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# A study of at-risk students' perceptions of an online academic credit recovery program in an urban North Texas independent school district

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# A STUDY OF AT-RISK STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF AN ONLINE ACADEMIC CREDIT RECOVERY PROGRAM IN AN URBAN NORTH TEXAS INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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# DEDICATION

Based on my standardized test scores, I was not destined to become a college graduate, not even to mention earning a doctorate. I dedicate this project to all students who never gave up on education when their standardized test scores said they were not capable of attending college or of succeeding. To my parents for the invaluable gifts, my mother, who gave me determination and made the ultimate decision in her life to take on the burden of raising four babies by herself, this degree is as much yours as it is mine and my dad, who gave me vision and taught me what not to do. Most importantly, I would not be able to dedicate anything in this dissertation without my grandfathers, who graduated from the toughest schools I know, the school of "hard knocks." Apa Ortiz, before he passed, taught me about work and that it does not matter how much a person has but what a person does with what they have as long as they do it to the best of their ability with passion while working hard. Daddy Buckley passed away during this academic journey and did not get to see me graduate. He taught me about sacrifices, life, always staying focused on the big picture, and understanding God's plans for me, all of which have impacted me as a learner. Without both of their presence in my life, I would not have learned the lessons about family and becoming the man and human being that I am today. I miss them both. May they rest in peace.

I love you all.

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Thank you to my wife and son for all your love and patience when I was not the most pleasant person to be around while lying on the floor with research documents everywhere, dealing with Hanna, and typing away on this self-inflicted educational journey. I appreciate the unconditional support that my siblings provided when I was not the most willing person and not totally engaged in all of our normal family activities. To my grandmothers, who kept me in check and grounded at all times. To the rest of my family from the Midwest, East Coast, and Southwest who checked on me from time to time to make sure I was alive and kicking, I love you all.

I did the best I could do with my efforts to balance life and school; thank you all for understanding the importance of this goal.

# VITA

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# ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to describe and analyze at-risk high school students' perceptions of their experiences with online academic credit recovery classes offered to them through an urban school district's dropout prevention department. The review of literature concerning curricula for online programs revealed that the variety of offerings and experiences varied from state to state and district to district about how online academic programs have been utilized. This particular quantitative research study was selected due to students enrolling in district sponsored online credit recovery classes possibly with some underlying perceptions that could have impacted their success and affect the total enhancement of the program. District leaders determined students needed to express and have a voice in making the online credit recovery program stronger and to establish a greater understanding of the students' perceptions about the dropout prevention online program. Surveys were gathered from credit recovery high school students in the North Texas urban school district. Data obtained from the surveys revealed the attitudes articulated through typical online academic credit recovery students' experiences. This quantitative study involved the use of data from a survey employing a 5-point Likert scale with the anchor points ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The independent variables were the high schools included in the study, students' grade levels and gender, and students' online and traditional efficacy scores. The dependent variables in this study were students' perceptions of online classes, in particular their perception of whether or not the online program prevented them from dropping out of high school. A number of items were used to measure students' perceptions. Overall, the students felt that the online academic credit recovery program prevented them from dropping out, they would prefer more online course

options, and the program should be offered 24 hours a day. Further research study findings could assist in strengthening the district's online academic credit recovery program, enhancing student achievement, and informing other districts' use of similar course delivery technology.

# Chapter 1. The Problem

## Introduction

Educational technology transformations for at-risk high school students are happening more by arguing cogently than by actively establishing student relationships based on their feedback and what they need to succeed. High school education from the students' standpoint should lead to understanding of self, culture, community, and world. The increased daily failures of public schools providing equitable education and producing high dropout rates as well as ongoing, continuous advances in technology curricula have not been shown to have any direct correlations. According to Michael Fullan (2001):

> To make a substantial difference in outcomes, the next phase of reform must focus on what has typically been the "black box" in education reform: classroom instruction. The focus must be on improving classroom instruction and adopting processes that will create a more precise, validated, data-driven expert activity that can respond to the learning needs of individual students. (p. 81)

If the dual missions of reducing schools' dropout rates and increasing students' accessibility to technology were actively entangled in a streamlined manner and if risk taking educational leaders acted on productive and all-encompassing conversations about the factors influencing dropout decisions, a technological revolution would occur in K-12 public school education. According to Stillwell's (2010) numbers, the traditional public school format has not produced outstanding graduation rates while reacting to dropout rates annually of 500,000 students nationally and approximately 50,000 students in Texas. Consequently, increased positive academic achievement outcomes could be produced through adding course credit delivery mechanisms. Giving students technological options directed at them achieving their goals could be vital in reducing the

appalling dropout rates across the United States (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007; Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2007). According to Ferdig, Cavanaugh, DiPietro, Black, and Dawson (2009), within K-12 education in the United States, the numbers of online students have increased multifold since online classes began in 1996.

Educational philosophies from leaders drive the academic changes and reforms in school systems designed to meet the diverse needs of an increasingly multicultural population of students who are not succeeding in graduating from high school (Fullan, 2001, 2008). The addition of technology and how to enhance and embed it to academic curriculums in school districts nationwide may be the missing piece in solving the dropout rate puzzle. In reality, a one size fits all solution does not exist. Online programs are not the panacea for academic curricula, though they should be vital components of the conversations taking place with district school board members and leaders preferring to keep pace with the progress of technology in this society.

William R. Thomas, the Director of Educational Technology for the Southern Regional Education Board, believed that within the next couple of years that the Internet would provide secondary students with some, if not all, of their academic courses (Hendon Blaylock & Newman, 2005). In recent years, current school administrators and districts throughout the United States have become involved with offering new alternative school options via online K-12 curriculums (Clark & Berge, 2005). Some of the virtual high schools have established new and nontraditional grounds of academic landscape and have changed the traditional high school from what it used to be (Clark & Berge, 2005). With 45 states having some type of online program, high school students

should no longer have to select only from classes offered physically within the walls of their local schools to graduate.

With current budget crunches in many districts nationally, the creation of Internet-based instruction geared toward secondary students has been established in an uncharted and somewhat unprepared environment for a small but increasingly growing number of students and educators. The International Association for K-12 Online Learning (2010) reported that the numbers of high school students enrolled online will continue to grow at an annual rate of 30%. O'Dwyer, Carey, and Kleinman (2007) further elaborated on possible reasons for the rapid growth in instruction as a need to provide academic variety to coursework. Online course offerings have created alternative sources for enabling secondary students to complete high school, even though traditional high schools likely do not utilize much academic technology. A new member of the public school family, the online high school course, has emerged and could one day possibly replace the traditional school for educating K-12 students through high school graduation.

Ideally, all students should graduate from high school, but the reality is that they do not (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006). According to Alliance for Excellent Education (2008), the United States is ranked 20 out of 28 industrialized nations in the number of students graduating from public high schools. In Texas, the dropout rate for the class of 2008 in the state was 11% (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2010b). This rate is based on freshman students successfully completing high school in four years. Both students and educators need equitable opportunities to engage in any type of learning that will improve the academic welfare of all students, regardless of public school students' economic status, race, or educational aspirations. At the secondary

level, the chances for students to graduate from public high school diminish as they transition to the ninth grade and become worse with the added burden of students being poor or minorities (Legters & Kerr, 2001).

Although some of the perceptions of online literature may imply that students who utilize online programs to be over achievers, they are not according to Barbour (2009). Education technology conversations are now vital for school districts' leaders to engage, in even if these leaders have little or no experience with using online curricula or academic technology. If public schools' instructional leaders want their schools to be competitive in the global academic race, then they need to compete by using online technology. They need to obtain as much data in as short an amount of time as possible in order to present proposals to school boards and to make decisions to implement online programs that could improve the quality of the education provided to students in their districts. Making the vital decision to employ online learning technology could prevent districts from lagging behind other progressive districts already utilizing curricular technologies and delivery systems.

The necessity to incorporate more technology and increase graduation rates further emphasizes how important it is for students from a wide variety of backgrounds and living in various geographical regions to gain equitable academic opportunities through online class offerings provided at their high schools. However, districts must have the courage and vision to provide students with the technological opportunities. Within online coursework, students have more flexibility in enrolling a variety of classes because of availability and have fewer restrictions due the local lack of available licensed teachers (Carnevale, 2001; Filton, 2002). Students from rural New Mexico to an urban

global district in Las Vegas, Nevada, can now participate in the same online class if they have access to the internet within their school districts. In some cases, when families are willing and have the financial ability to pay, their students, with district support, can take advantage of the opportunity for advanced placement or for any elective courses not offered at their traditional high schools and offered through online educational delivery.

A virtual school is a distance education school enabling the teacher and student not to be at the same place during instruction, and instruction can be mediated from the home of the instructor (Carnevale, 2001; Clark & Berge, 2005; Filton, 2002). According to Dillon and Greene (2003), one curricula is utilized in 18 states, and a half a million students participate in and take classes online. In the state of Ohio, for example, the state provides a report card (see Appendix A) and a performance index (see Appendix B), and additional comparisons between online programs within Ohio are presented for families to view. While the information provided in Ohio only shows comparisons between the virtual school programs, a major benefit in developing these comparisons involves enabling parents and school districts' administrators to contemplate the fixed costs for online courses and the impact online course delivery can have when determining which individualized educational program would be the better fit for their students' needs (Hendon Blaylock & Newman, 2005).

District leaders cannot skip the arduous build up costs needed to make technology for data storage available, if moving toward providing a successful and productive curricular online program is the goal. Rose and Blomeyer (2007) additionally agree that all attempts to extend online model opportunities for success will only enhance opportunities for at-risk student success. Computer-based instruction requires proactive

action and planning, that is, positive movement while anticipating the growth and advancement of how technology is embedded to the K-12 experience beginning with student outcomes in mind. At some point, these same leaders will have to explain to their board members who will be apoplectic with fury when the board report reflects the increasingly large drop out gap and no technological option in assisting their secondary students.

The variety of definitions of "at-risk" is not a clear and concise phrase, but according to the U.S. Department of Education (2009), is any student who may not graduate from school and "any primary or secondary grade student who is at risk as a result of substance abuse, teen pregnancy, recent migration, disability, ESL (limited English proficiency), juvenile delinquency, illiteracy, extreme poverty, or dropping out school" (p. 36). The disconnect resulting from a failing public school education has significantly increased the number of students who drop out. This failure is widely observed but not targeted with the same level of passion that may be displayed in other areas of high school culture and curricula, such as athletics, even in a budget crisis as is currently being faced by many districts.

A head coach of any high school football team in Texas would not be allowed to continue to coach if the program were producing life threatening injuries to players who were dropping from the team at the same rate high school graduation rates currently display. Although there are a number of factors contributing to failures in any academic level, according to Shore and Shore (2009) making sure that students are grounded with support would decrease the possibility of any failure of the students and not being a successful candidate for at risk. That football coach would be fired, the program would

be labeled unsuccessful and shut down for not producing wins for the alumni, yet year after year at-risk students are lost in the shuffle until presentations to policy making school boards lead to inquiries about various curricular programs.

Yet, when identifying the various factors that impact at-risk students, the examination reveals several of these identifiers show direct correlations to decreases in graduation rates in the U.S. from the east to the west coast (Watson & Gemin, 2008). These characteristics, which are not uniform in definition, vary from district to district, and include a variety of descriptors including race, pregnancy during high school enrollment, employment status, and even cultural norms. The U.S. Department of Education (2009) explored the circumstances leading to students becoming at risk for dropping out of high school and noted that almost 1.2 million of the country's students leave the public school system without ever obtaining a high school diploma. The graduation rates for 2007-2008 freshmen minorities yielded deplorable percentages and caused many educational leaders great frustration over how to reduce the inequity. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2010), the graduation rates were for Asian/Pacific Islander students 91%, White students 81%, American Indian/Alaska Native 64%, Hispanic 64%, and Black 62%. According to Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006), nearly 50% of all African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans do not to graduate from public high schools with their classes.

Many students are at risk. However, until recently, finding a solution to this dilemma has not been systematically approached from the perspectives of various educational recommendations. Students offer several reasons for dropping out, but the common characteristics cover several areas (Hammond, Linton, Smink, & Drew, 2007).

These areas are tied to the students' family backgrounds, which can increase the number of students' dropping out of high school (Tompkins & Deloney, 1994). Some districts have increased the number and types of family involvement strategies within their districts and provided more opportunities for family members to have a greater impact on their student's academic career and completion.

A number of the various programs that have been employed ranged from utilizing Response To Intervention (RTI) plans to one-to-one connections and incentive-laden plans. Whether successful or not, these programs have been attempts to alleviate the dropout rate. The U.S. General Accounting Office (2002) reported:

> While dropout prevention programs can vary widely, they tend to cluster around three main approaches: (1) supplemental services for at-risk students; (2) different forms of alternative education for students who do not do well in regular classrooms; (3) school-wide restructuring efforts for all students. (p. 17)

Although these interventions have been widely accepted, the end result has still been that districts do not have the impact and the result they would like to have in preventing at-risk students from dropping out or in ensuring at-risk high school students can graduate from high school in a timely fashion.

**Statement of Problem**

The primary problem leading to this study was the appalling dropout rates in American high schools and the number of at-risk students lacking opportunities for intervention to prevent them from dropping out (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007; Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2007). Although the standard, or traditional, education delivery model for the majority of K-12 schools involves public schools operating within four "brick and mortar" walls, many high school students nationwide participate in non-traditional school settings by enrolling in individual online course programs that allow

them the opportunity to recover and to acquire additional credits and prevent them from dropping out of high school. Not surprisingly, data indicating the success rates of students in online programs compared to the success rates of students in traditional high school settings were not readily available (Clark & Berge, 2005). While some forms of research have been available for online programs, according to Rice (2006), very little research addressing the review of online education with secondary students, and even less on elementary students, has been conducted.

In April of 2010, the United States Department of Education published the results of a survey conducted in 2008, and no data were readily available to indicate the success rates for students enrolled in online programs (NCES, 2010). Very little descriptive research has been conducted to help educators and researchers understand the phenomenon of online high school educational opportunities. According to author Ambient Insight (2010), an international market research firm known for using predictive analytics to identify online learning opportunities, the number of students attending virtual schools will increase to more than 10 million by 2014.

Any decisions to deviate from offering all curricula in the traditional school setting to offering curricula with the virtual school setting and about whether to contract with an online provider or create a virtual site housed on the home campus are made by state and district leaders and are based on a number of factors. These factors include the viability of various educational technology models and the variable costs of these viable models. Blomeyer (2002) cautioned the implementation of learning technologies requires an intense amount of time, effort, and money for schools, teachers, and districts. At times, these factors might be overlooked by central office administrators seeking

quick implementation. More needed to be known about the nature of the online course experience for today's high school students. Possession of more information should facilitate better decision making by education leaders.

A descriptive understanding of students' perceptions of the online course models could be vital to establishing a sound foundation of research beneficial to educational leaders needing assistance in selecting from appropriate online programs for their students. Most educational leaders making curricular decisions about adding online courses to their curricula do so with limited information, and less background research. They lack available online curricular options to compare and reviews of the curricula available to them. Available research has shown leaders who lack statistical data about the online programs available to students within their states, and in many cases, decision makers still need background support to make the decision to use online course delivery (Davis & Rose, 2007). Online program delivery has not become a national requirement or phenomenon and has not been subjected to any accountability requirements or standards at the K-12 level. With data derived from students in the hands of schools' district-level administrators, these administrators and leaders could become more knowledgeable and accountable for developing curricular programs for enriching their students' educational experiences and enhancing their schools' graduation rates.

During attempts to implement sound online high school models, urban districts' administrators have expressed frustration over the lack of information regarding online programs. The past 10 years of online high school data gathered from 18 states appears to have been provided by one of the few management companies offering such programs to high schools (Watson, Gemin, Ryan, & Wicks, 2009). Obviously, the data in question

could be viewed as biased because proprietary companies might have provided such data as more of a selling point than as truly unbiased data regarding the viability of K-12 online learning programs. Based on Watson et al.'s (2009) presentation of the data and the lack of any other data to which they could be compared, any interested customer might choose to purchase their program rather than investigate the worth and value of any other program.

Thus, any interested school districts shopping for online curricula ought to have a number of choices. However, to no individual district's fault, such has not been the case. Unless administrators have thoroughly investigated the selection of online providers, the limited research available might bias administrators against using online programs with students in their schools or districts. A critical flaw in using online programs with only at-risk students in Texas could show up on a state of Texas Independent School District's (ISD) report card and dropout rate. The concerns involve credit recovery courses possibly yielding higher numbers of drop outs and failures, because initially the majority of the students who took the classes represented high potential to drop out of high school and already were classified as at-risk students when they began the credit recovery program. On the surface, it could appear that an online program might not be successful with at-risk students who do not complete the program. Obtaining data about students' perceptions of their experiences with an online credit recovery program was thought to have the potential to ameliorate administrators' legitimate concerns about this type of course delivery.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to describe and analyze at-risk high school students' perceptions of their experiences with the online academic credit recovery classes offered to them by the Drop Out Prevention Department in an urban school district. Schools using online programs have not often utilized research assessing the perceptions of their students' experiences with online compared to traditional programs. Thus administrators could utilize the results to verify the success of the online curricula currently in place and whether the implementation of additional online programs is needed for this particular approach to assist potential dropouts and ensure at-risk students' academic success. The implications could dramatically assist school districts in reducing the high school dropout rates in ways the United States has yet to consider. Upon the enhancement of the dropout prevention program, much more analysis needed to be brought to the surface so that it could be recognized as a possible solution and be part of improving the dropout rate.

This study was intended to be a vital contribution to the limited research in the combination of online curriculums and dropout prevention. Although the study was limited to this particular targeted district, the impact of having this descriptive, correlational data available could be examined by other districts. The data were expected to serve as a basis for beginning credit recovery programs in other districts.

## Research Questions

This study was designed to answer the following three research questions:

1. What are high school students' perceptions of their experiences with online credit recovery classes offered to them by the Drop Out Prevention Department in an urban school district?

2. What are the factors that caused students to experience deficiencies and overall dislike for school completion?

3. What are high school students' perceptions of the differences between online and traditional courses?

**Key Terms and Operational Definitions**

For the purposes of this study, TEA definitions were used in the way the definitions were applied to the district hosting the study and to the variables of this study.

*At-risk student.* "Any primary or secondary grade student who is at risk as a result of substance abuse, teen pregnancy, recent migration, disability, ESL (limited English proficiency), juvenile delinquency, illiteracy, extreme poverty, or dropping out school" (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 36). This student is likely to fail at school (TEA, 2010a).

*Buy-in.* All parties involved as stakeholders offer honest and unwavering emotional support for a specific activity or program (Lencioni, 2005).

*Credit recovery.* Students in Grades 7 through 12 who have failed a class retake the class at the high school they attend as an opportunity to graduate in a timely manner.

*Distance education.* Formal, asynchronous education occurs via a majority of the instruction happening while teacher and learner work from separate locations (Clark & Berge, 2005).

*Drop out.* The TEA (2010a) classifies a student as a dropout if "dropout" is the final status recorded for the student on reports provided to the state.

*E-learning.* All types of education and training utilizing electronic technology represent this type of learning format (Clark & Berge, 2005).

*Fixed costs.* Those one-time expenses incurred by the provider in order to offer any courses by online delivery represent this type of budget expense (Clark & Berge, 2005).

*Online program.* The term refers to the series or selection of courses systematically offered to students through Internet-based computer courses.

*Perception.* A person's opinions derived from observation and experience and represented cognitively to discern attitudes about a specific issue, event, or lesson (Nevid, 2009).

*Secondary standardized test.* As applied to this study, the Northwest Evaluation Association assessment is taken by students in Grades 9 through 12 for the subjects of Science, Reading, Mathematics, and Language Usage.

*Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS).* This standardized test was established for testing students' acquisition of knowledge according to state curricula in Texas in 2003 and was administered through spring of 2011 (TEA, 2010a).

*Traditional secondary courses.* These courses are taught by middle or high school level teachers for Grades 7 through 12 and delivered face to face in a building setting. These courses may also be referred to as "brick and mortar" classes.

*Urban school district.* This type of school district is represented by a 70% or greater metropolitan population.

*Variable costs.* Financial cost increases result from the number of units of output increasing (i.e., increasing numbers of course spots filled by increasing numbers of students; Clark & Berge, 2005).

*Virtual school.* This form of distance education, or online program, means the teacher and learner are located in separate locations, but instruction is mediated through electronic, Internet, and synchronous or asynchronous contact (Clark & Berge, 2005; Filton, 2002).

**Importance of the Study**

The results were important not only to the district hosting the study but also to the various districts both in Texas and in the nation now entering the online curriculum race and needing data for determining their next steps. Descriptions of students' perceptions of their online program experiences were critical to further developing such programs. Also, this study was important because of the increasing number of online schools offering courses to high school students nationwide and the need for data to show their value or lack of value (Clark & Berge, 2005). The perceptions of the students who participated in an online program could weigh heavily on a district and influence the level of success such a program might have, because in the end, the students are the individuals who utilize the curriculum. "Students constitute a significant group within this social system, and their perspectives play an important part in framing the activity that takes place in school settings" (Deaney, Ruthven, & Hennessy, 2003, p. 142).

States or districts not using online curricular programs may be in the exploratory phase, due to current trends toward implementing more online courses (Clark & Berge, 2005). State and district leaders must consider the characteristics of an online program of

courses that can provide enrollment stability for at-risk students needing to recover course credits and how to implement any selected program from a variety of technological options. Because urban district leaders have an interest in evaluating online programs, sufficient data may be generated from this study to enable school district decision makers to propose to their school board members not only to continue using online learning technology but also to expand the number and types of online course offerings into a district-based virtual school for all students. If so, more than just students at risk for becoming drop-outs could take advantage of online learning opportunities.

The director of dropout prevention for the targeted urban school district had actively sought data, as reported by students, to determine the effectiveness of the online program presently used for credit recovery. Research data from the students' perceptions enabled the host district's leaders to evaluate the impact of fully utilizing online K-12 programs for all of its students in all subjects. Many of the high school students in the United States are more technologically savvy than most of their high schools' staffs. This study's findings could be of benefit to the administration's understanding of today's students.

Due to budget constraints, educational leaders must determine if adding online programs is to their advantage economically and if such curricular additions positively impact students' academic achievement. For example, in Florida, a class size amendment was passed in 2002 that placed the cap at 25 students per class in Grades 9 through 12. The amendment did not place a cap on virtual classes. In August 2010 Miami-Dade County Public Schools, 7,000 students were placed in core classes with only a lab

facilitator in the lab saving the district money by not paying for all the full time teachers that would have been required in a traditional classroom.

The study results showed significant differences in students' perceptions of their experiences with online courses compared to their experiences with traditional courses, and the results could be used to justify proposing additional online courses for the current curriculum or continuing with the credit recovery technology presently in place. The available data might show that the students enrolled in the current online program believed it contributed to decreasing the district's dropout rate, thus saving the district quite a bit of money during tightly budgeted economic times, appeasing the school board all while witnessing increased, enhanced, and advanced learning among the students. Students' perceptions might offer explanation for the potential dropout rate reduction phenomenon of the host district.

From the district's stand point, online program success could mean shifting funds, similar to the 54 participating schools in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, to other academic needs like purchasing and maintaining other technological and curricular materials while potentially decreasing staff costs even while implementing new educational opportunities. The need to hire and pay core subject teachers would be less, and teachers could monitor the students from within the computer e-learning labs where the online courses are delivered. It could present a financial opportunity to lower administrative costs. The results might encourage other districts to examine online computer-assisted instruction as it relates to dropout prevention efforts and secondary high school students' perceptions of their experiences with credit recovery classes.

Additionally, understanding students' perceptions could aid school districts seeking to avoid being left behind and to achieve technological competitiveness.

Districts nationwide could benefit from this study's findings because educators would be able to make sound decisions to improve the achievement of all students based on student feedback. The findings could be used to facilitate the addition of support systems to assist potential dropouts and keep them in school (Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2009) and improve the nation's ability to meet global skill demands. The nature of online delivery could mean every student learning and performing on an "even playing field," so to speak. Teachers could serve as instructors, facilitators, and monitors and reduce the turnaround time involved in providing students with performance feedback and improvement recommendations. Students could develop increased motivation because of their successes in online courses. If online programs were made more available to the general student population, as a result of this study, the current population of public school students, thought to be technologically savvy, could become more likely to accept and participate in online programs.

**Limitations**

One limitation to the study was that not all online K-12 programs and curricula provide equivalent educational curricula delivery. They are not structured in the same way, due to the fact that every school and district implements programs specifically designed for its population of students. Comparisons between online programs presented an obstacle. Therefore, the results of this study might not be generalizable to other districts.

A second limitation was that certain types of students might more likely be drawn to online programs, which could represent sampling bias. There might be students who would do very well using online programs when on campus. However, because they can only attend credit recovery sessions during the scheduled school day, they may not put forth the required effort needed for thorough study time.

A third limitation related to using self-report surveys. Because students might be concerned about appearing to like one form of curriculum over another, their answers might have been biased. Students might have answered the items in socially desirable ways to please their teachers.

**Assumptions**

I assumed that the K-12 online program adequately met grade level standards and educational requirements as the district requested. I also assumed that technology could improve student achievement based on the growing numbers of online programs offering K-12 curricula. Finally, I assumed all data were provided truthfully and honestly by the district and by the students.

**Organization of the Study**

This dissertation was a quantitative study of the perceptions of students in a dropout prevention program in an urban school district. This dissertation was organized into five chapters. In this chapter, the study was introduced through background information and the purpose of the study. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature addressing the field of online curricula and the impact of online curricula on students, particularly on secondary student attitudes. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology that was utilized in conducting the study. Chapter 4 outlines the findings

from the data collected and the interpretation of the data. The final chapter, Chapter 5 provides a conclusion to the research findings and suggestions for further studies.

# Chapter 2. Literature Review

The review of the literature addresses online curricula and the impact of online curricula on students, particularly secondary student attitudes. The purpose of this research study was to describe and analyze at-risk high school students' perceptions of their experiences with the online academic credit recovery classes offered to them by the Drop Out Prevention Department in an urban school district. The study was designed to respond to the national trend toward districts offering more online high school courses and the potential need for the targeted Independent School District's (ISD) Drop Out Prevention Department to incorporate additional online programs for students needing credit recovery opportunities. Due to the limited amount of summative and empirical research addressing online curricula and success rates, much still needed to be learned about secondary online programs, the results of this study therefore enhanced the body of literature on the potential incorporation additional online curriculums by urban K-12 school districts.

The literature review provides background information about the targeted ISD. The online program used in this ISD is described, and information from various resources is shared. The review is divided into the following sections: (a) theoretical framework (b) overview of traditional, (c) historical overview of technology, (d) overview of online education, (e) online programs and high schools, (f) targeted school district, (g) PLATO online curricula, and (h) findings in the literature.

## Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is self-efficacy as written by Albert Bandura which encompasses the characteristics of having the ability and confidence to manage a set of

circumstances (Bandura, 1994). The results of learning to manage specific circumstances lead to behavior that is predictable, and self-efficacy can be acquired. It appears that at-risk high school students do not have enough confidence in the school environment to assert themselves and make successful efforts for assuring their academic futures. Additionally, they may believe that they cannot control their circumstances.

According to Bandura (1986), "what people think, believe, and feel affects how they behave" (p. 25). Students tend to be positively engaged in subjects to which they are actively connected or in which they have confidence. Students will not disengage if they experience successes and accomplish the goal of moving to the next academic level.

Holding a lack of confidence may reduce at-risk students' likelihood of gaining academic-related confidence (Walker & Greene, 2009). In order to facilitate their increases in self-efficacy and capabilities of success the conditions of the educational system must be evaluated and possibly changed. Adolescents' opportunities for social support are fairly evident on any high school campus while attempting to provide academic enrichment (Walker & Greene, 2009). Role models may be among of several possible opportunities that could be established for the at-risk student. Role models include classroom teachers.

Successful educators know and recognize the important roles adults have in the lives of high school students (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). While the various strategies of identifying the most at-risk students vary from campus to campus and district to district, the understanding Barone (1989) conveyed involves teachers needing some grasp of the environments from which their students come and honoring those circumstances. The only way to honor students' circumstances involves

targeting the most at-risk students at the secondary level, then creating and implementing a plan of action.

An effective online academic credit recovery program that may be a model throughout the nation in student teacher relationships at the secondary level may be the program implemented at West Oak Senior High school in South Carolina (Zehr, 2010). The high school employs an individual teacher whose title is Graduation Coach and whose responsibility is to specifically work with those students who have been identified as the most at-risk on campus. The criteria for the at-risk student classification require low attendance, low test scores, and being required to retake classes or record of failed classes. This coach, after reviewing the necessary data, encourages the at-risk students to stay in school and can be the only lifeline in their support system (Zehr, 2010). This coach can be the role model students need in order for the students' self-efficacies about school to increase and to lead to their ability to graduate.

No longer can educators just have students fill out basic autobiographical information in the classroom and expect to understand all that there is about the students with whom they are interact daily. Such information can be helpful, but for students on the cusp of dropping out of high school, understanding the success and value of site-based intervention strategies may assist educators, improve their relationships with at-risk students, and enable them to prevent students from dropping out of high school (Roderick, 1993). This proposed study could be the starting point to viewing and assessing the impact of teacher interaction and the role they have with those students who may drop out.

**Overview of Traditional Education**

The basic beginning of education and its influences is reported by Joel Spring (2004), author of *The American School 1642-2004*. The initial concept of public school education in the United States began during a time in the 1600s when Puritan and Congregationalist religious beliefs were dominant in the colonies (Johnson, Collins, Dupuis, & Johansen, 2004). These immigrants did not want to embrace new found American society which was happening and increasing as the population increased, because of their desire to maintain the religious freedom they sought in the journey to the American colonies. Among the reasons for the development of U.S. public schools during the 19th-century was ensuring the establishment and permanence of Anglo-American values which were to be left unhampered by the influx of cultures that appeared to be potential threats to the challenges from incoming immigrants to the U.S., such as the Irish and Africans, and from the continent's indigenous people, the Native Americans. What stemmed from these early colonists was the conception of educational reform and its emphasis on change. In 1865, the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guaranteed a fair and equitable education for all students, even if schools were state operated, since states were required to provide such under the federal constitution.

At present, American cultural changes continue and increase within public schools as demographic changes in communities have impacted educational reform. Such areas of impact include bilingual education, school choice, and standardized testing. Within the continuous growth of diversity in academic arenas during the past 10 years, technological implications have surfaced to create a movement in professional educator circles of combining all areas while incorporating the ongoing technology refinements.

However, these changes have taken a toll on the delivery of public school education and compounded the stressors of deciding what is appropriate and still appear progressive at the same time. The result of this impact of technological progress on education has historical implications that could diminish the United States status even lower in the world and education. Establishing these technological foundations has created enhancements in areas that education leaders have never had to deal with while creating problems unfamiliar to the K-12 education industry.

Several attempts have been made to close the achievement gap and improve dropout rates, but nothing has improved the situation. It appears that the rates continue to increase. According to the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) in *A Nation at Risk* report, a promise was established to give all students their entitled, equitable, and fair chance at an education. All students would have this opportunity using the tools required to achieve an education. All American students would have what they needed for obtaining academic achievement. The efforts that followed this report's publication were expected to lead educators to make logical academic decisions, to allow some of the national promise to be fulfilled, and to make contributions to the success of all students. However, that promise has not been fully achieved because technology has progressively been enhanced and expanded throughout the nation since the report was originally issued. Unfortunately, school districts have not kept up with technological innovations and find themselves lost in the wake of the technology boom of the late 20th and early 21st centuries (NCES, 2007).

**Historical Overview of Technology**

The beginnings for much of the previous technological enhancements which have impacted education in some academic fashion in the U.S. could be evidenced during what was called the *common school period* in the 19th century(Henkin & Ignasias, 1978). During this period, significant achievements broadened opportunities for students through efforts of education reformers like Henry Barnard and Horace Mann (Henkin & Ignasias, 1978). These reformers potentially improved learning theories in conjunction with academic tools that were technological in nature and included typewriters, cameras, film strips, telephone, and record players.

The relationship between technology and education has not always been a mutually documented conversation in school districts throughout the United States. The academic tool of the slide rule was a manually manipulated stick full of numbers and figures and involved gliding a glass or plastic sliders along the length of the tool and was commonly used for mathematical calculations in schools in the 1950s and 1960s. By the 1970s and 1980s, students used electronic calculators. In the 1990s and 2000s, online calculation websites emerged as computers and the Internet proliferated. Websites such as Wolframalpha.com simply required users to input the mathematical problem's values, and in return, every step to the solution was offered on the screen in various formats from which the user could select a preference. This change in technology has created a scenario in which educational curricula require ongoing and up-to-date advancements. The need for updates will continue to evolve. The problem of constant change challenges educators whose textbooks tend to be at best 5 years out of date (Squire & Morgan, 1990).

Through the early 1990s, distance education by paper and pencil correspondence classes was considered the quickest way to speed up the pace and tempo in completing high school courses (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2009). While these pre-Internet distant education programs utilized the United States Postal Service, or what is in the 21st century referred to as "snail mail," in their former iteration, correspondence education of this type took a precipitous drop in popularity by the 21st century as the only viable option available outside the traditional brick and mortar classroom setting. This adoption of the computers by school districts constituted a technological paradigm shift in how educational curricula could be combined with increased use of the Internet.

**Overview of Online Education**

Since the inception of online education courses in 1996, the continuous evolving history of online education has led educators to a currently unfamiliar state. The literature regarding online education offers terms and the formation and reformation of virtual schools and their progression over a short history of existence. Terms like online learning, e-learning, distance learning, and distance education have all been used interchangeably since the beginning of electronic, computer mediated distance education (Carnelvale, 2001). Watson, Winograd, and Kalmon (2004) identified five classes of online education in two areas. These two areas are (a) how the online program operates within the state structure and (b) whether the program operates as a cyber school that can issue credits or a supplemental online program for students enrolled in other diploma granting high schools (i.e., traditional high schools).

Currently intense debates have been occurring across the nation related to the success of these online programs and whether they will lead to the transformation of

public schools. The traditional purpose of high school has been to prepare students to develop the basic skills needed to function as productive, self-sufficient citizens of a modern society. Spring (2004) concluded that "the school was used to select individuals for particular occupations" (p. 220). The traditional brick and mortar standard model of a U.S. high school has involved the components of students, staff, curriculum, assessments, and administration to manage and make sure students graduate. Beyond the standard brick and mortar model, the variations of this model have come from school boards and policies created alongside each state's laws.

Since the beginning of public school education in the United States, educational reform movements have emerged and waned, and each movement has left changes and legacies in place. Astuto, Clark, Read, McGree, and DeKoven Pelton Fernandez (1994) stated that "education reform is a complex process, not an event" (p. 85). In some states, such as Texas, reform has led to schools' educational successes being based on the number of students to pass the state's mandated and standardized test (TEA, 2010a). However, reform efforts across the nation have resulted in the increased application of creative ideas and improvements to current curricula to assist in dropout prevention through technological enhancements (Lehr, Clapper, & Thurlow, 2005).

Although online education emerged essentially as a result of technological progress, stakeholders have expanded technology use in K-12 schools as much as possible to ensure U.S. students will be able to compete as adults in a global economy. The American desire to improve unsuccessful educational programs and out perform any and all global competition has established a need to knock down the walls of what the brick and mortar school building used to be. The virtual school has been founded as "a

form of distant education in which the teacher and learner are separate and instruction is mediated" (Clark & Berge, 2005, p. 9). The need to incorporate virtual space with almost no barriers and no boundaries to which the mind or imagination can see has expedited the need for increasing the level of academic progress that can be made by using technology. It is only a matter of time before all states utilize or incorporate some type of virtual online curriculum, if not some type of virtual school, into their public school systems (Evergreen Educational Group, 2005).

In some cases, as educational leaders experience the dawn of the second decade of the 21st century, they are just now becoming familiar with the educational software used in their school districts and learning how that software benefits students. Curricular decisions are being made every day by these same leaders who have based their decisions entirely on feedback from students and staff (Beem, 2010), because of the lack of research data available to them. School leaders must now decide how to become competitive with other schools offering firmly established, well-understood technology and online K-12 curricula. Inevitably, these leaders will have to decide whether they should create their own online curricula or choose an existing online program, whether to lag behind other innovative districts, or what do to with any program chosen if it is not a success with the students after implementation. Those leaders of schools already using online K-12 technology now find assessing the learning effectiveness and success of their online programs and courses to be necessary because they are being held to account for whether online course delivery improves their schools (Berman & Pape, 2001).

Various researchers have stated why virtual online programs are important to state educational programs and to schools. The Southern Regional Education Board (2007)

presented five reasons to support the need: (a) state virtual schools provide courses that schools cannot or do not provide; (b) state virtual schools provide credit-recovery courses in support or improving high school graduation rates; (c) state virtual schools give high school students access to many different AP courses; (d) state virtual schools provide quality teachers to all middle and high schools, regardless of where the students reside; (e) state virtual schools provide students with access to quality teachers and quality courses to improve their chances of academic success.

The five reasons to support virtual schools present strong arguments for states to encourage districts to pursue any online additions to a curricular program that could improve student academic success (Clark & Berge, 2005). Although this report revealed many states' lack of experience and knowledge in the online curricula arena, it is vital to embrace the change and challenges ahead requiring states to establish standards for online programs and for veterans of online programs to role model how to develop programs that may be suited for their districts' needs. The goal of access and equity for all students, even those at-risk for dropping out, should be an initiative that all districts strive to achieve. Online programs offer the at-risk students great opportunity to complete high school.

The majority of districts utilizing online or virtual school programs plan to expand to allow for more student opportunities, and the only reason that would prevent them from doing so would be lack of familiarity about any newly available programs and the cost of developing courses ("Virtual School Initiatives," 2005). Establishing any academic program in itself is difficult. Consequently, the next section in the literature review offers examples of programs that exist and vital characteristics of each program.

**Online Programs and High Schools**

In researching various models of online high school programs, locating helpful information, let alone empirical research, is difficult. States usually play an important role in establishing their first online programs. In particular, research from a 2001 report for Distance Learning Resource Network at WestEd, Clark (2001) discussed the 14 states who had formed virtual school programs (see Appendix A). Although colleges and universities have reported success in establishing and offering online courses, it may be that K-12 educational institutions are not yet up to speed in this area due only to utilizing e-learning standards as a definition (Oliver, Osborne, Patel, & Kleiman, 2009). Nationally, three state high school programs, one virtual high school within a school district, and one statewide K-8 online charter school offer enough data for reviewing their effectiveness. Brief descriptions of a number of existing online programs, including Florida Virtual School, Virtual High School in Massachusetts, Ohio Virtual Academy, Clark County School District Virtual High School in Nevada, Connections Academy in Texas, Michigan Virtual High School are provided in this section.

**Florida Virtual School.** Florida, in 1997, was the first state to implement an online program in the public school setting and currently offers the largest self-paced online high school in the United States. Florida Virtual School (FLVS, 2010) was created by the state legislature in 2000 and $200,000 in seed money. The program is run by local school administrators and is considered the oldest self-paced online model. Initially, it was started as an opportunity for Florida students to gain Advanced Placement (AP) credits. Within the first 5 years, it grew from 50 students and three courses to an enrollment of 6,000 students and 60 courses. Currently FLVS has 82,000 students and 1,100 full-time teachers. FLVS leaders still hold the titles of being online education

experts due to having the most years of operational experience (FLVS, 2010). This statement suggests that because they are the founding fathers of online high school education, they have set the bar in online K-12 curriculums and the foundation for the fundamental national standard in success and completion (see Appendix B).

Florida was the first state to offer any student in the whole state the opportunity to take online classes and to meet graduation requirements. Watson and Gemin (2008) asserted that 20% of the FLVS students are students seeking credit recovery. Florida Virtual School has begun now placing their own instructors in newly established FLVS centers throughout the state's various brick and mortar, traditional schools (Watson & Gemin, 2008).

**Virtual High School, Massachusetts.** Virtual High School is an online secondary school based in Maynard, Massachusetts. The school began in 1996 as a consortium that created Internet classes for secondary schools throughout the United States. Virtual High School offers classes 24 hours a day, 7 days week, 365 days a year. Its members pay membership dues that vary according to the plan the school selects (Virtual High School, Inc., 2010). The school is a non-diploma granting educational program, but it also provides courses internationally.

SRI International was commissioned by Virtual High School as an objective third-party evaluator to collect data and evaluate the first 2 years of the program. Kyo Yamashiro and Andy Zucker (1999) sought to determine whether "net courses" offered at the Virtual High School were of high quality. A panel of six experts was brought together by Yamashiro and Zucker and they were:

- Steven Meiring, Ohio State Mathematics Supervisor for 25 years; author of addenda supplement to the NCTM mathematics standards; Ohio Statewide Systemic Initiative project
- Michael Padilla, Professor at University of Georgia; contributor to national science education standards; principal investigator on Georgia's Statewide Systemic Initiative project
- Joanne Grenier, Curriculum Content Specialist in Integrated History/Social Science and English/LA, Massachusetts Dept of Ed; reviews courses for alignment with state standards; helped develop Massachusetts history/social science assessment
- Leo West, Past President of Pennsylvania Council for the Social Studies and East Allegheny Education Assoc.; author of AP History software; 24 years as high school social studies chair
- Kathleen Fulton, Assoc. Director of Center for Learning and Educational Technology, University of Maryland; works with school districts to implement standards-based curriculum and instruction in English, language arts, and the social studies
- Linda Mayfield, Immediate Past President of Virginia Assoc. of Teachers of English; helped develop Virginia's English/Language Arts standards; has taught English courses for 25 years. (p. 4)

Yamashiro and Zucker (1999) concluded this program was successful at offering high quality curriculum content. Based on their presentation of the data, it is possible that the data could have been manipulated to their advantage in order to make a sales pitch to any interested school customer so that the customer might choose to purchase the high school education software programs with which Yamashiro and Zucker were associated.

The panel members' review, which was also in the report by Yamashiro and Zucker, (1999) was summed up as the following:

> The panel applauds the efforts of teachers and students who are pioneers in developing courses on the Internet that are challenging, interesting, and relevant. We see the project as beneficial in improving education by offering opportunities for a varied curriculum in schools with limited ability to do so. We hope that VHS will continue to grow and reach an even more diverse audience of schools and students. (p. 35)

**Ohio Virtual Academy.** The state of Ohio, in conjunction with the online educational company K12, Inc., which is a for profit company formed in 1999 by former United States Secretary of Education William Bennett, created the Ohio Virtual Academy (OHVA, 2008), but OHVA has not yet generated the data needed to compare its outcomes to public schools' outcomes. The state of Ohio did not have an established basis for comparisons due to the fact that the virtual academies were in the infancy stage of implementation. However, with regard to OHVA's state report card, performance index, and relationship to other online programs within the state, for the past five years, OHVA has been the top performing eSchool in the state of Ohio. OHVA's comparisons with this type of data from similar schools could be used to show the successfulness of OHVA or other programs (see Appendices C and D).

**Clark County School District Virtual High School, Nevada.** In the academic year 2004-2005, Clark County School District, Las Vegas, Nevada converted its distance education program into an online secondary diploma-granting high school. Because Las Vegas is a 24-hour city with plenty of jobs, the district has been at risk to lose a large portion of the high school student population as dropouts. The presence of the online high school in the district has alleviated some of this risk (Clark County School District Virtual High School [CCSDVHS], 2008). Currently, the majority of the high school student population is made up of students who are part-time or full-time, working in local industries, and wanting to graduate from high school early. According to the online Virtual High School's data, the online school meets all of the curricular benchmarks required by the state of Nevada to graduate students with a high school diploma (CCSDVHS, 2008). The major difference between CCSDVHS and OHVA involve

OHVA being statewide and CCSDVHS being operated within a single school district containing many traditional high schools.

**Connections Academy, Texas.** Texas Connections Academy of Houston is an online charter school created by a partnership of the online parent company Connections Academy and Houston ISD for Texas students in Grades 3 through 10. Connections Academy is a free program for students and has several K-12 online schools throughout the nation and has added the state of Texas to its roster of subscribers. In the state of Texas, Connections Academy provides curriculum that can serve all students within the state. Connections Academy's teaching center and administrative offices are located in Houston. According to Connection Academy's parent survey, 95% of the parents polled believe that the program's curriculum is of high quality. Texas Connections Academy (2010) reported in its website the parents' self-reported opinions as follows:

- 95% of parents agree that their technology tools improves their child's learning experience
- 94% of parents are satisfied with teachers' helpfulness
- 96% of parents are satisfied with the variety of learning activities
- 96% of parents agree the lessons are well organized
- 95% of parents would recommend Connections Academy to other families. (para. 2)

No other information is available through any third or other objective party about this program beyond information found at the Connections Academy website for interested onlookers.

**Michigan Virtual High School.** Michigan Virtual High School was a project created by Michigan Virtual University. According to the Michigan Virtual School (2010) website its history was described in the following way:

> The *Michigan Virtual School* is an online resource that enables Michigan high schools and middle schools to provide courses (all taught by certified teachers)

> and other learning tools that students wouldn't otherwise have access to. It was funded by the Michigan Legislature in July 2000 to be operated by the *Michigan Virtual University*, a private, not-for-profit Michigan corporation. *MVS* works in cooperation with individual school districts to grant course credit and diplomas. (para. 2)

**Targeted Urban School District**

The targeted urban public ISD in North Texas serves three cities, has over 63,000 students, and nine high schools in a mixed (middle to lower) class community located in between Fort Worth and Dallas (TEA, 2010a). Three of the nine high schools are alternative campuses, and eight out the nine high schools utilize the district-wide credit recovery program. One site is a community center which assists high school students in the district but is not located a school campus nor included in the total numbers for credits attempted or number of students enrolled in credit recovery. The campus sites' operating hours are from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. in the evening each Monday through Thursday. The community center site operates between 4:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. each Monday through Friday.

The district's dropout statistics are fairly typical of those seen in the rest of the United States (TEA, 2010b). For the past year and a half, the district's dropout prevention director has overseen the dropout and credit recovery programs and is responsible for improving the district's highly at-risk students' academic participation, graduation rates, and Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores. The requirements placed on all high schools by the district's administrators include incorporating some type of enrichment technology to assist students in recovering deficient credits and graduating in order to achieve the goals for the target areas. The district's administrative staff became interested in using an online program to help the at-risk high school students recover from course credit deficiencies that are needed for

graduation. As a result of this mandate, the district purchased the PLATO (2010) online program for educating at-risk students who found themselves in danger of not graduating.

The district has purchased only core curriculum classes from PLATO. These classes are facilitated and monitored by licensed teachers working in high school campus-level computer labs. The online PLATO courses offered in the targeted district are available only to credit deficient at-risk students so that they can recover lost high school credits. The targeted ISD does not offer any online or virtual high school courses to non-at-risk students progressing through the curricula at a normal pace or to high achieving students seeing credit advancement for early graduation.

The at-risk students enrolled in the PLATO online courses offered by the targeted district are not on track to graduate high school and are in need of course credit remediation. The fall 2009 snapshot, which is a report that provides information to central office administration on each campus in the areas of credits attempted and number of students, showed a total of 2,894 credits attempted to be recovered by 2,382 students (see Appendix E). The justification of offering PLATO only to the at-risk students primarily follows from the need to lower dropout rates in the district's high schools and to allow students to recover credit and meet the state of Texas graduation standards.

**PLATO® Online Credit Recovery Curricula**

The program the urban school district selected for delivering online courses to students requiring remediation and credit recovery is PLATO (2010), a computer-based e-learning program from PLATO Learning, Inc. According to PLATO, the credit recovery program is in service in 1,000 schools throughout the nation, and each course requires student mastery. The reading level range is targeted to Grades 9 through 12. One

of the benefits of the PLATO credit recovery program to a school district's students involves students having the opportunity to recover required graduation credits. PLATO promotes its programs in the following manner:

> PLATO Courses allow students to learn online anytime, anywhere while still being challenged by a rigorous, standards-driven curriculum. Self-paced, out-of-the-box, whole semester courses that include exemptive pre-tests to target learning allow students to concentrate on their skill gaps and complete course requirements quickly. Comprehensive reporting built into PLATO Courses gives [administrators and faculty] the information [necessary] to ensure students have acquired knowledge and earned course credit. (para. 2)

The students enrolled in the targeted, urban ISD's particular PLATO program can take courses for remediation and credit recovery that they would not have been able to take through the traditional program of course offerings on their respective campuses. Students who master the PLATO courses attempt to graduate from high school in a timely manner. However, in this urban school district, only the district's core courses are offered through PLATO, and students' grades in the PLATO courses count toward their final grade point averages.

PLATO was incorporated into the urban ISD's dropout prevention curriculum in the 2009-2010 school year. The subjects of English I, II, III, and IV; algebra I and II; geometry; world geography; world history; U.S. history; U.S. government; economics; biology I; chemistry I; and chemistry communication are offered through the credit recovery program. Elective courses are generally an option in the PLATO program (PLATO, 2010). PLATO (2010) offers students the ability to sign into their courses from home, but the urban school district has not allowed students to use PLATO via home Internet access due to budgetary concerns. Students must come to their respective campuses to work on the assignments and content of the courses. Each of the eight campuses houses a computer lab dedicated to PLATO courses which operates on

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on most high school campuses and on Monday through Thursday 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at one campus throughout the academic school year. Students complete the regular school day before remaining on campus to recover the missing credits on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. The students working on the PLATO courses at the urban ISD's high school campuses are monitored by at least two certified teachers. The teachers supervise the students and address any questions or concerns students may have. The courses offered in these labs occur in addition to students' regular school schedules, and with permission, PLATO courses can be added to the school day schedule for specific at-risk students.

**Conclusion**

The literature included the following results: students when motivated and supported are excited about the opportunity to acquire credits online and even have the opportunity to progress toward graduation (Weiner, 2003); teachers, though frustrated at times, believe the online programs will help their students (Cavanaugh, Gillan, Kromrey, Hess, & Blomeyer, 2004); administrators of successful online programs believe they are improving the academic community and high schools' graduation rates when they implement online programs (Roblyer, 2006); and successful online programs demonstrate that students in online classes hold individualized educational plans and gear students' interests toward the opportunities best suited to those plans (Watson & Gemin, 2008).

The literature has shown that while online curriculums appear to represent a new academic area and another educational strategy for school districts (Goldin & Katz, 2008; Picciano & Seaman, 2009; Watson & Gemin, 2008), it is important to understand that online programs represent a business enterprise that generates $300 million in sales each

year and continues to grow at a rate of 30% annually (International Association for K-12 Online Learning, 2010). According to Evergreen Educational Group (2005), at least 24 states offer full-time online schools. In addition, the NCES (2007) stated that 57% of secondary public schools provide some type of access to online learning for their students.

The NCES (2009) revealed that in the future, 72% of districts who have distance education programs will add and offer online courses. Michigan became the first state to require high school students to take at least one online course prior to graduation and in 2008 Alabama followed suit (Michigan Department of Education, 2006). The Sloan Consortium (2009) noted that district administrators who added online courses gave a variety of reasons for the importance of the added courses, such as Advanced Placement, over courses not offered.

The Pew Foundation (2005) suggested that secondary students use the Internet as a vital learning component of successful educational experiences. North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL, 2005) reported students' online educational performance, on average, equals or surpasses the performance of students enrolled in traditional brick and mortar high school classes. The Gates Foundation (2006) revealed that students said that boredom was a major reason for dropping out of high school, even as 88% of these same students had been passing their traditional school classes at the time of dropping out.

Historically, traditional school-oriented dropout prevention strategies have assisted some students (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000) but have not been shown to generate statistically significant improvements to drop out percentages over online curricula. The

use of online curricula for lowering drop-out rates needs further examination and reporting by districts presently using this mode of course delivery. Therefore, acquiring an understanding students' perceptions as part of explaining how online curricula use can be successful is necessary.

**Summary**

The literature review has included a contextual breakdown of various online curricular options to public school systems. The intent of this study was to examine the perceptions of secondary students who utilize online course options. At-risk students' perceptions of their online courses were expected to reveal the impact on this targeted urban school district and to inform other districts contemplating or implementing online curricula to reduce dropout rates. Furthermore, while it appeared that no study had been used to study students' perceptions at the secondary level, very little information was found to be available to address this particular area in online secondary curriculums. It was a goal for this study to provide a foundational contribution to the body of research on secondary schools and online learning. The results of the proposed research study provided a foundation for more research on student perceptions in online programs. "Attention to the pupil voice may help us to determine how and where judicious pedagogical exploitation of such tools can be most advantageous to the learner" (Deaney et al., 2003, p. 163).

# Chapter 3. Research Methodology

## Introduction

This proposed study was a quantitative examination of the perceptions of secondary students enrolled in online academic credit recovery classes as collected by the targeted urban school district at the end of the 2010-2011 academic school year. The purpose of this research study was to describe and analyze at-risk high school students' perceptions of their experiences with the online academic credit recovery classes offered to them by the Drop Out Prevention Department in an urban school district. The rationale was to compare district data regarding students' perceptions of traditional courses and online courses at high schools in the targeted school district. The methods are presented in the following order: research design; targeted ISD's characteristics; population; variables; instrument; procedures; and data analysis.

## Research Design

A descriptive, correlational research design was used for this study to explore the extent to which, if at all, at-risk high school students' perceptions of their experiences with their online courses differ from those they hold about their traditional courses. This design was the most appropriate for determining how at-risk students perceive the online academic credit recovery program in order to assist district leaders needing data for making recommendations to improve the delivery of online curricula offered at the secondary level as part of the plan to reduce the district's dropout rate. The study's data included responses from at-risk students in Grades 9 through 12 taking online academic credit recovery classes in the urban school district in order to fulfill graduation requirements. At-risk credit deficient high school students in the district participated in

online courses via PLATO. No manipulation of the students, their scores, or their grades occurred. Students had completed the online academic credit recovery courses by the time the data were analyzed.

## Research Questions

The following three research questions were answered through conducting the study:

1. What are high school students' perceptions of their experiences with online credit recovery classes offered to them by the Drop Out Prevention Department in an urban school district?
2. What are the factors that caused students to experience deficiencies and overall dislike for school completion?
3. What are high school students' perceptions of the differences between online and traditional courses?

## Targeted ISD's Characteristics

The targeted ISD operated six high schools. Below, in Table 1, is the school accountability report and summary for 2008-2009 school year for the hosting ISD (TEA, 2010a). The ISD met its goals by achieving the state's academically acceptable rating for students' test scores and graduation rate for the 2008-2009 year.

## Population

The population for the study included the 2010-2011 school year data from all six high schools, with permission from the Dropout Prevention program director. The population for this study consisted of all 2010-2011 PLATO enrolled students at the six

urban traditional high schools in the district under study. For the full study, 138 students responded to the survey; their demographics are provided in Chapter 4.

Table 1

*The Texas Education Agency AEIS Report Card for the Urban ISD*

TEXAS EDUCATION AGENCY — Section I

District Name: A[redacted]
District #: 220901

Academic Excellence Indicator System
2008-09 District Performance
2009 Accountability Rating: Academically Acceptable

| Indicator: | State | Region 11 | District | African American | Hispanic | White | Native American | Asian/ Pacific Is | Male | Female | Special Ed | Econ Disad | LEP | At Risk |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Annual Dropout Rate (Gr 9-12)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2007-08 | 3.2% | 2.5% | 2.6% | 3.4% | 3.4% | 1.6% | 1.1% | 0.8% | 3.0% | 2.1% | 4.4% | 2.5% | 3.4% | 2.9% |
| 2006-07 | 3.9% | 3.1% | 4.4% | 5.8% | 5.9% | 2.6% | 6.0% | 2.2% | 4.3% | 4.4% | 5.9% | 4.5% | 7.4% | 5.5% |
| **Completion/Student Status Rate (Gr 9-12)** | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Class of 2008 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Graduated | 79.1% | 83.3% | 74.5% | 68.4% | 63.6% | 82.6% | 95.2% | 87.3% | 71.9% | 76.9% | 58.2% | 66.2% | 51.2% | 62.2% |
| Received GED | 1.5% | 1.2% | 2.0% | 1.3% | 1.8% | 3.0% | 0.0% | 0.3% | 2.6% | 1.5% | 1.4% | 2.0% | 0.0% | 2.8% |
| Continued HS | 8.9% | 7.5% | 14.3% | 17.4% | 21.5% | 9.1% | 0.0% | 7.8% | 15.3% | 13.3% | 24.5% | 13.9% | 26.3% | 22.3% |
| Dropped Out (4-yr) | 10.5% | 7.9% | 9.2% | 13.0% | 13.1% | 5.3% | 4.8% | 4.6% | 10.2% | 8.3% | 15.9% | 17.9% | 22.5% | 12.7% |
| Class of 2007 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Graduated | 78.0% | 81.9% | 75.2% | 68.2% | 61.0% | 84.2% | 68.2% | 89.3% | 72.3% | 78.1% | 58.0% | 62.8% | 43.5% | 60.4% |
| Received GED | 2.0% | 1.7% | 2.3% | 1.0% | 2.2% | 3.3% | 0.0% | 0.7% | 3.2% | 1.3% | 1.6% | 2.5% | 0.0% | 3.4% |
| Continued HS | 8.7% | 7.0% | 11.0% | 13.7% | 18.7% | 6.4% | 9.1% | 5.2% | 12.5% | 9.5% | 20.2% | 12.6% | 28.5% | 18.1% |
| Dropped Out (4-yr) | 11.4% | 9.3% | 11.5% | 17.0% | 18.1% | 6.1% | 22.7% | 4.8% | 11.9% | 11.1% | 20.2% | 22.1% | 28.0% | 18.1% |

*Note.* The data in this table were found using the TEA's (2010a) Academic Excellence Indicator System and are available in the public domain through the agency's website.

## Variables

The independent variables were the high schools included in the study and students' grade levels and gender. The dependent variables in this study were students' perceptions of online classes. A number of items were used to measure students' perceptions.

## Instrument

The district's survey (see Appendix F) was adapted from one modified for use with the collegiate student population at the University of West Georgia (Moore & Benbasat, 1991). The district's personnel surveyed the students and collected data during the 2010-2011 school year to insure validity as the survey was used to measure what the director wanted to know in order to assess the Drop Out Prevention program and to

generate reliability of data by using a standardized protocol for distributing the instrument. The survey was used to solicit a variety of responses about the perceptions secondary students held about the district's curriculum, including their traditional course experiences and their credit recovery experiences. The items reflected the students' perceptions of their online courses via the 5-point Likert scale with strongly agree and strongly disagree as anchoring points. The items addressed parent support, online effectiveness, traditional setting, students, and school district staff. Finally, the data were checked to test the instrument's reliability with the Cronbach α reliability coefficient. The reliabilities are provided in Chapter 4.

**Procedures**

Prior to conducting the study, I, as the primary researcher, obtained IRB approval from Pepperdine University. No procedure was needed to obtain approval at the urban district level to do the study as the director made analyzing the data from this survey my project to complete (see Appendices G and H). The data were analyzed as extant or *ex post facto* data following the data collection and at the end of the online credit recovery courses in which the at-risk students were enrolled. The director released the data to me for conducting the analysis. I obtained all of the necessary data during the end of the 2010-2011 school year.

The district provided me with a list of credit recovery students from the six public high schools who were at risk for dropping out of high school and who had attended or were currently enrolled in these online courses. The students who met the criteria were invited to participate in the study. I met with the students to give them an invitation letter as approved by Pepperdine University's Institutional Review

Board (IRB). This letter introduced the research and the reason they were being asked to participate. The students were asked to take an envelope, which included a notice of interest in research study and return envelope, home to their parents. I contacted any parents who returned the interest in participating in the research study form to set up a meeting. No forms were returned for parent meetings.

I met with the interested at-risk students who agreed to participate in the study. In that meeting, I answered all questions that the participants or parents asked about the study. I explained the Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities Form for both parents and participants to sign. The document described the nature, purpose, and duration of the study as well as the expected commitment of time. The consent form indicated that the students' perceptions were being explored because they aspired to graduate from high school and because the district wanted to make improvements to their program of study. Participants and their parents were informed that the students could withdraw from the study at any time without any penalties. I reviewed the assent form with the participants in these meetings as well. At the conclusion of this meeting, parents and participants were given the opportunity to sign the Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities Form and the Assent Form.

**Data Analysis**

The proposed plan for data reduction and analysis involved exploratory data analysis and computation of descriptive statistics through StatView. For the purpose of the study, the objective of the data analysis was to describe the nature of the students' perceptions about their experiences with online credit courses and to determine the

presence of significant statistical findings about students' perceptions about online versus traditional classes. The data were used to analyze students' perceptions of their online course experiences during high school. The data were collected utilizing Graduation Coach assistance at each of the participating campuses. The data were analyzed as follows in the next paragraph.

High school students' perceptions of their experiences with online credit recovery classes offered to them by the Drop Out Prevention Department in an urban school district were presented using descriptive statistics including frequencies and measures of central tendency and variability, where appropriate for the survey items. The central tendency and variability of students' self efficacy for success in online courses were presented based on the data analysis. The students' self-efficacy scores were correlated to their responses to the online perception items using the Spearman ($r$) rank correlation coefficient. Students' perceptions of the differences between online and traditional courses were presented according to the frequencies of their responses to the items. The $\chi^2$ (chi-square) statistic was used to test the differences in their response choices to the items.

# Chapter 4. Results

## Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative research study was to describe and analyze at-risk high school students' perceptions of their experiences with online academic credit recovery classes offered to them through an urban school district's Drop Out Prevention Department. The survey responses were collected from secondary high school credit recovery students who were enrolled in the urban school district. The 50 question survey employed a 5-point Likert scale for each item with the anchor points ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). A preliminary analysis of the nature of the data was conducted as part of data management. The data provided by the respondents ($N$ = 138) were found to be normally distributed.

## Respondents

The collection of data for this study was conducted in the fall of the 2011-2012 school year within the high schools that utilized the PLATO credit recovery program. One hundred thirty-eight students participated in the study and completed the survey. The survey items asked the students their perceptions of the credit recovery online program with 70% ($n$ = 97) of the respondents in Grade 12, 13% ($n$ = 18) in Grade 11, 12% ($n$ = 16) in Grade 10, and 5% ($n$ = 7) in Grade 9. Of the participants, 59% ($n$ = 81) were male, and 41% ($n$ = 57) were female. This demographic information is presented in Figures 1 and 2.

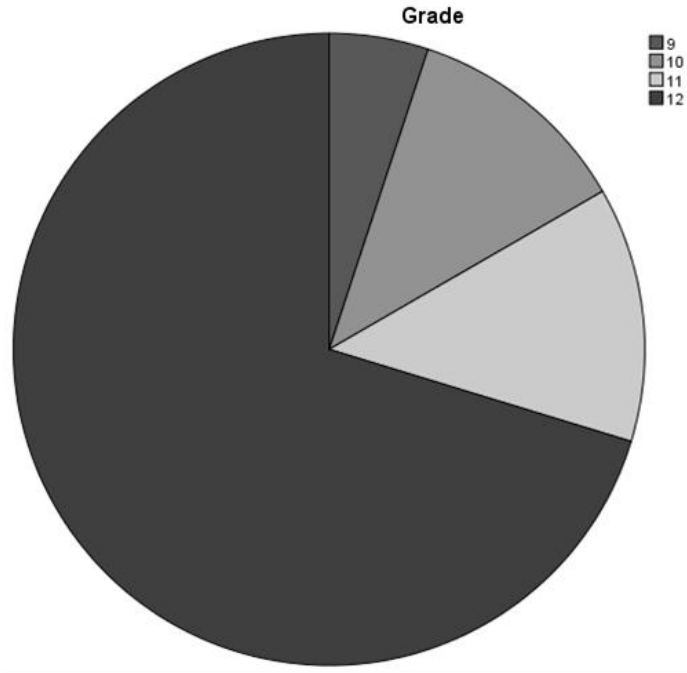


*Figure 1.* Distribution of grades in which respondents were enrolled.

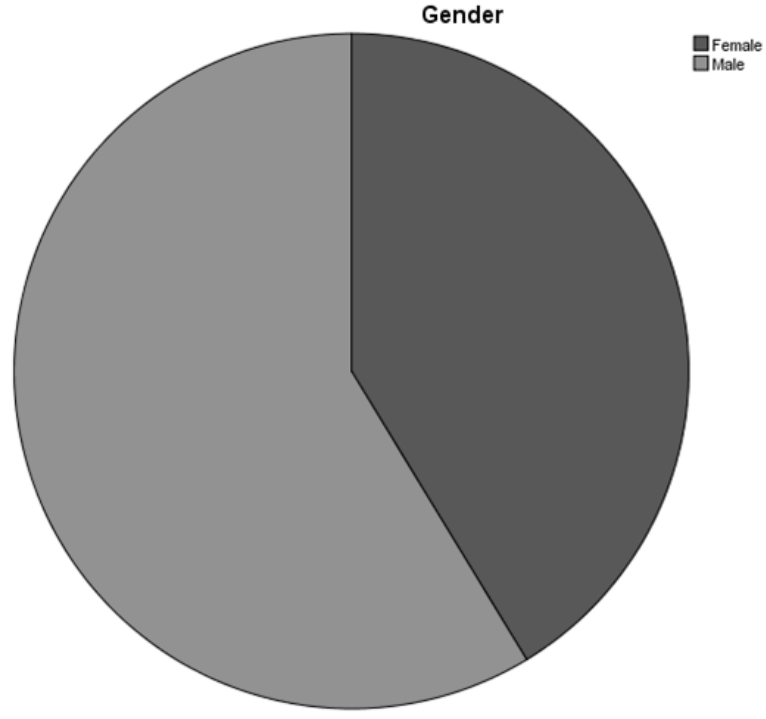


*Figure 2.* Distribution of gender for the respondents.

**Results for the Research Questions**

The 3 research questions presented in Chapter 1 were used as the parameters for this study along with the 50 question survey. These research questions were the following:

1. What are high school students' perceptions of their experiences with online credit recovery classes offered to them by the Drop Out Prevention Department in an urban school district?
2. What are the factors that caused students to experience deficiencies and overall dislike for school completion?
3. What are high school students' perceptions of the differences between online and traditional courses?

**Research question 1 results.** For Survey Question (SQ) 13, "traditional teachers treated me fairly," there were 138 responses, and 52% strongly agreed and agreed, 28% were neutral, and 20% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 54.681$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 14, "online teachers treat me fairly," 137students responded, and 66% strongly agreed and agreed, 29% were neutral, and 6% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 91.431$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 16, "I prefer online courses to traditional courses," 136 students responded, and 54% strongly agreed and agreed, 24% were neutral, and 22% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 22.603$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 17, "school culture in the online courses encourages me to graduate," 131 students responded, and 53% strongly agreed and agreed, 35% were neutral, and 12% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 65.756$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$).

For SQ 21, "I feel successful when taking online courses," 138 students responded, and 63% strongly agreed and agreed that they felt successful, 26% were

neutral, and 11% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 73.232$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 22, "I felt successful when taking traditional courses," 138 students responded, and 51% strongly agreed and agreed, 30% were neutral, and 19% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 38.104$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$).

For SQ 46, "online courses do not offer any advantage to me," 138 students responded, and 14% strongly agreed and agreed, 26% were neutral, and 59% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 54.899$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 47, "online courses should be offered 24 hours a day," 136 students responded and 73% strongly agreed and agreed, 19% were neutral, and 8% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 71.868$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 49, "I would take all of my courses online full-time if the district offered them," 137 students responded, and 59% strongly agreed and agreed, 20% were neutral, and 21% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 26.905$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$).

**Research question 2 results.** For SQ 2, "I would have done better on a traditional campus if the school culture was more supportive," 138 students responded, and 33% strongly agreed and agreed, 40% were neutral, and 27% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 46.565$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 4, "I feel supported by my parents or guardian," 137 students responded, and 74% strongly agreed and agreed, 16% were neutral, and 10% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 90.044$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$).

For SQ 15, "traditional school administrators treated me fairly," 133 students responded, and 51% strongly agreed and agreed, 32% were neutral, and 17% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 63.805$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 18, "school culture in the traditional courses encourage me to graduate," there were 137 responses, and 56% strongly agreed and agreed, 30% were neutral, and 15% strongly disagreed and disagreed

($\chi^2$ = 68.073, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001). For SQ 20, "I find what I learn in school to be relevant to real life," 138 responded, and 53% strongly agreed and agreed, 34% were neutral, and 13% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 78.449, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001).

For SQ 29, "I believe that online courses can prevent students from dropping out,' there were 136 responses, and 71% strongly agreed and agreed, 21% were neutral, and 8% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 71.279, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001). For SQ 30, "I believe that traditional courses prevent students from dropping out," there were 138 responses, and 33% strongly agreed and agreed, 28% were neutral, and 40% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 23.667, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001). For SQ 31, "I feel good about myself when I am doing well in school," 136 responded and 92% strongly agreed and agreed, 8% were neutral, and 0% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 82.779, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001). For SQ 32, "I am doing my best to graduate," 137 responded, and 87% strongly agreed and agreed, 10% were neutral, and 3% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 85.044, *df* = 3, *p* < .0001). For SQ 33, "participating in extracurricular activities is important to me," out of 136 responses, 45.5% strongly agreed and agreed, 32% were neutral, and 23% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 34.294, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001).

SQ 45 was "I would benefit if I could take more online courses." There were 138 responses with 62% strongly agreeing and agreeing, 23% staying neutral, and 15% strongly disagreeing and disagreeing ($\chi^2$ = 45.043, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001). For SQ 50, "this online program prevented me from dropping out of school," 138 students responded, and 62% strongly agreed and agreed, 23% were neutral, and 15% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 42.217, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001).

**Research question 3 results.** SQ 3, "in a course with both a traditional teacher and an online teacher, I learn better with the online," had 137 responses. For SQ 3, 43% strongly agreed and agreed, 30% were neutral, and 27% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 24.715$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 5, "I had opportunities to choose my own projects with traditional courses," out of 136 responses, 40% strongly agreed and agreed, 32% were neutral, and 28% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 60.176$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 6, "I have opportunities to choose my own projects with online courses," out of 137 responses, 35% strongly agreed and agreed, 29% were neutral, and 37% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 37.124$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 7, "I feel that I am in charge of what I learn with online courses," 136 students responded, and 68% strongly agreed and agreed, 15% were neutral, and 17% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 61.059$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). SQ 8 was "I felt I was in charge of what I learned in the traditional courses." Out of the 136 responses, 33% strongly agreed and agreed, 30% were neutral, and 37% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 41.426$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 9 ($N = 138$), "traditional classroom teachers encouraged me when I attended class," 61% strongly agreed and agreed, 22% were neutral, and 17% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 80.768$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$).

SQ 10 was "online teachers encourage me when I attend class." Out of the 135 responses, 50% strongly agreed and agreed, 30% were neutral, and 20% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 50.741$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 11's 136 respondents, "traditional classes prepared me to graduate," 62% strongly agreed and agreed, 23% were neutral, and 17% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 43.412$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 12's 136 respondents, "online classes are preparing me to graduate," 62% strongly

agreed and agreed, 26% were neutral, and 12% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 54.370, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001).

For SQ 19, "I believe that I can learn the same amount of information in an online course as in a traditional course," there were 137 responses, and 55% strongly agreed and agreed, 16% were neutral, and 29% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 23.912, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001). For SQ 23's 136 responses, "online courses are fun," 38% strongly agreed and agreed, 41% were neutral, and 21% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 50.544, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001). For SQ 24's 137 responses, "traditional courses were fun," 52% strongly agreed and agreed, 28% were neutral, and 21% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 54.423, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001). For SQ 25, "I like online courses," out of 137 responses, 63% strongly agreed and agreed, 29% were neutral, and 9% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 62.307, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001). For SQ 26, "I like traditional courses," out of 136 responses, 52% strongly agreed and agreed, 27% were neutral, and 21% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 47.750, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001). For SQ 27, "I believe the online course is a good program," out of 138 responses, 75% strongly agreed and agreed, 19% were neutral, and 7% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 80.072, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001). For SQ 28, "I believe the traditional course is a good program" and its 137 responses, 65% strongly agreed and agreed, 26% were neutral, and 10% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 66.759, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001).

For SQ 34, "my online teachers expect students to do their best," and its 138 responses, 70% strongly agreed and agreed, 25% were neutral, and 4% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2$ = 79.029, *df* = 4, *p* < .0001). For SQ 35, "my traditional teachers expected students to do their best," and its 136 responses, 71% strongly agreed and

agreed, 18% were neutral, and 11% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 64.221$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 36, "my online teachers expect me to do my best," and its 137 responses, 71% strongly agreed and agreed, 26% were neutral, and 3% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 90.409$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 37, "my traditional teachers expected me to do my best," and its 138 responses, 75% strongly agreed and agreed, 18% were neutral, and 7% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 83.014$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 38, "my online teachers are understanding when students have personal problems," and its 138 responses, 41% strongly agreed and agreed, 33% were neutral, and 26% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 18.884$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 39, "my traditional teachers were understanding when students had personal problems," and its 138 responses, 54% strongly agreed and agreed, 22% were neutral, and 24% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 46.275$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$).

For SQ 40, "my traditional teachers set high standards for learning in their classes," and its 138 responses, 70% strongly agreed and agreed, 21% were neutral, and 9% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 74.899$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 41, "my online teachers set high standards for learning in their classes," and its 138 responses, 49% strongly agreed and agreed, 37% were neutral, and 14% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 62.217$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For SQ 42, "my traditional teachers helped me gain confidence in my ability to learn," and its 137 responses, 60% strongly agreed and agreed, 22% were neutral, and 18% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 48.803$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For the 138 responses to SQ 43, "my online teachers help me gain confidence in my ability to learn," 56% strongly agreed and agreed, 35% were neutral, and 9% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 61.493$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For the 138 responses

to SQ 44, “I believe that I can make the same grade in an online course as in a traditional course,” 45% strongly agreed and agreed, 19% were neutral, and 36% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 14.464$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$). For the 137 responses to SQ 48, “I believe that I can learn more or would learn more through online material than through teacher lectures,” 47% strongly agreed and agreed, 36% were neutral, and 17% strongly disagreed and disagreed ($\chi^2 = 43.547$, $df = 4$, $p < .0001$).

For this research question, the students’ online efficacy and traditional efficacy were established. Factor analysis was conducted to determine which items composed each of the efficacies. Component 1 represented the Online Efficacy factor. The items included in the factor analysis for measuring Online Efficacy are listed in Table 2.

Table 2

*Varimax with Kaiser Normalization Component Matrix for Online Efficacy Items*

| Online Efficacy Test Items | Component | |
|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 |
| I feel that I am in charge of what I learn with online courses. | .616 | .164 |
| Online classes are preparing me to graduate. | .731 | .135 |
| I prefer online courses to traditional courses. | .876 | .015 |
| I believe that I can learn the same amount of information in an online course as in a traditional course. | .422 | .487 |
| I find what I learn in school to be relevant to real life. | .083 | .605 |
| I feel successful when taking online courses. | .822 | .109 |
| I feel good about myself when I am doing well in school. | .176 | .513 |
| I am doing my best to graduate. | .138 | .375 |
| My traditional teachers helped me gain confidence in my ability to learn. | -.333 | .675 |
| I believe that I can make the same grade in an online course as in a traditional course. | -.118 | .548 |
| I believe that I can learn more or would learn more through online material than through teacher lectures. | .714 | -.329 |

*Note.* Principal component analysis with rotation converged in three iterations.

The final Online Efficacy scale had five items. The reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's α of .822. The reliability coefficient was considered acceptable for the scale. The five items were the following:

1. I feel that I am in charge of what I learn with online courses.
2. Online classes are preparing me to graduate.
3. I prefer online courses to traditional courses.
4. I feel successful when taking online courses.
5. I believe that I can learn more or would learn more through online material than through teacher lectures.

Seven items were initially included in the factor analysis for measuring Traditional Efficacy. These items are listed in Table 3. Component 1 represented the Traditional Efficacy factor.

Table 3

*Varimax with Kaiser Normalization Component Matrix for Traditional Efficacy Items*

| Traditional Efficacy Test Items | Component | |
|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 |
| Traditional classes prepared me to graduate. | .860 | .104 |
| I find what I learn in school to be relevant to real life. | .325 | .599 |
| I felt successful when taking traditional courses. | .852 | .074 |
| I felt I was in charge of what I learned in the traditional courses. | .508 | .272 |
| I feel good about myself when I am doing well in school. | .097 | .719 |
| My traditional teachers helped me gain confidence in my ability to learn. | .849 | .080 |
| I am doing my best to graduate. | -.007 | .714 |

*Note.* Principal component analysis with rotation converged in three iterations.

The final Traditional Efficacy factor held five items. The reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's α of .755. The reliability coefficient was considered acceptable for the scale. The five items were the following:

1. I felt I was in charge of what I learned in the traditional courses.
2. Traditional classes prepared me to graduate.
3. I felt successful when taking traditional courses.
4. I feel good about myself when I am doing well in school.
5. My traditional teachers helped me gain confidence in my ability to learn.

The descriptive statistics for the two efficacy scales are provided in Table 4. The two types of efficacies demonstrated nearly equal characteristics, with the standard

deviation (SD) showing just slightly less variability for Traditional Efficacy than for Online Efficacy.

Table 4

*Descriptive Statistics for the Online and Traditional Efficacy Scales*

| Efficacy | Mean | SD | Min Value | Max Value | Skewness | Kurtosis |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Online | 18.06 | 4.089 | 7 | 25 | -.678 | .420 |
| Traditional | 18.07 | 3.650 | 7 | 25 | -.539 | .420 |

*Note*. For the two efficacy scales $n = 131$.

After calculating the students' two efficacy scale scores, the Spearman rank correlation coefficient (rho) was calculated for efficacy and the items relating to this research question. The items that were not part of the two types of efficacy were included in the correlation table with the two efficacy scales. Table 5 presents the correlation coefficients.

The Spearman correlation test was utilized for the area of efficacy and the results revealed that there were significant correlations with either a moderate to strong correlation coefficient in absolute value for nine of the survey questions. The data listed below illustrated the relationships between these items and both online and traditional efficacy.

For the item "in a course with both a traditional teacher and an online teacher, I learn better with online," the correlation coefficient was .722 for online efficacy ($r^2 = .52$) and was -.223 for traditional efficacy ($r^2 = .05$). Both correlations were significant, but

Table 5

*Spearman Rho Coefficients for Online Efficacy and Traditional Efficacy and Items Relating to the High School Students' Perceptions of the Differences Between Online and Traditional Courses*

| Survey Item | | Online Efficacy | Traditional Efficacy |
|---|---|---|---|
| I would have done better on a traditional campus if the school culture was more supportive. | Spearman's rho | -.119 | .094 |
| | *p* | .177 | .283 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |
| In a course with both a traditional teacher and an online teacher, I learn better with the online. | Spearman's rho | .722** | -.232** |
| | *p* | .000 | .008 |
| | *n* | 130 | 130 |
| I feel supported by my parents or guardian. | Spearman's rho | .140 | .391** |
| | *p* | .110 | .000 |
| | *n* | 131 | 130 |
| I had opportunities to choose my own projects with traditional courses. | Spearman's rho | .027 | .399** |
| | *p* | .764 | .000 |
| | *n* | 129 | 129 |
| I have opportunities to choose my own projects with online courses. | Spearman's rho | .449** | -.096 |
| | *p* | .000 | .278 |
| | *n* | 130 | 130 |
| Traditional classroom teachers encouraged me when I attended class. | Spearman's rho | -.281** | .667** |
| | *p* | .001 | .000 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |
| Online teachers encourage me when I attend class. | Spearman's rho | .481** | -.158 |
| | *p* | .000 | .076 |
| | *n* | 129 | 128 |
| Traditional teachers treated me fairly. | Spearman's rho | -.084 | .595** |
| | *p* | .338 | .000 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |
| Online teachers treat me fairly. | Spearman's rho | .452** | -.062 |
| | *p* | .000 | .483 |
| | *n* | 131 | 130 |
| Traditional school administrators treated me fairly. | Spearman's rho | -.091 | .479** |
| | *p* | .310 | .000 |
| | *n* | 126 | 126 |
| School culture in the online courses encourages me to graduate. | Spearman's rho | .573** | -.088 |
| | *p* | .000 | .331 |
| | *n* | 125 | 125 |
| School culture in the traditional courses encourages me to graduate. | Spearman's rho | -.179* | .621** |
| | *p* | .042 | .000 |
| | *n* | 130 | 130 |
| I believe that I can learn the same amount of information in an online course as in a traditional course. | Spearman's rho | .325** | .154 |
| | *p* | .000 | .081 |
| | *n* | 130 | 130 |
| I find what I learn in school to be relevant to real life. | Spearman's rho | .143 | .412** |
| | *p* | .104 | .000 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |
| Online courses are fun. | Spearman's rho | .595** | -.057 |
| | *p* | .000 | .518 |
| | *n* | 129 | 129 |

*(continued)*

| Survey Item | | Online Efficacy | Traditional Efficacy |
|---|---|---|---|
| Traditional courses were fun. | Spearman's rho | -.299** | .616** |
| | *p* | .001 | .000 |
| | *n* | 130 | 130 |
| I like online courses. | Spearman's rho | .737** | -.154 |
| | *p* | .000 | .079 |
| | *n* | 131 | 130 |
| I liked traditional courses. | Spearman's rho | -.397** | .659** |
| | *p* | .000 | .000 |
| | *n* | 129 | 129 |
| I believe the online course is a good program. | Spearman's rho | .683** | -.095 |
| | *p* | .000 | .278 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |
| I believe the traditional course is a good program. | Spearman's rho | -.306** | .635** |
| | *p* | .000 | .000 |
| | *n* | 130 | 130 |
| I believe that online courses can prevent students from dropping out. | Spearman's rho | .387** | .039 |
| | *p* | .000 | .660 |
| | *n* | 129 | 129 |
| I believe that traditional courses prevent students from dropping out. | Spearman's rho | -.258** | .370** |
| | *p* | .003 | .000 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |
| I am doing my best to graduate. | Spearman's rho | .135 | .218* |
| | *p* | .125 | .013 |
| | *n* | 130 | 130 |
| Participating in extracurricular activities is important to me. | Spearman's rho | -.049 | .367** |
| | *p* | .578 | .000 |
| | *n* | 130 | 129 |
| My online teachers expect students to do their best. | Spearman's rho | .484** | -.085 |
| | *p* | .000 | .334 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |
| My traditional teachers expected students to do their best. | Spearman's rho | -.028 | .572** |
| | *p* | .754 | .000 |
| | *n* | 129 | 129 |
| My online teachers expect me to do my best. | Spearman's rho | .501** | -.069 |
| | *p* | .000 | .436 |
| | *n* | 130 | 130 |
| My traditional teachers expected me to do my best. | Spearman's rho | .059 | .537** |
| | *p* | .505 | .000 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |
| My online teachers are understanding when students have personal problems. | Spearman's rho | .437** | -.309** |
| | *p* | .000 | .000 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |
| My traditional teachers were understanding when students had personal problems. | Spearman's rho | -.187* | .609** |
| | *p* | .032 | .000 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |
| My traditional teachers set high standards for learning in their classes. | Spearman's rho | .152 | .350** |
| | *p* | .083 | .000 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |

*(continued)*

| Survey Item | | Online Efficacy | Traditional Efficacy |
|---|---|---|---|
| My online teachers set high standards for learning in their classes. | Spearman's rho | .371** | .122 |
| | *p* | .000 | .166 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |
| My online teachers help me gain confidence in my ability to learn. | Spearman's rho | .602** | -.096 |
| | *p* | .000 | .277 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |
| I believe that I can make the same grade in an online course as in a traditional course. | Spearman's rho | -.087 | .365** |
| | *p* | .326 | .000 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |
| I would benefit if I could take more online courses. | Spearman's rho | .676** | -.250** |
| | *p* | .000 | .004 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |
| Online courses do not offer any advantage to me. | Spearman's rho | -.421** | .287** |
| | *p* | .000 | .001 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |
| Online courses should be offered 24 hours a day. | Spearman's rho | .416** | -.173 |
| | *p* | .000 | .050 |
| | *n* | 129 | 129 |
| I would take all of my courses online full-time if the district offered them. | Spearman's rho | .605** | -.281** |
| | *p* | .000 | .001 |
| | *n* | 130 | 130 |
| This online program prevented me from dropping out of school. | Spearman's rho | .409** | -.167 |
| | *p* | .000 | .057 |
| | *n* | 131 | 131 |

*Note.* *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

for online efficacy the correlation was moderate and positive, meaning as students' online efficacy increased so did their belief in learning better with an online teacher. For traditional efficacy, the correlation was mild and negative, meaning as students' traditional efficacy increased, their belief in learning better with an online teacher decreased.

For the item "traditional classroom teachers encouraged me when I attended class," the correlation coefficient was -.281 for online efficacy ($r^2$ = .078) and was .667 for traditional efficacy ($r^2$ = .445). Both correlations were significant, but for online efficacy the correlation was mild and negative, meaning as students' online efficacy increased as their belief in receiving encouragement from a traditional teacher decreased. For traditional efficacy, the correlation was moderate and positive, meaning as students'

traditional efficacy increased so did their belief in encouragement from a traditional teacher.

For the item "school culture in the traditional courses encourages me to graduate," the correlation coefficient was -.179 for online efficacy ($r^2$ = .032) and was .621 for traditional efficacy ($r^2$ = .386). Both correlations were significant, but for online efficacy, the correlation was mild and negative, meaning as students' online efficacy increased their belief in encouragement to graduate from traditional courses decreased. For traditional efficacy, the correlation was moderate and positive, meaning as students' traditional efficacy increased so did their belief of encouragement to graduate from traditional courses.

For the item "traditional courses were fun," the correlation coefficient was -.299 for online efficacy ($r^2$ = .089) and was .616 for traditional efficacy ($r^2$ = .379). Both correlations were significant, but for online efficacy the correlation was mild and negative, meaning as students' online efficacy increased their belief in traditional courses being fun decreased. For traditional efficacy, the correlation was moderate and positive, meaning as students' traditional efficacy increased so did their belief in the fun of traditional courses.

For the item "I liked traditional courses," the correlation coefficient was -.397 for online efficacy ($r^2$ = .158) and was .659 for traditional efficacy ($r^2$ = .434). Both correlations were significant, but for online efficacy the correlation was nearly moderate and was negative, meaning as students' online efficacy increased their belief in liking traditional courses decreased. For traditional efficacy, the correlation was moderately

positive, meaning as students' traditional efficacy increased so did their belief in liking traditional courses.

For the item "I believe the traditional courses is a good program, the correlation coefficient was -.306 for online efficacy ($r^2$ = .094) and was .635 for traditional efficacy ($r^2$ = .403). Both correlations were significant, but for online efficacy the correlation was mildly negative, meaning as students' online efficacy increased their belief of traditional courses being a good program decreased. For traditional efficacy, the correlation was moderately positive, meaning as students' traditional efficacy increased so did their belief in traditional courses being a good program.

For the item "I believe that traditional courses prevent students from dropping out," the correlation coefficient was -.258 for online efficacy ($r^2$ = .067) and was .370 for traditional efficacy ($r^2$ = .137). Both correlations were significant and mild. For online efficacy the correlation was negative, meaning as students' online efficacy increased their belief that traditional courses prevented students from dropping out decreased. For traditional efficacy, the correlation was positive, meaning as students' traditional efficacy increased so did their belief that traditional courses prevented students from dropping out.

For the item "My traditional teachers were understanding when students had personal problems," the correlation coefficient was -.187 for online efficacy ($r^2$ = .035) and was .609 for traditional efficacy ($r^2$ = .371). Both correlations were significant, but for online efficacy the correlation was mildly negative, meaning as students' online efficacy increased their belief that traditional teachers were understanding when students had personal problems increased. For traditional efficacy, the correlation was moderately

positive, meaning as students' traditional efficacy increased so did their belief that traditional teachers were understanding.

For the item "I would benefit if I could take more online courses," the correlation coefficient was .676 for online efficacy ($r^2$ = .457) and was -.250 for traditional efficacy ($r^2$ = .063). Both correlations were significant, but for online efficacy the correlation was moderately positive, meaning as students' online efficacy increased so did their belief in benefitting from taking more online courses. For traditional efficacy, the correlation was mildly negative, meaning as students' traditional efficacy increased, their belief in benefitting from taking more online courses decreased.

For the item "I would take all of my courses online full-time if the district offered them," the correlation coefficient was .605 for online efficacy ($r^2$ = .270) and was -.281 for traditional efficacy ($r^2$ = .079). Both correlations were significant, but for online efficacy the correlation was moderately positive, meaning as students' online efficacy increased so did their belief that they would take all of their courses online full-time if the district offered them. For traditional efficacy, the correlation was mildly negative, meaning as students' traditional efficacy increased, their belief that they would take all of their courses online full-time if the district offered them decreased.

**Summary of the Analysis of Data**

In summary, the purpose of this quantitative research study was to describe and analyze at-risk high school students' perceptions of their experiences with online academic credit recovery classes offered to them through an urban school district's Drop Out Prevention Department. The relationships observed of the correlation coefficients demonstrated that credit recovery students preferred online courses over traditional

courses and did not feel encouraged by traditional teachers. They did not believe the traditional school culture encouraged them to graduate. They did not regard traditional courses as fun or likeable, and they did not believe that the traditional school was a good program. They reported that traditional teachers were not understanding when they had problems and that taking more online courses would benefit them. Finally, the credit recovery students responded that they would take all of their courses online full-time if the district offered them this option.

# Chapter 5. Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

## Summary of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative research study was to describe and analyze at-risk high school students' perceptions of their experiences with online academic credit recovery classes offered to them through an urban school district's Drop Out Prevention Department. The 50 question survey employed a 5-point Likert scale with the anchor points ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The survey responses were collected from secondary high school credit recovery students who were enrolled in PLATO courses in the urban school district.

**PLATO.** In review, PLATO (2010) was incorporated into the urban ISD's dropout prevention curriculum in the 2009-2010 school year. The subjects of English I, II, III, and IV; algebra I and II; geometry; world geography; world history; U.S. history; U.S. government; economics; biology I; chemistry I; and chemistry communication are offered through the credit recovery program. Elective courses are generally an option in the PLATO program (PLATO, 2010). With PLATO, students can sign into their courses from home if their school allows them to do so, but the urban school district under study has not allowed students to use PLATO via home Internet access due to budgetary concerns. Students must come to their respective high school campuses to work on assignments and study the content provided in the courses. Each of the eight campuses houses a computer lab dedicated to PLATO courses. This lab operates on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on most high school campuses and on Monday through Thursday 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at one campus throughout the academic school year. Students complete the regular school day before remaining on campus to recover

the missing credits on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. The students working on the PLATO courses at the urban ISD's high school campuses are monitored by at least two certified teachers. The teachers supervise the students and address any questions or concerns students have. The courses offered in these labs occur in addition to students' regular school schedules, and with permission, PLATO courses can be added to the school day schedule for specific at-risk students.

**Review of findings by research question.** The first research question was used to examine the credit recovery high school students' perceptions of their experiences with online credit recovery classes offered to them by the Drop Out Prevention Department in an urban school district. The results indicated that the majority of the respondents' perceptions were that both traditional and online teachers treated them fairly although the majority of the respondents preferred online courses to traditional courses. The online school culture did encourage the respondents to graduate and they felt successful when taking online courses. An overwhelming number of respondents reported that the online courses should be offered 24 hours per day.

The second research question was used to examine students' experiences with deficiencies and overall dislike for school completion. The results indicated that the primary obstacle preventing them from completing high school was that the traditional setting did nothing to prevent students from dropping out, and a large number of respondents believed that they would benefit if they could take more online courses. The majority of the respondents believed that the online credit recovery courses prevented them from dropping out of school.

The third research question was used to examine the school students' perceptions of the differences between online and traditional courses. The results of this quantitative study indicated that the students believed they had more control of learning content in the online classes and less control in the traditional classes. Overall, the participants enjoyed the online classes and felt that the online courses were a good program.

**Summary of findings.** The students' perceptions of the credit recovery program included the following findings:

- Of the students surveyed, 47% agreed and strongly agreed that they can or would learn more through online material than teacher lectures compared to 17% who disagreed and strongly disagreed.
- Of the students surveyed, 73% agreed and strongly agreed that the courses should be offered 24 hours a day.
- Of the students surveyed, 59% agreed and strongly agreed that they would be willing to take all of their courses online full-time if the district offered them.
- Of the students surveyed, 57% agreed and strongly agreed that they would benefit if they could take more online courses.
- Of the students surveyed, 62% agreed and strongly agreed that the online program kept them from dropping out of school.

Alternatively, some limitations affected this quantitative survey study. The study was focused exclusively on at-risk credit recovery students in a dropout prevention program in a North Texas urban school district, and the results might not generalize to other districts in the area or state. Second, the types of students who might more likely be drawn to enroll in online programs, which could represent sampling bias. There might

be students who would do very well using online programs when on campus. However, because students can only attend credit recovery sessions during the scheduled school day, they may not put forth the required effort needed for thorough study time. Third, data were collected using self-report surveys. Because students might be concerned about appearing to like one form of curriculum over another, their answers might have been biased. Students might have answered the items in socially desirable ways to please their teachers.

**Discussion of Findings**

Ultimately, the transformations in educational technology will continue to be an evolving process that will never stop. The dropout rate will always exist at some level with secondary students. To what extent will be determined from district to district and state to state. In 1983, a promise was made by the National Commission on Excellence in Education in *A Nation At Risk* to give every student the equitable opportunity and the tools necessary to obtain the best education possible. The increasing level of demand in the ongoing and growing area of educational technology along with the requests for districts to look toward using online curriculum and instruction programs, whether the programs are offered at the state or district level, exists. Students in this study expressed their interest in and need for online learning.

Students have grown up with technology intertwined in their lives, but they are likely to experience less technology at school than they encounter at home and in the environment outside of school. Students can become disengaged with public school programs that lack technology and may drop out due to disinterest in their education. The dropout numbers may increase in all districts that do not engage the students with

technology on a daily basis. If districts fail to consider all available technological alternatives to try to help students stay in school, school board members and community stakeholders will at some point ask educators about what is being done to reduce the dropout numbers.

Although there may be an increase in the number of students taking online courses nationwide, connecting the results of this study to the literature in Chapter 2 was difficult since research on this topic remains in its infancy and lack empirical data to which to compare it. The limited amount of overall research data, if any, in the areas of secondary public school students' perceptions of credit recovery programs, the quality of online courses and the success rates of programs, and the lack of sufficient data statewide could not be used as a benchmark as currently no established success cases exist. The amount of information still needing to be compiled from the federal, state, district, and campus levels continues to push some districts to start online programs for the first time while original programs continue to grow.

As leaders continue to anticipate more cost cutting budget issues during this second decade of the 21st century, the need to keep up with the expanding technology changes will put constant pressure on districts' leaders. School districts' leaders will want to keep up with researched based evidence for their decisions that could be used to guarantee legacies. The anticipation of technological progress could not have been predicted. In schools, the current level of technology utilization is lower than in other industries. What could be determined with all certainty is that technology change will continue and students will have the ability and confidence to progress within the current

public school systems only if the districts attend to their students' perceptions and adapt to meet students' legitimate learning needs by using technology.

## Conclusions

The results clearly demonstrated that the respondents believed that the credit recovery program prevented them from dropping out of high school, and they responded that they would take more classes online if given the opportunity. The findings suggested the presence of a relational disconnect between students who take credit recovery classes and components of traditional brick and mortar campus staffing and course delivery. If this disconnect is actual, it needs to be addressed with professional development and reconsideration of the nature of course delivery at the high school level. Based on the students' perceptions, a sufficient amount of support to help the students as much as they would have liked within their public schools was not available to them. Therefore, based on the findings, it is strongly recommended that the course recovery have online course access from their homes in order to ensure they feel supported and are able to graduate from high school in a timely manner.

## Recommendations for Further Study

The findings did show that there is a need for conversations to take place at the district level about the students' perceptions of learning modules and delivery. The following recommendations for future research are based on the information from the findings in Chapter 4:

1. A follow-up study that is qualitative in order to obtain a more detailed understanding of student perceptions.

2. A comparison between campuses about students' perceptions in order to assist campus culture.
3. Further validation of the online and traditional efficacy scales for use with not only at-risk but also high achieving high school students.
4. Qualitative research to review the impact that teacher attitude has on the dropout rate.
5. Compare student success and effectiveness of curriculum and instruction technology enabling students to have 24 hour student access to their online credit recovery courses.

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# APPENDIX A

## State-Sanctioned “State Level” Virtual Schools

*Alabama*. The Alabama Online High School began pilot instruction in fall 1999 and became available statewide in fall 2001. AOHS is a joint effort of the state education agency, University of Alabama, local schools and state education associations, funded through a federal Technology Challenge grant. It currently offers several high school courses within a 4 x 4 instructional model.

*Arkansas.* Operations began in Spring 2000 for the Arkansas Virtual High School. This high school currently offers 13 locally developed core curriculum courses as supplemental instruction for students attending participating public high schools. Operated by an education cooperative with state education agency funding.

*Florida.* The Florida Virtual School (previously the Florida Virtual School), begun in 1997, has been state funded as an independent entity. It offers a full online curriculum but not a diploma. The largest virtual school in terms of enrollments, it acts as a course provider for districts in Florida and other states.

*Hawaii.* When federal funding ended for the state department of education. Hawaii E-School in 2000, the Hawaii E-Charter was developed to replace it. The first statewide charter school, ECharter offers a full locally developed curriculum and approved diploma study and is free to any qualified Hawaii high school student.

*Idaho.* The Idaho Virtual High School, established through H. B. 317 in spring 2001, will be a state-operated charter school in which districts will receive the same state funding for in-district students who enroll.

*Illinois.* The Illinois Virtual High School, operated by a broad consortium, began offering instruction in January 2001, with a focus on AP curriculum.

*Kentucky*. The Kentucky Virtual High School began operation in January 2000 within the state department of education, with state legislative funding. It provides supplemental pre-college curricula for public middle and high schools, taught by certified regular K-12 staff. It currently offers over 40 courses, including 14 AP courses.

*Louisiana*. The Louisiana Virtual Classroom was opened in fall 2000 by the state department of education with funding from the State Distance Learning Network. LVC follows the Concord VHS bartering model, and currently shares 11 courses among participating high schools.

*Maryland.* The Maryland Virtual Learning Community will debut in fall 2002, operated by the state education agency. Its initial focus will be on high school instruction.

*Michigan.* The Michigan Virtual High School, established by the legislature as part of the private nonprofit Michigan Virtual University, began instruction in fall 2000 with AP courses and added 20 core and elective high school courses in fall 2001.

*New Mexico*. The New Mexico Virtual School, established by legislative act within the Department of Public Education, began instruction in January 2001 with initial AP course offerings, and now offers a full high school curriculum developed by an external provider. It has a long-term focus on all K-12 levels.

*North Dakota*. The North Dakota Division of Independent Study began offering online high school courses in fall 2000, and now offers over 70 courses and an approved diploma.

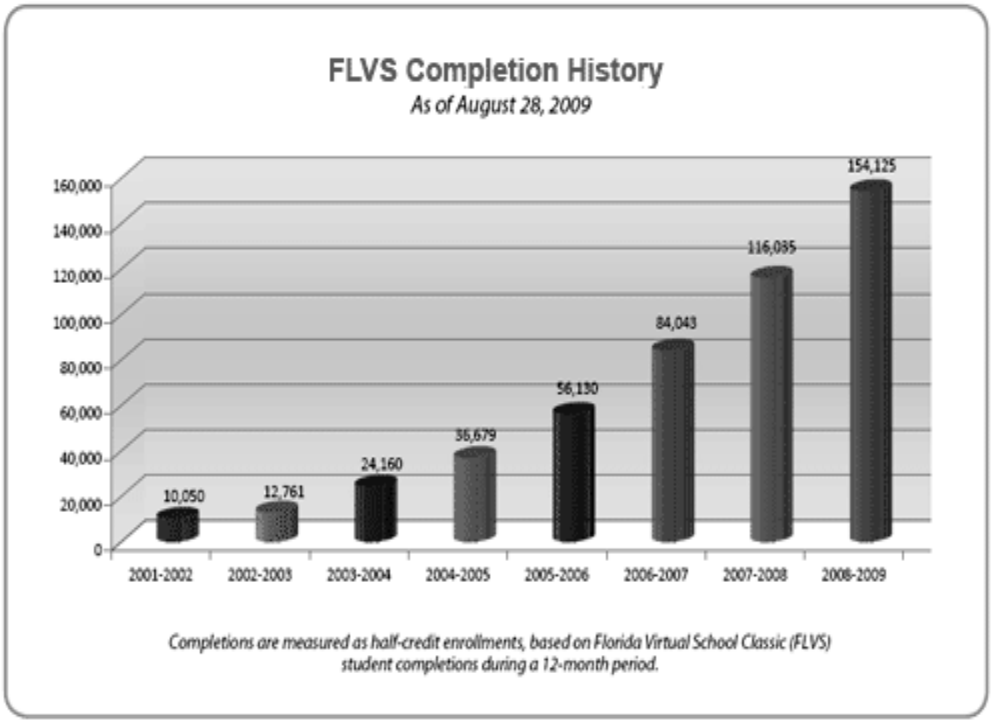
*Utah.* The Electronic High School began in 1994 funded by the State Office of Education. It acts as a course broker for high school courses offered through interactive

television, public television and online. It currently offers 29 online core and concurrent enrollment courses developed with Utah Education Network.

*West Virginia*. The West Virginia Virtual School within the state department of education began operation in fall 2000, with legislative and local district funding. Currently over 40 online courses at all K-12 levels, developed and delivered by external providers are brokered by WVHS to participating districts.

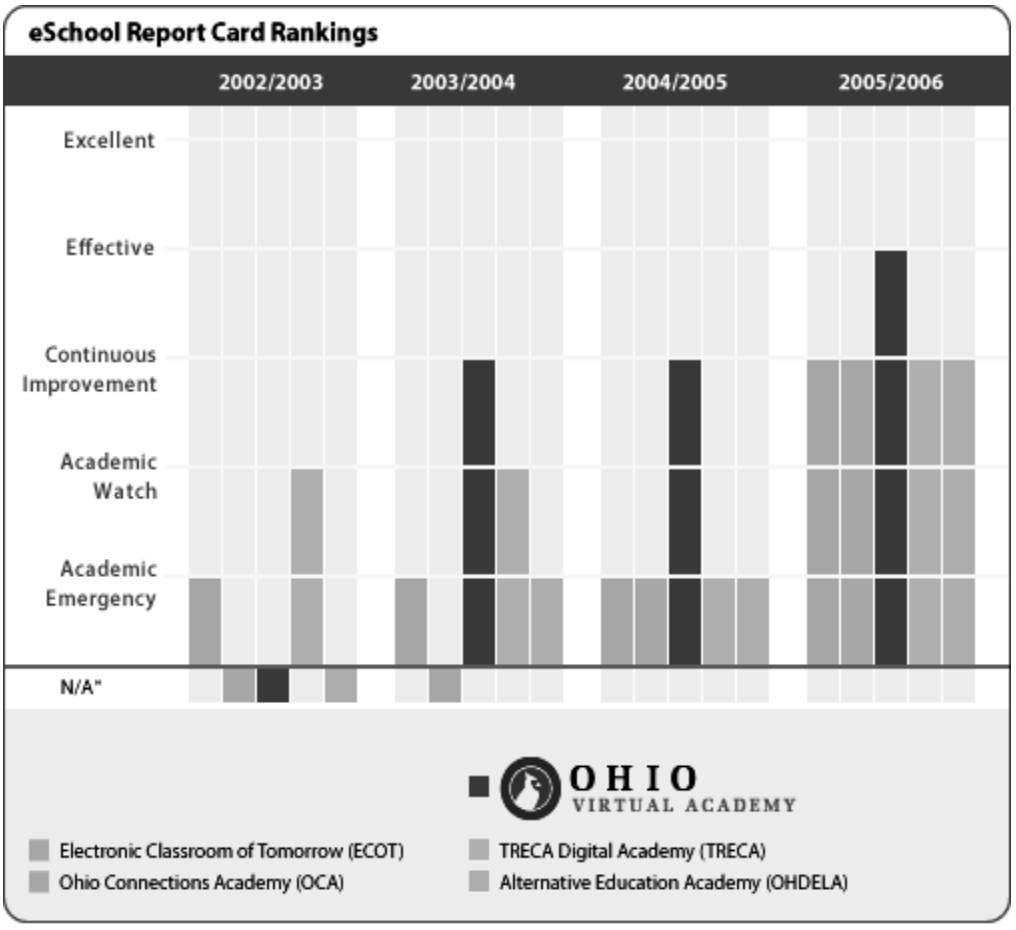
# APPENDIX B

## Florida Virtual Completion History


FLVS Completion History
As of August 28, 2009
160,000
140,000
120,000
100,000
80,000
60,000
40,000
20,000
0
10,050
12,761
24,160
36,679
56,130
84,043
116,085
154,125
2001-2002
2002-2003
2003-2004
2004-2005
2005-2006
2006-2007
2007-2008
2008-2009
Completions are measured as half-credit enrollments, based on Florida Virtual School Classic (FLVS) student completions during a 12-month period.

# APPENDIX C

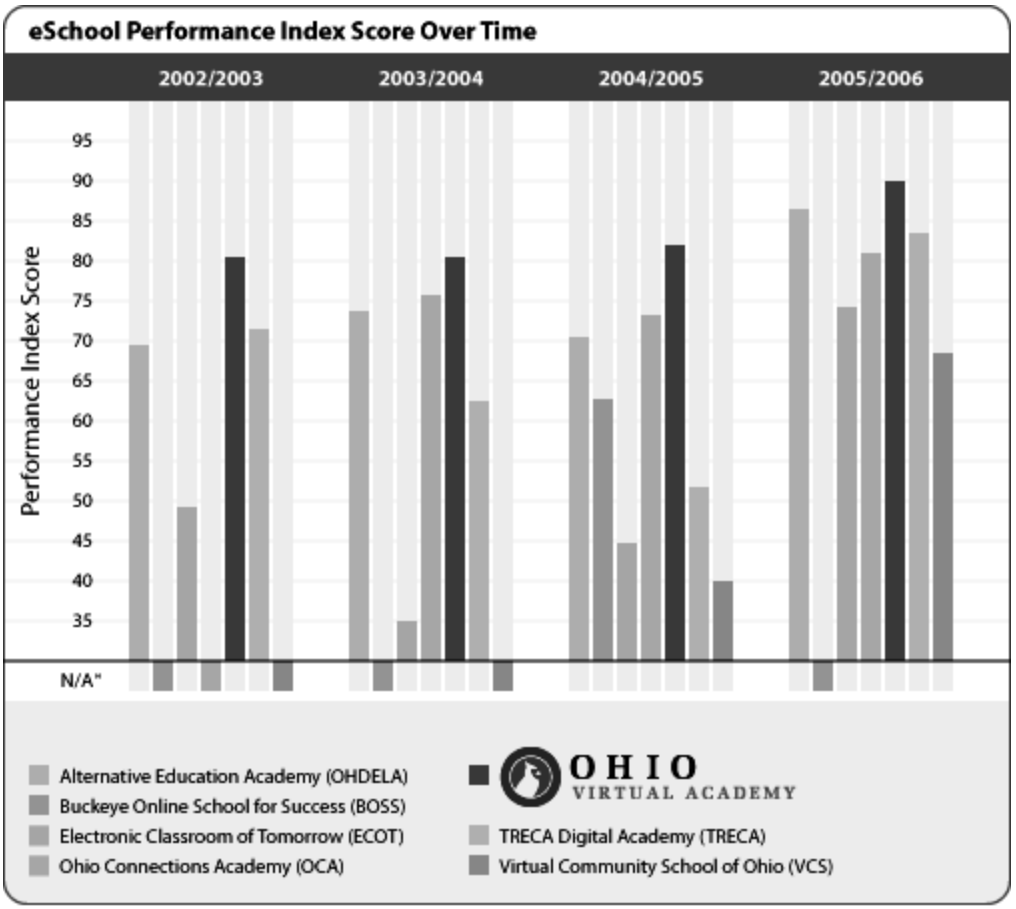
## Ohio Virtual Academy Report Card Rankings




* Information does not exist or is not available.

# APPENDIX D

## Ohio Virtual Academy Performance Index Score




* Information does not exist or is not available.

# APPENDIX E

## Plato 2009 Fall Snapshot

| Targeted Urban School District High School Campuses | Credits Attempted | Number of Students |
|---|---|---|
| #1 | 440 | 340 |
| #2 | 390 | 223 |
| #3 | 324 | 135 |
| #4 | 300 | 268 |
| #5 | No classes | |
| #6 | 418 | 301 |
| #7 | 513 | 542 |
| #8 | 271 | 264 |
| #9 | 238 | 309 |

# APPENDIX F

## Survey of Student Perceptions of Online Plato Courses

**Questions marked with an asterisk (*) are mandatory.**

Please read the following statements carefully. Select the response that best describes your opinion. All responses are completely confidential.

1 a  What high school do you attend?

1 b  What grade?

1 c  Gender?

2 I would have done better on a traditional campus if the school culture was more supportive.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

3 In a course with both a traditional teacher and an online teacher, I learn better with the online.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

4 I feel supported by my parents or guardian

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

5 I had opportunities to choose my own projects with traditional courses

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

6 I have opportunities to choose my own projects with online courses.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

7 I feel that I am in charge of what I learn with online courses.

| Strongly | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Disagree | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

8 I felt I was in charge of what I learned in the traditional courses.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

9 Traditional classroom teachers encouraged me when I attended class.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

10 Online teachers encourage me when I attend class.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

11 Traditional classes prepared me to graduate.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

12 Online classes are preparing me to graduate.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

13 Traditional teachers treated me fairly.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

14 Online teachers treat me fairly.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

15 Traditional school administrators treated me fairly.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

16 I prefer online courses to traditional courses.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

17 School culture in the online courses encourage me to graduate.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

18 School culture in the traditional courses encourage me to graduate.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

19 I believe that I can learn the same amount of information in an online course as in a traditional course.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

20 I find what I learn in school to be relevant to real life.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

21 I feel successful when taking online courses.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

22 I felt successful when taking traditional courses

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

23 Online courses are fun.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

24 Traditional courses were fun.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

25 I like online courses.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

26 I liked traditional courses.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

27 I believe the online courses is a good program.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

28 I believe the traditional courses is a good program.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

29 I believe that online courses can prevent students from dropping out.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

30 I believe that traditional courses prevent students from dropping out.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

31 I feel good about myself when I am doing well in school.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

32 I am doing my best to graduate.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

33 Participating in extracurricular activities is important to me.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

34 My online teachers expect students to do their best.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

35 My traditional teachers expected students to do their best.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

36 My online teachers expect me to do my best.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

37 My traditional teachers expected me to do my best.

| Strongly | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Disagree | | | | |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

38 My online teachers are understanding when students have personal problems.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

39 My traditional teachers were understanding when students had personal problems

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

40 My traditional teachers set high standards for learning in their classes.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

41 My online teachers set high standards for learning in their classes.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

42 My traditional teachers helped me gain confidence in my ability to learn.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

43 My online teachers help me gain confidence in my ability to learn.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

44 I believe that I can make the same grade in an online course as in a traditional course.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

45 I would benefit if I could take more online courses.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

46 Online courses do not offer any advantage to me.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

47 Online courses should be offered 24 hours a day.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

48 I believe that I can learn more or would learn more through online material than through teacher lectures.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

49 I would take all of my courses online full-time if the district offered them.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

50 This online program prevented me from dropping out of school.

| Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

# APPENDIX G

## Permission to Conduct Study from District's IRB

Printed by: **Mychl K Buckley**
Title:

Friday, September 09, 2011 7:34:36 A
Page 1 of

Message Thu, Sep 08, 2011 3:09 PM

From: Wallace H. Carter
To: **Mychl K. Buckley**

Subject: Re: IRB approval

Mr. Buckley,
You now have approval to conduct your study, *A Study of At-Risk Students' Perceptions of An Online Credit Recovery Program in an Urban North Texas Independent School District*.
On completion of your dissertation, we would appreciate an abstract of your study.
Thanks.
Wally

**Mychl K. Buckley writes:**
Good afternoon Dr. Carter.

Attached is the IRB approval letter you requested for district final approval.

Please advise.

Respectfully,

Mr. Mychl K Buckley
Dropout Prevention Department
[redacted]ndependent School District
[redacted]
[redacted]Texas[redacted]
[redacted]

"Academic rigor is the quality or action that requires an individual to challenge oneself to persevere in order to increase one's complexity of knowledge and thinking and perform at a higher level."
Tim R. Westerberg

Dr. Wallace Carter
Director, Accountability & Testing
[redacted]ndependent School District
[redacted]

# APPENDIX H

Permission to Conduct Study from Executive Director of Secondary Instruction

Printed by: **Mychl K Buckley** Monday, December 05, 2011 7:09:48 A
Title: Page 1 of

[redacted] Message Mon, Nov 28, 2011 10:12 PM

From: [redacted] Karen Hill

To: [redacted] **Mychl K. Buckley**

Subject: Credit Recovery Survey

Mychl,
Dr. Cavazos has been provided information regarding your survey, please proceed.

Karen Hill
Executive Director of Secondary Instruction
[redacted] Independent School District
[redacted]
[redacted] Texas [redacted]
[redacted]
khill1@[redacted]