

**LEARNING STYLES AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS' ATTITUDES  
AND ITS RELATION TO TRUANCY AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN  
SECONDARY EDUCATION**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in  
The School of  
Human Resource Education and Workforce Development

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May, 2008

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Isiah and Annette Nelson, whose love and support I cherish throughout my life. This dissertation is also dedicated to my siblings, Adrienne Nelson Patterson, Sherletha M. Nelson, Chantanette Nelson Moore, Isiah Nelson, IV, and Trevian D. Nelson. Without the love and support of you all I would not have succeeded. You all have provided me with the greatest support, both financial and spiritual, anyone can ever hope for.

To my nephews and niece, Tilton “TJ” Moore, Trent Moore and Alaynna Patterson, never give up. Press toward the highest you can achieve. No man can keep you from what God has planned for you.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my husband, Clifton J. Smith, Jr. Thanks for all you have done for me. Our love is never-ending.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My greatest thanks, my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! Without His graciousness, mercy and inner peace, I would not have been able to successfully travel through this journey. Dr. Geraldine Johnson, you are a wonderful and patient leader, mentor and friend. My path was made much smoother when you became my mentor. Thank you for all you have done to help me make it through this part of my life. Dr. Joan Benedict, you opened my eyes to a new exciting door, Childhood Development. I appreciate the opportunities you gave me. Dr. Michael Burnett, there's nothing more to say than thank you. You were the first person I met upon entering graduate school and told me I could make it. You are a strong silent leader who is much appreciated. To Dr. Robert Laird, thank you for your insightfulness on adolescent behaviors and remaining on my committee. Last, to Dr. Younghee Lim, my graduate school appointee, may God bless you in your endeavors.

My family, who has been by my side, I love you all. First, my parents, Pastor and Mrs. Isiah Nelson, III, your spiritual guidance has taken me further in life than you know. It is not often one can have such strong leaders as parents. Your prayers and support, in all ways imaginable, has helped me make it through. I love you both deeply. To my oldest siblings, Adrienne and Norman (brother in law) Patterson, you all have truly played the role of my other parents. When I felt loss, confused, or just drained, those plane flights to Florida and road trips to Mississippi as a "get-away" did not get unnoticed, even the packages mailed to me in the name of Kenyetta Nelson, Ph.D., letting me know you all had the faith I would succeed. The two of you have been a strong source of support throughout these years in school. To Sherletha Nelson, I love you girl! You may be younger than me, but you still looked out for me. Chantanette, Isiah (Junior) and Trevian, I love you all. Junior, your prayers and support are truly anointed, even when you would tell me "you can do it Black", just knowing I had the strength and support of

my little brother made me feel stronger. I cannot forget all my biological and church family who called me “doctor” from the beginning. To my extended sisters Felicia B. Smith and Denise Burrell, I love you girls. You have been a blessing in my life in ways you do not know.

To my wonderful husband, Clifton J. Smith, Jr., you came just in time! When I felt like giving up and just “working” you told me no. You are strong and His spirit is continuously manifesting in you. I am blessed to have you in my life.

Last, to my SREB family: Monique Sam, Jennifer Fabre, Dr. Chanika R. Jones, Dr. T. Elon Dancy, and Dr. Franchesca Mellion-Williams. It was by God’s grace that we met. You all have been my rock through this process. A special thanks to Dr. Chanika R. Jones. You provided unending support throughout this process. I deeply appreciate everything you did to guide me through this process.

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## ABSTRACT

Many researchers have examined the effect of truancy and student achievement. However, there has been little or no focus on the effect of truancy and non-attendance among ethnic minorities. The current study examined how African American students' learning styles and their perceptions of teachers' attitudes toward them and the learning environment influenced their decision to become high truants. Additionally, the study sought to find if selected demographic factors had any relevance on the truancy rate of African American students. The researcher used several assessment instruments to measure the variables being tested. The Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire (ILS), developed by Richard M. Felder and Barbara A. Soloman at North Carolina State University, was used to determine the preferred learning styles of African American students. The researcher designed instrument consisted of three parts. The first section, demographics, was used to measure descriptive interests for the researcher. The second section was used to gather data on truancy status. The third section was a 15-item questionnaire used to determine students' perception of teachers' attitudes toward them and the learning environment. The sample included 166 9th grade African American students enrolled in freshmen English classes in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States. Descriptive statistics, Cronbach's alpha estimates for reliability, and multiple regression analysis were the analysis methods used in the study. The results from the analysis suggest that students with low grade point averages; those who had siblings who left school without receiving a high school diploma; those who had been in legal troubles; those who were not involved in clubs/organizations; and gender in relation to females were more likely to be truant. The variable "grade point averages" was found to be the most significant with the dependent variable "unexcused days missed." The variables together explained 32.5% of the variance in the dependent variable.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

Truancy has been labeled one of the top ten major problems in this country's schools (DeKalb, 1999). It is a sign that our children may be facing difficulties in life that may need addressing or that they may be giving up and losing his or her way (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). As a widely researched topic throughout the past decades, truancy has gradually changed from an increase in the number of students graduating from high school to one where more of our youth are choosing to refrain from school. As a gateway to crime, truancy is damaging to the future of our nation with high rates of truancy linked to high daytime crime rates and vandalism (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Truancy is the most powerful predictor of juvenile delinquent behavior, according to the Los Angeles County Office of Education. As such, truancy prevention processes should be a part of all community law enforcement efforts to prevent crime before it happens (U.S. Department of Education, 1995).

What is truancy? There is no universal definition for the term. For the purpose of this research, we will use Zhang, Katsiyannis, Barrett and Wilson (2007) definition of truancy as a term used to describe the habitual engagement in unexcused absences from school.

“Over the last decade, between 347,000 and 544,000 tenth through twelfth grade students left school each year without successfully completing a high school program” (Vanderslice, 2004, p.15). Of 1 million students in the city of New York, about 15% are absent on a daily basis (DeKalb, 1999). Adolescents may be losing sight of the importance of a high school diploma. They may believe work is more important, and might not realize the type of dead end jobs available to those without a diploma.

As a result of the increase in truancy in the U.S., dropout rates are increasing at higher rates, particularly among African Americans. About 7000 students drop out of school each day,

averaging about 1.23 million who drop out of school each year, half of which are minorities (“High school dropouts in America”, 2007). Of all the African American students who enter 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the U.S., about 49.8% don’t graduate on time with regular diplomas after 12<sup>th</sup> grade, about 17.8% above the national average (Paulson, 2006).

As a consequence of dropping out, unemployment rates are increasing and if dropouts do find employment, they are likely to be paid less than those with diplomas (Vanderslice, 2004). Not only are dropouts jeopardizing their likelihood of success, the nation as a whole suffers as the percentage of dropouts increase. Dropouts from the class of 2007 will cost the nation nearly \$329 billion in lost wages, taxes, and productivity over their lifetimes; if the 2006 dropouts had graduated, it would have saved the nation over \$17 billion in medications and expenditures for uninsured health care over their lifetimes (“High school dropouts in America”, 2007).

African Americans have a higher dropout rate than their White counterparts (Tompkins & Deloney, 1995). The national percentage of dropout rates of in the United States for the year 2004, ages 16-24, was 10.3%. The percentage of African American students in this age range who dropped out during 2004 was 11.8%, higher than the national average, and drastically higher than Whites whose dropout rate was 6.8% (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). As a predictor of drop outs, high rates of truancy are one of the most notable factors that lead to this outcome (Reid, 2005).

Reid (2005) stated factors within school settings that may be unnoticed when considering truancy. These factors are ease of leaving school, poor school management, poor student-teacher relationships, poor peer-peer relationships and the perceived irrelevance within school curriculum. If educators and administrators could learn to reach individuals who seem to be headed toward this path, maybe the dropout rates would decrease not only with African Americans, but with all youth across the nation.

### Overview on Importance of Truancy Recognition

How do we attempt to decrease dropouts within our schools? The number one predictor of dropping out is evaluating those with high truancy rates. Truancy is such an important aspect when considering how to decrease dropouts. This may be because many individuals with high truancy records are those more likely to drop out of school. Researchers (Luster & McAdoo, 1994; Somers & Piliawsky, 2004) have since focused on obvious reasons children are truant but fail to realize how school culture and students' individual cultures differ. The school environment plays a factor in how students feel comfortable and are able to relate to their lives, and ultimately their decision to graduate. It is reported that students "...stay away from school because their social backgrounds have left them ill-equipped to handle the demands placed on them at school - or even to appreciate the value of an education" (Gabb, 1995, p. 4), especially in reference to ninth grade students. Previous research notes how most students who drop out of school do so during their first two years of high school (NCSET, n.d.). Many students are not given the support needed to become successful upon entering high school, accounting for over one-third of all drop outs in ninth grade (High school dropouts in America, 2007). Since the majority of ninth graders are already behind at least one grade level upon entering high school, they feel they do not possess the knowledge to succeed in high school (High school dropouts in America, 2007). Ninth grade serves as a narrow passage of progression where students begin their freshman year to find they do not have the academic skills to succeed in high school (High school dropouts in America, 2007).

### Characteristics of Students with High Truancy Records

Given the high cost of dropping out of high school for the individual and society, it is imperative we know characteristics most closely associated with those at high risk of dropping out. Previous literature (Crowder & South, 2003; Reid, 2005) stated numerous contributing

variables linked with truancy and dropouts among high school students. These variables include (1) parental educational background, (2) ethnicity, (3) gender, (4) socioeconomic status, (5) lack of motivation, (6) self-esteem, (7) being held back at least one grade, (8) sibling dropout, (9) record of low academic achievement, (10) having a job while in school, and (11) living in a single parent household (Crowder & South, 2003; Dechamps, 1992; McLaughlin, 1990; Reid, 2005). Students with these characteristics are believed to be those most likely to drop out. Reid (2005), in his review of literature, categorized these variables into three factors:

- Individual factors: lack of self-esteem, social skills and confidence, poor peer relations, lack of academic ability, special needs, lack of concentrations and self-management skills;
- Family factors: parentally condoned absences, not valuing education, domestic problems, inconsistent/inadequate parenting, economic deprivation; and,
- Community factors: socio-economic factors, location, local attitudes, lack of community self-esteem.

#### Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Attitudes

Not a widely researched topic, teachers' attitudes as perceived by students may also have a drastic effect on students' ability to learn, their self-esteem, and ultimately their academic success. An earlier study found that student perceptions of support, interest, and respect received from their teachers was the most influential element of academic motivation, effort, and achievement (Zimmerman, Khoury, Vega, Gil, & Warheit, 1995). They also noted that students' perceptions of teacher disinterest directly related to feelings of alienation, lack of commitment to school, and high dropout rates of low socioeconomic status minority students (Zimmerman, Khoury, Vega, Gil, & Warheit, 1995).

## Learning Styles

Teaching methods that involve a variety of learning styles may lead to more student success. Learning style and behavioral trends exist, and students from particular socialization and cultural experiences often possess approaches to knowledge that are highly functional in their original living environment and can be capitalized upon to increase performance in academic settings (Claxton, 1990). Learning styles are a way of perceiving, conceptualizing, and problem-solving; a preferred way of interacting with and responding to the environment (Francis, 2000). They are cognitive, affective, and psychological indicators of the manners by which students perceive, interact with, and respond to their learning environment (Matthews, 1996). Students who learn with their preferred learning styles are more likely to gain more knowledge and skills when taught and counseled through their natural or primary style rather than through a style that is secondary or undeveloped, particularly when they are presented with new materials or engage in new experiences (Matthews, 1996).

## **Problem Statement**

Approximately 70% of students graduate from high school on time, but less than 50% of African Americans earn diplomas (“High school dropouts in America”, 2007). Most of these students who are not earning their diplomas and dropping out do so during their first two years of high school (NCSET, n.d.). Identifying key influences of truancy among African American youth is imperative. Identifying factors that lead to truant behaviors may ultimately lead to a decrease in the large percentage of dropouts African American students represent. Over 80% of high schools in our nation that produce the largest percentage of dropouts are between 15 cities in the north and west, and largely spread throughout the southern states (High school dropouts in America, 2007). To alleviate the problem of dropouts, which overwhelms our country, particularly in the south, researchers must identify factors which cause truancy and utilize this

knowledge to ultimately decrease this truancy, ultimately decreasing dropouts, producing more productive citizens in our society.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The need for research studies concerning the causes of truancy and non-attendance among ethnic minority backgrounds is necessary (Reid, 2005). The primary purpose of this study was to determine if African American students' learning styles and their perceptions of teachers' attitudes toward them and the learning environment influenced their decision to become high truants. Additionally, the study sought to find if selected demographic factors had any relevance on the truancy rate of African American students. Approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix C).

Knowledge gained through previous research enables us to recognize truant students and those who are more likely to dropout in our efforts to prevent future dropouts. As stated earlier, nearly one-third of high school students do not graduate on time (Paulson, 2006). Among African Americans, 50% do not graduate on time (Paulson, 2006). Nowicki, Sisney, Stricker, and Tyler (2004) assert how any research contributing to decreasing our national percentage of dropouts (approximately 40%) is beneficial.

### **Research Objectives**

Several research objectives will be used to guide this study:

1. Objective one was to describe 9<sup>th</sup> grade African-American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States on the following selected personal and academic demographic characteristics (a) Gender, (b) Age, (c) Held back in school, (d) Socioeconomic status as measured by whether or not parents/guardians rent or own and parents/guardians employment (full-time/part-time/unemployed), (e) Whether student is a parent, (f)

Whether or not student live with their parents, (g) Number of siblings students have, (h) Whether or not any siblings left school before receiving a high school diploma, (i) Whether or not students have had any legal troubles (stopped by police, handcuffed, taken to police station, convicted of felony), (j) If students are involved in after school activities, (k) If students are involved in clubs/organizations, (l) If students attend school regularly, (m) If students ever considered dropping out, (n) If students have a job, if so, how many hours worked, (o) Parents/guardians education level, (p) Students current grade point average.

2. Describe students' perceptions of teachers' attitudes and the learning environment toward 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic city in the southern region of the United States.
3. Determine the preferred learning style of 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States as measured by the "Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire."
4. Determine 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students' level of truancy based on all absences above the allowable limit of 10 days per semester according to East Baton Rouge Parish school board as measured by the following characteristics: Number of unexcused days missed this school year, ever been truant, if so, for what reasons.
5. Objective five was to determine if a model exists explaining a significant portion of the variance in the level of absenteeism among 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States from the following selected personal and academic demographic characteristics: preferred learning styles; students perceptions of

teachers' attitudes toward them; students perception of teachers' attitude toward their learning environment; gender; if respondents had any legal troubles; if any of their siblings left school without a high school diploma; whether or not they are involved in after school sports/activities; and whether or not they are involved in clubs/organizations.

### **Significance of the Study**

Two important considerations researchers should evaluate are the inclusion of diverse learning styles and students' perceptions of their teachers and learning environment. Research examining these factors as it effects truancy among high school students is very limited.

“Although the 1960s produced a large body of literature on teaching the “disadvantaged” and the 1970s produced a body of literature about “effective schools,” none of it was aimed specifically at preparing teachers to meet the needs of African American students” (Billings, 1994, p.7). There is limited research on the relationship between learning styles and students' perception of teachers' attitudes in secondary education, and how they may impact African American students' decision to remain in school. “Given the long history of the poor academic performance of African American students, one might ask why almost no literature exists to address their specific educational needs. One reason is a stubborn refusal in American education to recognize African Americans as a distinct cultural group” (Billings, 1994, p.9). This research project proposes to use and expand on past and present ideas, contributing to the world of education, to help improve society through attempting to add to the body of knowledge, ways to decrease the percentage of high school dropouts among African American students. In the course of conducting this research process, the researcher hopes to possibly recognize contributing factors that may have an impact on students' decision to become high truant. By observing learning differences in learning styles of students considered truants and those that are not

considered truants, the researcher hopes to be able to determine if learning style makes a difference, and use this information to add to the body of knowledge of how to develop curriculum that gear to these differences, resulting in a decrease of drop outs among African American students.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Learning styles** are ways of perceiving, conceptualizing, and problem-solving. It is a preferred way of interacting with and responding to the environment (Francis, 2000).

**Non-traditional 9<sup>th</sup> grade students** are students enrolled in 9<sup>th</sup> grade who are repeating the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Truant** students are those that refrain from school without permission. These students have histories of unexcused absences and tend to deviate from their responsibilities (Dukes & Stein, 2001). East Baton Rouge Parish School Board define truant as one who is absent from school without permission (Student Rights and Responsibilities Handbook, 2006).

According to East Baton Rouge Parish School Board and the Louisiana state law, students enrolled in secondary education, grades 9-12, are to be in attendance a minimum of 80 days per semester (not to exceed 10 or more absences per semester) unless absences are excused under the following circumstances (LA Welfare and Attendance Handbook, 2006, p.5):

1. Personal illness
2. Serious illness in the student's immediate family
3. Death in the student's immediate family (Absences are not to exceed five school days.)
4. Recognized religious holidays of the student's own faith
5. Natural catastrophe and/or disasters.

**Dropouts** are 16 to 24 year-olds who are not enrolled in school and who have not

completed a high school program regardless of when they left school. People who have received GED credentials are counted as high school completers” (U.S. Department of Education, 2005, p.105).

## **CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Review of Literature**

This literature review is composed of multiple sections: overview of research on truancy in secondary education, overview of truancy and dropouts among African American students, overview of learning styles, overview of learning styles of African American students, students' perception of teachers attitudes' and its affect on African American students' decision to remain in school, relationship of students' perception of teachers' attitude and learning styles on the educational success of African American students, review of previous research, and a theoretical framework. Risk factors, factors within school settings, and demographic factors related to truancy will also be discussed. Key issues from these areas of research are combined to determine if the factors, learning styles, and students' perceptions of teachers' attitudes and learning environment, have an effect on African American students' decision to become truant while enrolled in secondary education.

#### **Overview of Research on Truancy in Secondary Education**

Truancy among high school students is such a vast problem that nationwide programs, such as *No Child Left Behind*, have been developed in an effort to help students become more successful in education, but more so in secondary education. Less than one-half of students receive a high school diploma in the United States (Lagana, 2004), reaching drop out rates of almost 50% in most cities (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004). Most recent research on truancy has focused on individual reasons and consequences of truancy and dropouts (Reid, 2005). Of those that were completed, the majority was conducted in other countries, such as United Kingdom, which explained curriculum and poor teaching as preponderant factors when considering causes or truancy and non-attendance (Reid, 2005).

What is truancy? Who are truant students? How do we determine who is considered a

truant student? Truancy generally refers to students' unexcused absences from school. Walls (2003) define truancy as the number of unexcused absences by a student as determined locally. This definition is useful in that the term "locally" is used in an effort to emphasize the lack of a universal definition of truancy. Dukes and Stein (2001) define truant students as those that refrain from school without permission. These students have histories of unexcused absences and tend to deviate from their responsibilities (Dukes & Stein, 2001). One way to determine truants is observing their truancy records. There is no one definition of truancy. The definition of truancy is determined by the state and school in which individuals are located. The following are factors that may contribute to high truancy rates and ultimately drop outs: low socioeconomic status, race, parental educational status, low reading or math skills, academic disidentification, unstable living arrangements, racial isolation in residentially segregated neighborhoods (Crowder & South, 2003), and lack of self-esteem. All of these factors may be placed within the three categories stated in Reid's (2005) article on school truancy: individual, family, and community factors. The following are examples of how these factors can be ranked in Reid's three categories:

1. Individual factors include lack of self-esteem, social skills and confidence, poor peer relations, lack of academic ability, special needs, lack of concentrations and self-management skills.
2. Family factors include parentally condoned absences, not valuing education, domestic problems, inconsistent/inadequate parenting, and economic deprivation.
3. Community factors include socio-economic factors, location, local attitudes, lack of community, and self-esteem.

Reid (2005) also ranked ordered what he considered were the main causes of truancy: (1) Influence of friends and peers; (2) Relations with teachers, often those lacking in respect for

pupils; (3) Content and delivery of curriculum; (4) Family aspects (parents' attitude, domestic problems); (5) Bullying; and (6) Classroom context, for example, pupils' learning. The following sections discuss the impact these aspects have on truant behaviors of individuals as risk factors, factors within school settings, and demographic factors.

### **Risk Factors**

Risk factors most closely related to truancy include single parent households (Crowder & South, 2003); family stability or residential status (Crowder & South, 2003); poverty or financial status; student employment (Walls, 2003); and teenage pregnancy. Research also examines the difficulties children experience when parents separate and/or divorce and how it impacts school attendance (Reid, 2005). School dropout rate for single parent households are twice as much as those who are married, and generally tend to have lower grade point averages (McLanahan, 1996). Children of divorced families tend to exhibit lower levels of academic performance (Portnay, 2007), are at double risk of dropping out of school (Breivik & Olweus, 2006), score lower on achievement tests, have lower educational aspirations, are two to three times more likely to drop out of school, and eventually acquire lower levels of education (Portney, 2007).

Of the risk factors noted above, residential status is rated as one of the highest distresses on students' school attendance (Crowder & South, 2003; Reid, 2005). African American female headed households range over 50% of the nations total divorced households (Portes, Brown, Saylor, & Sekhon, 2005). Because African American children are more likely to live with their mothers, whose incomes are generally lower, they are more likely to live in lower socioeconomic areas. Consequently, these students may be more prone to live where violence is in or near the home, feel in danger when going to or returning from school ("Truancy Prevention", n.d.), have a lack of guidance in the home, drug and alcohol abuse, and a lack of parental awareness of attendance laws (Walls, 2003).

### Factors within School Settings

Another facet of factors is those that appear within school settings. Poor school management, ease of pupils to slip away unnoticed, poor relationship with teachers and peers, students' perception of irrelevance of the school curriculum, school environment and attitude of teachers and poor teaching methods, are factors within school settings which have a large impact on truancy (Attwood & Croll, 2006; Reid, 2005; Walls, 2003).

### Demographic Factors

An individual's decision to become truant may also be affected by the area in which he or she reside. Some demographic factors associated with truancy include socioeconomic factors, location, local attitudes and lack of community self-esteem (Reid, 2005). "Negative effect of neighborhood distress on high school completion is particularly pronounced among black adolescents... [thus, their] exposure to neighborhood poverty reinforces the damaging consequences of individual disadvantage" (Crowder & South, 2003, p.659).

According to Crowder and South (2003), "adult neighbors provide important models of behavior for local adolescents so that youth living in neighborhoods in which many residents experience school failure, joblessness, poverty, and family instability, will themselves be less likely to complete school" (p.661). They also state how adolescents are affected by the attitudes and behaviors of their peers in their neighborhood so that dropping out of high school and other harmful outcomes spread in epidemic fashion in poor and distressed neighborhoods.

### **Overview of Truancy and Dropouts among African American Students**

While much research has been completed on truancy and prevention methods (Reid 2005), empirical evidence is limited regarding the relationship between truancy, dropouts, and African American students. Dropouts among African Americans are at much higher rates than Whites. African American students are drastically behind their white counterparts on all standard

measures of achievement (Billings, 1994). African American students account for 17 percent of public school population but 41 percent of the special education population in high schools, and are five times more likely than their white peers to be dependent on welfare and to become teen parents (Billings, 1994). Studies reveal whites are drastically underrepresented in juvenile reported cases, whereas African Americans account for a large majority (Walls, 2003). Walls also note that students with the highest truancy rates are more likely to become dropouts and that African Americans are among those with the highest dropout rates. This is an overt call for intervention among African American students in secondary education.

According to the United States Department of Education (2006) 12 out of every 100 African Americans between the ages of 16 and 24 did not receive a high school diploma during the year 2004. Majority of truancy behaviors take place in large cities, which are more likely to have large schools (Walls, 2003), and larger schools are noted to have high rates of truancy. As such, a large percentage of those who populate these large urban communities with large schools and low-income homes are African Americans, thus, they are more likely to become truant or at-risk of high truancy (Vanderslice, 2004).

Risk factors most strongly associated with underachievement among African American students in urban communities are: teachers' demonstrations of caring, lack of teacher-peer respect, a disinterest in children's growth, lack of teacher expectations for children's achievement, curriculum relevance, class size, disengagement from school-related activities, students' own lack of confidence in their abilities to achieve, high mobility in school attendance, little or no parental expectations and involvement, level of parents' education, and poverty or low income (Somers & Piliawsky, 2004).

Socioeconomic status may also be directly related to African American students' ability or inability to access knowledge, material resources, and personal mastery (Lagana, 2004). Drop-

out rates are much higher in urban areas and even higher among low-income, low-achieving youths, and youths in ethnic minority groups (Lagana, 2004), largely because they lack the resources needed to succeed educationally. This may include educators' and administrators' knowledge of how to prepare for internal controls such as behavior problems and lack of motivation among African American students. Students who are vulnerable to this disadvantage have a susceptibility to receive the most impoverished education.

Family and community are also found to have an influence on school attendance rates. Students from communities actively involved in education are less likely to have high truancy rates. On the other hand, students from communities less involved in education, who have parents who are not involved, lack of guidance, lack of attendance laws, and whose families have differing views about education (Walls, 2003) may tend to follow the same patterns of inactivity in their education. Taking sole responsibility for the care giving of their families at an early age is another family factor impacting the educational success of African American students. The responsibility of having a part-time job may add to their disengagement from school. Researchers are beginning to relate how these types of home environments and early care giving may affect truancy among students (Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004). Because of their increased responsibilities, students may begin to feel alienated from the educational environment because they fail to see its relationship to everyday living. "The overt indicators of disengagement are generally accompanied by feelings of alienation, a poor sense of belonging, and a general dislike for school" (Lehr, Sinclair, & Christenson, 2004, p.280). Students must be able to identify with learning and relate its purpose to everyday situations. With an increase in the percentage of students with adult responsibilities, creating feelings of belonging to school environment through positive teacher-student relationships can foster in students' ability to see and understand the importance of educational success (NCSET, n.d.). Paulson (2006) in her

study on dropout rates, found students are not dropping out because they cannot do the work, nearly 90% of those in the study had passing grades before deciding to drop out. She found instead, students dropped out because classes were “too boring” and students needed to feel engaged in school and learning as a part of their community. As an effort to improve test scores, institutions have gone as far as informally push low-achieving students out (Paulson, 2006), instead of addressing the problem of why they are not achieving academic success. Thus, student engagement in school may be able to lessen truancy rates if institutions encouraged motivational success in class subjects.

Students who lack motivation to remain in school or to attend regularly have either lost or never had command of their social and personal controls. These two concepts may also influence truancy rates among African American students in secondary education. Social control, according to Hirschi's theory of social control, is the assumption that persons will engage in delinquent behavior when their "social bond" to society is destabilized (Miller, 2003). Dukes and Stein (2001) define social controls as factors related to students' decision to drop out, somewhat based on their upbringing, but students do not see how they can control them. There are also connections to institutions such as the family, school, or organized religion (Dukes & Stein, 2001). African Americans are forced to deal with factors proven significant to their sense of self, identity, success, and survival, while continuing to battle in an environment constantly producing hostility and interruptions (Miller, 2003). Other issues of social control directly related to educational institutions affecting truancy include overcrowding in classrooms, inflexible rules, tracking procedures, competency exams, unfair discipline, and lack of faculty interest (Lagana, 2004). All of these factors can be related to teachers and school board leaders' failure to consider various ethnic groups and learning styles in curriculum.

Personal controls are individuals' characteristics which may include their personal traits

(Dukes & Stein, 2001). Students who lack motivation may feel they have no personal control over who they are, who they want to become, or their ability to have high self-esteem. Literature suggests less high school truancy and drop outs would prevail if curriculum and prevention methods focused on individuality of students' learning styles and their background (Whaley & Smyer, 1998). Members of African American communities must find ways to help African American students understand success and ways to obtain that success through navigating the system for achievement in school (Spradlin, Welsh, & Hinson, 2000).

Dropouts, though not used as a variable in the study, will be discussed in view of the fact that many students with high truancy rates are the ones subjected to become dropouts. Truancy closely relates to dropout and should be considered when attempting to develop truancy prevention methods. As a result, this section discusses the consequences of dropping out for the individual and society.

#### Consequences of Dropping Out

The national dropout rate within the United States has decreased within the last few decades. Despite this decline, dropouts among African Americans continue to increase and continue to be a huge problem in our nation. Research data documents students who become truant and eventually drop out of school put themselves at a long term disadvantage in becoming useful citizens (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Furthermore, not obtaining a high school diploma is found to have more severe consequences for Black than White students (Davis, Ajzen, Saunders, & Williams, 2002).

Failing to complete high school not only affects the individual, but his/her community, and society as a whole. Youth who do not earn a high school diploma lack the skills required to secure permanent employment, are more likely to be on welfare, and are more at-risk for drug/alcohol abuse (Davis, Ajzen, Saunders, & Williams, 2002).

### Consequences for the Individual

One consequence of dropping out of high school is the direct impact it has on the individual. It has been known for years that those who do not complete high school are faced with many more difficulties later in life than those that do (“Youth Who Drop Out,” 2000). The decision to permanently withdraw from school may seem ideal in the beginning, but the lifelong consequences are detrimental. The wages of those who graduate from high school are much higher than those that do not, and continue to climb. “Recent dropouts will earn \$200,000 less than high school graduates, and over \$800,000 less than college graduates, in their lives” (“Youth Who Drop Out,” 2000, p. 2).

Not only will high school dropouts have a more likely chance of living in poverty because of low income jobs, they may also be faced with the inability to receive employment. Those without a high school education are not properly equipped for the modern workforce (Davis, Ajzen, Saunders, & Williams, 2002). “Unemployment rates among male high school dropouts are much higher than those for high school graduates...As the job market requires greater skills, many dropouts may find themselves completely locked out of an increasing variety of jobs as employers begin demanding a high school diploma as the minimum job qualification” (McLaughlin, 1990, p.6).

In addition, dropping out has a direct impact on the mental development of individuals. Dropouts may not be able to function as well psychologically as would high school graduates. The network circle of those in high school is larger since they have more persons to consult with during their adolescent development. They are able to form closer bonds with those that may help them cope with difficult situations during adolescence, their teachers and peers, who play a large part in adolescent development since students spend more time in school environments

than they do at home. This network provides more persons to assist them during the most difficult time in their lives. The social networks of dropouts may affect them mentally.

“Obtaining a high school diploma has become an increasingly important prerequisite for economic and social mobility in the United States” (Davis, Ajzen, Saunders, & Williams, 2002, p.810).

In the view of the researcher, because truant students are stigmatized with negative perceptions brought on by high school dropouts, they may develop low self-esteem, thus lacking confidence that they can succeed. Because of this stigmatism, and the consequences that follow, their possibilities for success in life are few.

#### Consequences to Society

The high rate of dropouts in the U.S. has serious effects on our society. High school dropouts are two and a half times more likely to be on welfare than high school graduates (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Dropouts from the class of 2006 will cost the nation over \$17 billion dollars for health care over their lifetimes (High school dropouts in America, 2007). Those who are truants and may become dropouts are more likely from low socioeconomic areas. Leaving school without a diploma means more likely they will continue this cycle of low-income living as opposed to graduating. As such, if the graduation rates of minorities don't reach that of whites by 2020, the nation will continue to reach high deficits whereas personal income would have helped the economy (“High school dropouts in America”, 2007). “This high rate ... saddles the United States with an undereducated work force which, in turn, retards economic and social development. Dropouts also cost the nation billions of dollars in lost tax revenues and in welfare, unemployment, and crime prevention programs” (McLaughlin, 1990, p.5).

With the increase of high school dropouts also comes the increase of daytime crime and incarceration rates. “Higher rates of crime found amongst young people from socio-economically

disadvantaged families reflect a life course process in which adverse family, individual, school, and peer factors combine to increase individual susceptibility to crime” (Fergusson, Campbell & Harwood, 2004, p.956). The monetary costs of maintaining prisons are extreme. Many individuals who are incarcerated were high school drop outs, making up nearly half of the prison population.

### **Overview of Learning Styles**

Literature suggests less high school truancy and drop outs would prevail if teaching and prevention methods focused on individuality of students’ learning styles (Whaley & Smyer, 1998). Learning styles is defined as “a consistent pattern of behavior and performance by which an individual approaches educational experiences” (Durodoye & Hildreth, 1995, p.242). Davis further defines learning styles as “individuals’ characteristic and preferred ways of gathering, interpreting, organizing, and thinking about information” (2001, p.185). A person's learning style is developed based on their hereditary factors, life experiences, and the demands of their present environment (Matthews, 1996). It is composed of biological and developmental characteristics that make the traditional learning environments, methods, and resources successful for some learners and ineffective for others (Lovelace, 2005).

No one learning style is projected to be better than another. Learning styles are based on a person’s preferred method of processing information and should not be used to believe that is the only way a student takes in information. Their “preferred” learning style only means the one most often used, not neglecting the fact they may use any other learning styles at any given time or situation. Contributors of students’ preferred learning styles are educational experiences, family relationships, socioeconomic class, and academic environment (Anderson, 1988). Davis (2001) acknowledges three reasons understanding learning styles are useful for educators.

1. Having knowledge about learning styles may help educators understand and explain

differences observed among students.

2. Learning styles will enable educators to develop teaching strategies which build on the different strengths of individuals in the classroom.
3. Knowing how students differ in their preferred learning styles may help educators assist students increase their range of learning strategies.

Research based on learning styles of students in educational settings have supported the notion that including more variety in learning styles in the classroom encourage success in high school. “Once learning styles have been identified, instructors can estimate the approaches, methods, and sequences that are likely to make learning relatively comfortable for each person” (Lovelace, 2005, p.177). The problem exists with educators and administrators failing to implement research methods proven to provide positive results.

In a study based on the Dunn and Dunn Learning-Style Model, Lovelace (2005) wanted to determine if responsive instruction increased achievement or improved students’ attitudes toward learning. She found matching student learning-style preferences with complementing instruction would improve students’ academic achievement and attitudes toward learning. This study supported the belief that “regardless of academic level, students earn statistically higher standardized achievement and attitude test scores when they are taught and/or tested with resources and strategies responsive to their learning-styles” (Lovelace, 2005, p.176). Everyone has the ability to learn new and difficult information when they capitalize on their preferred learning styles (Dunn & Dunn, 1998). Therefore, education curriculum should be less traditional or focused on one major learning style, and more geared toward the variety of the students they are teaching.

### **Overview of Learning Styles of African American Students**

How do learning styles affect the decision of African American students to drop out of

high school? Are African American students with active learning styles more likely to drop out of high school than African American students with less active learning styles? There is limited literature concerning learning styles as they relate to African American students in secondary education. Of those that exist, the majority focus on risk factors that cause drop outs among African American students or the need to include various learning styles in curriculum. African American students are important to examine due to their high drop out rate, but very few studies have specifically targeted them (Forsbach, Yanowitz & Fiala, 2002). It is known, however, that a growing number of students experiencing school failure are African American (Young, 2005). “Every seven seconds of the school day an African American student is suspended from public school...Every forty-nine seconds of the school day an African American student drops out of school” (Young, 2005).

Nagging our country’s educational system for decades is the insensitivity toward learning styles and culture. Curriculum nationwide is designed to fit one type of learner, mainly focused on the western European culture. It lacks diversity that characterizes our nation and must be urbanized on levels that accept the different ways communities think, believe, and learn. The continuous failure among African American children is created by teachers’ diverse cultural ineptness, improper attitudes, and differential behaviors toward African American students (Young, 2005). “When the learning styles of most students in a class and the teaching style of the professor are seriously mismatched, the students are likely to become uncomfortable, bored and inattentive in class, do poorly on tests, get discouraged about the courses, the curriculum and themselves, and in some cases...drop out of school” (Felder & Spurlin, 2005, p.103). This may be a large part of why students do not feel connected with their learning environment. Not only must there be a change in curriculum but “teachers in today’s schools must learn to effectively educate students from diverse cultural backgrounds” (Vanderslice, 2004, p.19).

Important cultural characteristics normally only addressed at home should now be included in classroom curriculum. Teachers should be allowed creativity in their teaching methods to make subjects like reading and math enthusiastic for their students and be able to illustrate how it relates to daily activities in their students lives. They must be able to forget their own bias and consider the particular population they are attempting to educate. Teachers should also know how to interact with students of different cultures and not lessen their expectations of minority students. “When teachers bring their own culture and values with them into the classroom, when teachers face a conflict in cultural values they often react by rigidly adhering to their own set of values; thus inadvertently, their behavior can interfere with the learning or limit the learning of their students” (Graybill, 1997, p. 312). According to Vanderslice (2004), teachers must be able to bring subjects alive through understanding the environments they are teaching and know how to include characteristics of lifestyles in their teaching styles. “Time teachers spend learning other cultures and integrating those into the classroom is time well spent” (Vanderslice, 2004, p.19).

African American children’s attitude toward success in education is found to decrease as they age. As they get older, they undergo experiences that are brought upon by the majority European white culture. Because of their ineptness during their elementary education year, by early adolescence they begin to believe their status in life cannot be improved through academic achievement (Kuykendall, 1991). They learn to start believing this perceived definition of life, or of educational failure, and begin to give less time and energy in school (Kuykendall, 1991).

“If we believe that everyone can learn, then what accounts for the difficulties that many African American children have in school?” (Graybill, 1997, p.311). The lack of effort of educators at the secondary education level to implement variations in teaching styles, to account for the rainbow of learning styles, may explain many of these difficulties. Burke and Dunn

(2002) found in their study on learning styles to raise minority student test scores that students are more enthusiastic and participative in learning when a learning style based curriculum is introduced. Though these educators may be consumed with prior duties, they must remember their ultimate purpose, educating youth to become more productive citizens.

“It was found by investigators using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator that persons with the intuitive style rather than sensory style have a greater potential for success in school; one reason for this potential is that instruction, counseling, and other student services more nearly match the learning styles of the groups who find success” (Matthews, 1996, p.249). Matthews’ research further support the belief that dissimilarities between student and instructor learning and teaching styles has an affect on school success. “Although mismatching is appropriate for developmental reasons, students possess more positive attitudes toward school when taught and counseled through their natural learning style rather than through a learning style that is secondary or undeveloped, particularly when they are presented with new materials or engage in new experiences” (Matthews, 1996, p.249).

Additionally, when determining learning styles, it is imperative that educators understand student backgrounds as a way of understanding differences in learning styles. Research lack studies examining the need for more inclusive teaching methods, recognizing variations in learning styles and its relationship with learning environments and student’s perception. Instead of ignoring diversity in education, discussions of culture and learning styles are effective and essential to understanding how African American children learn (Durodoye & Hildreth, 1995). Teachers should become trained on variations in culture and how that affects learning of African American students. Though total blame should not be placed in the hands of teachers who are overwhelmed with responsibilities, it is somewhat their responsibility to assist minority students to become effective learners. Research has shown that teachers often have lower expectations for

minority, and African-American students are aware of these low expectations, thus, because of these perceived lower expectations, they are more likely to lack engagement in school (Murdock, 1999). We should not take this to encourage teachers to become over nurturing as to favor minority students or lessen their expectations of them, but to acknowledge differences in learning styles and gear teaching to fit those differences. Willis (1989) completed a study on learning styles of African American students and found they are more (1) social or people oriented so social interaction is imperative in learning; (2) harmonious in that knowledge is sought for more practical purposes; (3) expressive, creative and prefer oral expression; and (4) nonverbal in communicating.

### **Students' Perception of Teachers Attitudes and Its Effect on African American Students' Decision to Remain in School**

Educators often fail to notice the impact of school as a social context on student behavior (Forsbach, Yanowitz & Fiala, 2002). Students yearn for the feeling of belongingness to their school environment through their relationship with their teachers, administration, and peers (NCSET, n.d.). The sense of belonging conveys the relevance students, particularly African American students, need to feel their school environment understand what they are going through and encounter in their living environments. This will ultimately play upon how these students view education as a vital part of their lives. Forsbach, Yanowitz and Fiala (2002), in their study on students' perceptions of school success, interviewed six African-American high school seniors and found six issues they felt impacted school success. The issues included, in order of importance: 1) initiative, 2) self-image; 3) family; 4) teachers; 5) labeling/racism; and 6) participation in school programs. These students described initiative, the most often reported issue, as how they are more determined and work harder than other students to be successful. Self-image, the second most reported factor, students felt were important because school success was also determined by the way they carried themselves in public and how they possessed high

self-esteem. Family was ranked because many of them reported how their family had high expectations of them. For instance, one student said their mother was always saying how proud the family would be when he/she became the first high school graduate in their family.

Though these students were exposed to labeling and racism by some teachers, they perceived teachers' attitudes toward them and their peers and helpfulness as precursors of success in high school. Labeling and racism were ranked in this list of issues because it was mentioned 17 times by the students in regards to standardized testing not being made for them, and how many of their African American classmates were being labeled as Special Ed or Resource. The last issue of the Forsbach, Yanowitz and Fiala (2002) study was participation in school programs basically was a result of the students mentioning how they felt, though dominated by white students, participation in school programs were related to school success. The ranking of these issues were reflective of how the African American students of this study perceived the importance social support networks were regarding school success.

### **Relationship of Students' Perception of Teachers' Attitudes and Learning Styles on the Educational Success of African American Students**

Students are individuals who employ a variety of methods as a way to understand or conceptualize information. Some respond effectively to lectures and notes while others can better internalize information connected to visual stimuli (Francis, 2000). Research concerning African American students show they prefer oral experiences, physical activities and loyalty in interpersonal relationships (Guild, 1994). This differs from mainstream culture in that education is based on the individual learner valuing independence, analytic thinking, objectivity, and accuracy (Guild, 1994). Many theorists believe African-American children generally learn successfully in ways characterized by harmony, cooperation, affect, and socialization (Francis, 2000).

In an effort to improve education for African American students, teacher education programs must excel in preparing teachers and administrators concerning African American students cultural background as it may directly relate to how these students perceive they are accepted by their educators; the impact African American culture has on behavior, learning styles, and preferred teaching styles; and a genuine appreciation of the diversity African Americans bring to learning environments (“Strategies for Teaching the African American Student”, 2005). Teachers must take a deep look at their own cultural background, understanding the effects their biases may have when interacting with students. Only then can teachers examine the backgrounds and needs of their student population and understand their students' cultural biases as well (“Strategies for Teaching the African American Student”, 2005). Following are tactics “Strategies for Teaching the African American Student” give for success in teaching African American students:

- Recognize and understand the cultural differences among students from diverse backgrounds, and treat such differences with respect.
- Intervene immediately, should a fellow student disparage a Black student's culture or language.
- Value the broad and varied experiences Black students bring to the classroom, and promote their acceptance.
- Avoid segregating students by cultural groups, and do not allow the students to segregate.
- Expand students' capacity to appreciate and deal with the differences in others, and help students to perceive self in a multi-cultural perspective.
- Demand the same level of excellence from all students.
- Have high science expectations for all students; positive expectations increase student achievement.

- Do not base a student's capability by their proficiency with the cultural mainstream.
- Due to cultural differences, cultural conflict and behavioral problems are more likely to emerge when minorities are unaware of expected cultural or communicative norms.
- Realize that every American is a product of his or her culture, and a tolerance and understanding of language differences must exist in such a diverse society.
- Many black students speak Ebonics; these differences in dialect must only be perceived as language variances, and not as a set back. These students should be accepted with a positive attitude and aided in the mastery of Standard American English.
- Students should be judged based on current situations and circumstances, not on previous mistakes.
- There exist congruencies between a student's learning style and the teacher's teaching style.

Therefore, in order to increase the success rate of African-American students, educators should develop more efficient methods of teaching that includes the values underlying the African American worldview (Francis, 2000).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical base for this research is formed on the belief that such factors as learning environment and learning styles have an impact on students desire to become truant. Theories used in this research project have relevance in how specific risk factors influence students' decision to become high truants.

The two focal independent variables of the study are learning styles and student perceptions. I will attempt to conceptualize learning style and student perception and how I use them in this study. For this reason I have selected the theory of perception, and the experiential learning theory (learning styles model) as the theoretical framework for this study.

Learning is the assumption that education in classrooms is unproblematic and taken for granted (Smith, 1999). Learning is based on the idea of how learning may happen (Smith, 1999). This traditional belief of learning undermines the learning process as it often takes place at any place at any time. Learning should be enthusiastic to the learner, a desire and willingness by the learner. As Carl Rogers said (Smith, 1999, p. 1):

“I want to talk about learning. But not the lifeless, sterile, futile, quickly forgotten stuff that is crammed into the mind of the poor helpless individual tied into his seat by ironclad bonds of conformity! I am talking about LEARNING – the insatiable curiosity that drives the adolescent boy to absorb everything he can see or hear or read...I am talking about any learning in which the experience of the learner progresses along this line: “No, no, that’s not what I want”; “Wait! This is closer to what I am interested in, what I need”; “Ah, here it is! Now I’m grasping and comprehending what I need and what I want to know!”

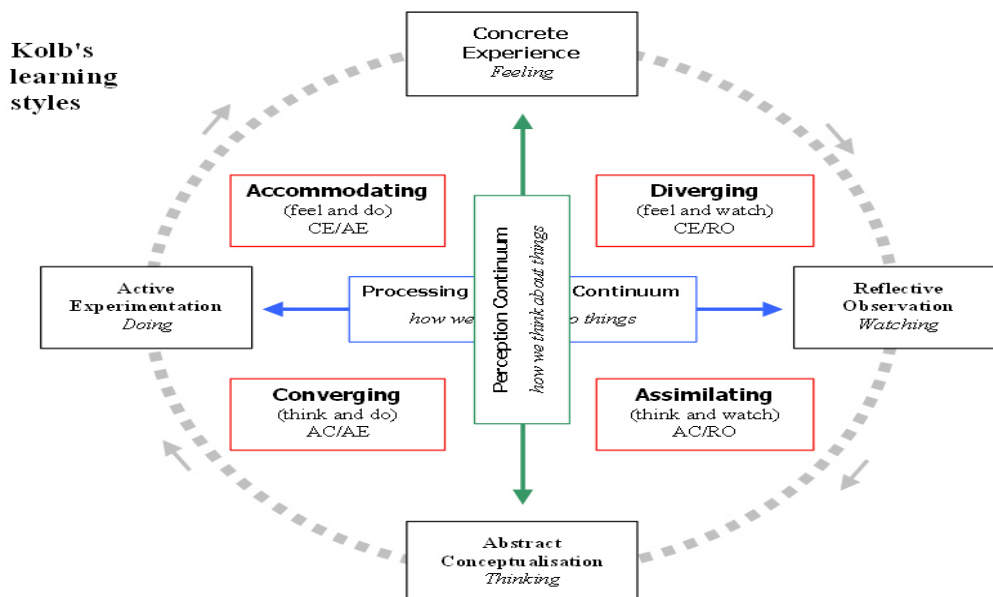
This should be the goal of learning and teaching in all realms of life. The lack of attention to the true nature of learning (as more than teacher gives information, student takes test, and learning has occurred) eventually leads to the decreased levels of education we witness today.

Learning styles are the different ways we learn and process information. Francis (2000) defines learning styles as a preferred way of interacting with and responding to the environment. Kolb’s experiential learning theory will be used to explain learning styles as it relates to this study. Kolb's 1984 theory of experiential learning is the belief that learning is based on experience as the source of learning and development (Clark, 1999). This theorized that people develop preferences for different learning styles in the same way that they develop any other sort of style (Clark, 1999).

According to Kolb, the learning cycle involves four processes that must be present for learning to occur (Chapman, 2006). These four learning preferences are based on a four stage learning cycle which includes (1) active experimentation (activist), (2) reflective observation (reflector), (3) abstract conceptualization (theorist), and (4) concrete experience (pragmatist). Kolb found that the four combinations of perceiving and processing information determine the

four learning styles (Clark, 1999). These variations in learning, according to Kolb, are along a continuum which he describes as the processing continuum (west-east), how we approach a task; or the perception continuum (north-south), how we feel or think about a particular task (Chapman, 2006).

Kolb basically assert that different people naturally prefer a specific learning style, but all persons utilize all learning styles (Chapman, 2006). The learning style preference is simply a product of two choices along the continuum, where particular factors, such as demographic and family factors, influence a person’s preferred style of learning. The diagram below depicts a diagram of Kolb’s learning styles (Chapman (2006). In this system of learning Kolb describes three stages of development: Acquisition (birth to adolescence), the development of basic abilities and cognitive structures; specialization (school years, and early experiences of adulthood), the development of your personalized learning style which is shaped by your social, educational, and organizational socialization; and integration (mid-career to later life), the use of non-dominant learning styles in work and your personal life.



© concept david kolb, adaptation and design alan chapman 2005-06, based on Kolb's learning styles, 1984  
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Figure 1 Kolb’s Learning Styles Model by Alan Chapman (2006)

From this model, Kolb suggests that our propensity to reconcile and successfully integrate the four learning styles improve as we develop through these stages (Chapman, 2006), but our learning from birth to adolescence is dependent on how our learning activities match our preferred learning styles.

Many individuals perceive learning as how they learned. As times change, so do people. Children now are facing struggles never faced by children before. As their experiences change, so do their perceptions of education and the way they perceive education to benefit them. If they are presented with information believed to be important, but they cannot relate it to their personal lives, then we lose them. Understanding learning as it affects each individual is imperative. We are losing too many of our youth to society, while they try to make it on their own.

This variation in learning among individuals is contingent along with the belief of this study that all individuals learn differently. Though all students are capable of using traditional learning styles to align with traditional teaching methods, African American students have been found to prefer more active learning styles which do not match these traditional methods. Based on this, the experiential learning theory was found to be the most appropriate theory to guide and interpret the findings of this dissertation as it relates to learning styles.

Students' perception is, in their eyes, the truth. Influenced by their experiences and expectation, perception is what they see as reality to them, and what they believe will happen, whether it is true or not. In the eyes of students, perception of how they will perform in school determines their academic success (Rollins & Valdez, 2006). Perception includes all processes associated with the recognition, transformation and organization of sensory information (Little, 1999).

The perception theory defines perception as images which exist where and when the mind perceives them (Carr, 1918). Carr believes images are not the whole reality of what is seen,

but reality is duration, and the images are a selection within this duration. Perception, on the other hand, is derived throughout this period of reality (Carr, 1918). Perception is an external awareness of two objects, the mind and an absolute space at that moment (Carr, 1918), thus what students see a given time sends messages to their mind that what they have seen is the truth.

### **Review of Previous Research**

Of the review of literature within the last fifteen years, the majority discusses characteristics of truancy, but few attempt to find ways to reach students and decrease truancy (Durodoye & Hildreth, 1995; Gabb, 1995; Lagana, 2004; Nowicki, Sisney & Stricker, 2004; Reid, 2005; Somers & Piliawsky, 2004). A trend in the United States towards controlling truancy is a tightening of school discipline normally involving the imposition of academic penalties (Gabb, 1995). Gabb also found at Aurora High School in Colorado, persistent truants are suspended from school, and occasional truants are required to catch up on the class work they have missed as a result of those suspensions. In some places “truants can be punished by grade reduction and exclusion from higher grades, or even from final examinations” (Gabb, 1995, p. 2). This type of punishment does not help but continue to add to the cycle of truancy given that students fall further behind and feel they can’t catch up on missed assignments.

Kearney (2007) studied behavior forms and functions of school refusal behaviors in youth ages 5-17 years of age. In a university based clinic for youth with school refusal behaviors (e.g. those that missed large amounts of school time, those who skipped classes, those who displayed severe behaviors in the morning in an attempt to miss school, and those who requested school extraction often from their parents), Kearney gathered child self-reports and parental forms on school refusal behaviors. He found school refusal is better measured using functions than measuring certain behaviors as previous research has done. These functions that may show a desire to refrain from school include pursuit of attention from a significant other (peer

companionship), pursuit of tangible reinforces outside of school (gang, friendship cliques, etc.), and disconnection from social activities at school (e.g. extracurricular activities). Thus, if researchers and parents focus less on current behaviors and characteristics and pay more attention to the functions, they can better serve potential severe truant students.

Davis, Ajzen, Saunders, and Williams (2002) conducted a 4-year longitudinal study that allowed them to examine the personal beliefs and attitudes of African American youth with respect to their decision to remain in school, and used this behavior to predict actual behavior. This study followed students from their freshman year through their senior year. It was conducted at a large urban high school with 99% African American student enrollment and based on the theory of planned behavior. The theory of planned behavior, developed by Icek Ajzen (1991), holds that human actions are governed by three kinds of considerations:

- Beliefs about the likely outcomes and the behavior and the evaluations of these outcomes (behavioral beliefs);
- Beliefs about the perceived behavioral expectations of others and motivation to comply with expectations (normative beliefs); and
- Beliefs about the presence of factors that may facilitate or impede performance of the behavior and the perceived power of these factors (control beliefs).

Davis, Ajzen, Saunders, and Williams (2002) found that consistent with the theory of planned behavior, intentions to complete the second year of high school are very well predicted from students' attitudes toward school completion, perceived social pressure and perceived control over attending and remaining in school. They found that graduation from high school could be predicted with intentions to complete the school year and control over this behavior. They also found that with perceived behavioral control, many students were concerned about the ability to control barriers in their lives that may hinder them from remaining in school or

graduating. This indicates that among control factors are perceived weaknesses in academic skills or distracting life situations that may control their behavior in reference to school.

The last aspect of this theory, Davis, Ajzen, Saunders, and Williams (2002) found normative expectations to closely relate to student's decision to remain in school. These persons whose expectations would influence their decision to remain in school include their parents, family members, teachers, friends, and peers. Overall, the results of this study found that students anticipated remaining in school and graduating.

### **Truancy Prevention Research**

What do we do to utilize knowledge gained from previous research to decrease truancy? There are many truancy prevention programs in practice, all of which may show some success. Characteristics learned from research on truant students should not be used to focus on students who seem to want to succeed, and ignore or give up on those that may seem more likely to drop out. Instead, these characteristics should be used to identify students most likely to become high truants so we may try to reach them and provide them with the assistance needed in order to succeed before we lose them. Truancy programs should not be a national decision, but instead one based on the specific needs of the community in which schools are having these problems, and not the responsibility of the school board or school but a collaboration of multiple organizations. Despite popular beliefs, students are not truant based on a desire to play video games or watch television, truancy almost always stem from much deeper issues (Stover, 2004).

A number of major research studies have been conducted addressing the need to decrease truancy and dropouts in America. These studies have focused on determining factors of behaviors associated with truancy and dropout. The literature draws from several studies that have relevant importance to the body of knowledge regarding truancy prevention. These studies provide an extensive review of research on truancy prevention and intervention.

The Truancy Intervention Program, an anti-truancy program in St. Paul, Minnesota, was developed as a joint effort between the schools and the county attorney's office (Stover, 2004). They utilized specific steps in an attempt to control truancy. First, school personnel contact the parents when their child has constant absences. If this fails, the child and parents visit with the county's attorney, along with other families with the same problem, to hear a lecture on the importance of attending school and explanation about the state's compulsory attendance law. Students who continue to skip school are required to attend a hearing of the Student Attendance Review Team (representatives of the county attorney office, the juvenile probation office, and the school district). The team efforts are to determine the underlying causes of these students' truant behaviors, and place children and parents with whatever counseling services they may need. If this step fails, the last step requires the students and parents to appear in juvenile court, where a judge can decide what measure should be taken. Utilizing this system of escalating intervention has made a noticeable impact on St. Paul's truancy problem, with student absences down 33%, and the number of chronic truants appearing in court declined by two-thirds.

Research findings and conclusions in a study on truancy prevention and intervention by Gerrard, Burhans, and Fair (2003) identified these approaches most effective when attempting to incorporate intervention programs:

- Strong relationships between students, school administrators and teachers,
- Clear attendance policies,
- Family counseling on the importance of family relationships and strengths to increase attendance,
- School interventions (a mixture of strategies) with mentors, individualized teaching plans, and learning circles (efforts of teachers to include cultural background or community and environment in academics and discipline), and

- Ongoing truancy prevention programs and measuring of the program.

Thus, as an effort to decrease truancy, we should not allow educational leaders to use information gained from research to stereotype potential truants, but more so to understand how to recognize possible truants and use this information to direct them in a path toward educational success.

In a review of literature by the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET), researchers found most students who drop out do so during their first two years in high school. In this study on ninth grade dropouts, they wanted to find ways to prevent dropouts and promote academic success. They proposed students performed better through the positive relationships formed with teachers and their school environment. Through a study design which included teacher orientation; emphasis on study skills, addressing socialization by attending to student concerns; and emphasis on attendance through quick absenteeism reactions, they found significant results.

The results of this study found that across a three year school span, this program was most effective on student attendance, thus decreasing truancy or truant behaviors. The program formed a sense of responsibility among students. Participants' attendance increased from 89.6% to 95.6% by the third year. The proportion of those who continued school over three years increased, whereas dropouts over this time decreased.

In relation to the effect of after school programs, clubs, and activities, ASPIRA (1995), an after school program designed for Hispanics to determine the effect of these activities on their high school success, was designed. ASPIRA provides students in middle and high school, and college with individual tutoring and group work to improve academic achievement, particularly in math, science, and technology subjects. Founded in New York in 1961, a chapter of ASPIRA was established in Chicago. This program consisted of a six week summer program, and after

school program, and fall semester follow-up. More than 80% of the participants live below poverty level and were identified as academically at-risk. ASPIRA-Chicago, during the 1992-93 school year, served 1,112 students in which 907 stayed in school.

Results of this study found that student involvement in after school programs are significant when considering truancy. Of the 1,112 participants, 907 stayed in school; 312 were accepted into postsecondary institutions; and twenty-four of the ASPIRA students graduated from alternative high schools.

### **Summary**

The review of literature revealed that certain demographic, school, and family factors directly impacted individuals' decision to remain in school or become truant, and also impacted their preferred learning styles. These factors are potential risk factors. The literature review also revealed African American students prefer more active learning styles as opposed to majority teaching styles practiced by educators. Truancy and dropout is a problem nationwide. Though national efforts have been implemented, it is the responsibility of individual communities and community leaders to design and implement prevention and intervention methods to reach their particular population.

Research on truancy prevention has been conducted in a wide range of areas throughout the world. Though these studies have proven effective in their chosen populations, they are not guaranteed to decrease the problem everywhere. Current knowledge revealing specific causes of truancy do not exist. Majority research provides us with causes and influences, which are for the most part similar across the board. They lack the ability to relate how student attendance is affected by their perception of teachers' attitude and their learning environment, and how their learning styles may all effect their decision to become truant and/or dropout.

## **CHAPTER III: METHODS**

### **Methodology**

The primary purpose of this study was to determine if African American students' learning styles and their perceptions of teachers' attitudes toward them and their learning environment influenced their decision to become high truants. This does not necessarily mean to imply students made a conscious decision to become truant, but that it may have some influence on their decision to refrain from regular attendance. Additionally, the study sought to find if selected demographic factors had any relevance on the truancy rate of African American students.

Approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (See Appendix C). Since the data was collected with the approval and in collaboration with the school's guidance counselor, parental consent was not needed. All students agreed to participate.

### **Study Design**

This was an exploratory, correlational study designed to examine relationships between factors relevant to the issues of truancy. Data was collected using survey instruments developed to measure students' perceptions of teachers' attitudes, learning styles and whether students are truant. The instruments used in the study included Solomon and Fedler's Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire and 3 researcher designed instruments. The researcher designed instruments were (1) Demographics, (2) Truancy, and (3) Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Attitudes and their Learning Environment. The researcher employed a descriptive, correlational design to investigate the relationship between selected risk factors. The theoretical perspective was based on perceived attitudes and its effect on high truancy rates among African American students.

## **Population**

The target population of this study was 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States. A convenience sample was used for collection of data. The accessible population was defined as all 9<sup>th</sup> graders, excluding special education students, who were enrolled in freshmen English classes in the public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States. Non-traditional 9<sup>th</sup> grade students were also included in the population. Non-traditional 9<sup>th</sup> grade students were those who were not enrolled in 9<sup>th</sup> grade for the first time.

## **Instrumentation**

The researcher used several existing assessment instruments to measure the variables being tested. The Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire (ILS) (1991), developed by Richard M. Felder and Barbara A. Soloman at North Carolina State University, was used to determine the preferred learning styles of selected African Americans students (A copy of this instrument can be found in Appendix A). The ILS has two purposes: to provide guidance to instructors on the diversity of learning styles within their classroom, and to give individual students insights into possible learning strengths and weaknesses (Felder & Spurlin, 2005). The ILS is a 44-item questionnaire based on the model developed in 1988 by Richard M. Felder and Linda Silverman, to determine learning style differences in engineering students. This instrument was later developed to help these engineering instructors design an approach which addresses needs of all students (Felder & Spurlin, 2005). The ILS can be used for an individual or to determine a groups' preferred learning style to provide possible strengths or habits that may lead to difficulty in educational settings (Felder & Spurlin, 2005). From the selected learning styles, one of each learning style dimension has associated with it 11 forced-items, with each option (*a* or *b*)

corresponding to one or the other dimension.

The categories of the ILS are active/reflective learners, sensing/intuitive learners, visual/verbal learners, and sequential/global learners (description of learning styles attached in Appendix B). “A reliable and valid instrument which measures learning styles and approaches could be used as a tool to encourage self development, not only by diagnosing how people learn, but by showing them how to enhance their learning” (Litzinger, Lee, Wise & Felder, 2007, p. 309). The reliability and validity for the ILS was determined by multiple studies utilizing this instrument. For test-retest reliability, the interval between test administrations should be large enough so that subjects cannot remember their responses from one administration to the next (Felder & Spurlin, 2005). Internal consistency is the extent to which responses to the item are correlated using Cronbach’s coefficient alpha, an average of all possible split pair correlations (Felder & Spurlin, 2005). A valid instrument would consist of a high level of internal consistency and a high Cronbach alpha. The construct validity means an instrument measures what it meant to measure (Felder & Spurlin, 2005).

This reliability and validity study by Felder & Spurlin (2005) gathers data of several studies to determine reliability and validity of the ILS. The test-retest correlation coefficients for four scales of the instrument varied between 0.7 and 0.9 for the four week interval and between 0.5 and 0.8 for the eight week interval. Since all correlation coefficients were significant at the 0.05 level or better, all coefficients were significant, signifying the reliability of this instrument. In reference to the internal consistency, all Cronbach alpha coefficients were greater than 0.5, signifying their internal consistency. The validity was not compromised in this study for the purpose of designing balanced instruction based on the consistency of the Pearson correlation coefficients of 0.2 or less, and the association of the factor analysis on the dimensions of learning styles.

This ILS was chosen for the purpose of determining the preferred learning styles of African American students to determine if the curriculum did have an impact on their decision to become high truants. It was proposed that students with more active learning styles would be the more truant students. Since the ILS incorporated most of the leading learning style models (Kolb’s learning style model, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, etc.), it seemed more suitable for the study.

An extensive review of literature revealed that no existing instrument entirely and satisfactorily contained factors that may help explain high truancy in African American students. Therefore, based on previous research studies a questionnaire was created specifically for identifying demographic factors that may help explain high truancy in African American students. (See Table 1).

The researcher designed instruments consisted of three parts (A copy of these instruments can be found in appendix A). The first section, demographics, was used to measure descriptive interests for the researcher. The second section was used to gather data on truancy status. The third section was used to determine students’ perception of teachers’ attitudes.

Table 1

Factors Believed to Influence Truancy Among African American Students

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Researchers</b>
Socioeconomic factors	Crowder & South (2003); Reid (2005)
Held back in school	Crowder & South (2003); Reid (2005)
Socioeconomic status	Crowder & South (2003); Reid (2005)
Gender	Crowder & South (2003)
Age	Crowder & South (2003)

(table con’d)

Own/Rent homes	Reid (2005)
Legal trouble	Reid (2005)
Large number of siblings	Reid (2005)
Involvement in school activities	Reid (2005); Forsbach, Yanowitz & Fiala (2002)
Parents/guardians education level	Somers & Piliawsky (2004); McLaughlin (1990)
Student employment	Walls (2003)

The second researcher designed instrument was developed based on the School Board's definition of truant as one who is absent 10 or more days from school without permission. Participants who reported missing 10 or more days from school were then asked to report their reason for being truant.

The last instrument on students' perceptions of teachers' attitudes was developed based on Walberg's model of the learning process, developed in 1976, which suggest student learning involves student perceptions acting as intermediaries in the learning process (Koul & Fisher, 2006), and also Walls (2003) belief that school environment has a direct impact on truancy and dropouts. Koul and Fisher (2006) also advocated the use of Walberg's model to determine student perceptions to assess environments because students seemed quite able to perceive and weigh stimuli and to render predicatively valid judgments of the social environment of their classes. The advantages of using students' perceptions are outlined by Koul and Fisher (2006): Students and teachers have an advantage of making valid judgments about classrooms and learning environments since they are immersed in the atmosphere for extended periods of time, thus, their opinions are based on long-term experiences; the advantage of using experiences of students over observers are they students act on their perceptions; and last, perceptions of

classroom environment have been found to account for considerably more variance in student learning outcomes.

### **Data Collection**

For this study several data collection procedures were performed. The primary purpose of the data collection process was to gather information for the purpose of conducting the study for the researcher. The selected schools' guidance counselor also assisted with the research process for future use of collected information. Data was collected during regular school hours during the selected schools' freshmen English classes. There was one assistant selected to help with the data collection process. The assistant was chosen based on her knowledge and comfort with the selected schools' environment. The assistant was trained by the researcher on what was expected and provided with a script describing the instrument, the purpose of the study, and a frequently asked questions page to ascertain all participants received the same information (See Appendix E for script and frequently asked questions page). Copies of all instruments were attached to each other. The following week, the researcher returned to an all-call (a process where all students needed for a particular reason are called to the one room in the school) in the school library for 9<sup>th</sup> grade students who were absent on the original date of data collection. Non-traditional 9<sup>th</sup> grade students were also called to participate in the study at this time. After collection of data from research participants, the researcher manually keyed data into SPSS Statistical Software.

### **Analysis**

#### **Objective 1**

Objective one was to describe 9<sup>th</sup> grade African-American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States on the following selected personal and academic demographic characteristics (a) Gender, (b) Age, (c) Held back in school, (d) Socioeconomic status as measured by whether or not

parents/guardians rent or own and parents/guardians employment (full-time/part-time/unemployed), (e) Whether student is a parent, (f) Whether or not student live with their parents, (g) Number of siblings students have, (h) Whether or not any siblings left school before receiving a high school diploma, (i) Whether or not students have had any legal troubles (stopped by police, handcuffed, taken to police station, convicted of felony), (j) If students are involved in after school activities, (k) If students are involved in clubs/organizations, (l) If students attend school regularly, (m) If students ever considered dropping out, (n) If students have a job, if so, how many hours worked, (o) Parents/guardians education level, (p) Students current grade point average as reported by school records.

The variables gender, held back in school, socioeconomic status as measured by whether or not parents/guardians rent or own and reside in a house/apartment/duplex, parents employment, if the student is a parent, whether or not student's live with their parents, number of siblings student has, whether or not students have had any legal troubles, students current grade point average, attend school regularly, involved in after school activities, involved in clubs/organizations, ever considered dropping out, have a job, and parents/guardians education level are nominal in nature. They were summarized using frequencies and percentages in categories.

The variable age was categorized into ordinal-level data and measure as interval-level data as well. Age was summarized using mean, frequencies, and percentages. All answers, except grade point averages, were self reported by participant respondents. The variable grade point averages were supplied by the selected school's administration.

## Objective 2

Objective two was to describe the perceptions of teachers' attitudes and the learning environment toward 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a public school located in a

low socioeconomic city in the southern region of the United States. The survey items included: (1) teachers attitudes toward school as perceived by the students, (2) teachers attitude toward subject being taught as perceived by the students, (3) teachers attitude toward the student as perceived by the students, (4) teachers' enthusiasm of subject taught as perceived by the students, (5) environment of school is positive or negative as perceived by the student, (6) I feel my teachers care about me as a person, (7) overall, my teachers don't mind answering my questions, (8) the subjects taught relate to my perception of real life, (9) I feel my teachers are enthused when teaching, (10) Information taught is useful to me, (11) I feel there is enough support for my educational success as an African American teenager from my teachers, (12) I feel comfortable in my classrooms, (13) my teachers are open to new ideas and opinions, (14) my teachers are concerned when I am not doing well, and (15) my teachers make sure I am comfortable when discussing new subjects. Respondents were asked to use the 5-point Likert scale for items 1-5 using point values. The purpose of objective two of the study was to describe the 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students' perceptions of teachers' attitudes and the learning environment toward 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic economic city in the southern region of the United States. Students were asked to respond to 15 items using a 5 point Likert scale. (See Appendix A: Survey Instrument: Student's Perception of Teachers Attitude and Learning Environment). For questions 1-5, students were asked to respond using the following scale: 1=highly positive, 2=positive, 3=neutral, 4=negative, 5=highly negative. For questions 6-15, students were asked to respond using the following scale: 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree.

The researcher developed ranges for interpreting the perceptions of participants. Each respondent's scores from the survey were calculated using the frequencies to determine their total score. For the first 5 questions, Learning Environment, the range of participants' responses

was 5-25. For questions 6-15, Teacher's Attitude, the range of participants' responses was 5-50. An interpretive scale was also developed by the researcher as an aid to explaining the data. Participants' responses to the survey were added for a total.

According to Pedhazur and Schmelkin (1991) reliability is a necessary condition of validity, and reliability is used to check for homogeneity of items measuring a variable or to the extent to which item scores are free from "errors of measurement" (p.82). According to Pedhazur and Schmelkin (1991), Cronbach's alpha or alpha coefficient is the most often used technique in estimating internal consistency reliability. In the current study, the reliability of the two scales of measurement Students' Perception of Teachers' Attitude Toward Them and Students' Perception of Teachers' Attitude Toward the Learning Environment was estimated using Cronbach's alpha technique.

### Objective 3

Objective three was to determine the preferred learning style of 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States as measured by the "Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire." Quantitative data was derived from the Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS software where descriptive statistics were used.

### Objective 4

Objective four was to determine students' level of truancy based on all absences above the allowable limit of 10 days per semester according to East Baton Rouge Parish school board as measured by the following characteristics: Number of unexcused days missed this school year, ever been truant, if so, for what reasons.

Data for this objective was collected from the students as part of a questionnaire. Students were asked to report how many days they missed from the following responses:

0 - non-truant

1-4 - seldom truant

5-9 - often truant

10-above - highly truant

If they were absent 10 or more days from school, they were asked to select all reasons that applied to them for being truant from the following responses: I was sick; an illness in my family; I was working; I didn't want to come to school; I was suspended from school; or other reason. Each response was entered as nominal-level data. Those that reported more than two reasons were entered as *2 or more reasons*. The data was analyzed using frequencies and percents.

#### Objective 5

Objective five was to determine if a model exists explaining a significant portion of the variance in the level of absenteeism among 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States from the following selected personal and academic demographic characteristics: preferred learning styles; students perceptions of teachers' attitudes toward them; students perception of teachers' attitude toward their learning environment; gender; if respondents had any legal troubles; if any of their siblings left school without a high school diploma; whether or not they are involved in after school sports/activities; and whether or not they are involved in clubs/organizations. Other variables were used as independent variables.

This objective was calculated using Multiple Regression with unexcused days as reported by respondents as the dependent variable. Regression analysis was used in the current study to examine if the independent variables predicted the dependent variable. According to Kachigan (1991), a regression analysis equation "describes the nature of the relationship between two

variables” and “regression analysis supplies variance measures which allow us to assess the accuracy with which the regression equation can predict values on the criterion variable...”

(p.160). A p-value of .05 or less was used as the criterion to decide if the degree of prediction was significant.

## **CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS**

Findings of the study are presented in this chapter. This chapter presents the data and discusses findings according to the order of the objectives of this study. Prior to addressing the specific purpose of the study, a description of research participants will be presented.

The purpose of this study was to determine if African American students' learning styles and their perception of teachers' attitudes toward them and the learning environment influenced their decision to become high truants. Additionally, the study sought to find if selected demographic factors had any relevance on the truancy rate of African American students. The sample population included 9<sup>th</sup> grade and non-traditional 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in freshmen English classes in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States. All students in attendance chose to participate in the study. There were two English classes and a total of 166 participants in the study.

### **Objective 1**

Objective one was to describe 9<sup>th</sup> grade African-American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States on the following selected personal and academic demographic characteristics (a) Gender, (b) Age, (c) Held back in school, (d) Socioeconomic status as measured by whether or not parents/guardians rent or own and parents/guardians employment (full-time/part-time/unemployed), (e) Whether student is a parent, (f) Whether or not students live with their parents, (g) Number of siblings students have, (h) Whether or not any siblings left school before receiving a high school diploma, (i) Whether or not students have had any legal troubles (stopped by police, handcuffed, taken to police station, convicted of felony), (j) If students are involved in after school activities, (k) If students are involved in clubs/organizations, (l) If students attend school regularly, (m) If students ever considered dropping out, (n) If students have a job, if so,

how many hours worked, (o) Parents/guardians education level, (p) Students current grade point average.

Gender

Participants were asked “What is your gender?” Females ( $n = 90, 54.2\%$ ) were more numerous than males ( $n = 76, 45.8\%$ ).

Age

Participants were asked “What is your age?” The most frequently reported age was 15 ( $n = 102, 61.5\%$ ). The next most frequently reported age was 14 ( $n = 34, 20.5\%$ ). In addition, 30 (18.0%) of the respondents indicated that they were more than 15 years old. The mean age of respondents was 15 ( $SD = .67$ ). (See Table 2).

Table 2

Current Age of 9<sup>th</sup> Grade African American Students Enrolled in an Inner-City Public School

Age	<u>n</u>	%
14	34	20.5
15	102	61.5
16	27	16.2
17	3	1.8
Total	166	100.0

*Note:*  $\bar{X} = 15, SD = .67$ .

Held Back in School

Participants were asked “Have you ever been held back in school?” The majority of the students ( $n = 112, 67.5\%$ ) had not. A total of 54 (32.5%) had been held back.

Socioeconomic Status

Another characteristic on which respondents were described was socioeconomic status using parents’ residential status and parents’ employment as determinants. According to Reid

(2005) socioeconomic status included whether or not families lived in public housing or owned their homes. Crowder and South (2003) included parental employment status as a predictor of socioeconomic status.

Participants were asked “Do you live in a house, apartment/duplex, or other?” The majority of the participants, 143 (86.1%) reported living in a house. Twenty ( $n = 20$ , 12.1%) reported living in an apartment/duplex. Only 3, (1.8%) reported “Other.”

In reference to respondents’ residential status, they were asked whether their parents/guardians rent/lease or own their homes. The majority ( $n = 105$ , 63.2%) reported their parents/guardians owned their homes. Sixty-one (36.8%) respondents reported their parents rented.

Finally, participants were asked “My mother works...” and “My father works...” The majority ( $n = 127$ , 76.5%) stated their mothers worked full-time. Unemployed mothers was the second most frequently reported response ( $n = 20$ , 12.1%). Sixteen (9.6%) mothers worked part-time, and 3 (1.8%) reported unknown. In reference to participants’ fathers’ employment status, the largest group ( $n = 123$ , 74.5%) reported their fathers worked full-time. Part-time ( $n = 14$ , 8.5%), unemployed ( $n = 14$ , 8.5%) and unknown ( $n = 14$ , 8.5%) were all the same. One (0.6%) respondent did not respond to fathers’ employment status.

The socioeconomic status was calculated by scoring respondents’ mothers’ and fathers’ employment status and whether or not they rent or owned. If the respondents reported their mother and/or father owned their home, a score of 1 was given. If the respondents reported their mother and/or father rented their home, a score of 0 was given. If the father worked full time he was given a score of 3. If the father worked part time he was given a score of 2. If the father was unemployed he was given a score of 1; and if the respondent did not know the employment status of their father, a score of 0 was given. If the mother worked full time she was given a score

of 3. If the mother worked part time she was given a score of 2. If the mother was unemployed she was given a score of 1; and if the respondent did not know the employment status of their mother, a score of 0 was given. One (.6%) respondent did not report fathers' employment, so it was not calculated in this table. The lowest possible score was 0. The highest possible score was 7. For example, those who scored a 7 reported both parents worked full-time and they owned a house. The data was reverse coded so that the numbers matched levels of socioeconomic status.

For ease of interpretation for the researcher, the highest level reported was determined by combining responses that ranged 6 and 7. Middle level was those who had ranges of 4 and 5. The Lowest level reported was those who ranged between 1 and 3. The majority (n = 111, 67.3%) of respondents' socioeconomic status ranged in the highest level reported. (See Table 3).

Table 3

Socioeconomic Status of 9<sup>th</sup> Grade African American Students Enrolled in an Inner-City Public School

SES	<u>n</u>	%
Highest Level Reported	111	67.3
Middle Level Reported	41	24.8
Lowest Level Reported	13	7.9
Total	165	100.0

*Note:* 1 case missing.

Parental Status

Participants were asked "Do you have any children?" Of the respondents, 98.8% (n = 164) answered they do not have children. Only 1.2% (n = 2) of them had children.

### Live with Parents

Participants were asked “Do you live with your parents?” The majority ( $n = 159, 95.8\%$ ) reported they do live with their parents. The remaining 7 participants (4.2%) do not live with their parents.

### Siblings

Participants were asked “Do you have any siblings?” One hundred fifty-seven (94.6%) respondents reported that they had siblings. The remaining 9 (5.4%) had no siblings.

### Siblings Education

Participants were asked “Did any of your siblings leave school without receiving a high school diploma?” Of the 157 participants who reported that they had siblings, 117 ( $n = 74.5\%$ ) of them who had siblings reported their siblings did not leave without a high school diploma. The remaining respondents ( $n = 40, 25.5\%$ ) who had siblings reported their siblings did leave high school without receiving a diploma. The 9 individuals who did not respond were those who reported being an only child.

### Legal Trouble

Participants were asked “Have you had any legal trouble?” The majority of respondents ( $n = 141, 84.9\%$ ) reported they had never been in any legal trouble. Of the 25 who responded they had legal troubles, they were asked to select a reason from the following: “yes, I have been handcuffed,” “yes, I have been arrested and taken to the police station,” and “yes, I have been arrested and convicted.” A total of 20 (80%) respondents had been handcuffed, while only 4 (16%) had been arrested and taken to the police station. (See Table 4).

Table 4

Legal Trouble Selected by 9<sup>th</sup> Grade African American Students Enrolled in an Inner-City Public School

Legal Trouble Selected	<u>n</u>	%
Yes, I have been handcuffed.	20	80
Yes, I have been arrested and taken to the police station.	4	16
Yes, I have been arrested and convicted.	1	4
Total	25	100

After School Sports/Activities

Participants were asked “Are you involved in after school sports or activities?” The majority (n = 88, 53%) indicated they were involved in after school sports/activities. The remaining 78 (47%) responded they were not involved in after school sports/activities.

Clubs/Organizations

Participants were asked “Are you involved in clubs/organizations?” The most frequent occurring response was “no” (n = 109, 65.7%). The remaining 34.3% (n = 57) indicated that they were involved in clubs/ organizations.

School Attendance

Participants were asked “Do you attend school regularly?” Of the respondents, 158 (95.2%) answered they do attend school regularly with only 8 (4.8%) stating they do not attend school regularly.

Considered Dropping Out

Participants were asked “Have you ever considered dropping out of school?” The majority (n = 144, 86.7%) reported “no” in response to this question. Only 22 (13.3%) reported “yes” they had considered dropping out of school.

### Employment

Participants were asked “Do you have a part-time job?” Those that had a job were asked “How many hours do you work per week?” One-hundred forty-eight (89.2%) of the respondents reported they were unemployed. Eighteen (10.8%) were employed. Seven (38.7%) respondents worked 20 hours per week. (See Table 5).

Table 5

#### Part-time Hours Reported by 9<sup>th</sup> Grade African American Students Enrolled in an Inner-City Public School Who Held Jobs

Hours Worked	<u>n</u>	%
5	1	5.6
6	4	22.1
9	1	5.6
13	1	5.6
20	7	38.7
20+	4	22.4
Total	18	100.0

*Note.* Missing 148 individuals were those who reported not having a job.

### Mother/Father Education Level

Participants were asked “What is your mothers’/fathers’ highest educational level attained?” In regards to their mothers, fifty-five (33.1%) reported their mothers received a high school diploma or GED. Fourteen (8.4%) reported their mothers’ received less than a high school education. (See Table 6).

In regards to education levels of respondents’ fathers, 38.0% (n = 63) received a high school diploma or GED as their highest level of education. Twelve percent (n = 20) of respondents’ fathers received less than a high school diploma. (See Table 7).

Table 6

Mothers' Highest Educational Level Attained as Reported by 9<sup>th</sup> Grade African American Students Enrolled in an Inner-City Public School

	<u>n</u>	%
Less than HS	14	8.5
HS or GED	55	33.3
Some College	36	21.8
AS Degree	20	12.1
BA/BS Degree	18	10.9
Masters Degree	11	6.7
Unknown	11	6.7
Total	165	100.0

*Note:* 1 respondent did not report.

Table 7

Fathers' Highest Educational Level Attained as Reported by 9<sup>th</sup> Grade African American Students Enrolled in an Inner-City Public School

	<u>n</u>	%
Less than HS	20	12.0
HS or GED	63	38.0
Some College	32	19.3
AS Degree	8	4.8
BA/BS Degree	14	8.4
Masters Degree	7	4.2
Unknown	22	13.3
Total	166	100.0

Grade Point Average

Grade point averages were also used to describe respondents. Grade point averages were identified through school records. The largest number of grade point averages reported were

between 2.00 and 2.50 ( $n = 36$ , 21.6%). More than 50 percent ( $n=85$ , 51.3%) of the students had grade point averages of less than 2.0. The mean grade point average was 1.90 ( $SD = .89$ ). For ease in interpretation, grade point averages were lumped to represent the average grade of respondents. (See Table 8).

Table 8

Grade Point Averages of 9<sup>th</sup> Grade African American Students Enrolled in an Inner-City Public School

Grade Point Average	$n$	%
A (3.26-4.0)	10	6.0
B (2.51-3.25)	35	21.1
C (1.76-2.5)	42	25.3
D (1.01-1.75)	53	31.9
F (0.0-1.0)	26	15.7
Total	166	100.0

Note:  $\bar{X} = 1.90$ ,  $SD = .89$ .

**Objective 2**

The purpose of objective two of the study was to describe the 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students' perceptions of teachers' attitudes and the learning environment toward 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic city in the southern region of the United States. Students were asked to respond to 15 items using a 5 point Likert-type scale. (See Appendix A: Survey Instrument: Student's Perception of Teachers Attitude and Learning Environment). For questions 1-5, students were asked to respond using the following scale: 1=highly positive, 2=positive, 3=neutral, 4=negative, 5=highly negative. For questions 6-15, students were asked to respond using the following scale: 1=strongly agree, 2=agree, 3=neutral, 4=disagree, 5=strongly disagree.

The survey items were first analyzed using means and standard deviations of each item. The survey item “I feel the overall environment of the school is...” had the highest mean of 1.77 (SD = .91). This meant students felt overall “positive” toward their learning environment. The mean and standard deviation of each survey item is presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Survey Participants’ Responses to Their Perceptions of Their Teachers and Their Learning Environment

Factor	<u>n</u>	M <sup>1</sup>	SD	Descriptor <sup>2</sup>
I feel my teachers attitude toward the subjects being taught are...	166	1.00	0.85	HP
I feel my teachers care about my educational success.	166	1.07	1.07	HP
I feel my teachers attitude toward school are...	166	1.12	0.89	HP
I feel my teachers attitude toward me are...	166	1.17	0.98	HP
I feel the overall environment of the school is...	166	1.77	0.91	P
Information taught is useful to me.	166	1.00	0.94	SA
I feel comfortable in my classrooms.	166	1.12	1.02	SA
I feel there is enough support for my educational success as an African American teenager.	166	1.17	1.07	SA
Overall, my teachers don’t mind answering my questions.	166	1.23	1.07	SA
My teachers are concerned when I am not doing well.	166	1.26	1.10	SA
My teachers are open to new ideas and opinions.	166	1.28	1.01	SA
I feel my teachers care about me as a	166	1.29	1.03	SA

(table con’d)

person.	166	1.42	0.99	SA
I feel my teachers are enthused when teaching.				
The subjects taught relate to my perception of real life.	166	1.48	1.09	SA
My teachers make sure I am comfortable when discussing new subjects.	166	1.72	1.19	A

<sup>1</sup>Response Scale: 1 = Highly Positive/Strongly Agree, 2 = Positive/Agree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Negative/Disagree, 5 = Highly Negative/Strongly Disagree

<sup>2</sup>Interpretative Scale: 1.00 – 1.49 = Highly Positive (HP)/ Strongly Agree (SA), 1.50 – 2.49 = Positive (P)/Agree (A), 2.50 – 3.49 = Neutral (N), 3.50 – 4.49 = Negative (N)/Disagree (D), 4.50 – 5.00 = Highly Negative (HN)/Strongly Disagree (SD)

The researcher developed ranges for interpreting the perceptions of participants. Each respondent's scores from the survey were calculated using the frequencies to determine their total score. For the first 5 questions, Learning Environment, the range of participants' responses was 5-25. Table 10 contains an interpretive scale developed by the researcher as an aid to explaining the data. The scale had a mean of 2.15 and a variance of .93. The five items had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .842.

Table 10

Interpretative Scale for Survey Items 1-5: Learning Environment

5-7 highly positive

8-10 positive

11-16 neutral

17-22 negative

23-25 highly negative

For the next 10 questions, Teacher's Attitude, the range of participants' responses was 10-50. Table 11 contains an interpretive scale developed by the researcher as an aid to

explaining the data. The scale had a mean of 2.53 and a variance of .858. The ten items had a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .886. According to Pedhazur and Schmelkin (1991), a score of .80 or higher meant that 80% of the variance is systematic or reliable variance.

Table 11

Interpretative Scale for Survey Items 6-15: Teacher’s Attitude

10-15 strongly agree

16-22 agree

23-32 neutral

33-45 disagree

46-50 strongly disagree

The Perceptions Score was measured using all 15 items drawn from the Student’s Perception of Teachers Attitude and Learning Environment scale. Reliability was acceptable as measured by the Cronbach alpha coefficient of .76 which was above the suggested level of .7.

Table 12 shows that the majority ( $n=71$ , 42.8%) of the students were either neutral in their perceptions of the teachers’ attitudes concerning the Learning Environment. Over one-fourth ( $n =49$ , 29.5%) of the students were positive concerning the teachers attitudes concerning the Learning Environment.

Table 12

Perceptions of Teachers’ Attitude and Learning Environment Scores: Items 1-5

Responses	<u>n</u>	%
Highly positive	33	19.9
Positive	49	29.5
Neutral	71	42.8
Negative	12	7.2

(table con’d)

Highly negative	1	0.6
Total	166	100.0

Table 13 shows that slightly over half ( $\underline{n}=87$ , 52.4%) of the students either agreed or strongly agreed with reference to their perceptions of the teachers' attitudes concerning them. Over one-third ( $\underline{n}=59$ , 35.5%) of the students were neutral with reference to their teachers' attitudes concerning them. Approximately 12% ( $\underline{n}=20$ , 12.1%) indicated they disagreed or strongly disagreed in reference to their teachers' attitudes concerning them.

Table 13

Perceptions of Teachers' Attitude and Teachers' Attitude toward Students Scores: Items 6-15

Responses	$\underline{n}$	%
Strongly agree	26	15.7
Agree	61	36.7
Neutral	59	35.5
Disagree	19	11.5
Strongly disagree	1	0.6
Total	166	100.0

Students' perception of their teachers' attitude toward them and their learning environment was also crosstabulated with whether or not they ever considered dropping out of high school. Of the participants, 22 (13.3%) had considered dropping out of high school. Of these 22, 4 (40%) felt teachers attitude toward the learning environment was "negative". Almost one-third ( $\underline{n}=43$ , 25.9%) of the total participants reported they felt neutral. (See Table 14). In regards to their perceptions of teachers' attitude toward them, majority ( $\underline{n}=72$ , 43.4%) of those who considered dropping out "agree" with items concerning their perceptions of their teachers attitude toward them. (See Table 15).

Table 14

Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Attitude Toward Their Learning Environment and if Students Considered Dropping Out of School

	HP		P		N		NEG		HN		Total	
Yes	5	10.6	8	12.7	5	11.6	4	40.0	0	0.0	22	13.3
No	42	89.4	55	87.3	38	88.4	6	60.0	3	100.0	144	86.7
Total	47	100.0	63	100.0	43	100.0	10	100.0	3	100.0	166	100.0

Note: HP= Highly Positive; P= Positive; N= Neutral; NEG= Negative; HN= Highly Negative

Table 15

Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Attitude Toward Them and if Students Considered Dropping Out of School

	SA		A		N		D		SD		Total	
Yes	3	20.0	5	6.9	9	16.1	4	18.2	1	100.0	22	13.3
No	12	80.0	67	93.1	47	83.9	18	81.8	0	0.0	144	86.7
Total	15	200.0	72	100.0	56	100.0	22	100.0	1	100.0	166	100.0

Note: SA= Strongly Agree; A= Agree; N= Neutral; D= Disagree; SD = Strongly Disagree

**Objective 3**

The purpose of objective three was to determine the preferred learning style of 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States as measured by the “Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire.” The Index of Learning Styles yielded results that described study participants on their specific learning styles. Results of the instrument were keyed into SPSS and analyzed using the frequencies and percents. Participants could be *active* or *reflective*, *sensing* or *intuitive*, *visual* or *verbal*, or *sequential* or *global*. Each learning style can be defined as oral transmitting of information (verbal); stating what should be learned instead of step-by-step goals (global); disseminating information with no visuals (reflective); and lacking the ability to relate what’s being taught to real world situations (intuitive), all of which are opposite of most African

American learners (Felder, 1993). Results of this research illustrate how African American students prefer more hands on activities (active); the need to relate what’s being taught to their perception of the real world (sensing); the need for visual images (visual); and the need to understand material in small connected dots (sequential). Appendix B gives a description of each learning style as described by Solomon and Felder.

The first part of the results from the Learning Styles Instrument reported whether participants preferred either “active” or “reflective” learning styles. Results reported majority of the participants prefer “active” learning style ( $n=127$ , 76.5%). (See Table 16).

Table 16

Results of Learning Style Instrument Measuring if Participants were either Active or Reflective Learners

Learning Style	<u>n</u>	%
Active	127	76.5
Reflective	39	23.5
Total	166	100

The second part of the instrument reported participants’ preference of “sensing” or “intuitive.” The largest response were “sensing” ( $n = 118$ , 71.5%). (See Table 17).

Table 17

Results of Learning Styles Instrument Measuring if Participants were either Sensing or Intuitive Learners

Learning Style	<u>n</u>	%
Sensing	118	71.5
Intuitive	47	28.5
Total	165	100

*Note:* Data was missing for 1 student.

The third part of the Index of Learning Style Questionnaire measured if participants were

either “visual” or “verbal” learners. Visual learners ( $n=147$ , 88.6%) were majority. (See Table 18).

Table 18

Results of Learning Style Instrument Measuring if Participants were either Visual or Verbal Learners

Learning Style	<u>n</u>	%
Visual	147	88.6
Verbal	19	11.4
Total	166	100

The last phase of this measuring instrument measured participants on whether they prefer “sequential” or “global” learning environments. Sequential ( $n = 112$ , 67.5%) were majority with the highest number of participants preferring that learning style. (See Table 19).

Table 19

Results of Learning Style Instrument Measuring if Participants were either Sequential or Global Learners

Learning Style	<u>n</u>	%
Sequential	112	67.5
Global	54	32.5
Total	166	100

The most frequently ( $n=65$ , 39.2%) occurring Learning Styles of the students were Active, Sensing, Visual, Sequential as shown in Table 20.

Table 20

Preferred Learning Style of Research Participants

Learning Style	<u>n</u>	%
Active, Sensing, Visual, Sequential	65	39.2
Active. Sensing, Visual, Global	18	10.8

(table con'd)

Active, Initiative, Visual, Sequential	17	10.2
Active, Initiative, Visual, Global	16	9.6
Reflective, Sensing, Visual, Sequential	13	7.8
Reflective, Sensing, Visual, Global	9	5.4
Reflective, Initiative, Visual, Sequential	7	4.2
Active, Sensing, Verbal, Sequential	7	4.2
Reflective, Initiative, Verbal, Global	3	1.8
Reflective, Sensing, Verbal, Sequential	3	1.8
Active, Sensing, Verbal, Global	3	1.8
Active, Initiative, Verbal, Sequential	2	1.2
Reflective, Initiative, Visual, Global	2	1.2
Reflective, Sensing, Verbal, Global	1	0.6
Active. Initiative, Verbal, Global	0	0.0
Reflective, Initiative, Verbal, Sequential	0	0.0
Total	166	100.0

#### **Objective 4**

Objective four was to determine the 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students' level of truancy based on all absences above the allowable limit of 10 days per semester according to East Baton Rouge parish school board as measured by the following characteristics: Number of unexcused days missed this school year, ever been truancy, if so, for what reasons.

The first part of the truancy survey asked participants to respond to the number of unexcused days they missed that particular school year. They were given choices of:

0 - non-truant

1-4 - seldom truant

5-9 - often truant

10-above - highly truant

According to the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board, truancy is the result of 10 or more unexcused days per semester. Thus, those that were considered highly truant were over 13 percent ( $n = 23$ ) of the total survey participants. Majority respondents reported being seldom truant ( $n = 88$ , 53.0%). (See Table 21).

Table 21

Unexcused Days Missed as Reported by 9<sup>th</sup> Grade African American Students Enrolled in an Inner-City Public School

Unexcused Days Missed	$n$	%
0 - non truant	22	13.3
1-4 - seldom truant	33	19.9
5-9 - often truant	88	53.0
10-above - highly truant	23	13.8
Total	166	100.0

The 24 respondents who reported being truant were asked to “select all that apply” concerning their reasons for being truant. The reasons they were asked to respond to were “I was sick,” “an illness in my family,” “I was working,” “I didn’t want to come to school,” “I was suspended from school,” and “other.” The most frequently occurring response was “other” ( $n = 12$ , 25.5%). Participants that responded to “other” did not give reasons. (See Table 22).

Table 22

Results of 9<sup>th</sup> Grade African American Students Enrolled in an Inner-City Public School Concerning Reasons for Becoming Truant

Reasons for Becoming Truant	Selected		Not Selected		Total	
	$n$	%	$n$	%	$n$	%
I was sick	11	45.8	13	54.2	24	100.0
Other	12	50.0	12	50.0	24	100.0

(table con’d)

I was suspended from school	6	25.0	18	75.0	24	100.0
I didn't want to come to school	4	16.7	20	83.3	24	100.0
An illness in my family	4	16.7	20	83.3	24	100.0
I was working	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0

### Objective 5

Objective five was to determine if a model exists explaining a significant portion of the variance in the level of absenteeism among African American students enrolled in an inner-city school in Louisiana from the following selected personal and academic demographic characteristics: preferred learning styles; students perceptions of teachers' attitudes toward them; students perception of teachers' attitude toward their learning environment; gender; if respondents had any legal troubles; if any of their siblings left school without a high school diploma; whether or not they are involved in after school sports/activities; and whether or not they are involved in clubs/organizations.

This objective was accomplished using Multiple Regression with unexcused days as reported by respondents as the dependent variable. Other variables were used as independent variables. Because of the nature of the study, stepwise entry of the independent variables was used. The nature of influence of all selected variables on unexcused days missed from school through calculation of the Multiple Regression is depicted in Table 24.

The demographic variable "have you had any legal trouble" was included in the regression analysis as an independent variable. For purposes of the regression analysis, it was recoded as a dichotomous variable. This variable was used in the analysis as whether or not respondents reported they had any legal troubles.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, the researcher developed ranges for interpreting the perceptions of participants. Each respondent's scores from the survey were calculated using the frequencies to determine their total score. For items 1-5, Learning Environment, the range of participants' responses was 5-25. For items 6-15, Teacher's Attitude, the range of participants' responses was 10-50. Participants' responses to the survey were also added for a total perceptions score.

For descriptive purposes, correlations between the factors that were used as independent variables and the dependent variable, unexcused days missed, are presented in Table 23. The variable, "Grade" had the strongest association with the dependent variable ( $r = .42, p = <.001$ ). Additionally, the variables "Legal Troubles" ( $r = .30, p = <.001$ ) and "Involvement in Clubs/Organizations" ( $r = .33, p = <.001$ ) had moderate associations with the dependent variable, unexcused days missed.

The relationship between "Sibling Education Level" ( $r = -.27, p = <.001$ ), "Involvement in After School Sports/Activities" ( $r = .17, p = .016$ ), and "I feel my teachers' attitudes toward me are..." ( $r = .16, p = .020$ ) and the dependent all had low associations with the dependent variable. All remaining independent variables and the dependent variable, unexcused days missed, was not statistically significant. (See Table 24).

Table 23

Correlation Scale between Unexcused Days Missed and Selected Personal and Demographic Characteristics

<u>Variable</u>	<u>r</u>	<u>p<sup>1</sup></u>
Grade Point Average	.42	<.001
Legal Troubles	.30	<.001
Involvement in Clubs/Organizations	.33	<.001
Sibling Education Level	-.27	<.001

(table con'd)

Involvement in After School Sports/Activities	.17	.016
I feel my teachers' attitude toward me are...	.16	.020
Active or Reflective Learning Styles	.12	.071
Perception Survey Items 1-5	.11	.075
Visual or Verbal Learning Styles	-.06	.241
If Respondents had a Job	-.05	.265
Gender of Respondent	.03	.376
I feel the overall environment of the school is...	.02	.383
Sensing or Intuitive Learning Styles	-.01	.436
Perception Survey Items 6-15	.01	.451
Sequential or Global Learning Styles	-.00	.483

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Note:  $n = 166$

<sup>1</sup>Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient

<sup>2</sup>Interpretation based on Davis' Descriptors where .70 or higher = very strong association; .50 - .69 = substantial association; .30 - .49 = moderate association; .10 - .29 = low association; and .01 - .09 = negligible association.

The model summary presents the results of the multiple regression analysis. The variable that entered the regression model first was "grade point average." Considered alone, this variable explained 17.3% of the variance in the dependent variable, unexcused days missed from school. (See Table 24).

Four additional variables entered the regression equation. These variables explained an additional 14.6% of the variance in the dependent variable, unexcused days missed from school. These variables were: "sibling educational level," "legal troubles," "involvement in clubs/organizations," and "gender." The variables together explained 31.9% of the variance in unexcused days missed as reported by respondents. (See Table 24).

The nature of the influence of these significant explanatory variables was such that students with low grade point averages; those who had siblings who left school without receiving a high school diploma; those who had been in legal troubles; those who were not involved in clubs/organizations; and gender in relation to females were more likely to be truant. Table 29 displays the analysis of variance (ANOVA) which indicates a significant regression equation ( $p < .001$ ). (See Table 24).

Table 24

Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis with Unexcused Days Missed and Selected Personal and Demographic Characteristics

<b>ANOVA</b>					
Source of Variation		<u>df</u>	<u>MS</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>p</u>
Regression		5	7.815	14.497	<.001
Residual		154	.539		
Total		159			
<b>Variables in the Equation</b>					
<b>Variable</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup> Cumulative</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup> Change</b>	<b>F Change</b>	<b>p change</b>	<b>Beta</b>
Grade Point Average	.175	.175	33.588	<.001	-.310
Sibling Education	.237	.062	12.727	.003	-.203
Legal Troubles	.271	.034	7.177	.002	.223
Clubs/ Organizations	.299	.028	6.283	.013	.179
Gender	.320	.021	4.738	.031	.152

<b>Variables not in the Equation</b>		
<u>Variable</u>	<u>t</u>	<u>Sign. t</u>
Are you involved in after school sports/activities?	-.129	.898

(table con'd)

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Do you have a part time job?	.883	.379
I feel my teachers' attitude toward me are...	.171	.865
I feel the overall environment of the school is...	-.228	.820
Survey Items 1-5: Learning Environment	.410	.628
Survey Items 6-15: Teachers Attitude	-1.193	.235
Active or Reflective Learning Styles	1.527	.129
Sensing or Intuitive Learning Styles	-.950	.344
Visual or Verbal Learning Styles	-.813	.418
Sequential or Global	-.164	.870

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*Note:* Gender coded 0 = male, 1 = female; Sibling educational level and clubs/organizations coded 1 = no, 0 = yes; Legal troubles coded 0 = no, 1 = yes.

## **CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This chapter presents an overview of the study. The objectives of the study guided the analyses performed by the researcher and serves as a guide for presenting the data.

### **Summary**

#### Purpose and Objectives

The overall purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship exist between learning styles and students' perceptions of teachers' attitudes and schools' environment and African American students' decision to become high truants.

1. Objective one was to describe 9<sup>th</sup> grade African-American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States on the following selected personal and academic demographic characteristics (a) Gender, (b) Age, (c) Held back in school, (d) Socioeconomic status as measured by whether or not parents/guardians rent or own and parents/guardians employment (full-time/part-time/unemployed), (e) Whether student is a parent, (f) Whether or not student live with their parents, (g) Number of siblings students have, (h) Whether or not any siblings left school before receiving a high school diploma, (i) Whether or not students have had any legal troubles (stopped by police, handcuffed, taken to police station, convicted of felony), (j) If students are involved in after school activities, (k) If students are involved in clubs/organizations, (l) If students attend school regularly. (n) If students ever considered dropping out, (m) If students have a job, if so, how many hours worked, (o) Parents/guardians education level, (p) Students current grade point average.
2. Objective two was to describe the perceptions of teachers' attitudes and the learning environment toward 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a low

- socioeconomic city in the southern region of the United States.
3. Objective three was to determine the preferred learning style of 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States as measured by the “Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire.”
  4. Objective four was to determine level of truancy among African American 9<sup>th</sup> grade students who were enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States. The level of truancy was based on 10 or more absences per semester according to East Baton Rouge Parish school board as measured by the following characteristics: absentee days, whether or not they have ever been truant, and the reason.
  5. Objective five was to determine if a model exists explaining a significant portion of the variance in the level of absenteeism among 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a public school in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States from the following selected personal and academic demographic characteristics: preferred learning styles; students perceptions of teachers’ attitudes toward them; students perception of teachers’ attitude toward their learning environment; gender; if respondents had any legal troubles; if any of their siblings left school without a high school diploma; whether or not they are involved in after school sports/activities; and whether or not they are involved in clubs/organizations. Other variables were used as independent variables.

### **Methodology**

The population for the study was African American students enrolled in a high school 9<sup>th</sup> grade English I course and non-traditional 9<sup>th</sup> grade students in a southern region of the United

States. There were 166 total participants. Solomon-Fedler's Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire (1991) was used to gather learning styles of participants. Researcher designed instruments were also used in the study. The researcher designed instrument consisted of three sections. The demographics section was designed to gather demographic information. The truancy section was designed to gather information related to truancy and reasons for this behavior. The last section was used to determine students' perceptions of their teachers and the environment of the school. Portions of the survey required participants to use a Likert-type response scale that was assigned scores to measure level of satisfaction. All enrolled students in 9<sup>th</sup> grade were African American descent. Thus, there was no need to exclude races from the study.

Of the 166 instruments issued, all were able to be used in the study. Approval for conducting the study was requested and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

## **Major Findings**

### Objective 1

Objective one was to describe 9<sup>th</sup> grade African-American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States on the following selected personal and academic demographic characteristics (a) Gender, (b) Age, (c) Held back in school, (d) Socioeconomic status as measured by whether or not parents/guardians rent or own and parents/guardians employment (full-time/part-time/unemployed), (e) Whether student is a parent, (f) Whether or not students live with his/her parents, (g) Number of siblings students have, (h) Whether or not any siblings left school before receiving a high school diploma, (i) Whether or not students have had any legal troubles (stopped by police, handcuffed, taken to police station, convicted of felony), (j) If students are involved in after school activities, (k) If students are involved in clubs/organizations, (l) If students attend

school regularly. (n) If students ever considered dropping out, (m) If students have a job, if so, how many hours worked, (o) Parents/guardians education level, (p) Students current grade point average.

Findings for Objective 1 indicated that participants were predominantly female ( $\underline{n} = 90$ , 54.2%) and 15 ( $\underline{n} = 102$ , 61.5%) years of age. Majority respondents had never been held back in school ( $\underline{n} = 112$ , 67.5%). Respondents' primarily lived in a house ( $\underline{n} = 143$ , 86.1%) of which 105 (63.3%) reported their parents owned their home. The most frequently reported response for parents' working status was majority mother ( $\underline{n} = 127$ , 76.5%) and father ( $\underline{n} = 123$ , 74.6%) worked full time. The majority ( $\underline{n} = 164$ , 98.8%) respondents reported they had no children. The respondents primarily reported living with their parents ( $\underline{n} = 159$ , 95.8%). The majority of the respondents did have siblings ( $\underline{n} = 157$ , 94.6%). Most of the respondents who had siblings reported their siblings did not leave high school without a diploma ( $\underline{n} = 117$ , 72.7%). The most frequently occurring response for legal troubles was "No, I have never had any legal troubles" ( $\underline{n} = 141$ , 84.9%). The majority of the respondents were involved in after school sports/activities ( $\underline{n} = 88$ , 53%), but were not involved in clubs/organizations ( $\underline{n} = 109$ , 65.7%). Respondents primarily reported they attend school regularly ( $\underline{n} = 158$ , 95.2%) and never considered dropping out of school ( $\underline{n} = 144$ , 86.8%). The most frequently occurring response for employment status by respondents was "unemployed" ( $\underline{n} = 148$ , 89.7%). When asked the highest educational level attained by mothers/fathers of respondents, the majority of respondents reported high school for mothers ( $\underline{n} = 47$ , 28.3%) and fathers ( $\underline{n} = 53$ , 31.9%). The majority of respondents had grade point averages below 2.0 ( $\underline{n} = 85$ , 51.3%).

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The majority of respondents were females and low-achievers. This conclusion is based on the findings that over 50% reported they were female and 51.3% ( $n = 85$ ) of the respondents

received grade point averages below 2.0.

Research states the importance of recognizing gender in academic achievement, particularly for females, children of color, and low-income families (Scott-Jones, 2002). The results of this study supports previous research since majority of participants were females who were low-achievers. Since females are more at-risk of dropping out of high school after the second year than males, the need to determine existing factors for the cause of such low achievement among females of African American descent is drastically needed. Families should provide interventions to encourage educational success among African American females.

Community leaders, educators, and parents must come together and devise a plan that target females in the African American communities. Also, school board officials, education analysts, and school faculty and administrators should design and plan educational goals to meet the needs of these students. All of these individuals should come together to devise ways of emphasizing the importance of education to African American females, find underlying causes for their lack of attaining educational success, and work together in schools and communities to decrease this problem.

Fifty-four (32.5%) respondents had been held back at least one grade in school. Though this is not the majority, this represents almost one-third of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade student population. African Americans make up a large percentage of retained students throughout the United States. Students who have been retained at least once are more likely from households where their parents had lower levels of formal education (Scott-Jones, 2002). As with previous research, findings of this study indicated study participants who had been held back had parents who had lower levels of educational attainment.

Based on the findings that over 50% of the respondents received grade point averages below 2.0 and over one-third had been held back at least one grade, the researcher recommends

that school board officials, education analysts, and school faculty and administrators design and plan educational goals to meet the needs of African American students. This should include curriculum geared to these specific types of learners, after school tutoring programs, and community programs which all promote education and aim to provide help in problem subjects for students.

A significant amount of respondents who reported having siblings stated their siblings did leave school without receiving a diploma. This is based on the finding that  $\frac{1}{4}$  of respondents reported their siblings had left school without receiving a high school diploma.

Participation in after school sports/activities may have an influence on students' perception of their teachers and school environment. This is based on the finding that almost  $\frac{1}{2}$  ( $n = 78, 47\%$ ) of respondents were not involved in after school sports/activities. Involvement in sports/activities teach young people lifelong lessons just as important as in the classroom and support the academic mission of most schools (The case for high school activities, 2004). A study on school extracurricular involvement and academic achievement found students who participate in athletic programs are directly associated with a 2% increase in math and science and test scores (Lipscomb, 2007), have higher grade point averages, better attendance records, and lower dropout rates (The case for high school activities, 2004). In addition, Lipscomb (2007) found students involved in any type of athletic program or club/organization had a 5% increase in Bachelor's degree attainment (Lipscomb, 2007).

Another factor on student's decision to become truant is their participation in clubs/organizations. This is based on the finding that a large percentage ( $n = 109, 65.7\%$ ) of respondents reported they were not active in any clubs/organizations. Involvement in clubs/organizations has been found to have an influence on student success (Lipscomb, 2007). Participation in clubs/organizations helps students in making good grades since they are a good

support system for individuals (Martin, 2008) and are linked to at least 1% grade increases in subjects such as math and science (Lipscomb, 2007).

### Objective 2

Objective two was to describe the perceptions of teachers' attitudes and the learning environment toward 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic city in the southern region of the United States.

Findings for Objective 2 indicated respondents had "positive" or "highly positive" attitudes concerning their perceptions of teachers' attitudes in their learning environment and towards them as students. Though not half, many of the students reported neutral concerning their perceptions of their teachers' attitude concerning their learning environment and towards them. Those with "D" or "F" grade point averages held more negative perceptions. Females (47.7%) represented a higher percentage of neutral and negative perceptions toward their learning environment as opposed to males (45.9%). Females (36.1%) also represented a larger percentage of neutral, negative, and highly negative perceptions concerning teachers' attitude toward them as opposed to males (30.6%).

Although truancy and the perception of teachers' attitude toward the student or the perception of teachers' attitude toward the learning environment were not found to be statistically significant, the percent of females who felt the teachers' attitudes were neutral or negative should not be ignored.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

This conclusion is supported by the score of the survey items based on their perceptions of their teachers and learning environment. It is necessary that students feel comfortable in their learning environments so they sense an ability to feel open enough to ask for assistance, which is beneficial to their success as students. It is the perception of students which impacts their

learning (Young, Wright & Laster, 2005), thus, educators must take advantage of this knowledge when interacting with students since their behavior has such a drastic impact on how students perceive their attitudes toward them.

Overall, students had a positive perception of teachers' attitude and learning environment. In examining each item, although most were positive there was one item future researchers may want to examine, "My teachers make sure I am comfortable when discussing new subjects." How can teachers make it more comfortable for students? Maybe research should be conducted to see if the reason children "do not feel like coming to school" is because they are "not comfortable". Also, over ¼ of the survey participants reported respondents felt neutral, why is this? More so, when attempting to help African American children reach higher goals towards their academic success, teachers should create movement, provide opportunities for personal and oral expression, and create learning activities that are energetic and lively, even if they have to move outside the walls of the classroom (Young, 2005).

### Objective 3

Objective three was to determine the preferred learning style of 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States as measured by the "Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire."

Findings for Objective 3 indicated the preferred learning styles of research respondents. The majority of respondents did prefer "active" learning styles ( $n = 127, 76.5\%$ ), hands on activities, as opposed to "reflective" learning, disseminating information with no visuals. In regards to "sensing" or "intuitive", more respondents preferred "sensing" ( $n = 118, 71.5\%$ ), the need to relate what's being taught to their perception of the real world, as opposed to "intuitive," lacking the ability to relate what's being taught to real world situations The largest amount of

respondents reported preferring “visual” ( $n = 147, 88.6\%$ ) learning styles, the need to for images, as opposed to “verbal” transmitting of information. The last aspect of the learning style measure ranked whether respondents preferred “sequential” (logical order of facts) or “global” (random order of facts). Respondents reported a preference of sequential ( $n = 112, 67.5\%$ ) learning style. Of the sixteen possible Learning Styles combination, the most frequently ( $n=65, 39.2\%$ ) occurring Learning Styles of the students were Active, Sensing, Visual, Sequential.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

African American students in secondary education are predominantly active learners. This conclusion is based on the fact that 54% of the total 166 respondents reported active learning as their preferred learning style. This conclusion is consistent with the literature reported by Guild (1994), that African American students prefer oral experiences and physical activities in a learning environment.

Including variations in teaching methods, particularly “active” learning styles, would be beneficial. The need for various methods in the classroom may lead to more increased student participation and decreased school failure. Those who are in leadership positions should work together with school faculty and administrators to address the issues of high failure rate among high school students, and ultimately find solutions to end the continuous cycle of educational failure among African American students.

Sequential learners prefer environments where information is absorbed in logical order, whereas global learners learn randomly with no specific order of information.

Visual learners ( $n=147, 88.6\%$ ) were majority, preferring objects they can see such as pictures, charts, diagrams, films and demonstrations, learn best in environments where images are a big part of learning

The majority of African American students in secondary education are visual learners.

This study found 75% of the students in the selected school were visual learners. This aligns with Felder's (1993) findings that most people are visual learners. Though this is the case, still majority information presented in classrooms is overwhelmingly verbal (Felder, 1993).

The majority of African American students in secondary education are sensors. This means they prefer learning facts that relate to the real world. On the contrary, students who prefer intuitive learning styles are deemed more successful. Previous research indicated that persons with the intuitive style rather than sensory style have a greater potential for success in school, mainly because majority instruction matches the intuitive learning styles (Matthews, 1996).

Additional research should be done to determine the influence students' preferred learning styles has on their ability to succeed in secondary education. The researcher found majority African American students are active, visual, sensing, and sequential learners. Thus, according to research, a large percentage of students may be failing and/or truant because teachers teach using traditional methods which normally consist of oral transmitting of information (verbal); stating what should be learned instead of step-by-step goals (global); disseminating information with no visuals (reflective); and lacking the ability to relate what's being taught to real world situations (intuitive), all of which are opposite of most African American learners (Felder, 1993). Results of this research illustrate how African American students prefer more hands on activities (active); the need to relate what's being taught to their perception of the real world (sensing); the need for visual images (visual); and the need to understand material in small connected dots (sequential). The researcher believes if these students learn differently from what is perceived to be the normal learning styles, maybe this is part of the reason African American students have such low grade point averages, are truant, or have such high drop out rates, and can't relate the purpose of education to real life.

#### Objective 4

Objective four was to determine African American 9<sup>th</sup> grade students who were enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States level of truancy. The level of truancy was based on 10 or more absences per semester according to East Baton Rouge Parish school board as measured by the following characteristics: absentee days, whether or not they have ever been truant, and the reason.

Findings for Objective 4 indicated 57 (34.3%) of the research respondents were considered “often truant” or “highly truant”. Of these, majority selected 2 or more categories for their reasons of truancy. The two most frequently occurring responses among these nine respondents were “I was sick,” and “I didn’t feel like coming to school”. More than 50% of those who reported being truant felt “negative” or “highly negative” concerning their learning environment.

Future research must examine why students are truant because “they didn’t feel like coming to school.” Students have the tendency to feel detached from school curriculum, have larger responsibilities outside school, or lack the understanding of why an education is important. If one-third of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade population is truant, what can be done to prevent an increase in these numbers and future dropouts? Educators and policymakers must acknowledge how important it is that African American students see school as pointless and how this effects their academic achievement (Spradin, Welsh, & Hinson, 2000).

#### Conclusions and Recommendations

Too many respondents were truant, especially so early in their high school career. This aligns with the NCSET (n.d.) findings that those who drop out do so within their first two years of high school. Students do not drop out because they can’t do the work (Paulson, 2006). They either feel because they have repeated a grade they will not be able to catch up or “classes were

too boring” (Paulson, 2006). With the increase of drop outs among African American children, more focus should be on how to help students feel a part of a caring and concerned learning environment and to find prevention methods to decrease the percentage of dropouts early on in their high school career.

#### Objective 5

Objective five was to determine if a model exists explaining a significant portion of the variance in the level of absenteeism among 9<sup>th</sup> grade African American students enrolled in a public school located in a low socioeconomic inner-city in the southern region of the United States from the following selected personal and academic demographic characteristics: preferred learning styles; students perceptions of teachers’ attitudes toward them; students perception of teachers’ attitude toward their learning environment; gender; if respondents had any legal troubles; if any of their siblings left school without a high school diploma; whether or not they are involved in after school sports/activities; and whether or not they are involved in clubs/organizations. Other variables were used as independent variables.

The model summary presented the results of the multiple regression analysis. The variable that entered the regression model first was “grade point average.” Considered alone, this variable explained 17.3% of the variance in the dependent variable, unexcused days missed from school.

Four additional variables entered the regression equation. These variables explained an additional 15.2% of the variance in the dependent variable, unexcused days missed from school. These variables were: “Sibling educational level,” “legal troubles,” “involvement in clubs/organizations,” and “gender.” The variables together explained 32.5% of the variance in unexcused days missed as reported by respondents.

The nature of the influence of these significant explanatory variables was such that students with low grade point averages; those who had siblings who left school without receiving a high school diploma; those who had been in legal troubles; those who were not involved in clubs/organizations; and gender in relation to females were more likely to be truant.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Participants' grade point average proved the most significant of all entered variables. This means that students' low grade point averages did have some impact on their truancy behaviors. Students may not realize the importance of education on their future success. If they were able to relate educational success in high school to future success, they are more likely to become successful students (Mello & Swanson, 2001).

Students' siblings' educational attainment proved significant against unexcused absences. Reid (2005) noted how behaviors of offspring transport through generations. When children recognize parents' lack of responsibility in maintaining attendance among siblings who drop out, they feel they do not need to attend school regularly also and become truant, and may also drop out.

Legal trouble is another factor which proved significant against the dependent variable, unexcused days missed. Daytime crime is at an all time high and in which majority is contributed to school age children across the nation. Influences, such as alcohol and gambling, have been found to directly impact student attendance and frequency to commit crimes to support these behaviors. Students who are found to skip school to gamble, tend to steal from family and outside sources, which lead to gambling arrests (Westphal, Rush, Stevens & Johnson, 2000). They also found, in the state of Louisiana, minority males in public school were significantly higher gamblers. About 59% of these students are problem gamblers, use tobacco, drugs, and drank alcohol (Westphal, Rush, Stevens & Johnson, 2000). It is also found that students with

“D” averages or lower consume more alcohol per week and this behavior is more likely taking place at the students home (Hendricks, 1993). Hendricks (1993) also found the likelihood of heavy drinking increases as grade point averages decrease. As a result of heavy drinking, over 70% cut class and more than 15% have encountered legal problems as a result. Intervention methods should be adopted between schools and parents to decrease these behaviors among students. Students who adopt these types of behaviors so early on in life lessen their chances of educational success, ultimately decreasing their success in adulthood.

Previous studies have shown gender as an important factor when considering factors among dropouts. Though females are known to have higher grade point averages than males, females, particularly African American females, are more likely to become truant and dropout of high school (Crowder & South, 2003).

Students’ participation in clubs/organizations was found significant in this study which aligns with previous studies that found student involvement in clubs/organizations to have a direct impact on student success (Forsback, Yanowitz, & Fiala, 2002). Participation in clubs/organizations has a positive relationship with student retention, satisfaction and perceptions (Martin, 2008). Students’ positive perceptions of instructional behaviors will help sustain involvement in school (Martin, 2008).

### **Recommendations and Future Research**

Truancy may always be an issue within the United States. The problem lies in the fact that dropout rates steadily increase in the African American community. If the problem is not addressed correctly, the numbers will continue to increase. Based on the findings, sibling educational level, legal troubles, lack of participation in clubs/organizations and gender are all influences of truancy. Overall, the results of this study are helpful given the amount of explained variance in the dependent variable (56.5%). Though not high, the independent variables found

significant explains over 50% of the variance. However, the possibility exists that the findings are specific to the group used to conduct the study since the study used a convenience sample.

The researcher concludes that findings of this study are consistent with previous studies that stated students who are more actively involved in clubs/organizations are less likely to be truant; and students who have siblings who left school without receiving a high school diploma are more likely to be truant.

Interventions should be designed to encourage educational attainment among African Americans who have a family history of siblings who left high school without receiving a high school diploma. Also, community and school interventions should be done to decrease the deviant behaviors associated with crime and legal troubles among school age children.

Interventions that meet the needs of African American school age youth are needed so that these youth can identify with the importance of educational attainment and gain insight into how obtaining an education relates to them. It is not the duty of one individual or group, but a partnership among many individuals and organizations to develop such programs.

Limitations of this study include the use of 1 school for data collection and studying students with school based data collection. Limitation of studying truants with school based data collection is that the chance of not gathering data because of absence is greater. The data, thus, is specific to this one school and may not be generalizable to other schools, even if the racial composition is the same. Studying subjects from one school also limits generalisability. If multiple schools were used to collect data, findings could have more generalisability. Collecting data from other schools could have proven other variables, such as parental educational attainment and employment status, as having an influence on truancy, particularly among African American students, which would have aligned with previous research.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**SURVEY INSTRUMENTS:**  
**INDEX OF LEARNING STYLES QUESTIONNAIRE**  
**DEMOGRAPHICS**  
**TRUANCY**  
**STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS' ATTITUDE AND LEARNING**  
**ENVIRONMENT**

**Survey Instrument: Demographics**

1. **What is your gender?**  
 Male  
 Female
2. **What is your age?** \_\_\_\_\_
3. **Do you have any children?**  
 Yes  
 No
4. **Do you have any siblings? If no, go to 9.**  
 Yes  
 No
5. **Did any of your siblings leave school without receiving a high school diploma?**  
 Yes  
 No
6. **Have you had any legal troubles:**  
 No, I have never been in any legal troubles.  
 Yes, I have been handcuffed.  
 Yes, I have been arrested and taken to the police station.  
 Yes, I have been arrested and convicted.
7. **Have you ever been held back in school?**  
 Yes  
 No
8. **Do you attend school regularly?**  
 Yes  
 No
9. **Have you ever considered dropping out of high school before:**  
 Yes  
 No
10. **Are you involved in after school sports/activities?**  
 Yes  
 No
11. **Are you involved in clubs/organizations?**  
 Yes  
 No
12. **Do you have a part-time job?**  
 Yes  
 No-go to 15
13. **How many hours do you work per week?** \_\_\_\_\_
14. **Did you live in a different house 1 year ago?**  
 Yes  
 No
15. **Do you live with your parent(s)/guardian(s)?**  
 Yes

No

**16. Does your mother live in the home with you?**

Yes

No

**17. What is your mothers' educational level? (choose highest educational level attained)**

Elementary K-5

Middle 6-8

High School 9-12

Received high school diploma

Received GED

Some college

Associate degree in college: occupational/vocational

Associate degree in college: academic program

Completed college with BS/BA degree

Completed college with Master's degree

Professional school degree: M.D.

Doctorate degree: Ph.D.

Unknown

**18. My mother works:**

Full-time

Part-time

Presently unemployed

Unknown

**19. Does your father lives in the home with you?**

Yes

No

**20. What is your fathers' educational level? (choose highest educational level attained)**

Elementary K-5

Middle 6-8

High School 9-12

Received high school diploma

Received GED

Some college

Associate degree in college: occupational/vocational

Associate degree in college: academic program

Completed college with BS/BA degree

Completed college with Master's degree

Professional school degree: M.D.

Doctorate degree: Ph.D.

Unknown

**21. My father works:**

Full-time

Part-time

Presently unemployed

Unknown

**22. Residential living**

House

Apartment/duplex

Other

**23. Parent(s)/guardian(s) rent/lease the house/apartment we live in.**

Yes

No

**24. Parent(s)/guardian(s) own the house/apartment we live in.**

Yes

No

**Survey Instrument: Truancy**

**1. How many unexcused days missed this school year?**

0 no truant

1-4 seldom truant

5-9 often truant

10-above highly truant

**2. Have you ever been truant?**

(A truant is one who has missed 10 or more unexcused days from school)

Yes

No, do not answer #3

**3. My reason for being truant is: (select all that apply)**

a. I was sick  Yes  No

b. An illness in my family  Yes  No

c. I was working  Yes  No

d. I didn't want to come to school  Yes  No

e. I was suspended from school  Yes  No

f. other reason  Yes  No

## Survey Instrument: Student's Perception of Teachers Attitude and Learning Environment

Answer the questions below using the likert scale on whether you feel:  
1=highly positive 2=positive 3=neutral 4=negative 5=highly negative

1. I feel my teachers attitude toward school are... 1 2 3 4 5
2. I feel my teachers attitude toward me are... 1 2 3 4 5
3. I feel my teachers attitude toward subject being taught are... 1 2 3 4 5
4. I feel my teachers care about my educational success. 1 2 3 4 5
5. I feel the overall environment of the school is... 1 2 3 4 5

Answer the questions below using the scale on whether you:

1=highly positive 2=positive 3=neutral 4=negative 5=highly negative

6. I feel my teachers care about me as a person. 1 2 3 4 5
7. Overall, my teachers don't mind answering my questions. 1 2 3 4 5
8. The subjects taught relate to my perception of real life. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I feel my teachers are enthused when teaching. 1 2 3 4 5
10. Information taught is useful to me. 1 2 3 4 5
11. I feel there is enough support for my educational success as an African American teenager from my teachers. 1 2 3 4 5
12. I feel comfortable in my classrooms. 1 2 3 4 5
13. My teachers are open to new ideas and opinions. 1 2 3 4 5
14. My teachers are concerned when I am not doing well. 1 2 3 4 5
15. My teachers make sure I am comfortable when discussing new subjects. 1 2 3 4 5

**APPENDIX B**  
**DESCRIPTION OF LEARNING STYLES AND STRATEGIES QUESTIONNAIRE**

## **LEARNING STYLES AND STRATEGIES**

Richard M. Felder  
Hoechst Celanese Professor of Chemical Engineering  
North Carolina State University

Barbara A. Soloman  
Coordinator of Advising, First Year College  
North Carolina State University

### **ACTIVE AND REFLECTIVE LEARNERS**

- Active learners tend to retain and understand information best by doing something active with it--discussing or applying it or explaining it to others. Reflective learners prefer to think about it quietly first.
- "Let's try it out and see how it works" is an active learner's phrase; "Let's think it through first" is the reflective learner's response.
- Active learners tend to like group work more than reflective learners, who prefer working alone.
- Sitting through lectures without getting to do anything physical but take notes is hard for both learning types, but particularly hard for active learners.

*Everybody is active sometimes and reflective sometimes.* Your preference for one category or the other may be strong, moderate, or mild. A balance of the two is desirable. If you always act before reflecting you can jump into things prematurely and get into trouble, while if you spend too much time reflecting you may never get anything done.

#### **How can active learners help themselves?**

If you are an active learner in a class that allows little or no class time for discussion or problem-solving activities, you should try to compensate for these lacks when you study. Study in a group in which the members take turns explaining different topics to each other. Work with others to

guess what you will be asked on the next test and figure out how you will answer. You will always retain information better if you find ways to do something with it.

### **How can reflective learners help themselves?**

If you are a reflective learner in a class that allows little or not class time for thinking about new information, you should try to compensate for this lack when you study. Don't simply read or memorize the material; stop periodically to review what you have read and to think of possible questions or applications. You might find it helpful to write short summaries of readings or class notes in your own words. Doing so may take extra time but will enable you to retain the material more effectively.

### **SENSING AND INTUITIVE LEARNERS**

- Sensing learners tend to like learning facts, intuitive learners often prefer discovering possibilities and relationships.
- Sensors often like solving problems by well-established methods and dislike complications and surprises; intuitors like innovation and dislike repetition. Sensors are more likely than intuitors to resent being tested on material that has not been explicitly covered in class.
- Sensors tend to be patient with details and good at memorizing facts and doing hands-on (laboratory) work; intuitors may be better at grasping new concepts and are often more comfortable than sensors with abstractions and mathematical formulations.
- Sensors tend to be more practical and careful than intuitors; intuitors tend to work faster and to be more innovative than sensors.
- Sensors don't like courses that have no apparent connection to the real world; intuitors don't like "plug-and-chug" courses that involve a lot of memorization and routine calculations.

*Everybody is sensing sometimes and intuitive sometimes.* Your preference for one or the other may be strong, moderate, or mild. To be effective as a learner and problem solver, you need to be able to function both ways. If you overemphasize intuition, you may miss important details or make careless mistakes in calculations or hands-on work; if you overemphasize sensing, you may rely too much on memorization and familiar methods and not concentrate enough on understanding and innovative thinking.

### **How can sensing learners help themselves?**

Sensors remember and understand information best if they can see how it connects to the real world. If you are in a class where most of the material is abstract and theoretical, you may have difficulty. Ask your instructor for specific examples of concepts and procedures, and find out how the concepts apply in practice. If the teacher does not provide enough specifics, try to find some in your course text or other references or by brainstorming with friends or classmates.

### **How can intuitive learners help themselves?**

Many college lecture classes are aimed at intuitors. However, if you are an intuitor and you happen to be in a class that deals primarily with memorization and rote substitution in formulas, you may have trouble with boredom. Ask your instructor for interpretations or theories that link the facts, or try to find the connections yourself. You may also be prone to careless mistakes on test because you are impatient with details and don't like repetition (as in checking your completed solutions). Take time to read the entire question before you start answering and be sure to check your results

## **VISUAL AND VERBAL LEARNERS**

Visual learners remember best what they see--pictures, diagrams, flow charts, time lines, films, and demonstrations. Verbal learners get more out of words--written and spoken explanations. Everyone learns more when information is presented both visually and verbally.

In most college classes very little visual information is presented: students mainly listen to lectures and read material written on chalkboards and in textbooks and handouts. Unfortunately, most people are visual learners, which mean that most students do not get nearly as much as they would if more visual presentation were used in class. Good learners are capable of processing information presented either visually or verbally.

### **How can visual learners help themselves?**

If you are a visual learner, try to find diagrams, sketches, schematics, photographs, flow charts, or any other visual representation of course material that is predominantly verbal. Ask your instructor, consult reference books, and see if any videotapes or CD-ROM displays of the course material are available. Prepare a concept map by listing key points, enclosing them in boxes or circles, and drawing lines with arrows between concepts to show connections. Color-code your notes with a highlighter so that everything relating to one topic is the same color.

### **How can verbal learners help themselves?**

Write summaries or outlines of course material in your own words. Working in groups can be particularly effective: you gain understanding of material by hearing classmates' explanations and you learn even more when you do the explaining.

## **SEQUENTIAL AND GLOBAL LEARNERS**

- Sequential learners tend to gain understanding in linear steps, with each step following logically from the previous one. Global learners tend to learn in large jumps, absorbing material almost randomly without seeing connections, and then suddenly "getting it."
- Sequential learners tend to follow logical stepwise paths in finding solutions; global learners may be able to solve complex problems quickly or put things together in novel ways once they have grasped the big picture, but they may have difficulty explaining how they did it.

Many people who read this description may conclude incorrectly that they are global, since everyone has experienced bewilderment followed by a sudden flash of understanding. What makes you global or not is what happens before the light bulb goes on. Sequential learners may not fully understand the material but they can nevertheless do something with it (like solve the homework problems or pass the test) since the pieces they have absorbed are logically connected. Strongly global learners who lack good sequential thinking abilities, on the other hand, may have serious difficulties until they have the big picture. Even after they have it, they may be fuzzy about the details of the subject, while sequential learners may know a lot about specific aspects of a subject but may have trouble relating them to different aspects of the same subject or to different subjects.

### **How can sequential learners help themselves?**

Most college courses are taught in a sequential manner. However, if you are a sequential learner and you have an instructor who jumps around from topic to topic or skips steps, you may have difficulty following and remembering. Ask the instructor to fill in the skipped steps, or fill them in yourself by consulting references. When you are studying, take the time to outline the lecture material for yourself in logical order. In the long run doing so will save you time. You might also try to strengthen your global thinking skills by relating each new topic you study to things you already know. The more you can do so, the deeper your understanding of the topic is likely to be.

### **How can global learners help themselves?**

If you are a global learner, it can be helpful for you to realize that you need the big picture of a subject before you can master details. If your instructor plunges directly into new topics without bothering to explain how they relate to what you already know, it can cause problems for you. Fortunately, there are steps you can take that may help you get the big picture more rapidly.

Before you begin to study the first section of a chapter in a text, skim through the entire chapter

to get an overview. Doing so may be time-consuming initially but it may save you from going over and over individual parts later. Instead of spending a short time on every subject every night, you might find it more productive to immerse yourself in individual subjects for large blocks. Try to relate the subject to things you already know, either by asking the instructor to help you see connections or by consulting references. Above all, don't lose faith in yourself; you will eventually understand the new material, and once you do your understanding of how it connects to other topics and disciplines may enable you to apply it in ways that most sequential thinkers would never dream of.

**APPENDIX C**  
**IRB EXEMPTION**

**Application for Exemption from Institutional Oversight**

Unless qualified as meeting the specific criteria for exemption from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ALL LSU research/projects using living humans as subjects, or samples or data obtained from humans, directly or indirectly, with or without their consent, must be approved or exempted in advance by the LSU IRB. This Form helps the PI determine if a project may be exempted, and is used to request an exemption.



Institutional Review Board  
 Dr. Robert Mathews, Chair  
 203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
 Baton Rouge, LA 70803  
 P: 225.578.8692  
 F: 225.578.6792  
 irb@lsu.edu | lsu.edu/irb

- Applicant, Please fill out the application in its entirety and include the completed application as well as parts A-E, listed below, when submitting to the IRB. Once the application is completed, please submit two copies of the completed application to the IRB Office or to a member of the Human Subjects Screening Committee. Members of this committee can be found at [http://app1003.lsu.edu/osp/osp.nsf/\\$Content/Humans+Subject+Committee?OpenDocument](http://app1003.lsu.edu/osp/osp.nsf/$Content/Humans+Subject+Committee?OpenDocument)
- A Complete Application Includes All of the Following:
  - (A) Two copies of this completed form and two copies of parts B thru E.
  - (B) A brief project description (adequate to evaluate risks to subjects and to explain your responses to Parts 1 & 2)
  - (C) Copies of all instruments to be used.
    - If this proposal is part of a grant proposal, include a copy of the proposal and all recruitment material.
  - (D) The consent form that you will use in the study (see part 3 for more information.)
  - (E) Certificate of Completion of Human Subjects Protection Training for all personnel involved in the project, including students who are involved with testing or handling data, unless already on file with the IRB.  
 Training link: ( <http://cme.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/learning/humanparticipant-protections.asp>.)

1) Principal Investigator: Kenyetta Nelson Rank: \_\_\_\_\_ Student\*?  Y  
 Dept.: SHREWD Ph: 225-505-8779 E-mail: kgnelso1@aol.com

2) Co Investigator(s): please include department, rank and e-mail for each  
 \* If student, please identify and name supervising professor in this space

3) Project Title: Learning Styles and Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Attitudes and it's relation to truancy among African American Students in Secondary Education

4) LSU Proposal?(yes or no) No If Yes, LSU Proposal Number \_\_\_\_\_  
 Also, if YES, either  This application completely matches the scope of work in the grant **OR**  More IRB Applications will be filed later

5) Subject pool (e.g. Psychology Students) children < 18  
 • Circle any "vulnerable populations" to be used: (children < 18) the mentally impaired, pregnant women, the aged, other). Projects with incarcerated persons cannot be exempted.

6) PI Signature K. Nelson \*\* Date 8/24/07 (no per signatures)  
 \*\*I certify my responses are accurate and complete. If the project scope or design is later changed I will resubmit for review. I will obtain written approval from the Authorized Representative of all non-LSU institutions in which the study is conducted. I also understand that it is my responsibility to maintain copies of all consent forms at LSU for three years after completion of the study. If I leave LSU before that time the consent forms should be preserved in the Departmental Office.

\*\*\*Effective August 1, 2007, all Exemptions will expire three years from date of approval, unless a continuation report, found on our website, is filed prior to expiration date\*\*\*

Study Exempted By:  
 Dr. Robert C. Mathews, Chairman  
 Institutional Review Board  
 Louisiana State University  
 203 B-1 David Boyd Hall  
 225-578-8692 | [www.lsu.edu/irb](http://www.lsu.edu/irb)  
 Exemption Expires: 09-05-2010

IRB# E-3704 LSU Proposal# \_\_\_\_\_  
 Complete Application  
 Human Subjects Training

Screening Committee Action: Exempted  Not Exempted \_\_\_\_\_ Category/Paragraph 4  
 Reviewer Mathews Signature Robert Mathews Date 9/6/07

**APPENDIX D**  
**SCRIPT**

## Researcher's Script

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am [assisting Kenyetta Nelson in her] conducting a research study involving 9<sup>th</sup> graders in your school.

The title of [her] study is:

Learning Styles and Students Perception of Teacher's Attitude and Its Relation to Truancy among African American Students in Secondary Education

The purpose of the study is to determine if a relationship exist between learning styles and students perception of teachers attitudes toward them and African American students' decisions to become high truants.

Those who choose to participate will be taking a total of 4 instruments for about 40 minutes. Those that participate will receive a gift bag thanking you for your time and information.

(PASS OUT SURVEY INSTRUMENTS TO ONLY THOSE WHO ARE PARTICIPATING)

Before you begin, sign and print your name on the front assent form, and the front of the Demographics survey.

The first survey is titled "Index of Learning Styles". Learning styles are our preferred way of interacting with and responding to the environment. It is the way you prefer to take in and learn information. For each of the 44 items select either "a" or "b". Please choose only one answer for each question, if both apply to you, choose the one that applies more frequently.

The second survey is demographics. This 27 item instrument will consist of information from your background as an individual.

The third instrument is "Student's Perception of Teachers Attitudes". This will ask you to respond to how you feel teachers you have experienced make you feel as a student. The 10 item liekert scale will require you to answer in ranges 1-5, 1 being highly positive and 5 being highly negative.

The final instrument will ask your truancy records. Truancy is the days you have missed in school.

Please know that this information will not be linked to your name, the study will be anonymous and your name will not be published. I will first give you a few minutes to ask any questions you may have. If you have any questions please ask before beginning the survey. Thank you for your participation.

Please be honest!

### **Frequently Asked Questions:**

What is a truant?

Truants are students who miss 10 or more unexcused days per semester.

Why am I taking this survey?

We want to determine if students feel comfortable in their learning environment through studying their perceptions of how they feel their teachers see them.

Do I have to participate?

No, it's your personal choice whether or not you participate.

What is assent?

Permission from a minor. Saying one is going to do something parent or adult gives consent.

## VITA

Kenyetta Q. Nelson-Smith is the second oldest of 6 children. Her parents are Isiah and Annette Nelson, of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. She is married to Clifton J. Smith, Jr. Kenyetta graduated from Glen Oaks Senior High School of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in 1998. She received her Bachelor of Science degree from Southern University and A&M College in 2002. Kenyetta began graduate school at Louisiana State University in 2003 and obtained her master's degree in The Department of Human Resource Education and Workforce Development in 2004. She will be receiving her doctorate in The Department of Human Resource Education and Workforce Development from Louisiana State University in May 2008.