teachers of non-at-risk students). A smaller percentage of teachers of at-risk students (19.4%) were trained through alternative routes to certification than teachers of non-at-risk students (25.9%). Furthermore, the majority of teachers in both groups were trained to be teachers through bachelor degree programs (64% teachers of at-risk students vs. 58% teachers of non-at-risk students).

The respondents were also asked what further training they would have liked to have had as part of their teacher preparation courses. This question was posed in the form of an open-ended question. The teachers of at-risk students most commonly responded with increased training in the area of classroom management and in-class discipline. Two respondents' responses to these questions were: "Behavior and defiance issues" and "Classroom management." This group also remarked that they would have benefited from more in-class experience and the ability to work with students more prior to the completion of their teaching

programs. One respondent remarked" More in classroom experience, being a part of the entire year and not just parts of it. I missed the beginning of the year and the end of year instruction time due to the program I attended." Additionally, this group of teachers believed they would have benefited from a more realistic view of the teaching profession. One respondent stated "Less elaborate lesson planning more real-life experiences and daily obstacles - what will you do if a child tells you he was abused last night/ his father went to jail last night/ they haven't eaten in two days." Another teacher expressed "Parent Conferences, emails, staff meetings, the nitty gritty of paperwork. The prep in college was lesson plans and classroom observations. It left out all the 'real work'." Finally, this group would have liked the chance to work with the different curriculums that they were planning to teach to increase familiarity. "Up to date [*sic*] curriculum modules training. Not after your thrown into it by surprise" was one response for this area.

Of great interest are the similarities that were found within the data between the two groups of teachers. As with the teachers of at-risk students, the teachers of non-at-risk students believed that increased training in the realm of discipline and classroom management would have had a positive impact on their educational and professional experience. One respondent demonstrated his/her interest in increase learning regard discipline by stating "Discipline & Positive Behavior [*sic*]supports." This group also believed that they would have gained positive benefits from spending more time within classrooms and working directly with students while they were receiving their education. One teacher commented that he/she would have been interested in "Teaching in a regular classroom (not honors) with a mix of above average students, students that take longer to learn and students with IEP's." The final area that many of the teachers of non-at-risk students wanted to be part of their educational program was more learning regarding how to create and initiate differentiation strategies. One teacher remarked that he/she

would have liked to have support for developing differentiated practice and gradual release models.

**Summary of the Results**

According to Dillman (2007), errors can occur with survey research in the following areas: sampling, coverage, and measurement. A sampling error occurs when not the entire sample returns the survey. This occurred within this research survey. Only 7.3% of the potential respondents participated in the survey. To minimize the risk of sampling errors, respondents were provided with an ample amount of time and multiple communication attempts through district email, encouraging survey participation. To minimize the likelihood of coverage errors, the entire district that was chosen to examine was included in the sampling. Measurement error comes from poor questions. Additionally, participants may misunderstand questions or exaggerate their answers. Measurement errors were minimized by utilizing a survey that has been previously validated, as well as attempting to ensure that prompts, descriptions, and directions utilized were as clearly written as possible (American Psychological Association, 2006). The survey utilized can be found in Appendix A.

The delimitations of this study included the chosen survey items. Each of the survey items was chosen for the ability of respondents to answer the research questions. The questions supported the ability of the researcher to determine the *supports* and *strategies* that teachers of at-risk student believe will help to transform their students from demonstrating negative behavioral and academic performance into demonstrating positive behavioral and academic outcomes. Other delimitations included the specific location from which the respondents were sampled. Only those educators who were in the specific school district within the southeastern state were sampled.

Upon the completion of the time allotted for survey responses, the surveys were separated into at-risk school locations versus non-at-risk school locations, based upon the federal government's free- and reduced-lunch program participation. Schools that demonstrated 70% of the student body participating in this program were placed into the at-risk group. Schools that showed less than 70% participation in this program were considered non-at-risk. Frequency statistics were then employed to analyze the teacher responses to queries on potential *strategies* and *supports*. Frequency statistics were utilized due to the survey instrument utilizing either 0-4 or 0-5 Likert scales.

> To describe the data, means are often of limited value unless the data follow a classic normal distribution and a frequency distribution of responses will likely be more helpful. Furthermore, because the numbers derived from Likert scales represent ordinal responses, presentation of a mean to the 100th decimal place is usually not helpful or enlightening to readers. (Sullivan & Artino, 2013, p. 542)

After the survey questions were analyzed, utilizing frequency statistics, the responses of the teachers of at-risk students and non-at-risk students were then compared to determine if differences existed between the responses of the two groups. A MANOVA ($p < .05$) was utilized to determine if these differences existed.

> The MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) is a type of multivariate analysis used to analyze data that involves more than one dependent variable at a time. MANOVA allows us to test hypotheses regarding the effect of one or more independent variables on two or more dependent variables. (McDonald, 2014)

**Detailed Analysis**

Within this section, the data that were gathered pertaining to each research question, will be analyzed and reported based upon the research questions that they provide information.

**Research Question 1: To what extent are the *supports* and *strategies*-teachers of K-12 at-risk students perceive as essential to support academic improvements and social transformation for their students through their own transition to be more effective teachers?** Items within the research survey that pertain to research questions one were disaggregated into two main categories; *strategies* and *supports*.

***Strategies.*** Respondents were asked to rate their level of interest in taking part in training or professional development covering the following *strategies:* Classroom safety and security, decrease in class behavior issues, manage time effectively, increasing student engagement, communicate behavior issues with staff, assessing students' knowledge, differentiation of learning, student motivation, working with student with mental health and personal issues, working with special needs students, designing out-of-class assignments, student critical thinking, minority students, English-as-a-second-language-students, students of varying socioeconomic status (SES), varying grade level readiness, behavior problems, student strengths, academic problems, and caregivers of varying ethnicities. They were asked to rate their level of interest using the following Likert Scale; 0 – prefer not to answer, 1 – not at all, 2 – a little, 3 – neutral, 4 – somewhat, 5 – very. Tables that contain the complete frequency aggregation of both the teachers of at-risk students and the teachers of non-at-risk students with regards to interest in *strategy* based professional development can be found in appendices B and C.

To determine which *strategy*-based professional development training teachers would be most likely to attend, a percentage of two-thirds (66%) or more of the respondents choosing a

rating higher than neutral was selected. In the tables below *Strategy* based professional developments that 66% or more of teachers of both at-risk and non-at-risk students is reported.

Table 7

*Teachers of At-Risk Students Prioritized Strategy Needs*

| Professional Development | Percentage | Rank |
|---|---|---|
| In Class Behavior | 86.0% | 1 |
| Student Motivation | 85.0% | 2 |
| Supporting Mental Health | 85.0% | 2 |
| Student Critical Thinking | 82.8% | 3 |
| Student Engagement | 80.6% | 4 |
| Student Behaviors | 80.1% | 5 |
| Differentiation | 78.0% | 6 |
| Varying Grade Level Readiness | 72.5% | 7 |
| Academic Problems | 71.0% | 8 |
| Students with Special Needs | 69.8% | 9 |

Table 8

*Teachers of Non-At-Risk Students Prioritized Strategy Needs*

| Professional Development | Percentage | Rank |
|---|---|---|
| Student Critical Thinking | 84.7% | 1 |
| Student Motivation | 83.2% | 2 |
| In Class Behavior | 80.5% | 3 |
| Differentiation | 74.2% | 4 |
| Student Engagement | 73.5% | 5 |
| Student Behaviors | 73.5% | 6 |
| Supporting Mental Health | 70.0% | 7 |
| Academic Problems | 69.3% | 8 |
| Assessing Students | 67.2% | 9 |

Interest in *strategy*-based professional development was similar for both groups. Two strategy based professional developments that teachers of at-risk students demonstrated interest in that the teachers of non-at-risk students did not were in the areas of *varying grade level readiness* (72.5%) and *students with special needs* (69.8%). In comparison, the teachers of non-at-risk students demonstrated interest in professional development in *assessing students* (67.2%). Teachers of at-risk students did not demonstrate high levels of interest in this area (below 66%). When examining the strategies that garnered the highest interest, the choices were similar between the two groups except for *strategies* to *support mental health in students*. The teachers of at-risk students demonstrated an interest of 85% in this area, ranking it tied for the second highest interest. For the teachers of non-at-risk students, this area only received 70% (seventh

highest interest). The areas that both groups had in common for the highest three rankings were *in class behavior* (first, 86% for the at-risk group; third, 80.5% for the non-at-risk group), *student motivation* (tied for second, 85% for the at-risk group; second, 83.2% for the non-at-risk group), and *student critical thinking* (third, 82.8% for the at-risk group; first, 84.7% for the non-at-risk group).

The respondents were also asked what other *strategies* they would be interested in having as professional development training. This question was posed in the form of an open-ended question. Many of the responses to the open-ended question from both groups were choices that could be found within the Likert scale-based questions. The most common of responses, that were unique from the other survey questions, were recorded. The teachers of at-risk students reported that they would like to have increased professional development in in class technology usage and how to integrate it into the curriculum. One respondent write that they would like training in "New instructional strategies such as a flipped classroom", which is a technology based strategy. They also expressed interest in trainings which would help them to better understand the processes involved in progress monitoring and the multi-tier system of supports (MTSS). One teacher commented that they would like to learn about "The process to bring struggling students up for help is a confusing process and never fully explained to the staff." Of interest is that the teachers of non-at-risk students also reported an interest in training in the areas of progress monitoring and the MTSS process. One teacher stated they would like "The MTSS process clarification." The teachers of non-at-risk students further expressed an interest in professional development which would aid them in building relationships with their students. One respondent expressed interest in "social skills; interpersonal relationships."

***Supports.*** Respondents were asked to rate their level of interest in obtaining additional *supports* within the following areas: Additional guidance counselors, social workers, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), school psychologists, behavior specialists, in-home visits from school based teams, technology training, dedicated technology support, increased online educational offerings, increased access to technology hardware. They were asked to rate their level of interest using the following Likert Scale; 0 – preferred not to answer, 1 – not at all, 2 – a little, 3 – neutral, 4 – somewhat, 5 – very. Tables that contain the complete frequency aggregation of both the teachers of at-risk students and the teachers of non-at-risk students with regards to interest in specific *supports* can be found in appendix D and E.

To determine which *supports* were most sought after by teachers, a percentage of two-thirds (66%) or more of the respondents choosing a rating higher than neutral was selected. In the tables below *Supports* that 66% or more of teachers of both at-risk and non-at-risk students is reported.

Table 9

*Teachers of At-Risk Students Prioritized Support Needs*

| Support | Percentage | Rank |
|---|---|---|
| Behavior Specialist | 86.1% | 1 |
| Technology Hardware | 83.9% | 2 |
| Dedicated Tech Support | 83.8% | 3 |
| In-home Visits | 78.5% | 4 |
| Social Workers | 78.0% | 5 |
| School Psychologist | 74.8% | 6 |
| Guidance Counselors | 74.7% | 7 |
| Technology Training | 72.0% | 8 |
| PBIS | 71.5% | 9 |
| Increase Online Course Offerings | 66.2% | 10 |

Table 10

*Teachers of Non-At-Risk Students Prioritized Support Needs*

| Professional Development | Percentage | Rank |
|---|---|---|
| Technology Hardware | 85.3% | 1 |
| Behavior Specialist | 78.3% | 2 |
| Dedicated Tech Support | 74.2% | 3 |
| Technology Training | 70.0% | 4 |

Of interest when examining the respondent data in regard to interest in various *supports*, is that the teachers of at-risk students demonstrated high levels of interest in every *support* that was presented to them. In comparison, the teachers of non-at-risk students only demonstrated high levels of interest in four out of the 10 potential supports, the highest being the desire to having increase levels of *technology hardware* (85.3%) which was similar to the ranking of the at-risk group (second rank, 83.9%). Supports in the form of *behavior specialist*(s) also ranked high in both groups (first, 86.1% for teachers of at-risk students; second, 78.3% for teachers of non-at-risk students). Finally, *dedicated tech support* was ranked third by both groups (83.8% teachers of at-risk students, 74.2% teachers of non-at-risk students).

The respondents were also asked what other *supports* they believe would aid them in educating their students. This question was posed in the form of an open-ended question. Both groups expressed a need for additional parental support to be successful. Many of the responses from both groups were choices within the Likert scale-based questions. The most common of responses, that were unique from the other survey questions, were recorded. Both groups also specified that support in behavioral management and consistent consequences for negative behaviors was essential. One teacher demonstrated their interest in a support of this nature by stating "Actionable consequences for misbehavior/more rewards for positive behavior/ rewards that don't cost TEACHERS [*sic*] additional money." The other *support* that the teachers of non-at-risk students would like to receive was a cell phone ban for their students. In comparison, the teachers of at-risk students believe that *supports* which include character development for their students and increased numbers of staff members directly in contact with students could prove to be of value. One teacher remarked that they would be interested in "Character programs to encourage student accountability." What is also interesting to note is that even though four

technology-based *supports* were included in the survey questions, many of the respondents in both groups remarked in the open-ended questions that they would like to have more technology and technology-based *supports*. One statement from one of the respondents was "More, More, and More technology, especially since all of the high stakes testing is now conducting on computers." One teacher went so far as to mention the exact types and numbers of technology hardware she would like for her classroom. "I only have 3 laptops (that don't work great) and 4 IPADS for my classroom. More would be amazing!" One of the most interesting statements by a teacher of at-risk student with regard to *supports* was "Whether or not something would improve outcome depends on how it is implemented and supported. We spend a lot on technology but often don't have the knowledge and support to fully utilize it (for example.) How will psychologists be used? Will they expand testing to identify specific learning challenges (dyslexia, apraxia etc.) or just be used as another administrator? Will the social workers work intimately with the families or just do paperwork?" This demonstrated an interest in not solely being provided with *supports*, but in having them utilized in a manner that would be most effective and beneficial.

**Research Question 2: There was statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk students.** A MANOVA was performed to determine if differences exist between the perceived needs for *strategies* and *supports* between teachers of at-risk students and teachers of students that are not at risk. For the MANOVA that was performed, the P value was set *a priori* at $p < .05$.

Statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) were found between the responses of the teachers of at-risk students and the teachers of non-at-risk students in four out of 20 of the queries regarding potential *strategy*-based professional development. These differences occurred

between the groups in their responses to professional development concerning communication with staff regarding behavior issues ($p = .05$), interacting with students with mental health issues ($p = .005$), interacting with students of varying socioeconomic statuses ($p = .002$), and student behaviors ($p = .026$).

Statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) were found between the responses of the teachers of at-risk students and the teachers of non-at-risk students in six of 10 of the queries regarding potential *supports*. Those differences occurred between the groups in their responses pertaining to added guidance counselors ($p = .034$), added social workers ($p = .000$), PBIS supports ($p = .043$), added school psychologist ($p = .007$), behavior specialists ($p = .047$), and in-home visits from school staff ($p = .000$).

**Chapter 4 Summary**

This study sought to determine the perceptions of pre-K-12 teachers of at-risk students and non-at-risk students with regards to any *supports* and *strategies* they perceive that will provide them with aid in their effort to improve the education of their students. Within this chapter, data gathered from the Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education Report on Teacher Needs Survey (American Psychological Association, 2006), with additional questions added by the researcher was analyzed using IBM's SPSS statistical software to determine the frequency of responses from the survey questions. It was determined that both the teachers of at-risk students and the teachers of non-at-risk students have specific perceived needs for both *strategy*-based professional development and *supports* that may help them in educating their students. Further analyses were performed to determine if differences existed between the perceived *strategy* and *support* needs of the two groups of teachers. Findings demonstrated that there were statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) between some of the *strategy* and *support*

needs of the two groups of teachers. In chapter five, the discussion and conclusion, these findings will be discussed and ideas will be posed that may allow these data to support the teachers of at-risk students.

# Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

## Introduction

This study was conducted to determine the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and to determine if differences occurred between the needs of teachers of at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk students. The theory that was chosen to provide the guiding force and the conceptual framework of this study was Schlossberg's Transition theory (2006) and 4 S System of Transition (Goodman et al., 2006). Goodman et al. (2006) stated the definition of transition as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). Schlossberg's theory was chosen to better understand the *supports* and *strategies* required to accomplish transitions. Specifically, the transitions that teachers of at-risk students are seeking to better educate the at-risk student population. Insight into the *supports*, and *strategies* that teachers of at-risk student perceive as valuable may provide support for teachers of at-risk students, thus improving the likelihood that growth toward becoming the most effective teachers for at-risk students can occur.

In this chapter, the findings of the study will be discussed. The chapter includes an overview of the study that will contain a summary of the research questions, the conceptual framework, research procedures, findings, data analysis used, and the statistical significance of the findings. The results of the study will then be discussed and related to prior literature, how it relates to Schlossberg's Transition theory, and the potential interpretations of the results of the research for policy and practice within schools and school districts. An examination of any limitations that arose during the study will also occur. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research.

**Summary of Results**

The number of at-risk students in classrooms across the country continues to rise (Davies & Peltz, 2012; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2017). It is of paramount importance that a strong focus on improving educational opportunities for this population. To support teachers of at-risk students, it is essential to determine their needs for creating a successful transition toward being more successful in their efforts to educate at-risk youth. The questions which drove this research were as follows:

RQ 1: What are the *supports* and *strategies* that teachers of K-12 at-risk students perceive are essential to support academic improvements and social transformation for their students through their own transition to be more effective teachers?

RQ 2: How do these *supports* and *strategies* differ from the needs of teachers of K-12 non-at-risk students?

RQ 3: When understood, can these *supports* and *strategies* be viably fulfilled to determine if they are, in fact, supportive of the transitions needs within teachers of K-12 at-risk students to aid the transformation of their students in demonstrating academic improvements and social transformation for their students?

To better understand these transitions and the *supports* and *strategies* required to positively accomplish the transitions, Schlossberg's Transition theory (2006) and 4 S System of Transition was utilized as the conceptual framework of this study (Goodman et al., 2006). Schlossberg's Transition theory (2006) is a developmental theory that examines the transitions that occur during adults' lives and the ways that they change and interact with those transitions (Goodman et al., 2006). Transitions can be described in one of three manners: anticipated transitions (predictable), unanticipated transitions (non-predictable), and non-event transitions

(expecting, but not occurring) (Goodman et al., 2006). The factors that affect transitions include the *situation, self, support,* and *strategies* (Goodman et al., 2006). The *situation* examines the critical features of the transition and the possible influence and significance the transition may have. Demographics of the individual along with his or her outlook, values and psychological resources refer to the *self*. *Support* are resources that are present for the individual that may offer benefit to the individual throughout the transition. Finally, *strategies* are the methods of coping that the individual will express (Goodman et al., 2006). In this research the transitions are the potential improvements in teachers' ability to educate at-risk students. The *situation* is that these are teachers of at-risk students. The *self* is the outlooks, beliefs, and past experiences that these teachers exhibit. The *supports* and *strategies* are the items which were examined by this survey research to determine their perceived value to teachers in their transition.

The research conducted was a survey study. Survey data regarding teacher needs were collected and analyzed in conjunction with school at-risk status. At-risk status was determined using a southeastern state's aggregated student socioeconomic status, which was determined through the percentage of each school's student bodies participating in the federal free-and-reduced lunch program. Students' at-risk status and the survey results were gathered and analyzed to determine the needs of teachers of at-risk students. A comparison between the perceived needs of teachers of these students, compared to teachers of non-at-risk students, was also performed to determine if any differences existed.

Through the analysis of the surveys and open-ended questions it was possible to determine what are perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students regarding *supports* and professional development on specific *strategies* to help teachers in educating their at-risk students. The results revealed that teachers of at-risk students demonstrated high interest in

professional develop that covers the following *strategies*: in class behavior, student motivation, supporting mental health, student critical thinking, student engagement, student behaviors, differentiation, varying grade level readiness, academic problems, and students with special needs.

The results also showed that the teachers of at-risk students demonstrated high levels of interest in having the following supports available: behavior specialists, technology hardware, dedicated tech support, in-home visits from school staff, social workers, school psychologist, guidance counselors, technology training, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), and increased online course offerings. Furthermore, using a MANOVA, significant differences ($p < .05$) were found in the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and the perceived needs of teachers of non-at-risk students in both areas of interest in professional development on specific *strategies* and *supports*. The *strategies* in which significant differences ($p < .05$) were found were professional-development opportunities, which included the following: communication with staff regarding behavior issues ($p = .05$), interacting with students with mental health issues ($p = .005$), interacting with students of varying socioeconomic (SES) statuses ($p = .002$), and student behaviors ($p = .026$). The supports in which significant differences were found included additional guidance counselors ($p = .034$), added social workers ($p = .000$), PBIS supports ($p = .043$), added school psychologist ($p = .007$), behavior specialists ($p = .047$), and in-home visits from school staff ($p = .000$).

**Discussion of Results**

When examining the results of the data analysis the *strategies* that teachers of at-risk students chose as high-interest professional developments were not as unexpected as the *strategies*, which were not ranked as high-interest professional development. The areas that

were not chosen included *strategies* for working with students of varying socioeconomic status (SES) (61.2% high interest), minority students (47.3% high interest), English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) (51.1% high interest), and strategies for working with parents or guardians of varied ethnicities (51.7% high interest). Each of these *strategies* received less than 2/3 (66%) of the respondent interest in attending professional development. This was an unexpected finding due to at-risk status having been shown to include high percentages of low student SES, increased likelihood for minority status, and an increased likelihood of being a non-English speaker (McGlynn, 2014; Swain, 2006; Rathbun & McFarland, 2017).

In addition to the strategies that were included in the survey questions the teachers of at-risk students reported that they would like to have *strategy*-based professional development in the area of in-class technology usage and how to integrate it into the curriculum. One teacher mentioned that he or she would be interested in *strategy*-based professional development that examined new instructional strategies such as a flipped classroom, which is a technology-based modality. Another teacher stated interest in technology, effective teaching strategies for students to master CCSS (Common Core State Standards). One teacher simply stated he or she would be interested in technological immersion. This was also an unexpected finding because these teachers also demonstrated high levels of interest in all of the technology based *supports* that were presented within the survey.

In addition to demonstrating high interest in technology-based *supports*, the teachers of at-risk students also responded to the open-ended question regarding *supports* to demonstrate further need for technology-based *supports*. One of the at-risk teachers desired the district to provide technology for non-title one and older schools. More, more, and more technology, especially since all of the high stakes testing is now conducting on computers was another

comment from one of the respondents. It was apparent, based upon these data, that teachers of at-risk student perceived that increasing technology-based *supports* and having *strategies* on how to utilize the available technology would be beneficial in their transition to better educating the at-risk population. The findings are supported by Kalota and Hung (2013), who found that increasing technology and training to utilize technology can be highly beneficial for all teachers.

The other *strategy*-based professional development participants reported within the open-ended questions that was of interest was professional development in the areas of progress monitoring and the multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS). One teacher sought the MTSS process clarification. Another teacher stated that he or she had interest in strategies to ensure continuum of services throughout grades, which is an MTSS process. One teacher continued this trend by seeking strategies based on managing multi-tier supports/tracking within the curriculum. This may demonstrate a strong awareness of the need to progress monitor students and provide them with the supports they need to be successful. Although tiers of support, in the form of RTI (Response to Intervention), have been in place for many years, MTSS is a newer system of providing multiple levels of support for students. It appears teachers of at-risk students perceived a need for increased instances of *strategy*-based professional development in this area to better understand the system to provide support for their students.

What was not unexpected were the high levels of interest the teachers of at-risk students had in every *support* that was presented to them. Teachers of at-risk students demonstrated high interest (over 66% selected above neutral interest) in receiving any of the supports that were included in the survey. They also demonstrated interest in increased parental support, behavioral consequences, and improved behavior management, technology supports, and an increase in the number of staff members who work directly with students, in the open-ended question responses.

It is apparent that the teachers of at-risk students are seeking out every support made available to them to be more successful in educating their student population. This may have occurred because the teachers of at-risk students have a strong desire to see their students succeed and transform from demonstrating at-risk tendencies into demonstrating positive behavioral and academic outcomes. It may also be that these teachers recognize the need to provide these students additional supports because of their needs. DeAngelis (2012) stated that "Many of these students faced significant personal roadblocks that prevented them from doing well in school, including overworked or absent parents, emotional problems, and drug and alcohol abuse" (p. 46). All the *supports* that were offered with the survey may be able to put systems in place to aid students facing these struggles. Therefore, any of the potential *supports* that can be added to assist this student population could be potentially beneficial.

Some of the most interesting, and perhaps valuable, data came in the form of the Multivariate Analyses of Variance (MANOVA) that was performed to determine if differences existed between the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk students, in terms of the *strategy*-based professional development and *support* interest that each group displayed. When examining the MANOVA data, which examined the differences between the groups interests in *strategy*-based professional development, significant differences ($p < .05$), were found between the groups in the areas of communication with other staff regarding behaviors, working with students with mental-health issues, working with students of varying socioeconomic status (SES), and in-class behaviors. These findings are noteworthy in that they demonstrate that within these areas of professional development, differentiation should occur between schools in which the student population is at risk in comparison to the schools that are non-at-risk populations. The needs of teachers of at-risk students and not-at-risk students differ.

Therefore, the professional development of these two groups of teachers should differ accordingly. By providing differentiated professional development, it is possible that schools and districts may be better able to target the needs of teachers depending upon whether they work with at-risk or non-at-risk students. This would potentially bolster the skills of teachers of at-risk students and provide them with more of the strategies essential to their transition toward becoming more successful with their at-risk students.

This need for differentiation is further supported in terms of the *supports* that teachers of at-risk student believed to be essential for them to transition and express changes in learning, behaviors, and social relationships with students that move them towards being more successful with their student population. *Support*s are the resources available that may benefit an individual with his or her transition. Significant differences ($p < .05$) were found among participant interest in the following supports: guidance counselors, social workers, positive behavioral supports and interventions (PBIS), school psychologist(s), behavior specialist, and home visits from school staff members. Each of these *supports* was selected as high-interest by the teachers of at-risk students and not by the teachers of non-at-risk students, except for behavioral specialist(s). In the case of behavior specialist, 86.1% of the teachers of at-risk students deemed this to be of high interest, while 78.3% of the teachers of non-at-risk students chose this to be a high-interest support therefore demonstrate a need for both teachers of at-risk and non-at-risk students. These differences in perceived *support* needs may demonstrate that the teachers of at-risk students recognize the need for additional resources, above what is currently provided for them. Because there is a difference in the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk students, there may be differences in the resources that should be provided to each of these

groups of teachers to provide more assistance for their transition toward becoming more successful with each group's particular student population.

**Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature**

One of the goals of this study was to determine the areas of interest that teachers of at-risk students believe would be beneficial in their transition to be more successful educating this population. Within the scope of this study there appeared to be definitive of areas of high interest (more than 66% or 2/3 of the respondents demonstrating interest above neutral) for teachers of at-risk students in terms of *strategy*-based professional development and additional *supports* that may aid them. Many of the *strategies* and *supports* that were shown as high interest by the at-risk group correspond to the literature regarding potential needs to support at-risk students (Hughes, 2011; Peabody, 2011; Voyles, 2012). The literature referred to at-risk students exhibiting propensity toward demonstrating poor behavior and a history of academic problems (Julian, Young, & Williams, 2012). The findings of Julian, Young, and Williams (2012) as well as Hughes (2011), Peabody (2011), and Voyles (2012) in turn support the teachers of at-risk perceived needs seeking additional professional development in the areas of in-class behaviors, behavior in general, a lack of grade-level preparedness, and academic problems. This research also supports the high levels of interest in supports that provide behavior specialist (86.1%), guidance counselors (74.7%), and PBIS supports (71.5%).

To further support the perceived professional development needs of teachers of at-risk students, Slavin and Madden (2004) reported that at-risk students demonstrate higher levels of mental-health issues, lower motivation, and increased likelihood of a special education need existing. The teachers of at-risk students who participated in this study demonstrated high interest (more than 66% or 2/3 of the respondents demonstrating interest above neutral) in these

areas of *strategy*-based professional development as well as *supports* in the form of school psychologists (74.8%) and social workers (78.0%), all of which may provide support for helping these students and their needs. Furthermore, critical thinking (82.8%), motivation (85.0%), and differentiation (78.0%) were also *strategy*-based professional development opportunities that demonstrated high interest. This is supported by the findings of Vesley (2013), who reported that these are definite areas in which at-risk students demonstrate a dearth in comparison to their non-at-risk colleagues. Another *support* that was demonstrated as high interest by the teachers of at-risk students within the open-ended questions was increased parental support. One teacher was seeking ways of improving and increasing parental involvement and communications with parents. This was also supported by the literature. Research has reported that parental support can be make a great difference in terms of reading performance in at-risk students when familial support is present (Cameron & Losike-Sedimo, 2012). This familial support can be increased through the added support of home visits by school staff, which was a high-interest *support* for teachers of at-risk students.

An interesting finding within this study was that 100% of the teachers surveyed demonstrated high levels of interest in *strategy*-based professional development and additional *supports* in all the areas that focused on technology. Kalota and Hung (2013) found that technology training and increased levels of technology support can be highly beneficial for teachers, especially new teachers. Two of the highest-interest technology-based *supports* were increased levels of technology hardware (83.9%) and dedicated technical support (83.8%) for that technology. The interest in these areas was so great that many of the surveyed teachers in both groups remarked within the open-ended survey questions that they believed additional technology would support them in educating their students.

The second goal of this research was to determine if differences existed in the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk students in both *strategy*-based professional development and *supports* that can be provided. Due to the inherent differences that have been found between at-risk students and their non-at-risk peers (Ormrod, 2008; Slavin & Madden, 2004) a difference in the perceived needs was hypothesized. Casillas et al., (2012) remarked that at-risk students demonstrated differences in the areas of behavior, motivation, and academic history than their peers. It should, therefore, be noted that the teachers of these students would require different *supports* and *strategies* to successfully educate these them. This research demonstrated that the teachers of at-risk students recognized the need for differing *supports* and *strategies* from the teachers of non-at-risk students. Findings with this study demonstrated that significant differences do exist in the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and teachers of students who are not at risk. Significant differences ($p < .05$) were found between the groups in the areas of communication with other staff regarding behaviors, working with students with mental health issues, working with students of varying socioeconomic status (SES), and in-class behaviors. Furthermore, these differences were also demonstrated among interest in the following supports: guidance counselors, social workers, positive behavioral supports and interventions (PBIS), school psychologist(s), behavior specialist, and home visits from school staff members.

The third goal of this research was to determine if once the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students were identified, would it be possible to implement any of the high-interest areas of the at-risk teachers into available *strategy*-based professional development or *supports* that could be provided to the teachers thus supporting their transition toward more effectively educating at-risk students through the process of changing their behaviors, learning and social

relationships with students. Professional development of teachers has been found to be highly valuable for improving the performance of teachers (Shaha, Glassett, & Copas, 2015). In theory, information found within this research should be able to drive the local school district's professional-development planning to differentiate among the provided trainings for the teachers of at-risk students. Kraft and Blazar (2014) found that when teachers of at-risk students were provided with more professional development and specific trainings for at-risk students, the teachers performed better within the classroom in regard to their perceptions of comfort and competence with their students, as well as student performance on district-based assessments. However, providing the additional *supports* that the teachers of at-risk students may request may prove more difficult. Within the school district that this study occurring within, professional development for all teachers and schools is built into district budgets to provide teachers with the ability to grow professionally. The *supports* for which the teachers of at-risk students demonstrated a high interest would create additional expenditures that, although the supports may prove valuable, the district may not have the finances due to the current state of government support within the state that the research occurred within (Booth, 2017).

**Limitations**

Factors that may be potential weaknesses of a study are limitations (Creswell, 2003). In this study, some factors represented weaknesses. One limitation that occurred within this study was a lack of piloting of the Perception of Needs Survey prior to utilizing it to gain data for this research. Although this newly created instrument is based upon a previously validated survey (the APA Teacher Needs Survey), the Perception of Needs Survey utilized a different format, had questions removed, added, and rearranged which may have created a weakness within the study. One limitation for this study is that it took place within a single district within a

southeastern state. This can cause the information gathered to be viable for only districts which are similar in make-up to the district that was utilized. Additionally, the response rate of 7.3%, or 329 of the 4500 surveys that were sent was a low rate of return. I conducted the study during the last quarter of the school year, which can be a teacher's busy time of the school year. For this district, this time of the year falls directly between state-based-standardized assessments and the district-based end of the year exams. This may have resulted in the low response rate of the teachers (n=329), due to many may have not been able to put their time into the survey to complete it. However, although the percentage of respondents out of those polled was only 7.3%, the GPower calculation of required sample size for a power of .80 was calculated to be 102. In this regard, the sample size was over three-times the sample-size required by the GPower calculation. In addition to the response rate, it is possible that the survey consisted of too many questions. One-hundred-eleven surveys were not complete and had to be removed from the sample. The length of the survey may have caused attrition in the respondents as they took part in the survey. It is possible that 45 questions were too many to be answered by many of the teachers who may have felt pressed for time. A possible final limitation, may have been the level of honesty with which the respondents answered the survey questions. It is possible that some of the teachers were not comfortable in answering the questions honestly. Although no personal information was collected, other than the location at which participants taught, all manners of safeguards were put into place to ensure confidentiality. The teachers had this explained to them in the participation request email and informed consent, some teachers may have thought it was possible that an administrator or supervisor may have been able to identify the respondents and seen their responses.

**Implication of Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

The implications of this research can be far reaching in their examination of the *supports* and *strategies* that teachers of at-risk students perceive will aid them through transitions in their positions to educate this population by potentially changing their learning, behaviors, role, and social relationships with their students. Within Schlossberg's transition theory, Goodman et al. (2006) stated the definition of transition as "any event or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles" (p. 27). Transitions can therefore be described in three manners: anticipated transitions (predictable), unanticipated transitions (non-predictable), and non-event transitions (expecting, but not occurring) (Goodman et al., 2006). The perception of transition by the individual experiencing it is also essential. In this study, the teachers of at-risk students demonstrated that they desired a transition to occur to better serve their students. These transitions, based upon Schlossberg's theory, would occur within the teacher's behaviors, learning, and social relationships. In this research, the transition discussed should provide the potential for teachers to becoming more successful working with the at-risk student population. For transition to occur, specific *supports* and *strategies* need be in place to facilitate that transition (Goodman et al., 2006).

*Supports* refer to the resources that are present for the individual that may offer help and benefit to the individual throughout the transition. S*trategies* can be seen as the actions and manners of coping that the individual will express (Goodman et al., 2006). The *supports* and *strategies* that were examined within this research should enable teachers to experience anticipated transitions. These transitions in behaviors, roles, learning, and social relationships may occur in a predictable fashion once the teachers of at-risk students have gained access to the specific *strategies* through professional development. These changes can occur due to the new-

found knowledge that may be provided through the fulfillment of the *strategy*-based professional development that was chosen as being high interest. The teachers of at-risk students will at that point be trained to be more successful with their specific population and thus should transition towards changes in their behaviors and learning allowing them to be more success within their classrooms. Additionally, the *supports* were presented to the teachers of at-risk students could fill in gaps within what schools can currently provide to the teachers of at-risk students, thus bolstering their efforts at transition toward greater success with their student population through growth in their behaviors and especially the relationships with students. These changes could occur due to the *supports* such as additional behavior specialists, PBIS supports, social workers, and school psychologists.

Based upon the teachers' desire to transition demonstrated through their interest in the provided *supports* and *strategies*, the results of this study may help school sites and district administrators in developing plans to support their teachers of at-risk students. These plans can include differentiated professional development, utilizing the *strategy*-based professional development that the at-risk group chose as high interest. It can also support growth by providing additional *supports* to those schools and teachers that have an abundance of at-risk students. Although these *supports* may prove to be additional budgetary expenditures, support for these expenditures can come in the form of the research which has been performed in this study, and other that supports the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students found in this research (Hughes, 2011; Peabody, 2011; Voyles, 2012).

With proper planning, guided by the knowledge that teachers of at-risk students have provided during this study, research-backed fulfillment of perceived needs may bring about improvements in teacher and, therefore, student performance. If the high-interest *supports* and

*strategy*-based professional development are put into place, it is possible that teacher motivation may be improved because their requests are being responded to. The addition of these *supports* and *strategies* may provide the assistance and motivation needed to increase the rate at which their transitions occur toward being more successful with at-risk student population and enhance the changes that may occur in the teachers' learning, behaviors, and social relationships. This in turn may translate in increased learning gains by this student population and thus increased levels of academic and behavioral success.

In addition to aiding school sites and districts in planning for professional development and providing additional school based *supports*, this research may also prove to be valuable for colleges and universities that have teacher-preparation programs. Based upon this research, it may be worthwhile for these teacher-preparation programs to increase the amount of at-risk-student-focused coursework into their curriculum to ensure that new teachers are prepared to work with this population. Kraft and Blazar (2014) demonstrated that by providing training of this nature, new teachers more easily transitioned into being more comfortable and more successful when working with at-risk students. Additionally, in the survey's opened-ended question that asked teachers what more they would have liked to have had as part of their teacher-preparation programs, many of the respondents, both teachers of at-risk and non-at-risk students, remarked that they would have liked to spend more time within classrooms working with students during their preparation. Both groups also remarked that they would have liked to have more experience in working with difficult behaviors and classroom management. Additional coursework and field work in both areas could provide invaluable experience for teachers prior to attaining their first teaching position. This could then decrease the learning curve, which may occur with new teachers (McMahon, Forde, & Dickson, 2015).

## Recommendations for Further Research

The results of this study were limited to one individual school district within a south-eastern state. This school district is composed of mainly suburban communities with some rural locations. This research should be extended to include school districts that contain urban schools, as well as districts that are composed primarily of rural communities. This would also allow for a potentially larger sample size and thus more statistical power, as well as add a broader range of educational environments to future studies. Additional research that might also be valuable would be to provide a population of teachers of at-risk students with the *supports* and *strategy*-based professional development that was shown during this study to have a high interest. There should then be a comparative examination of their students' performance both before and after the added *supports* and *strategy*-based professional development had been implemented. This may determine if fulfillment of the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students has an impact upon student performance.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to determine the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and to determine if differences existed between the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk and teachers of non-at-risk students. Schlossberg's transition theory (2006) and 4 S system of transition was utilized as the conceptual framework of this study to aid in the examination of the *supports* and *strategies* needed for teachers of at-risk students to transition toward becoming more successful in educating the at-risk population (Goodman et al., 2006). The objectives of this study were accomplished by surveying the teachers from a given school district located within a southeastern state. The findings of this research demonstrated that teachers of at-risk students demonstrated high interest in additional *supports* and *strategy*-based professional

development. Through statistical analyses, statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) were found between the perceived needs of teachers of at-risk students and teachers of non-at-risk students. It may be possible that by providing teachers of at-risk students with the additional *supports* and *strategies*-in which they reported high interest in, that those teachers may be able to transition into becoming more successful teachers and may be able enhance the education of at-risk students.

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## Appendix A: Survey Questions

### Demographic and Job Related Information

Q1 Purpose and what you will be doing: The purpose of this survey is to determine the perceived needs of teachers and determine if and what differences exist between the needs of teachers of at-risk students versus teachers of non-at-risk students. To be in the study, you will be asked to fill out a questionnaire regarding your perception of needs that you believe will support your goals of educating your students. Doing this survey should take less than 15 minutes of your time. Risks: There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your opinions. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Your information will be kept private at all times. All study documents will be destroyed three years after we conclude this study. Benefits: Information you provide may help Pasco County Schools as well as other school districts in determining manners in which best to support teachers in educating both at-risk and non-at-risk students. Confidentiality: The information collected will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. Right to Withdraw: Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking may be perceived as being personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, you may stop answering questions.

❍ I acknowledge

Q2 What level(s) do you currently teach? (Mark all that apply)

- ❑ Pre-K
- ❑ Elementary
- ❑ Middle Grades
- ❑ High School

Q3 What school do you teach for?

Q4 What is your certification status?

- ❍ Not yet licensed/certified
- ❍ Temporary License/Certification
- ❍ Licensed/certified up to four years or less
- ❍ Licensed/certified for five to 15 years' experience
- ❍ Licensed/certified for more than 15 years

Q5 In what type of program were you prepared as a teacher?

- ❍ As part of a bachelor's degree program
- ❍ As part of a master's degree program
- ❍ As part of an alternative route to certification

Q6 Please rate your level of preparation in classroom management

- ❍ None
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Some
- ❍ A lot

Q7 Please rate your level of preparation in instructional skills

- ❍ None
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Some
- ❍ A lot

Q8 Please rate your level of preparation in classroom diversity

- ❍ None
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Some
- ❍ A lot

Q9 Please rate your level of preparation in communication with families and caregivers

- ❍ None
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Some
- ❍ A lot

Q10 What else would you have liked to experience in your teacher preparation program that would have better prepared you to educate your students?

Q11 For the next five questions, use the rating scale provided in the questions to please indicate the degree to which you would be interested in training designed support different manners of classroom management.

Q12 Ensure that students are physically safe and secure in the classroom

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little

- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q13 Ensure that students' negative behaviors are not an ongoing distraction to you and your classroom

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q14 Manage time effectively

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q15 Ensure that all students participate in classroom interaction

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q16 Communicate effectively with appropriate school staff about students' behaviors

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q17 The term "instructional skills" refers to the ways that teachers adapt their instruction to promote learning and motivation for students from different cultural and language backgrounds, life experiences, abilities and developmental levels.For the next seven questions, use the rating scale provided in the questions to please indicate the degree to which you would be interested in training designed to develop instructional skills.

Q18 Assess students' current skills and knowledge

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q19 Modify instructional strategies to meet individual student needs

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q20 Motivate students to learn

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q21 Work with students struggling with mental health and personal issues

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q22 Work effectively with students who demonstrate special needs

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat

❍ Very

Q23 Design appropriate out-of-class assignments and activities

❍ Not at all

❍ A little

❍ Neutral

❍ Somewhat

❍ A lot

Q24 Promote critical thinking

❍ Not at all

❍ A little

❍ Neutral

❍ Somewhat

❍ Very

Q25 For the next four questions, use the rating scale provided in the questions to please indicate the degree to which you would be interested in training designed to help you work with classroom diversity.

Q26 Students who are ethnic minorities

❍ Not at all

❍ A little

❍ Neutral

❍ Somewhat

❍ Very

Q27 Students whose first language is not English

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q28 Groups of students of varying socio-economic status

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q29 Groups of students of varying grade level readiness

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q30 It is widely acknowledged that teachers need to build relationships with parents, guardians, families and agencies in the larger community to support students' learning and well-being.For the next four questions, use the rating scale provided in the questions to please indicate the

degree to which you would be interested in training designed to help you work more effectively with parents or other caregivers.

Q31 Behavior problems

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q32 Strengths and achievements

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q33 Academic problems

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q34 Issues with caregivers who are of varying ethnicities

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little

- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q36 What other strategies would you like to learn about in order to better educate your students?

Q37 For the next six questions, use the rating scale provided in the questions to please indicate the degree to which you believe that following additional supports would positively affect your students' behavioral, social, and academic performance.

Q38 Additional Guidance Counselors

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q39 On Campus Social Workers

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q40 PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) Support Systems

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral

- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q41 Full-Time School Psychologist

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q42 Full-Time Behavior Specialist

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q43 In Home Visits by School Personnel

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q44 For the next four questions, use the rating scale provided in the questions to please indicate the degree to which you believe that following technological supports would positively affect your students' academic performance.

Q45 Increased Training in Academic Technology Usage

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q46 Dedicated Technical Support Personnel

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q47 Increased Availability of Online Educational Programs for Students

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat
- ❍ Very

Q48 Increased Availability of Academic Technology (i.e. Tablets, Laptops, Desktops, etc)

- ❍ Not at all
- ❍ A little
- ❍ Neutral
- ❍ Somewhat

❍ Very

Q49 Please give any further needs that if fulfilled would improve your students' behavioral, social, and academic performance and/or will improve your ability to be more successful in your endeavor to educate your students.

## Appendix B: At-Risk Group Strategy Professional Development Interest Frequencies

*At-Risk Group Strategy Professional Development Interest Frequencies*

| | Prefer Not to Answer | Not at All | A Little | Neutral | Somewhat | A Lot |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Classroom Safety and Security | 2.2% | 17.7% | 17.2% | 19.4% | 21.0% | 22.6% |
| In Class Behavior Issues | 1.6% | 3.2% | 3.8% | 5.4% | 24.2% | 61.8% |
| Time Management | 1.6% | 9.7% | 13.4% | 21.0% | 26.9% | 27.4% |
| Increasing Student Engagement | 1.6% | 3.8% | 5.4% | 8.6% | 37.1% | 43.5% |
| Communicating Behavior Issues with Staff | 1.6% | 9.1% | 10.8% | 17.7% | 31.2% | 29.6% |
| Assessment of Students | 1.6% | 8.1% | 11.8% | 15.6% | 42.5% | 20.4% |
| Differentiation of Learning | 1.6% | 7.5% | 5.4% | 7.5% | 42.5% | 35.5% |
| Increasing Student Motivation | 1.1% | 3.2% | 5.4% | 5.4% | 31.2% | 53.8% |
| Working with Mental Health Issues | 0.5% | 2.2% | 8.1% | 4.3% | 33.9% | 51.1% |
| Working with Special Needs Students | 1.6% | 4.3% | 11.3% | 12.9% | 34.9% | 34.9% |
| Homework Design | 1.6% | 16.1% | 13.4% | 22.0% | 27.4% | 19.4% |
| Promoting Student Critical Thinking | 1.1% | 3.2% | 2.7% | 10.2% | 31.7% | 51.1% |
| Working with Minority Students | 1.6% | 12.9% | 11.3% | 28.5% | 34.9% | 10.8% |
| Supporting ESOL Students | 1.6% | 11.8% | 10.8% | 26.3% | 29.6% | 19.9% |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Supporting Students of Varying SES | 1.6% | 9.1% | 9.7% | 18.3% | 30.6% | 30.6% |
| Working with Varied Grade Level Readiness | 1.6% | 8.1% | 4.3% | 13.4% | 34.9% | 37.6% |
| Handling In-Class Behaviors | 1.1% | 4.8% | 5.4% | 8.6% | 28.5% | 51.6% |
| Supporting Student Strengths | 1.6% | 9.7% | 7.0% | 17.7% | 37.1% | 26.9% |
| Support Academic Problems | 1.1% | 7.5% | 9.1% | 11.3% | 34.4% | 36.6% |
| Supporting Caregivers of Varied Ethnicities | 1.1% | 14.5% | 12.4% | 15.1% | 36.6% | 20.4% |

**Appendix C: Non-At-Risk Group Strategy Professional Development Interest Frequencies**

*Non-At-Risk Group Strategy Professional Development Interest Frequencies*

| | Prefer Not to Answer | Not at All | A Little | Neutral | Somewhat | A Lot |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Classroom Safety and Security | 0.0% | 27.3% | 16.8% | 16.8% | 18.9% | 20.3% |
| In Class Behavior Issues | 0.0% | 3.5% | 11.9% | 4.2% | 30.8% | 49.7% |
| Time Management | 0.0% | 14.0% | 14.7% | 11.9% | 37.1% | 22.4% |
| Increasing Student Engagement | 0.7% | 2.8% | 14.0% | 9.1% | 39.9% | 33.6% |
| Communicating Behavior Issues with Staff | 1.4% | 15.4% | 13.3% | 14.7% | 35.7% | 19.6% |
| Assessment of Students | 0.0% | 11.9% | 8.4% | 12.6% | 39.9% | 27.3% |
| Differentiation of Learning | 0.0% | 7.7% | 8.4% | 9.8% | 25.9% | 48.3% |
| Increasing Student Motivation | 0.0% | 3.5% | 8.4% | 4.9% | 28.7% | 54.5% |
| Working with Mental Health Issues | 0.0% | 3.5% | 15.4% | 11.2% | 30.8% | 39.2% |
| Working with Special Needs Students | 0.0% | 8.4% | 15.4% | 11.2% | 30.8% | 39.2% |
| Homework Design | 0.0% | 18.2% | 18.2% | 17.5% | 24.5% | 21.7% |
| Promoting Student Critical Thinking | 0.0% | 6.3% | 4.2% | 4.9% | 35.0% | 49.7% |
| Working with Minority Students | 0.0% | 18.2% | 21.7% | 23.8% | 23.1% | 13.3% |
| Supporting ESOL Students | 0.7% | 16.1% | 21.0% | 20.3% | 23.8% | 18.2% |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Supporting Students of Varying SES | 0.0% | 15.4% | 14.0% | 25.2% | 32.2% | 13.3% |
| Working with Varied Grade Level Readiness | 0.0% | 11.2% | 11.9% | 12.6% | 31.5% | 32.9% |
| Handling In-Class Behaviors | 0.0% | 7.7% | 11.2% | 7.7% | 37.1% | 36.4% |
| Supporting Student Strengths | 0.7% | 14.7% | 12.6% | 16.8% | 33.6% | 21.7% |
| Support Academic Problems | 0.0% | 9.1% | 10.5% | 11.2% | 32.2% | 37.1% |
| Supporting Caregivers of Varied Ethnicities | 0.0% | 25.2% | 10.5% | 19.6% | 34.3% | 10.5% |

## Appendix D: At-Risk Group Supports Interest Frequencies

*At-Risk Group Supports Interest Frequencies*

| | Prefer Not to Answer | Not at All | A Little | Neutral | Somewhat | Very |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Guidance Counselors | 1.1% | 9.7% | 5.9% | 8.6% | 28.5% | 46.2% |
| Social Workers | 0.5% | 4.8% | 4.8% | 11.8% | 25.8% | 52.2% |
| PBIS Supports | 0.5% | 4.3% | 7.0% | 16.7% | 24.7% | 46.8% |
| School Psychologists | 1.1% | 3.8% | 6.5% | 14.0% | 25.3% | 49.5% |
| Behavior Specialists | 1.1% | 3.8% | 4.8% | 4.3% | 12.4% | 73.7% |
| In-Home Visits from School-Based Staff | 1.1% | 4.3% | 3.2% | 12.9% | 29.6% | 48.9% |
| Technology Training | 1.1% | 4.8% | 4.3% | 17.7% | 30.6% | 41.4% |
| Dedicated Tech Support | 1.1% | 2.7% | 4.8% | 7.5% | 29.0% | 54.8% |
| Increased Online Educational Offerings | 1.1% | 8.1% | 8.6% | 16.1% | 32.3% | 33.9% |
| Increased Technology Hardware | 1.1% | 1.6% | 5.9% | 7.5% | 18.8% | 65.1% |

## Appendix E: Non-At-Risk Group Supports Interest Frequencies

*Non-At-Risk Group Supports Interest Frequencies*

| | Prefer Not to Answer | Not at All | A Little | Neutral | Somewhat | Very |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Guidance Counselors | 0.0% | 11.2% | 13.3% | 15.4% | 24.5% | 35.7% |
| Social Workers | 0.0% | 8.4% | 18.2% | 16.8% | 20.3% | 36.4% |
| PBIS Supports | 0.0% | 5.6% | 10.5% | 23.1% | 25.9% | 35.0% |
| School Psychologists | 0.0% | 10.5% | 12.6% | 12.6% | 26.6% | 37.8% |
| Behavior Specialists | 0.0% | 5.6% | 7.7% | 8.4% | 19.6% | 58.7% |
| In-Home Visits from School-Based Staff | 0.0% | 6.3% | 11.9% | 18.9% | 27.3% | 35.7% |
| Technology Training | 0.0% | 4.2% | 12.6% | 13.3% | 29.4% | 40.6% |
| Dedicated Tech Support | 0.7% | 5.6% | 7.0% | 12.6% | 25.9% | 48.3% |
| Increased Online Educational Offerings | .07% | 10.5% | 12.6% | 17.5% | 26.6% | 32.2% |
| Increased Technology Hardware | 0.7% | 2.1% | 3.5% | 8.4% | 18.2% | 67.1% |

## Appendix F: Concordia University-Portland IRB Approval

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

-PORTLAND, OREGON-

| | |
|---|---|
| DATE: | April 5, 2017 |
| TO: | Daniel Rushton, M.S. |
| FROM: | Concordia University - Portland IRB (CU IRB) |
| PROJECT TITLE: | [1001483-1] Perceived Needs of Teachers of At-Risk Students |
| REFERENCE #: | EDD-20170110-Weschke-Rushton |
| SUBMISSION TYPE: | New Project |
| ACTION: | APPROVED |
| APPROVAL DATE: | April 5, 2017 |
| EXPIRATION DATE: | April 5, 2018 |
| REVIEW TYPE: | Expedited Review |

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The Concordia University - Portland IRB (CU IRB) has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

Your project includes research that will be conducted within an institution that is not Concordia University. As such, you need to have their permission to conduct research. You are responsible for contacting and following the procedures and policies of Concordia University and the other institution where you conduct research. You cannot begin recruitment or collection of data within that institution until you receive approval from that institution.

This submission has received review based on the applicable federal regulations.
Attached is a stamped copy of the approved consent form. You must use this stamped version. Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. The form needed to request a revision is called a Modification Request Form, which is available at www.cu-portland.edu/IRB/Forms.
All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please email the CU IRB Director directly, at obranch@cu-portland.edu, if you have an unanticipated problem or other such urgent question or report.



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All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.
This project requires continuing review from the CU IRB on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of April 5, 2018.
You must submit a close-out report at the expiration of your project or upon completion of your project. The Close-out Report Form is available at www.cu-portland.edu/IRB/Forms.
Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.
If you have any questions, please contact Dr. OraLee Branch at 503-493-6390 or irb@cuportland.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within Concordia University - Portland IRB (CU IRB)'s records. April 5, 2017



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## Appendix G: Email Communication Requesting Participation

Good Afternoon,

My name is Daniel J. Rushton, the Learning Design Coach at XXXXXXXXX, soon to be a Learning Design Coach for XXXXXXXX. I am currently pursuing a doctoral degree, and my dissertation is the examination of the perceived needs of teachers of both at-risk and non-at-risk students.

I am seeking to determine the needs of teachers regarding professional development, social and behavioral supports, and technological supports that you, as a teacher, believe will support you in your schools.

In order to reach that goal, I am seeking your assistance in completing the survey in the link below. No personal information is being collected, and the survey should take less than 15 minutes.

https://cuportland.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_39TamOiIjDMml8h

Once I have collected the data, I will compare the needs of teachers of at-risk and non-at-risk students and determine if differences exist. It is possible that we may be able to develop professional develop plans and increase the supports that exist in our schools.

I hope you will consider completing the survey to not only assist me with my educational goals, but to also potentially assist educators in the future.

Thank you VERY much for you time and have a great day!

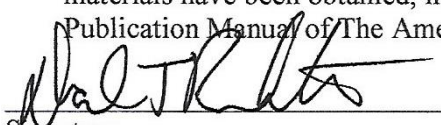
Daniel J. Rushton
Learning Design Coach
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
YouTube instructional Videos
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC7mMSax0EhJ4nCJq1LirF-w

## Appendix H: Statement of Original Work

**Statement of Original Work**

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association.



Signature

Daniel J. Rushton

Name (Typed)

10/31/17

Date