

AN EXAMINATION OF PHOENIX UNION HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT ADULT
BASIC EDUCATION'S COURSE FOR GED STUDENTS AGES 16 TO 22

by

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of the Requirements for the Degree

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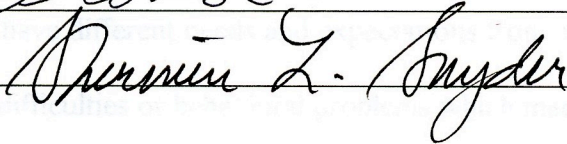
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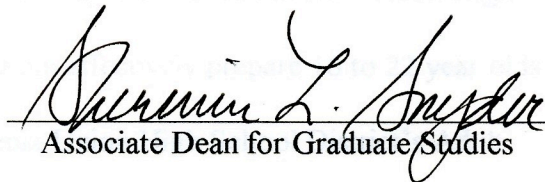
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the Phoenix Union High School District Adult Basic Education program's preparation of 16 to 22 year old students for the General Education Development examination.

A review of the literature indicated that the dropout rate of elementary and high school students has increased, the age of participants in GED classes has lowered. High schools are not able or willing to retain students with few credits who have little hope of graduating at 18 years of age or who have returned from correctional facilities. Parenting teens often are unable to continue their education at traditional schools because of child care needs. The age of students seeking the GED diploma has steadily decreased until in 1996 forty two percent of all students were between the ages of 16 and 24. Younger students have different needs and expectations from a GED program. Many students had learning difficulties or behavioral problems which made their traditional schooling unsuccessful. They bring these problems to the GED classroom.

The research question addressed in this study was: does Phoenix Union High School District's Adult Basic Education program effectively prepare 16 to 22 year olds for the GED examination? Records of the Phoenix Union High School District's Adult Education adult learning center were examined to determine age and educational attainment of participants. A survey was designed to collect information from those aged 16 to 22 to discover when and why they left school as well as their expectations of the

GED class. This survey indicated that the majority of GED class participants left school because their educational needs were not being served by the traditional school system. However, their answers to the question concerning how the GED class format could be improved indicated that they wanted and needed the structure of a traditional classroom, as opposed to an open entry/open exit, individualized environment.

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CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM

Introduction

This research project focuses on the Phoenix Union High School District's (PUHSD) Adult Basic Education (ABE) program and its effectiveness for the 16 to 22 year old traditional elementary or high school dropout. The basic skills and general education development (GED) programs are examined as well as the reasons the 16 to 22 year old left school and later prepares for the GED examination.

The records of the Phoenix Union High School District's Adult Learning Center were examined for the period June 15, 1996 to September 15, 1996. Students 16 to 22 years old were surveyed concerning their preparation for the GED examination, how long they attended traditional school, why they left, and how they learned about the GED examination.

Development of the Problem

In 1900, a literate person was one who could read and write at a fifth grade level. In the 1990s literacy is no longer defined just in terms of reading and writing. According to the National Literacy Act of 1991, literacy is defined as "an individual's ability to read, write, speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary

to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential"(Garth 1995, 6).

The above definition of literacy implies that literacy is determined more by situation and less by test scores or grade levels. If a job requires an employee to read at a 12th grade level but their ability is at the 8th grade level, the person will be less productive and effective. The person is not illiterate because he or she can decode the words, but he or she probably is unable to comprehend the meaning. Also, people who cannot write a correct sentence, will be unable to write a report or a memo. Without an understanding of basic math, workers cannot do statistical process control as required of most assembly line workers (Steck-Vaughn n.d.).

The adult population which is defined as undereducated (not having a high school diploma) consists of males and females, blacks, whites, Hispanic, Native Americans, and other persons of all races and age groups. The heaviest concentration of adults without a high school diploma are those forty-five years of age or older (Steck-Vaughn n.d.). The 16 to 24 age group also contains a significant number without high school diplomas. Males and females are fairly evenly divided, with a 53 to 47 ratio of females to males. Members of minority groups are more likely to be undereducated than whites (Steck-Vaughn n.d.).

The statistics relative to under education in American society are staggering. Three million Americans are completely unable to read or write. An estimated 70 million Americans meet significant obstacles in their daily lives because of poor reading ability. A person needs to read at a sixth grade level to understand a driver's license manual, at an

eighth grade level to follow directions in preparing a frozen dinner, at a tenth grade level to read label instructions on a bottle of aspirin, and even higher for understanding an apartment lease or an insurance policy. An estimated 27 million job holders have reading deficiencies serious enough to impede their job performance and/or advancement on the job. According to the 1990 census, over 65 million Americans sixteen years of age or older were not enrolled in school and did not have a high school diploma. The relationship between poor reading ability and the lack of a high school diploma seems evident (Steck-Vaughn n.d.).

Poor reading ability and/or lack of a high school diploma is a heavy burden for American adults. Seventy percent of the employed in the United States have at least a high school diploma. The undereducated are unable to compete in a job market where the demand for their abilities is rapidly disappearing. Fully one-half of the undereducated who are employed have an annual income of less than five thousand dollars. Their low level of educational attainment is a major barrier to being able to work at all. Many such people remain unemployed, their latent talents wasted, their abilities undeveloped (Steck-Vaughn n.d.).

Undereducated adults are relegated to second class citizenship by their inability to cope in a complex society. As consumers, they are more likely to be misled by questionable advertising, sales, and credit practices. They may be unable to fully exercise their basic rights in a democracy including the right to vote. As parents, they may be unable to give their children the assistance and support necessary for their success in

school their children may then go through life undereducated, perpetuating the cycle (Steck-Vaughn n.d.). The need for each person to develop, to the limit of his or her ability, the one academic skill which is basic to all education -- reading -- could not be made more clear. This need is evident to any educator. It is evident to the undereducated themselves.

In Arizona there are over 220,000 young adults ages eighteen to twenty four who do not have the skills necessary to comprehend directions, organize thoughts or write an understandable, informative paper. There are also over 375,000 young adults who do not possess even basic reading skills or an understanding of beginning level mathematics (Jelinek 1992).

Studies over the past ten years have shown that while businesses increasingly want employees at all levels who can read, write, problem solve, do basic math and communicate effectively with each other and the individual customer, there seems to be no significant increase in the workforce's ability to deliver (Garth 1995). Rapid changes in the workplace have expanded the definition of basic skills for work to include more than just the traditional reading, writing and mathematics. Some of the other basic skills now being sought for the workplace include interpersonal skills (teamwork, teaching others, customer service, leading, negotiating and working with people from culturally diverse backgrounds), information skills (acquiring and evaluating data, interpreting and communicating), thinking skills (thinking creatively, making decisions, solving problems, knowing how to learn and reasoning), and personal qualities (individual responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management and integrity) (Garth 1995).

Traditionally, the workforce involved skills for specific job tasks, while only supervisors and management required higher order skills. Today, management and workers become a team (Total Quality Management) and workers are expected to participate on a much higher level (Steck-Vaughn n.d.).

The 1974's Adult Performance Level (APL) study out of the University of Texas announced to the world that 25 million Americans could not read. The aftershock caused American businesses to lose ground in the world market place. Businesses began developing and implementing quality improvement programs with more worker involvement, handing over more responsibility and accountability to employees, which highlighted the Adult Performance Level deficits (Garth 1995).

In 1984, the Center for Public Resources conducted a survey of basic skills in the workforce and found that one third of the secretaries had difficulty with work-related reading, one half of skilled and semi-skilled employees did not understand how to use decimals and fractions in math problems, and that half of the managers and supervisors made grammatical errors in responding to the survey. The National Alliance of Business reported in 1992, that 60-70% of all companies surveyed reported problems with employees' basic writing, arithmetic, listening and following oral instructions, understanding manuals, graphs, and schedules and speaking (Garth 1995).

According to the Hudson Institute 1987 report Workforce 2000, 80% of new entrants into the workforce by the year 2000 will be women, minorities and immigrants, "groups that have historically been the least successful at attaining the skills needed to participate in the work force" (Garth 1995, 18).

The GED test has been available since 1942 as an alternative for those who are unable to finish a high school education. Phoenix Union High School District has provided Adult Basic Skills classes since 1965 to help adults complete their education with high school equivalency. In recent years the average age of people preparing for the GED examination has lowered. Fifteen years ago the average age of persons preparing for the GED examination was 24 years old. In 1994 the average was 19 (Arizona Adult Education Manual 1995).

Need for the Study

Phoenix Union High School District has a 50% dropout rate. This does not include the 20% that do not enroll in high school after completing the eighth grade (Diaz 1997). Many of these students are being advised to drop out of school at the ninth or tenth grade and obtain a GED. This may not be possible for students without above average basic skills. The comprehensiveness of the GED examination is not understood by students this young. In 1994, 73% of high school graduates could pass the GED (GED Items 1995). In 1996 only 67% of high school graduates could pass the GED examination (GED Items 1997). Does a ninth or tenth grader have the discipline or skills needed to pass the GED?

This study is necessary because of the large number of young people dropping out of high school who then expect to take the GED. Many of these students believe they can walk in, take the test and be finished with their education. Unfortunately, it is not that simple. With this study, the researcher shows that the vast majority of Phoenix Union

High School District (PUHSD) dropouts are not able to follow through with their GED plans, through lack of discipline and basic skills.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of Phoenix Union High School District Adult Basic Education program's preparation of 16 to 22 year old students for the General Education Development examination.

Research Question

Does Phoenix Union High School District's Adult Basic Education program effectively prepare 16 to 22 year olds for the GED examination?

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This research project focused on the Phoenix Union High School District's Adult Basic Education program and its effectiveness for the 16 to 22 year old traditional elementary or high school dropout. The history of the Adult Basic Education movement and the General Educational Development examination is presented. Today's version of the GED and its relationship to a high school diploma is discussed. A profile of the high school dropout is presented. Finally, Phoenix Union's Adult Basic Education program is examined.

Adult Basic Education

Adult Basic Education was initiated nationally under Federal Law, Title II-B of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. The program was started in Arizona in 1965. The purpose of this adult education instruction law is to provide educational opportunities for adults who lack the level of literacy skills requisite to effective citizenship and productive employment. Basic skills refers to elementary school level competencies (reading, writing, and mathematics to the 8.9 grade level). Adult education programs endeavor to provide the following:

1. Enable adults to acquire the basic educational skills necessary for literate functioning;
2. Provide adults with sufficient basic education to enable them to benefit from job training and retraining programs and obtain and retain productive employment; and
3. Enable adults who so desire to continue their education to at least the level of completion of secondary school. (AZ Adult Education Manual 1995, 1-2).

Adult Basic Education instruction is divided into two levels, ABE I and ABE II. These levels are for those people who function below the 9.0 grade level. ABE I instruction is designed for an adult who is unable to read, write and compute sufficiently well to meet the requirements of adult life in the United States or an adult who lacks a mastery of basic educational skills that will enable him/her to function effectively in society. These adults are termed "educationally disadvantaged." Beginning ABE includes grades 0 through 5.9. This term does not apply to foreign-born adults with limited English proficiency. ABE II or Pre-GED instruction is designed for adults who have some competence in reading, writing and computation but are not sufficiently competent to meet the requirements of adult life in the United States or an adult who lacks the mastery of basic educational skills that will enable him/her to function effectively in society. Intermediate ABE includes grades 6 through 8.9. This term also does not apply to foreign-born adults with limited English proficiency. In each case, students must be 16 years of age or older (AZ Adult Education Manual 1995).

Throughout Arizona, many adults are in need of the type of programming addressed by ABE Level I. Many of these students are assisted through one-on-one tutoring offered by volunteer programs. Another programming option which is receiving

wide-spread support and interest is computer-aided instruction. One of the first state-wide initiatives for computer aided instruction was sponsored by the Arizona Supreme Court. (AZ Adult Education Manual 1995).

In addition, many ABE level students are placed into heterogeneous class groups where they are challenged by GED level students but add to the instructional atmosphere by bringing their individual and unique perspective on the learning experience into a group setting. These mixed classes encourage multi-level teaching and provide opportunities for students to have a direct impact on other students' learning and understanding (Eyre 1996).

General Education Development

The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the G.I. Bill allocated funding for higher education of returning soldiers. The General Educational Development Test was created after World War II to accommodate the educational needs of returning veterans. Now, any person 18 years of age or older is eligible to study for and take the GED exam. Persons 16 or 17 years of age, who have been officially withdrawn from public education, may study for the GED exam; however, they are considered Pre-GED students. Funding for GED programs is provided by the State Legislature in Arizona (AZ Adult Education Manual 1995).

GED instruction occurs in either one-on-one situations, in a regular classroom setting, or a combination of both. Subjects taught include mathematics, reading from literature and the arts, writing skills, social studies, and science. To determine if a student

is ready to begin the GED program, he/she should be assessed in reading comprehension, language arts and math. An individual plan is developed for each student based on the results of the assessment. Continuous evaluation occurs throughout the program to ensure that students receive the level of instruction that is appropriate to their individual abilities and goals (AZ Adult Education Manual 1995).

GED preparation is instruction designed for an adult who is literate and can function in everyday life but is not proficient and/or does not hold a high school diploma or equivalency. This term is equivalent to adult secondary education as defined by the State of Arizona. The goals for GED instruction include:

1. Giving adult learners who did not complete secondary school, a foundation in writing, social studies, arts, science and math.
2. Enabling adult learners, through the development of critical thinking skills, to utilize new learning experiences in recognizing, evaluating and solving the problems of daily life.
3. Creating a desire to continue education through more advanced study and to become more proficient in observing and adopting new skills as lifelong learners.
4. Preparing adult students with the knowledge base and skills necessary to pass the GED test.
5. Creating greater self-esteem and confidence in all adult learners.
6. Assessing a student's preparedness for successfully completing the GED test battery by administering the official GED practice test (AZ Adult Education Manual 1995, 2).

General Educational Development Testing

Many adults have not completed a regular high school program of instruction. This does not mean, however, that their educational growth and experiences ceased on

leaving school. Many people learn through a variety of experiences encountered in everyday life. The purpose of the GED testing program is to provide a means by which learning acquired from such educational experiences can be evaluated and recognized. The GED tests make it possible for qualified individuals to earn high school equivalency diplomas that provide the opportunity for them to obtain certain jobs, gain promotions, or pursue higher education or other personal goals (AZ Adult Education Manual 1995).

The General Educational Development (GED) testing program was adopted by the Arizona State Board of Education in 1945. With the approval of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, the State Board arranged with the American Council on Education to utilize the GED Test batteries as a basis for awarding the High School Equivalency Diploma. The GED Diploma is accepted in lieu of a high school diploma in most business and industrial institutions, colleges and universities and by the military (AZ Adult Education Manual 1995).

The GED test is designed to measure the skills and concepts generally associated with four years of regular high school instruction. The test provides an opportunity to earn a high school equivalency diploma in an alternative mode. This credential is recognized as a key to employment opportunities, advancement, further education, and financial rewards (AZ Adult Education Manual 1995).

The actual GED test consists of five sections in the areas of writing skills, social studies, science, literature and the arts, and mathematics. Most of the test questions require the understanding of broad concepts and generalizations, rather than the ability to remember facts, details or precise definitions (American Council on Education 1995).

Although the GED tests are organized into five subject areas, there are many skills in common across the tests. For example, the ability to read and comprehend written material is a basic skill for all subject areas. An understanding of charts and graphs is necessary for the social studies, science and mathematics tests. In addition to the ability to comprehend information, the GED tests require the examinee to apply concepts and principles, analyze interrelationships, synthesize ideas, and evaluate the validity of assertions (American Council on Education 1995).

Periodically, the content of the GED tests is updated to ensure that the skills measured represent those currently found in the typical high school curriculum. The current editions of the GED tests were developed to match specifications defined in the mid-1980s by committees of secondary school and adult education curriculum specialists (American Council on Education 1995).

The award of a high school equivalency diploma based on GED test results rests on two logical foundations. One is that the GED tests are constructed from a representative sampling of high school curriculum content and skills. The second is that examinees test performance is evaluated relative to the demonstrated achievement of a representative sample of graduating high school seniors. These samples of high school content and student performance shape the procedures for test construction and use (American Council on Education 1995).

The content of the GED tests represents a sampling of the expected outcomes of four years of high school instruction. The review of high school curricula begins with a review of the course and requirements of high school programs. Many advisers, teachers,

curriculum specialists, and content experts, participate in the definition of the GED tests specifications. In addition to defining content areas, the GED tests specifications include rigorous guidelines that govern the selection, development, and review of test questions. Each question and each test are subjected to multiple reviews before a final test form is assembled (American Council on Education 1995).

The second foundation for GED high school equivalency is the method of establishing the GED score scales. Developing score scales based on the performance of graduating high school seniors provides a basis for comparing a GED examinee's educational achievement to that of recent high school graduates.

The current version of the General Educational Development exam was developed to match specifications defined in the mid-1980s by committees of secondary school and adult education curriculum specialists. This is an on-going process that will yield a new version of the GED again early in the next century (Taylor 1996).

High School Dropouts

The national dropout rate for students entering the ninth grade and not completing high school is 26%. In Arizona in 1991, the rate was 30% (Eyre 1994). Phoenix Union High School District's dropout rate for the 1994-95 school year was approximately 50% (Saenz 1995). One of the nation's most serious problems is the high rate among Hispanic student dropouts from the public school system. The consequences to youth who drop out and to the nation's economic and social well being is overwhelming (Pulido 1991). One of the most critical educational problems is the attrition rate for Hispanic students. In

the 20 to 24 year old population, 84% of white and 82% of blacks graduated from high school. However, only 55% of Hispanics had completed high school. In 1985, on a national level, 50.2% of the 18 to 19 year-old Hispanics had not completed high school as compared to 25.4% for whites (U.S. Department of Education 1987).

Research on effective schools, which addresses student populations in general, states that successful programs for at-risk students appear to employ individualized instruction, low student-teacher ratios, more autonomy, additional guidance, and other support services. In short, these programs modify the school to fit the needs of students (Flaxman 1987). Discipline programs that are fair and effective are a strong factor in providing for high student retention rates. It is suggested that school factors related to discipline are significant in developing a tendency to drop out. If one sees the institution's discipline systems as both ineffective and unfair, and one has serious encounters with that discipline system, then it is not unreasonable to expect such individuals to become alienated and lose their commitment to the goals of graduating (Pulido 1991).

Phoenix Union Adult Basic Education

Phoenix Union High School District's Adult Basic Education program has provided basic skills and GED preparation classes since 1964. These classes are offered to the general public on a walk-in basis. Participants must be at least 16 years of age and provide proof of withdrawal from public school if under 18 years of age. Classes at the adult learning center are open 12 hours per day four days a week. This permits people with varying schedules and responsibilities to take advantage of instruction. All

instruction is individualized. The registration process takes approximately three hours and includes an interview, a registration form, and a standardized pre-assessment, the TABE (Test of Adult Basic Education). This allows the instructor to determine the student's goals and previous educational attainment. An individual education plan is developed and the teacher assigns and explains academic work at the student's level of ability. The student's responsibilities includes reading the materials, answering questions about the material and asking questions about anything not understood. Materials used are Federally owned and not available outside the classroom, however, students may purchase their own materials at local bookstores. Students are also expected to continue coming to class until prepared for the GED test. Attendance is not required or closely monitored in the classroom. Some students are discouraged by the pre-assessment process and so never return after their initial visit. This unstructured environment is not the best situation for most 16 to 22 year old students (Theobald 1996).

Over the last ten years the population in the basic skills classroom has become younger so that in 1996 the average age was 18. These younger students come for a variety of reasons, some as a condition of probation or parole, many have been removed from public school because of behavioral problems or learning disabilities. Many come because their parents are not ready for them to leave school. As the population of the adult education classroom has become younger, discipline has become an issue.

Traditionally, the teachers in an adult education classroom have not completed formal elementary or secondary educational training. These teachers and aides have college degrees and have qualified for the state adult education teaching certification and

their usefulness to the program lies in their non-traditional approaches to instruction. This system works well for mature students who were unsuccessful in the traditional school setting but who are now ready for their GED diploma and are willing and able to do whatever it takes to prepare for the test. Unfortunately, these same teachers are not always capable of handling classroom disturbances or disruptive students. Many students are unable to work independently, sit quietly in class, or concentrate on an assignment (Theobald 1996).

Summary

Adult Basic Education and the General Education Development exam are designed to help those who could not complete their education through high school. These programs provide basic skills remediation and a second chance to earn a high school equivalency credential. For the purposes of Adult Basic Education, an adult is defined as one over the age of 16. Any person over the age of 16 who is not engaged in other public education may attend adult basic education classes, prepare for and take the GED examination in lieu of a high school diploma. The 16 to 22 year old population who have not completed high school often have special needs that were not addressed in the regular school system. This population often attends adult basic education classes to complete or continue their education with a GED.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the Phoenix Union High School District Adult Basic Education program's preparation of 16 to 22 year old students for the General Education Development examination. The research question addressed in the study was: is Phoenix Union High School District's Adult Basic Education program effective for 16 to 22 year olds preparing for the GED examination?

Research Design

A descriptive research design was used for this study. Descriptive research systematically describes facts and characteristics of a population or area of interest. Description may include collection of facts that describe existing phenomena, identification of problems, or justification of current conditions and practice. The strength of the descriptive research design is in the exploratory capability it provides (Merriam & Simpson 1995).

The descriptive design was chosen for this research because of its flexibility. It allows several factors to be examined in a relatively short time span. For the purpose of this study, descriptive research was functionally the best approach yielding the most useful data.

Sample and Population

The source of data was 16 to 22 year olds referred to the Phoenix Union Adult Basic Education classes. Of the 619 students enrolling in classes in the 3 month period, June 15 to September 15, 1996, 335 were in this age range. These students were contacted by telephone and a short survey was administered to determine why they had left high school, who had informed them of the adult education classes and what their impressions of the classes had been. Of the 335 students, 38 were contacted and completed the survey for a response rate of 11.8 percent.

Assumptions and Limitations

It is assumed that all respondents were truthful. Because the researcher was identified as a member of the Adult Education community it is possible some respondents answered as to slant the information for or against adult education.

Instrumentation

An eight question survey was designed by the researcher to collect data on students' reasons for leaving school and their expectations of adult education classes. The first three questions in the survey request demographic factors. These dealt with the student's high school career; age at drop out, grade level, date left public school and number of credits. Question five dealt with why the student left school. There were four broad categories to choose from; medical, behavioral, family problems, or learning difficulty. Question six

dealt with where/how the student learned about GED classes and Question seven dealt with taking the actual GED test. The eighth question asked for recommendations to improve the GED class format. The survey instrument was assessed for face validity.

Procedures

The Arizona Department of Education Adult Education Division's Annual Performance Report for 1996 lists 56,242 adult education students. Six thousand four hundred sixty two (11.5%) of the students registered in adult education classes were 16 to 17 years of age. It lists 17,065 (30.3%) of the students as being between the ages of 18 and 24 (Annual Performance Report 1997).

The registration forms and registration data base of the Phoenix Union High School District's Adult Education Learning Center at Metro Tech were examined and put into a separate research data base to start the process of narrowing down to the target population. Student registration dates, identification numbers, names and age group were available from the registration data base. These were put into a separate research data base and students within the age groups 16-18 and 19-22 were retained. Individual student registration forms were examined to add phone numbers and to clarify gender if necessary. This data base containing 335 names was then printed and students were called to participate in the survey. Notes were made on the data base pages as the status of each phone call. One hundred fifty nine phone calls met with disconnected or wrong phone numbers. Many of the wrong numbers were possibly due to the survey being conducted in March, 1997, when the students had registered for classes between June 15, and

September 15, 1996. While the phone numbers were correct when the student registered, many may have relocated and the phone numbers were reassigned. Each unanswered number on the list was tried three times. One hundred thirty eight students were not available after three phone calls. The remaining 38 students participated in the survey.

When a student was reached and agreed to participate in the survey, a survey form was completed. The student's identification number was entered on the form and the survey questions were asked. The completed surveys were then entered into a spreadsheet and additional student information was added. The student's pre-assessment reading score was entered from their classroom work folder. The student's attendance was also added to the spreadsheet from the class attendance records.

A data-base was compiled from student registration forms. This included date registered, student number, student age range, student name and phone number. The registration forms for the study period were used to contact current and former students and the survey was administered. Each interview took approximately three minutes to complete. The survey was completed after the student was reached on the phone. The student's identification number was entered on the form and then six questions were asked. A spreadsheet was compiled of completed surveys and included information from the student registration forms and the data base used to identify students for this study.

Method of Analysis

The data was transferred from the individual surveys into a spreadsheet to be manipulated and tallied. This allowed information to be grouped and regrouped by each of the items so information could be compared and presented in graph form for easier analysis. Information was arranged by age, gender, length of schooling, reasons for leaving school, pre-assessment scores, age at terminating formal schooling, and hours of attendance in adult education classes. The results and tables are contained in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The results of the first seven questions on the survey as well as information obtained from student records are presented in the following figures.

Demographics of Sample

Figure 1 shows the number of students in each target age group. There were 186 students between the ages of 16 and 18. Forty four percent or 149 students were between the ages of 19 and 22.

Figure 1

Age of Students In the Target Group

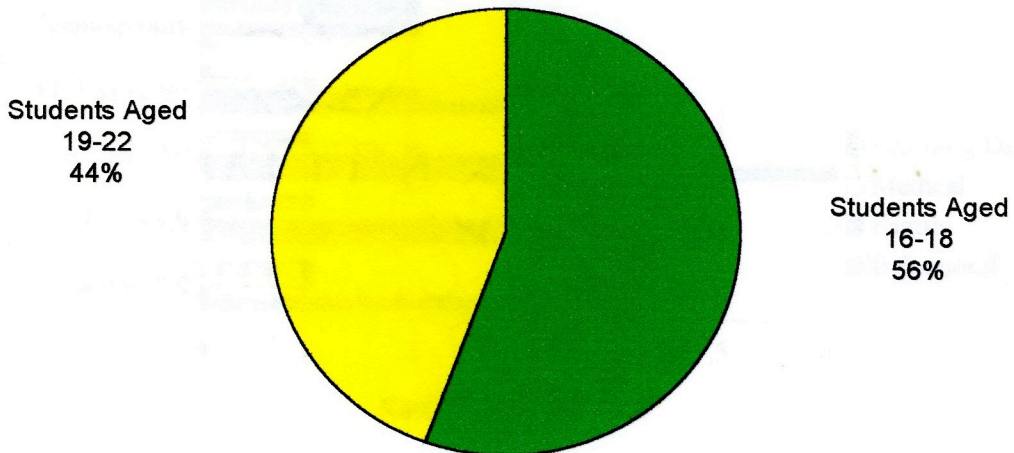


Figure 2 shows the pre-assessment reading levels and participants reasons for leaving school. Of the 38 participants in the survey five people read between the 4.0 and

the 6.9 grade level, three indicated they left school for behavioral reasons, one for medical reasons and one for learning disabilities. Ten people read between the 7.1 and the 8.9 grade level, five left school for behavioral reasons, four for family reasons, and one because of learning disabilities. Twelve participants read between 9.1 and 10.9 reading levels, six left school for behavioral reasons, three for family reasons, two for medical reasons and one because of learning disabilities. Six participants read at the 11.0 to 12.9+ level. Three of these indicated behavioral problems, two family problems and one medical problems as reasons for leaving school. Five participants indicated they were either not English literate or they were more literate in Spanish. Of these participants two left school for family reasons, one for medical and two indicated learning disabilities.

Figure 2

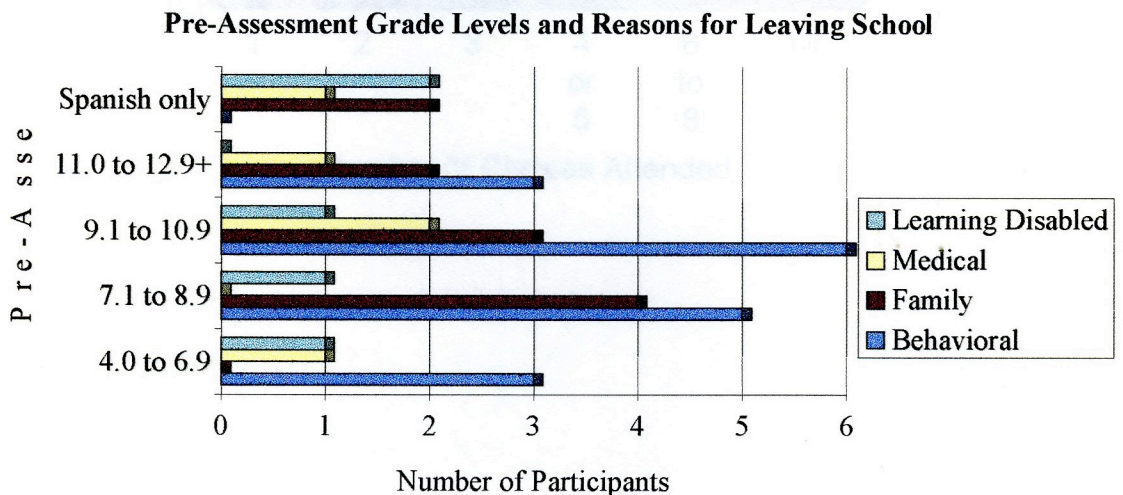


Figure 3 shows the number of classes attended by each age group. Eight 16 to 18 year olds attended one class. One person attended two classes, three attended three classes three attended four or five classes, two attended six to eight classes and five

attended ten or more. Of the 19-22 age group one person attended one class, four attended two, six attended three, one attended four or five, three attended six to eight and one attended ten or more classes.

Figure 3

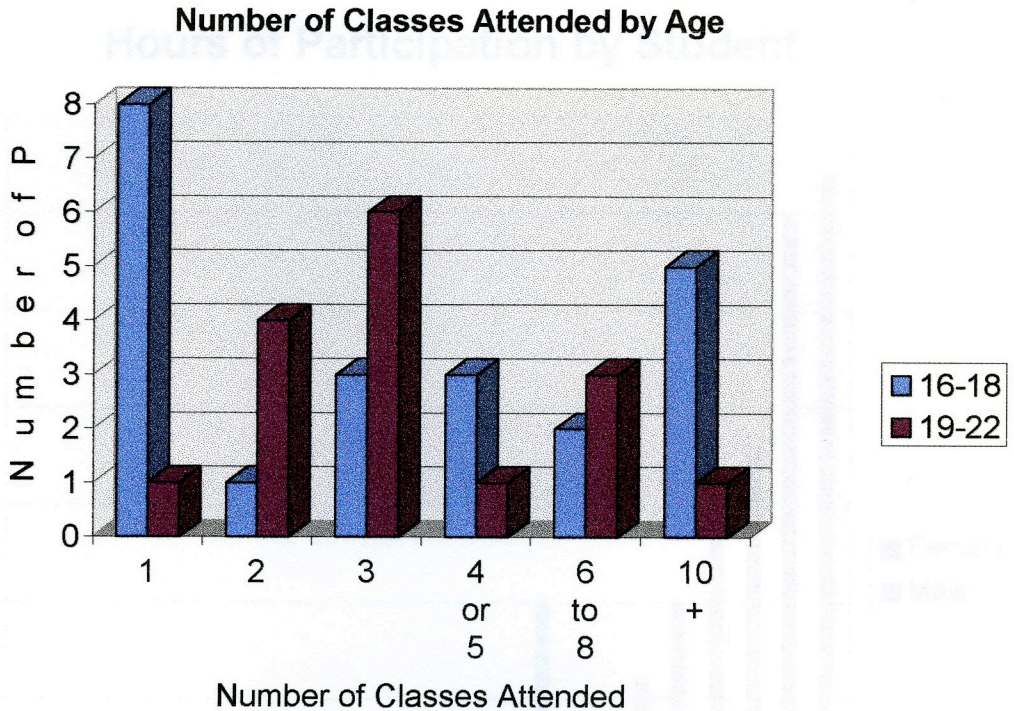


Figure 4 show the number of hours attended by each of the 38 respondents to the survey. The blue bars represent the fifteen male participants and the pink bars the 23 female respondents.

Figure 4

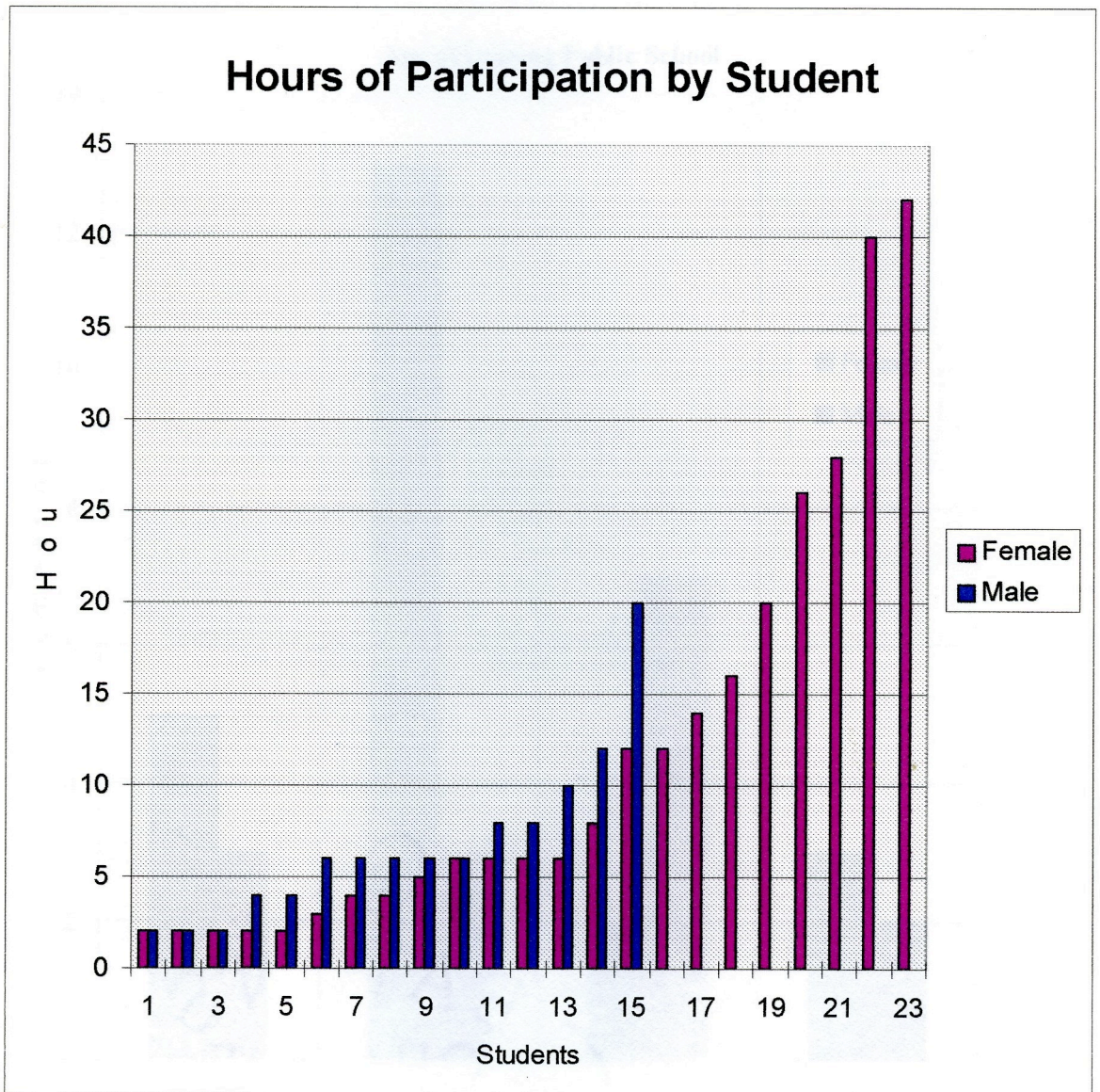


Figure 5 shows the age at which students left public school. 18 females left school before the age of 17; 5 females left at 17 or 18. Six males left school before the age of 17 and nine left at 17, 18 or 19.

Figure 5

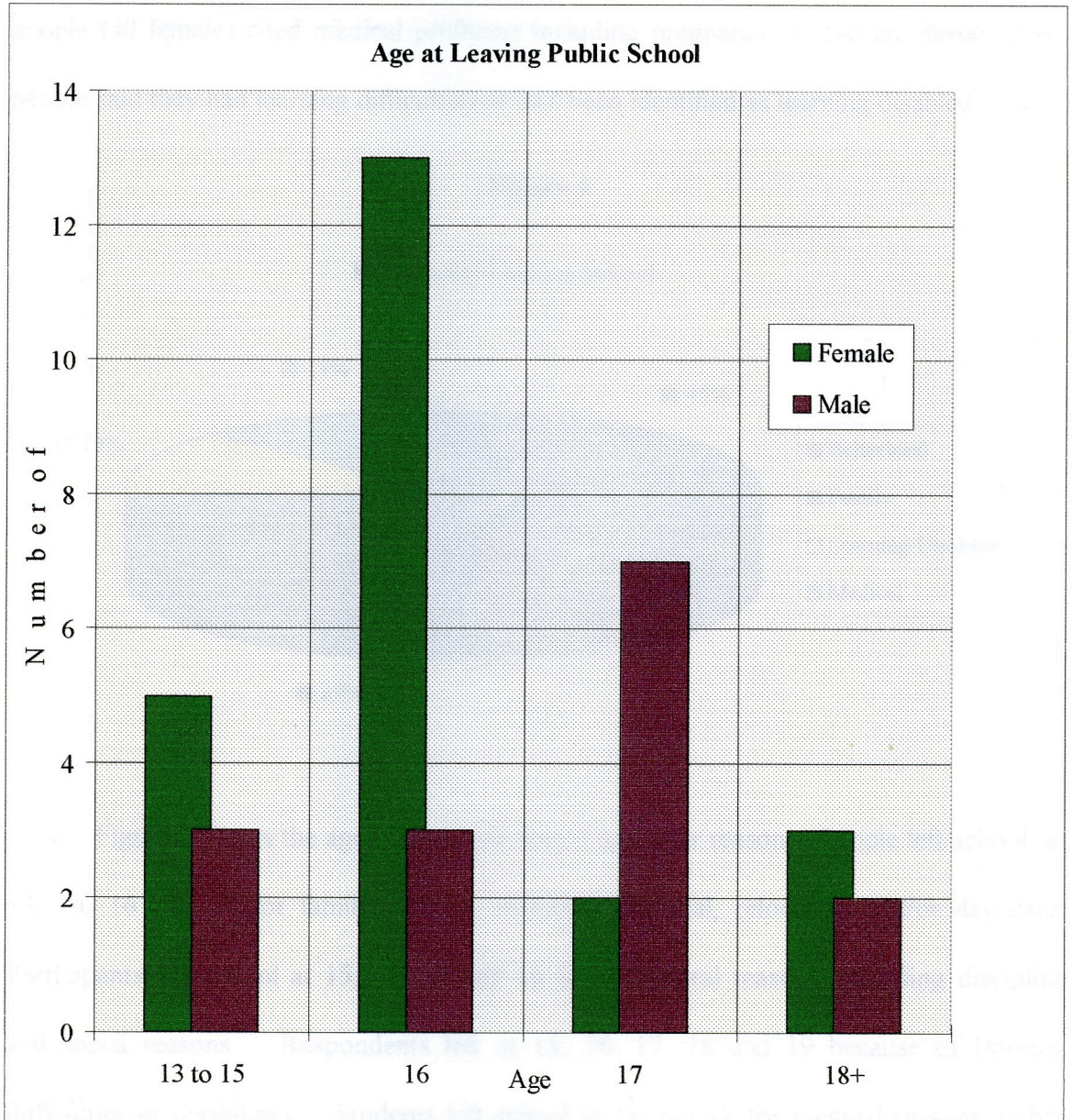


Figure 6 shows the participant's responses to the question, "Why did you leave school?" Seventeen people indicated behavioral problems which were described as either school discipline problems or social (peer) problems. Eleven people indicated family problems, which included financial difficulties, relocation or day care concerns. Five people (all female) cited medical problems including pregnancy or chronic illness. Five people said they had learning difficulties or had been identified as learning disabled.

Figure 6

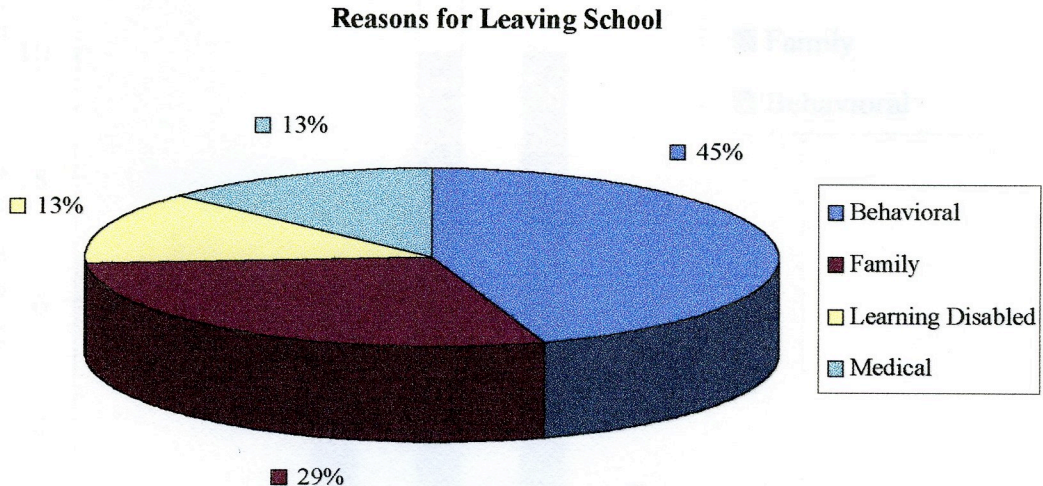


Figure 7 shows the ages people left school and their reasons. People left school at 13, 14, 16 and 17 for family reasons, including financial, relocation and/or day care. Participants left school at 15, 16, 17 and 18 for behavioral reasons, including discipline and social reasons. Respondents left at 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19 because of learning difficulties or disabilities. Students left school at 16 and 18 for medical reasons, either pregnancy or chronic illnesses.

Figure 7

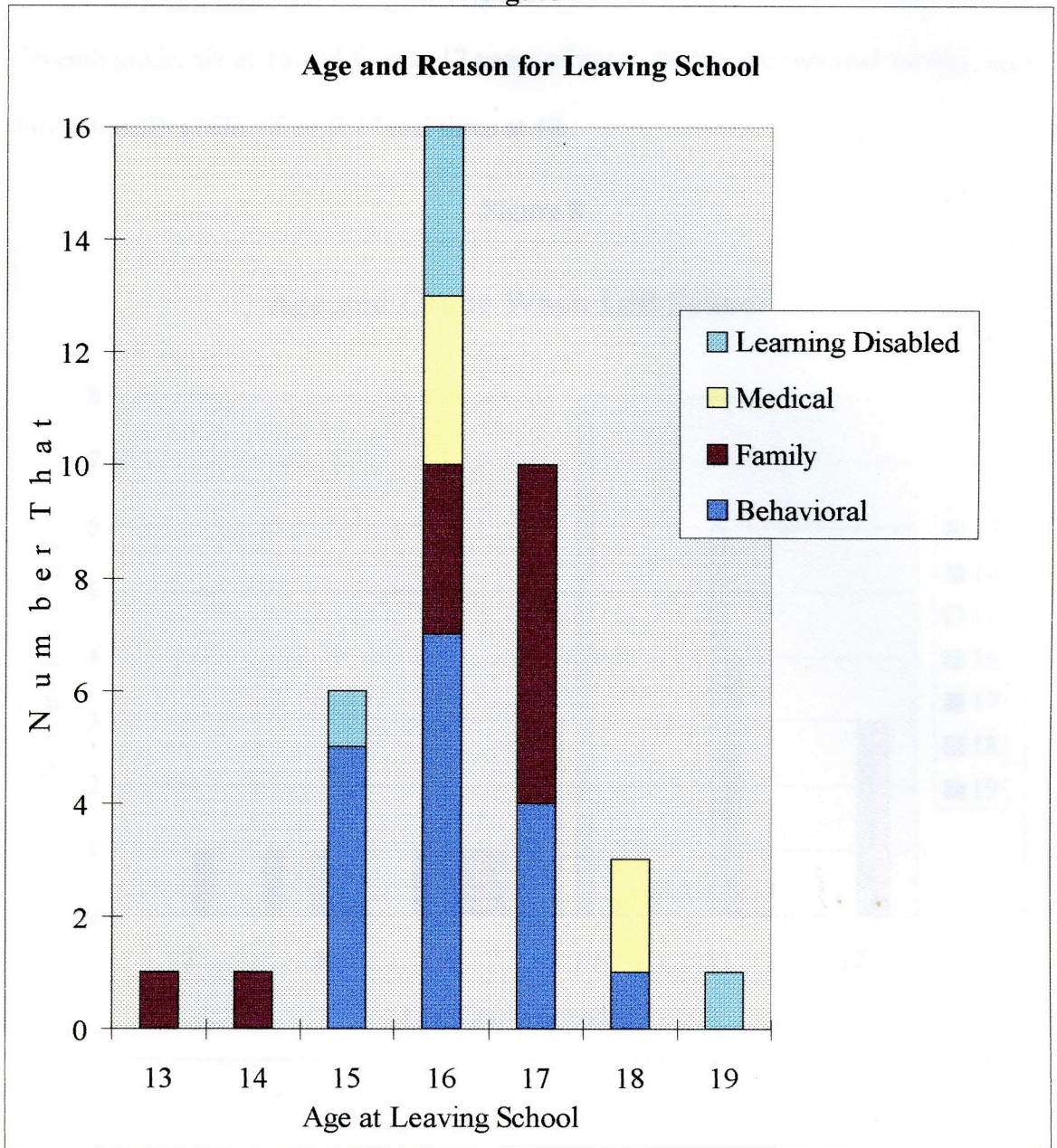


Figure 8 shows the participant's answers to the questions; "How old were you when you quit school?" and, "What grade were you in when you quit school?" One person left the seventh grade at 17. One 13 year old and one 16 year old left the eighth

grade. Eight people left school at the ninth grade, one each at 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, and three at 15. Eleven people left at tenth grade; three at 15 and 8 at 16. Ten left during the eleventh grade, six at 16 and four at 17. Six people reported leaving school during twelfth grade, three at 17 and three at 18.

Figure 8

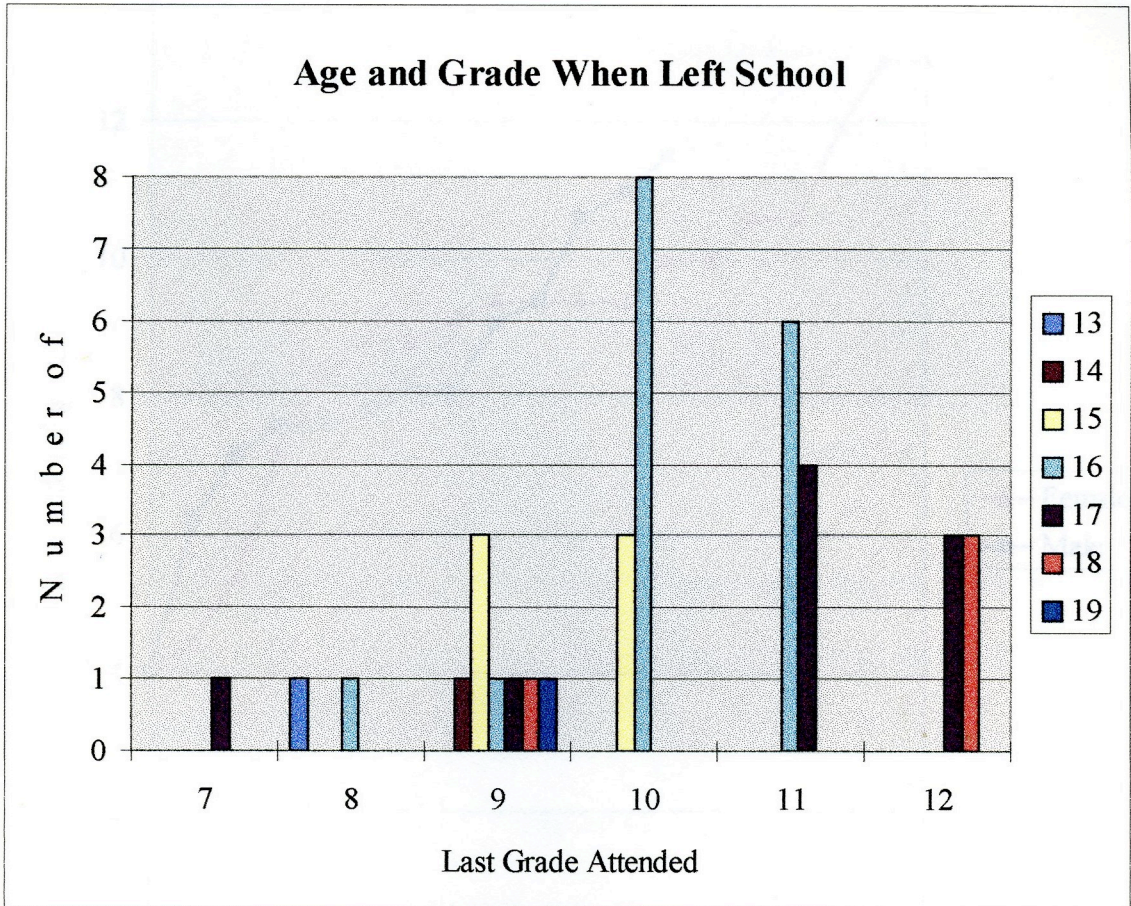
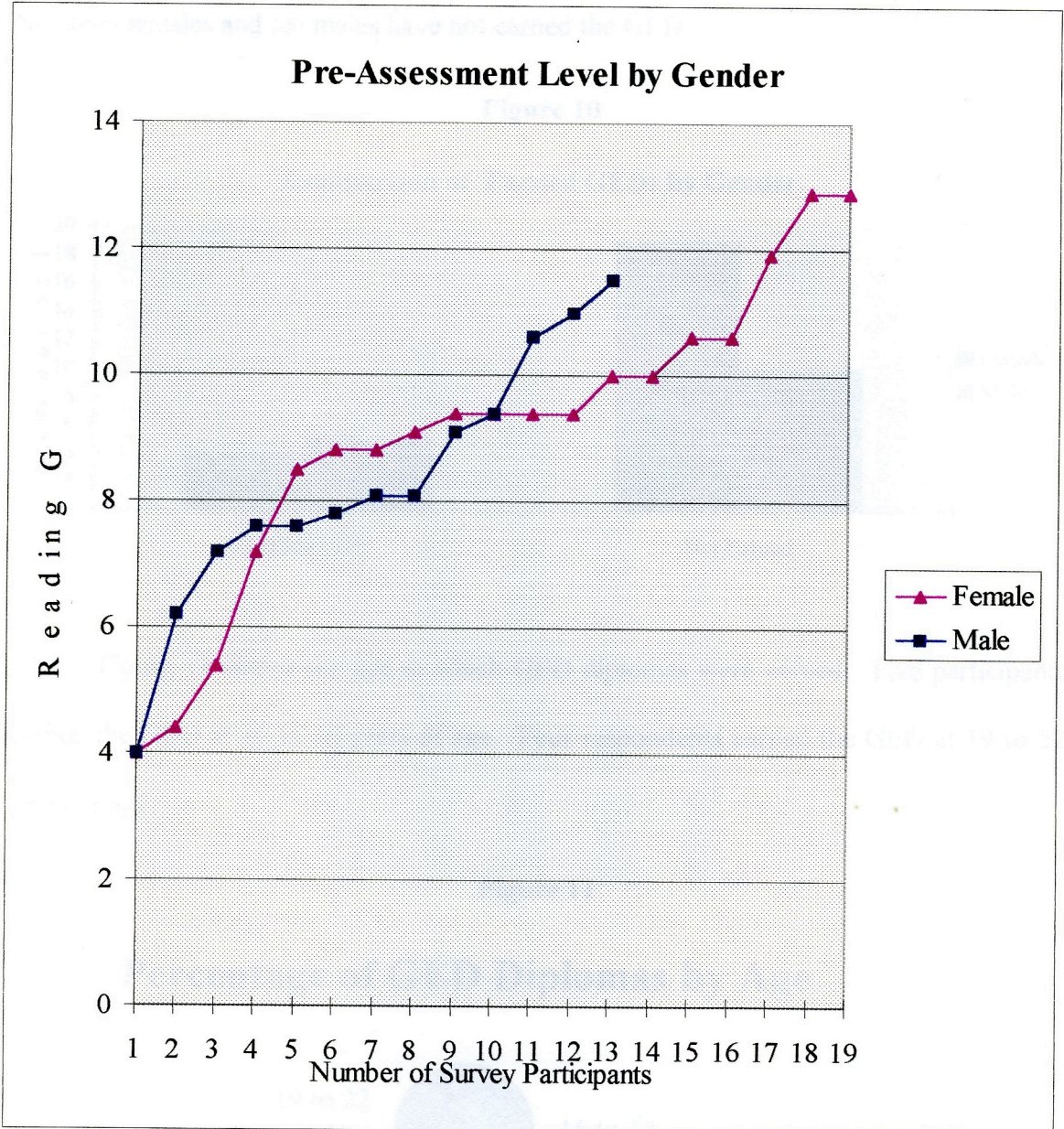


Figure 9 shows the pre-assessment grade levels of the thirty four survey participants who took the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) as a pre-assessment.

Figure 9



Findings and Results

Figure 10 compares the participants who have reported earning their GED diploma by gender. Four female and five male participants have earned their GED credential. Nineteen females and ten males have not earned the GED.

Figure 10

Comparison of Earned GEDs by Gender

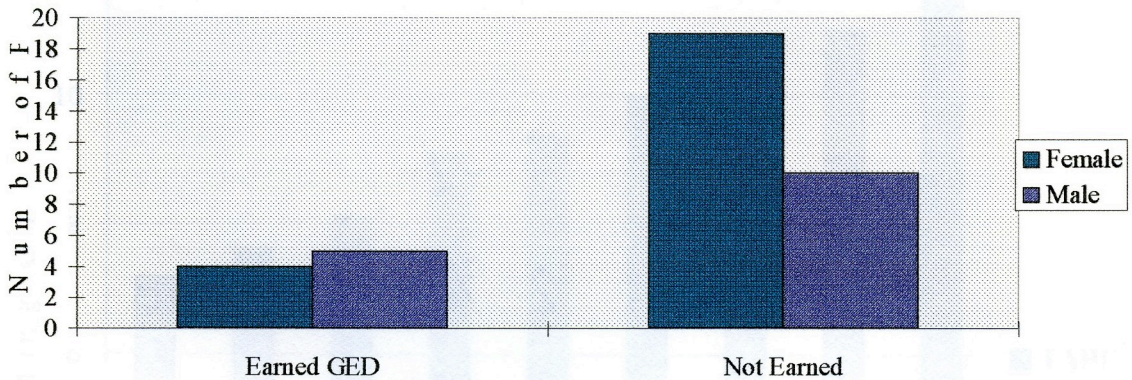


Figure 11 shows the age at which GED diplomas were earned. Five participants earned the GED at 16 to 18 years of age. Four respondents earned the GED at 19 to 22 years of age.

Figure 11

Percentage of GED Diplomas by Age

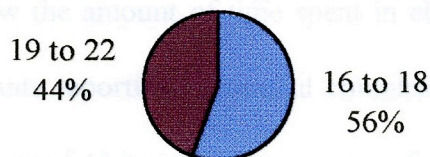


Figure 12 shows the pre-assessment reading level as measured by the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) for each of the participants reporting successful completion of the GED test. The beginning reading levels ranged from 7.2 to 11.9 as grade level measurements.

Figure 12

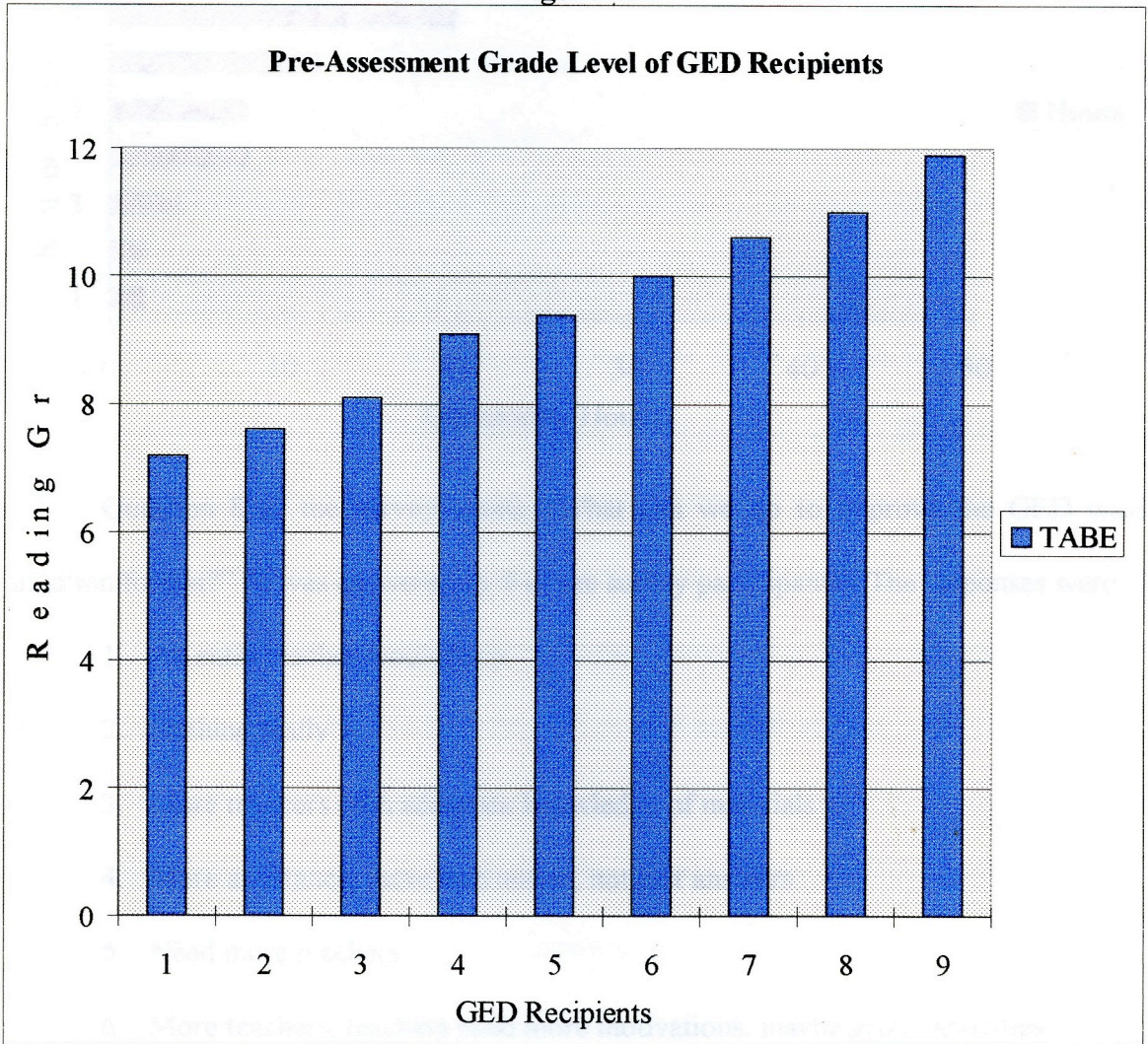
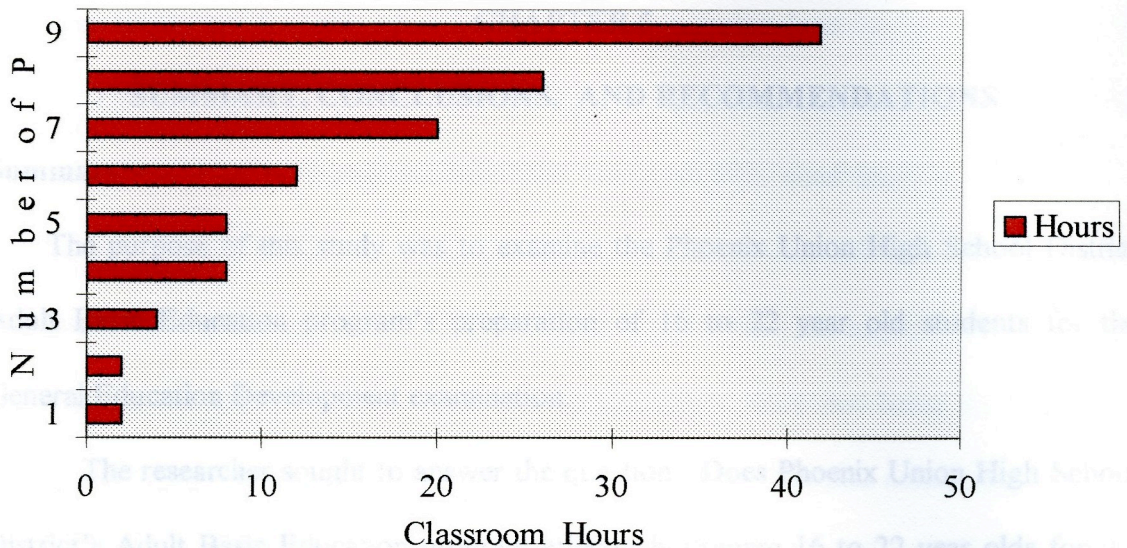


Figure 13 show the amount of time spent in classroom preparation for the GED test of those participants reporting successful completion. It ranges from a minimum of two hours to a maximum of 42 hours spent preparing for the test in the classroom setting.

Figure 13

Hours Spent in Classroom Preparation



Question 8 of the survey asked, “What can we do to improve the GED class situation/format?” It was answered by 9 of the survey participants. The responses were:

1. An extra teacher would help
2. Nothing really
3. More teachers with adequate knowledge of materials
4. More assistance, more instruction, not just answers
5. Need more teachers
6. More teachers, teachers need more motivations, maybe group activities
7. Don't teach, demonstration
8. Need instruction

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the Phoenix Union High School District Adult Basic Education program's preparation of 16 to 22 year old students for the General Education Development examination.

The researcher sought to answer the question: Does Phoenix Union High School District's Adult Basic Education program effectively prepare 16 to 22 year olds for the GED examination? Records of the Phoenix Union High School District's Adult Education adult learning center were examined to determine age and educational attainment of participants. A survey was designed to collect information from those aged 16 to 22 to discover when and why they left school as well as their expectations of the GED class. This survey indicated that the majority of GED class participants left school because their educational needs were not being served by the traditional school system. However, their answers to the question concerning how the GED class format could be improved indicated that they wanted and needed the structure of a traditional classroom, as opposed to an open entry/open exit, individualized environment.

Conclusions

A survey was conducted of students between the ages of 16 and 22 who had attended GED classes at the Adult Learning Center between June 15, and September 15, 1996. This survey showed that 45% left school because of behavioral problems which may also have masked learning disabilities. Another 13% cited learning difficulties or disabilities. Forty two percent of the participants indicated they left traditional schooling for family or medical reasons. This seems to indicate that the majority of GED class participants left school because their educational needs were not being served by the traditional school system. However, their answers to the question concerning how the GED class format could be improved indicated that they wanted and needed the structure of a traditional classroom, as opposed to an open entry/open exit, individualized environment. It seems that the unstructured environment of the Phoenix Union Adult Education Learning Center does not adequately serve the 16 to 22 year old population needing GED classes.

Recommendations

Because younger adults seek the GED as an alternative to traditional education and because they are bringing a variety of learning difficulties with them, different approaches need to be explored to help these students achieve their goals. It is not enough to say the younger students are unable to benefit from the Phoenix Union model of adult instruction. It may be necessary to go to an appointment system for GED class registration and pre-assessment. This would allow students and teachers time to explore

the student's educational background, learning styles and the most appropriate method of delivery for classes. It would also allow for referrals to professionals or learning specialists prior to a lengthy, frustrating investment on the part of the student and the teacher.

Alternative delivery methods could be developed. While the open/entry open/exit system works very well for more mature students that follow through to take the GED exam, students frustrated by the system either stop attending classes never to be heard from again, or, after calling for information about the program, feel overwhelmed and never register.

There needs to be a greater financial commitment to adult education by the government and private industry. In the Phoenix Union High School District funds are available at the rate of approximately \$4,000 per high school student per year. The State of Arizona funded adult education at \$114.68 per student for 1996 (Annual Performance Report 1997). This translates to overcrowding, waiting lists, nominal individualized instruction and a program dominated by volunteers, retirees and those marginally qualified to instruct bright, mature students. Helping students with learning difficulties, behavioral problems or needing specialized instruction is usually beyond the expertise of those available. Phoenix Union Adult Education employs one retired educational psychologist who provides educational profiles for those students referred. The need far exceeds the time and funding available for this service. After the profile is developed often it is found that the student would benefit most by a private tutor, costly computerized instruction, or other materials unavailable to the typical adult education student. Most students with

educational and/or behavioral difficulties cannot afford to have an education profile, which can cost several hundred dollars, developed independently.

It would be interesting to pursue a study of the successes of an individualized, open entry class as opposed to a structured classroom setting. Phoenix Union Adult Education is providing a structured class as a partnership with one of the high schools. The students in this class are hand picked and all have reading and math pre-assessment scores at the high school level. The success rate for this program is approximately 50%, but then there are no students with learning disabilities or behavioral problems admitted to the program.

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APPENDIX A

STUDENT SURVEY

STUDENT SURVEY

Student # _____

How old were you when you left school? _____

What grade were in? _____ Number of Credits? _____

Date quit _____

Why did you leave school?

- A. Medical (chronic illness, pregnancy)
- B. Behavioral (discipline, social)
- C. Family problems (financial, relocation, day care)
- D. Learning difficulties

How did you learn about GED classes/examination?

- A. School Counselor
- B. Friend or relative
- C. GED personnel
- D. Other

What have you done toward getting your GED?

- A. Attended classes
- B. # Hours/# Times attended
- C. Attempted/Passed the test YES NO
- D. Do you intend to continue your studies later? YES NO

What could be done to improve the GED class situation/format?

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