IMPROVING ADOLESCENT SELF-ESTEEM THROUGH ADULT SUPPORT SYSTEMS AND SCHOOL PROGRAMS

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to design guidelines to improve adolescent self-esteem, while avoiding at-risk behaviors, through adult support systems and programs at school. This was accomplished by investigating current literature and analyzing results from a survey of seniors at an upper middle-class southwestern high school. The focus of this survey was to obtain high school students’ perspectives on the benefits of support services and whether these services encouraged them to have good self-esteem.

The literature showed the importance of adult support systems, especially in promoting adolescent self-esteem. It also emphasized the need for society to not only be aware of the at-risk factors affecting today’s youngsters, but also to take responsibility to provide assistance to that population. It is recommended that instead of labeling students who may be at risk, it is best to promote resilience or encourage youngsters to make positive changes in their lives in spite of the difficulties involved. Teachers and community members can assist students through mentoring programs, which provide students with a caring adult who will establish a one-on-one relationship with them for guidance. School programs, after school activities and community service can increase young people’s self-esteem and positive feelings.

The survey conducted at the high school used a seven-point Likert Scale to measure how seniors felt about the activities, programs and counseling and advisement services at their school. Results were interpreted through the raw
scores and the calculation of mean scores from the senior respondents. The results that were obtained correlated with the literature in that the majority of these seniors believed that every student needs a support system. They concurred that there was at least one adult at their school with whom they could communicate. These students also listed some of the factors that helped them feel good about being at school and made suggestions for establishing guidelines to enhance services. The data was submitted to the high school administration in order to evaluate school programs. Further research, surveys, and investigations are suggested.
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CHAPTER 1
THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Working with young people in the nineties is no easy feat, especially because there are so many at-risk adolescents today. Levine and Levine (1996) define the at-risk student as one, "...whose disadvantaged economic or social background is associated with lack of success in the public schools" (p. 446). Wehlage, Rutter, and Turnbaugh (cited in Levine & Levine, 1996) are more specific, stating that an at-risk student is:

...a young person who comes from a low socioeconomic background which may include various forms of family stress or instability. If the young person is consistently discouraged by the school because he or she receives signals about academic inadequacies and failures, perceives little interest or caring from teachers, and sees the institution's discipline as both ineffective and unfair, then it is not unreasonable to expect that the student will become alienated and uncommitted to getting a high school diploma. (p. 446)

In addition to socioeconomic factors, adolescents' success can be determined in part by whether they have good self-esteem, if they have a strong adult support system and if there are school programs in place to offer additional assistance. Merriam-Webster dictionary (1986) defines self-esteem as, "a proper satisfaction with one's own worth" (p. 830). Having good self-esteem affects how people, whether children, adolescents or adults, face every situation on a daily basis throughout their lives.
It is important to analyze if the adult support systems and school programs currently in place are providing enough assistance for today’s youth. This study focuses primarily on American high school students, but some of the literature addresses middle school students as well. Specifically, in this project a survey was conducted of current high school seniors at an upper middle-class southwestern high school to gain their viewpoints about the support systems at their school.

Development of the Problem

Since children’s success can be determined in part by whether or not they have good self-esteem and if they have a strong adult support system, it is necessary to further understand the concept of self-esteem. According to McKay and Fanning (1992), “Self-esteem is essential for psychological survival…. Without some measure of self-worth, life can be enormously painful with many basic needs going unmet” (p. 1). They further state that, “...you have the capacity to define who you are and then decide if you like that identity or not…. When you reject parts of yourself, you greatly damage the psychological structures that literally keep you alive” (p. 1).

According to Coopersmith (cited in Miller & Neese, 1997), there are four main components of self-esteem: how the child believes others view him or her; successes the child has experienced; how the child defines success or failure; and, lastly, how the child handles negative feedback from others. Children raised
in environments with structure, limitations, and with parents, who positively model their expectations, possess high levels of self-esteem (Coopersmith cited in Miller & Neese, 1997, p. 29). However, with so many children being raised in less than ideal environments, society needs to be aware of what causes at-risk behaviors, and individuals must initiate and promote existing programs to reduce these behaviors. In order to avoid at-risk behaviors, it is necessary for one to be aware of those warning signs.

Frymier, Barber, Denton, Johnson-Lewis, and Robertson (cited in Barr & Parrett, 1995) claim at-risk behaviors include a student who has attempted suicide, has negative self-esteem, or has been arrested or expelled. In addition, if the student has endured a pregnancy, suffered abuse within the past year, or has had an involvement with drugs or alcohol, he or she could be considered at risk. They also claim that there are potential problems for students who have failed two or more classes during the school year, have been retained, have changed schools several times over the last few years or have had excessive absences, especially for non-illness reasons (Gaustad, 1991).

These problems could cause youngsters to drop out of school. Dropout rates are particularly high in major cities in the South and West especially for those from non-English speaking families in low socioeconomic settings (Gaustad, 1991). According to Frymier et al. (cited in Barr & Parrett, 1995) dropping out is a possibility if the student has siblings who are dropouts, parents possessing a negative perspective about education, or parents who are
alcoholic, suicidal or divorced. Those youngsters raised by single parents, especially mothers who have not graduated from high school, also may encounter trouble. There is also a strong potential for dropping out if teens marry or start having children (Gaustad, 1991).

Levine and Levine (1996) claim that as a result of divorce and new family structures, there are fewer traditional role models for healthy relationships. For example, the role of many grandparents has changed. Some are being forced to raise their grandchildren, while some are never allowed to see their grandchildren because of a divorce. Many at-risk adolescents come from dysfunctional, low-income, apathetic and uneducated families. They are faced with a lack of proper nutrition and guidance, and the negative influences of television, movies, drugs, weapons, violence and family disintegration (Cross, 1997, p. 73). This list could describe young people from all walks of life.

In fact, Gaustad (1991) claims there are other unexplainable reasons as to why students drop out of school. She says that most students who have just one of those at-risk factors do not drop out of school, but that the majority of those who do drop out are not even in the at-risk population. To defend this position, Gaustad (1991) cites the statistics of one school in which the majority of dropouts were white, came from English speaking backgrounds, with two parents living at home, were not married, had no children, and had not been retained. To have a better understanding of who is likely to drop out, Gaustad (1991) suggests better record keeping. In addition federal guidelines are needed for uniform definitions
of what constitutes a dropout (Gaustad, 1991). Some schools currently categorize students as dropouts who transfer, are in the hospital, have had early acceptance to college, or have taken a longer time than the traditional four years for graduation. Some simply call students at risk if they are not reaching their potential, which could describe gifted and remedial students who are not keeping up with the majority of other students (Casey, 1992). There needs to be a closer study of students who do not possess the obvious at-risk factors (Gaustad, 1991).

Need for the Study

Barr and Parrett (1995) agree that all youth have the potential to be at risk. This contingency includes the potential to either fail classes, drop out of school, suffer from adult illiteracy, be dependent on drugs or alcohol, be unemployed, deal with teenage pregnancy, or face the reality of becoming part of the welfare or judicial system. Within the United States prisons, more than 80 percent of the prisoners have dropped out of high school (Barr & Parrett, 1995, p. 3). As a result, everything possible must be done to reduce high school drop out rates.

Parental time constraints may not allow for much family time. In this debilitation of the family, there is now a generation of children, who, without much of a home support system, may be experiencing low self-esteem. Some of these children, left to their own devices, may engage in more at-risk behaviors. In addition, peer pressure is at an all time high. For example, statistics show that
between the hours of 3:30 and 5:30 p.m., after students have been dismissed from school, and there is no adult supervision as parents are still at work, many youngsters are engaging in sex and in many cases the girls are becoming pregnant. In addition, there are more reports of violence, vandalism, shoplifting and burglary during these hours (Barr & Parrett, 1995.) Children need supervision and boundaries.

It has been said that no man is an island. This observation is certainly true when considering the need for support systems for adolescents. They need as much support from as many people as possible in order to be successful. An African proverb says, “It takes a whole village to raise a child” (Houston, 1996, p. 87). This proverb refers to the fact that it is a difficult and many-faceted job to raise children. It requires that the family and community members are part of the process. Unfortunately, family conditions today are no longer what they were in the past, when the traditional family all lived in the same neighborhood, and economic conditions did not dictate that both parents work. Houston (1996) questions if perhaps the village has disintegrated to the point of nonexistence. Brown (1996) agrees that the whole village or community must be part of helping children learn how to deal with the complexities in today’s constantly changing world by building a bridge to connect school and work.

As a result of the breakdown of families, schools and community members have become critical components in the formula to raise children. Schools and community members are expected to not only provide basic skills for learning,
but also to serve as role models for those children who are being left alone watching television or playing on the computer. Individuals, other than parents, are being asked to provide the guidance and support that is so critical during the impressionable teenage years. There is no doubt that child rearing has become a team effort (Houston, 1996).

Clinton (1996) has taken this theme a step further in her book, *It Takes a Village to Raise a Child: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us* which examines how people can work together to support not only their own families but also other families. In light of the multitude of problems existing in today's society, numerous support systems must be in place to successfully raise children. Young people need to have at least one person in their lives to help get them through the hard times and to share their joy during the good times. Everyone needs some means of support.

In light of this data, much research has been done on how society and schools specifically, have addressed and continue to address these needs. Today school programs offer a wide variety of elective classes to help students develop their self-esteem and talents. In addition, there are numerous mentoring, school-to-work or cooperative education programs, and community service programs.

It would also be helpful to get current input from high school seniors, who are close to graduation, about existing school programs and what support they thought they needed from adults to feel successful. The students' perspectives
about their own self-esteem throughout high school could provide pertinent data. Specifically, it would be valuable to know how they felt when they first entered high school, how they interpreted the adult support systems at school, and what programs they saw as beneficial. Their suggestions to improve programs for the future would be useful. If the survey shows that programs are effective at the school where these students attend, then these programs could serve as a model for schools which are still experiencing problems. If these students do not believe that the programs are providing enough support, administrators should evaluate this situation.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to design guidelines to improve adolescent self-esteem, while avoiding at-risk behaviors, through adult support systems and programs at school. This purpose was accomplished by investigating current literature and analyzing results from a survey of current high school seniors at an upper middle-class southwestern high school. The purpose of this survey was to get the high school student's perspective on the benefits of support services and whether these services encouraged him or her to have good self-esteem.
Research Question

The research question to be answered was as follows: What is the content of guidelines to improve adolescent self-esteem, while avoiding at-risk behaviors, through adult support systems and programs at school?

Significance of the Study

By studying ways to improve adolescent self-esteem through adult support systems and programs, this study provides suggestions to better serve high school students, specifically, and society in general. However, this study has a more definitive significance. The administration at the school where the survey was taken has a keen interest in improving the school's mentoring services to students. Since the program is a unique one, there are few models to emulate, and student input could be quite valuable. In addition, other schools who have indicated an interest in developing a counseling/advisory model similar to the programs at this high school may also have an interest in these results. Research is certainly necessary now in order to improve the quality of life for the youngsters who will soon lead the country. The future of society depends upon it.
CHAPTER 2
THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

What can be done to improve the lives and thus the future of today's children? At-risk factors can originate from several areas: the individual person, the family, the community, and from the school. One cannot expect to get immediate results with the problems students encounter in the home and the community, but there are certainly some plans that schools can implement in conjunction with the community (Barr & Parrett, 1995). Kirst (cited in Abdal-Haqq, 1993) states that the current way of dealing with children is ineffective as children "fall through the cracks" and do not receive appropriate services. "Because schools have sustained, long-term contact with the majority of children, they are the logical gateway for providing multiple services to children" (Kirst cited in Abdal-Haqq, 1993, Internet).

This literature review covers the following topics. It reviews academic and social difficulties experienced by adolescents, self-esteem and gender issues, and resilience. Teachers are a critical component in providing support, and their roles and responsibilities are reviewed. Mentoring programs and the use of humor are discussed. The effects of school programs on student self-esteem are described as well as the benefits students receive from participating in community service projects. The benefits to students using computer technology
are introduced and the importance of students having specific homework assistance programs available to them is stressed. Lastly, the effects of school activities on adolescent self-esteem are reported.

**Academic and Social Difficulties**

Although any adolescent may experience academic and social difficulty from time to time, it is believed that it is more likely to occur when students are promoted from elementary to middle school, or from middle school to the high school level (Robertson, 1997). With parental support this difficult time could be minimal. If these behaviors have occurred over a long period of time, parents may need to work with teachers to develop some interventions. Such factors for these individuals could be problems with maintaining attention, behavioral difficulties, grade retention, unacceptable grades, excessive absences, a lack of involvement in school activities, the student's belief that he or she is not bright enough, or the student is lacking future goals. Survey results show that in order to ensure a better adjustment, students want more information about school programs in regard to their schedules, study skills, after school activities, and career opportunities. The schools that provide for these needs reduce the failure statistics at their schools (Robertson, 1997).

A team effort is often the best approach in helping adolescents. Parents and teachers can work together to alleviate the student's fears, set consistent boundaries, advocate for student membership in activities at school, and
encourage students to partake in sports and school events. Parents and teachers can meet with other school personnel to set appropriate goals stressing the importance of education and accessing tutoring or study sessions. In addition, goals should include career and college opportunities. It is important to work within the community for additional support services. Academic difficulties can be avoided with adult support and interventions at an early stage (Robertson, 1997).

Gilbert (1997) reported on the National Longitudinal Study on Adolescent Health, which surveyed 90,000 children between 1995 and 1997, and described the impact of families on adolescents. The results showed that youngsters who claimed to be the closest to their families were the most unlikely to be associated with at-risk behaviors such as smoking marijuana or cigarettes, drinking, or engaging in sexual activities. These individuals also stated that high parental expectations regarding academics were important, and that they needed to know that their teachers were interested in them. A less important factor was having a parent at home at critical times such as after school, during dinner and at bedtime. According to Blum (cited in Gilbert, 1997), parents being available emotionally was much more critical than being physically present in the home. Most important was youngsters knowing that whenever they need a parent, he or she could be reached even it is only through a telephone call (Gilbert, 1997).
The Effects of Low Self-Esteem

Poor attendance has been mentioned as one factor associated with at-risk behaviors. Low self-esteem may also affect school attendance. Students may feel unqualified to pass classes, lack motivation, and refuse to do homework or study for tests. Ultimately they may fail classes and eventually drop out of high school. Poor children attending school with other poor children, who are reading one year behind by the time they are in the third grade, and have already been held back one grade level, are predicted to have a zero percent chance of graduating from high school. These factors can predict as early as third grade with 80 percent accuracy which students will be dropouts. With this in mind, it is imperative that educators make changes to keep youngsters in school (Barr & Parrett, 1995). According to Gaustad (1991) a reliable way of determining dropout rates is by looking at tenth grade attendance records for the first four months of school.

Adults must make every attempt to improve student self-esteem so they can feel successful at school. Barr and Parrett (1995) state that:

Many of these students are filled with rage at the humiliations schools have caused them. Imagine being unable to read.... where almost everything revolves around students who are going to college and you know that for you higher education is an impossible dream. How must it feel ...being retained, tracked into slow classes with other 'dumb' kids, suspended on occasion, suffering through failure after failure on test after test, and then to have high-school counselors talk down to you about graduation credit, college entrance requirements, and your poor attitude? (p. 122)

Since over 80 percent of those in the nation's prisons are high school dropouts (Barr & Parrett, 1995), society must do whatever is necessary to keep students
motivated to perform well, have good self-esteem, and graduate from high school.

There is also a possible link between self-esteem and academic performance. A study was conducted to determine if self-esteem affected the academic behaviors and beliefs of 593 high school students (Filozof, Albertin, Jones, Steme, Myers & McDermott, 1998). The results showed that there is some correlation that school achievement affects self-esteem and that negative experiences in young people’s lives negatively effect their self-esteem. Gurney (cited in Filozof et al., 1998) claims that self-esteem is increased with parental support and is related to improved academic achievement. Positive experiences in academic areas are critical in order to avoid low self-esteem as it is related to behavior problems. In addition, students who set more educational goals upon graduating have higher self-esteem (Filozof et al., 1998).

The Effects of Gender on Self-Esteem

Another element that affects self-esteem and adolescent difficulties is gender. While some research indicates girls have a more difficult time at school, Gurian (1996) states that boys have lower educational expectations and self-esteem. Boys will drop out of high school more readily, and the suicide rate is four to one when comparing high school boys to girls. Boys experience more difficulty in elementary school in the areas of reading, writing and using verbal skills. Gurian (1996) says that the male brain is slower in grasping these skills and encourages teachers to modify teaching styles to meet these needs. There
is a 50 percent likelihood that eighth-grade boys, rather than girls, will be retained one grade level. Two-thirds of high school special education classes are comprised of boys (Gurian, 1996). High school boys outnumber girls as victims of physical violence, with three times as many males being involved in school-related homicides. In spite of these facts, all students, regardless of gender, are in need of support and assistance (Gurian, 1996).

Resilience

In the past, when agencies have pinpointed certain youth as being at-risk, this classification has garnered certain services for them and their families. However, there are numerous disadvantages in designating these categories, such as the creation of stereotypes, a tracking system that could label students, reduced academic expectations, and to some extent, prejudice. As a result of these generalities, individuals may lose sight of their own abilities and unique attributes (Benard, 1997).

A new approach to working with those at risk is to encourage resilience. Lifton (cited in Benard, 1997) describes resilience as the ability of people to initiate changes regardless of the risks and efforts involved. It involves creating social relationships, solving problems, developing a self-identity, and creating future goals. Werner and Smith (cited in Benard, 1997) claim that between 50 to 70 percent of children in very high-risk situations conquer their environments to become successful, effective and considerate individuals.
How Teachers Can Help

In analyzing resiliency factors, teachers can have an enormous effect. There are certain teachers or mentors who are responsible for providing the boost youngsters need to change their adversities by modeling such supportive actions as listening to and showing care and respect for their students. Their non-judgmental attitudes display unconditional acceptance (Benard, 1997). Delpit (cited in Benard, 1997) claims that with high expectations, teachers encourage students to create quality work. Teachers can help students recognize that when there are obstacles, they should not be viewed subjectively or as all-encompassing, but that they are only temporary (Benard, 1997). By encouraging students to voice their ideas and contribute to the community, they are able to view themselves as responsible, participating members (Benard, 1997).

Schools need to nurture positive relationships for the various combinations of people who work with young people. This involves teachers working with students, students working with other students, teachers working with other teachers, and teachers working with parents. This can be done through small group situations, using cooperative methods and community service, as well as encouraging peer assistance and multi-age mentoring (Benard, 1997). Teachers need to emphasize the abilities and strengths of their students by encouraging them to take personal responsibility to control their own environment. Students can accomplish this by engaging in critical self-evaluation, expressing themselves through the arts and by having opportunities to help create the
classroom structure. Promoting student resiliency requires that teachers be flexible and patient (Benard, 1997).

Cross (1997) conducted a study using teacher essays about student self-esteem and curriculum and how this compared to research on the subject. Teachers claimed that self-esteem was a tremendous issue in working with the students in their urban schools. In fact, according to these teachers, improving the self-esteem of these children was even more critical than working on the students’ possible lack of intellectual development. One teacher indicated her determination to provide some positive experiences to students who may have experienced only a dark side of life.

These teachers were all in agreement about the following elements to build self-esteem. Teachers needed to make positive statements to their students so they would learn to respect themselves. They had to let their students know they cared about them and that their opinions mattered. Lastly, teachers needed to instill feelings of success for students in other school-related areas. In addition, they promoted conflict resolution, peer mediation, cooperation, and goal setting, while rewarding positive behaviors (Cross, 1997).

Unfortunately, the literature and scholarly research does not agree with these teachers’ assumptions. Critics contend that the teachers defined self-esteem too broadly and that the data was superficial and misinterpreted (Cross, 1997). Kohn (cited in Cross, 1997) stated that there was no hard evidence in this study to verify that self-esteem was improved by school programs that may have originally been designed with that intention. These teachers need to be careful
about their assumptions regarding self-esteem, be more analytical about the
activities they are using to try to improve self-esteem, and reevaluate the
relationship between curriculum, self-esteem, and their own value systems in
these areas (Cross, 1997).

Mentoring

Sigesmund & Mockett (1999) claim that there are approximately 28 million
teenagers between the ages of 10 to 17 years old in the United States today.
With 13.6 million thought to be in the at-risk category, about half or approximately
seven million are considered to be very high risk. Another seven million
youngsters are considered to be a moderate risk who might learn to be
productive in society with some assistance (Sigesmund & Mockett, 1999).

Dryfoos (cited in Sigesmund & Mockett, 1999), says many youngsters
have no adult or parental support and may not even be acquainted with one
single working adult. She says that those who have been able to avoid at-risk
behaviors have done so because they have had an adult support system. Many
successful adults admit that at one point in their lives there was some individual
who was instrumental in helping with their development and support (Alter,
1999). Powell (1999) believes that if young people today do not have adults who
are responsible, caring, persistent and consistent, they may seek out the wrong
kind of role models and could be led astray.

There is a great deal of other research that suggests the need for student
support. Mentoring, or having someone serve as an advisor, has been proven to
be an excellent way of improving young people's self-esteem. Alter (1999) describes mentoring as, "... one-on-one relationships between caring adults and kids who need some guidance" (p. 4). Mentors encourage young people to open up, and build rapport and trust. They offer encouragement to youngsters to pursue future career opportunities (Barr & Parrett, 1995). Anyone can be a mentor. He or she can be a teacher, businessperson, retired individual, or college student (Barr & Parrett, 1995).

While mentoring is seen as an advantage by many, there is disagreement about the most salient elements. According to Martin (1999), the two most important elements of a mentoring relationship are maintaining patience and an open mind. However, Miller (1999) claims that goal setting is one of the main aspects. She says mentoring bolsters young people's self-esteem and must start from within, yet it is often difficult to get these individuals to think about the future.

Weinberger, founder of the Norwalk Mentor Program in Norwalk, Connecticut suggests the main element is active listening and not just providing unwanted advice. She believes that young people must go through their own thinking process in order to learn to problem-solve (cited in Miller, 1999). Dryfoos (cited in Sigesmund & Mockett, 1999) states that when mentors show these youngsters that they can make choices, they can begin to feel successful.

Alter (1999) agrees that mentors not only affect one individual's life, but also that they have the potential to change the whole country. Gurian (1996) states that mentoring programs should be required for a year at the junior high and high school levels. He contends that these programs can involve parents,
teachers, coaches or counselors to guide male students on sensitive issues, including sex education. He encourages parents, religious leaders and working professionals to spend more time working in the classroom with students. If the community would offer boys a program like, 'Take your son to work day' (p. 80), boys would learn the value of getting an education in order to be prepared for the workplace, thus discouraging male high school dropouts (Gurian, 1996). There are definite advantages in having the community and schools form a partnership to help students.

Barr and Parrett (1995) believe that it is best if there is an ethnic and cultural match for an effective mentoring program. These individuals serve to show students that they have had similar experiences and have emerged successfully. Unfortunately, there are times when it is not possible to have this match. Stewart, executive director of the Baltimore Mentoring Partnership (cited in Martin, 1999), admits that the differing languages and cultures can initially make for a more difficult adjustment, but the rewards are numerous. Group discussions and networking enable the student to share their experiences. Mentoring programs may be the most effective strategy in encouraging at-risk students, especially those growing up in poverty areas (Barr & Parrett, 1995). As both youngsters and adults continue to tout the benefits of mentoring, the numbers of programs supporting the mentoring process are increasing.

According to Rizio-Hamilton (1999), there are various mentoring programs. One-on-one mentoring provides one youngster with an adult mentor to form a bond while setting goals. This type of program usually requires a
screening process, provides continuous support, and concentrates on family issues. Another approach, team mentoring, involves the use of several mentors who work with a group of youngsters. It provides a buddy system with a choice of adults, which is less intimidating for youngsters who have trouble establishing relationships. Also, there is increased flexibility and much more support for all involved. School-based mentoring allows for meetings and activities to occur at school. Outside companies or organizations can work in conjunction with the school to improve academics. These adults can also work with upperclassmen to help with college applications or provide career information. Advantages to this type of program are that the school is a common meeting place, with the library being a valuable pre-existing resource. Also teachers are present and can lend support to students they already know. Regardless of the mentoring program that is employed, both the mentors and mentees will benefit the most with common goals (Rizio-Hamilton, 1999).

Various studies show the success rates of mentoring programs. The Big Brothers Big Sisters Impact Study of the early 1990s evaluated 959 boys and girls in an eight-state range (Alter, 1999). One half of the students were part of the mentoring program while the other half comprised the control group. Those individuals who spent time with a mentor three times a month over a year showed fewer at-risk behaviors. Their chances of beginning to use illegal drugs were 46 percent lower, while the likelihood of these students being truant from school was 52 percent lower and fighting incidents were 33 percent lower. Those students who had mentors stated that they felt more confident about their
academic performance and had improved family relationships. Another study undertaken by Procter & Gamble looked at the academic records of 133 students who worked with mentors. Eighty-six percent of these students attended college as opposed to the 25 to 30 percent who attended college before the mentoring program began (Alter, 1999).

The Benefits of Humor

The way adults approach situations dealing with adolescents can alter relationships whether at school or at home. The use of humor is especially helpful (Gard, 1998). While stress and anger are related to high blood pressure and illness, research has now shown that humor reduces blood pressure and keeps people healthy. Laughter affects the immune system and increases and aids antibodies and other natural processes. In addition, when people laugh they decrease their levels of serum cortisol and increase the oxygen flow in the blood. According to Derks (cited in Gard, 1998), when individuals listen to jokes, the process utilizes the analytical and sensory areas of the brain. People with a sense of humor possess an attitude that indicates they are in control of their own reactions and possess self-esteem. Since children who are in kindergarten laugh on the average of 300 times each day and adults laugh as little as 17 times during a day (Gard, 1998), children can serve as excellent role models for adults in learning to reduce stress. There are numerous advantages for everyone working with adolescents to maintain a good sense of humor and engaging in laughter on a daily basis.
Pollak and Freda (1997) studied middle school teachers who had incorporated humor into their daily classrooms and agree that it is beneficial. Many students claim their favorite teachers used humor. The use of humor does not entail just telling jokes or creating laughs. Nor does it not mean that teachers be sarcastic or cynical, as that approach tends to reduce learning and encourage stereotyping. It occurs when teachers simply put a positive, as opposed to a negative, slant on a situation. When teachers introduce humor to the school situation, students show less stress, depression, unhappiness, and anxiety and there is an increase in self-esteem, creativity, and interest.

Teachers who use humor increase their rapport with their students. This often reduces student hostility or resistance. Quina (cited in Pollak & Freda, 1997) suggests that when teachers and students share laughter, more cooperation is likely to take place in the classroom. The use of humor also emphasizes the similarities between the teacher and student. When the teachers can laugh at themselves, students feel empowered (Pollak & Freda, 1997) and others feel safe (Gard, 1998). In addition, when teachers use unusual, creative or humorous examples, creative thinking for students is encouraged. Learning becomes fun and facts are easier to remember. Self-esteem is increased as students allow themselves to take risks and forgive themselves if they make an error. The use of humor facilitates socialization. Humor can turn a tense moment into a meaningful experience that students can recall when facing similar challenges later in life. Lastly, teachers who incorporate humor at school, instill a love for education (Pollak & Freda, 1997).
School Programs

School programs are an essential aspect in providing support to adolescents. Schools that offer support groups provide yet one more resource to help students thrive. Wassef, Mason, Collins, VanHaalen, and Ingham (1998) report on one particular program at a Texas high school which offered a one-year, 50-minute, voluntary weekly support group for students. Students were given an opportunity to discuss any home or school-related problems. After the school year, the students were asked to complete a self-questionnaire. While the results were positive for most questions, in the area of attendance, one half of the students indicated no effect. Students also made positive statements about their abilities to communicate, deal with stress and handle their problems. In addition, they reported improvements in their self-worth, family relationships, and abilities to form friendships. Ninety percent of the students said they would suggest that their friends join a school support group, and 66 percent said they themselves planned to join a support group again the following year (Wassef et al., 1998). When students have an opportunity to relieve their stress levels through the support group forum, other areas of their lives are likely to show improvement.

There are other school programs that may be effective in making students feel more comfortable at school. Studies show that students can improve their self-esteem through school theater and music programs. In addition these programs may create other important results. Roman (1998) claims that teen suicide rates were on the rise in Puerto Rico until a school theater program was
introduced. Through the use of costumes, makeup, dialogue and stage movements, which created a fantasy world, these students were able to express ideas and any negative feelings they had about themselves. Once the audience accepted and recognized them, these students felt they belonged, became more assertive, and were desirous of a more productive life.

Extracurricular programs can also reinforce school success. Kupferberg (1999) claims that participation in school music programs improves other academic subjects such as reading readiness and math. The Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey, reports that students who had studied the arts for four or more years scored a combined 82 points better on the verbal and mathematics sections of the Scholastic Aptitude Tests than did students who had six months or less of art exposure. Schmidt (cited in Kupferberg, 1999), says that those students who are part of a music program earn better grades and have higher standardized test scores. Recent brain studies indicate that music increases everyone's ability to learn. More teacher training and staffing is necessary in these areas to increase the number of programs offered. Currently only one in four students throughout the nation is involved in a music program (Kupferberg, 1999).

Community-Related Programs

Students learn valuable lessons and can improve their confidence level and future career plans by working within the community. The National Dropout Prevention Center in Clemson, South Carolina, reports that 25 percent of
adolescents are high school dropouts. Many of these students report that in the real world, school has no value to them (Daugherty & Compton, 1996). Burnett (1992) claims that many schools have not done an adequate job of educating adolescents who choose not to attend college. Even if students do complete high school graduation requirements, many are still not prepared for the working world. School-to-work opportunities are valuable for all adolescents in that they allow them to redefine goals, learn about career choices, and develop confidence as they increase their hands-on responsibilities and their earning capabilities (Brown, 1998).

In Georgia, a study was done with non-traditional high school students over an 18-week period in which students received instruction which was then applied to community service. These students indicated in their journals that they experienced an increase in self-esteem and self-confidence, a better work ethic, as well as recognition of their individual talents when measuring qualitative but not quantitative data (Daugherty & Compton, 1996).

There has been a surge of federal funding to educate students about careers through "school-to-work" and "tech prep" programs (Brown, 1996). Specifically, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act was structured to help with this transition (Brown, 1998). Business people and educators work together to train today's youngsters. These individuals are society's future work force and will require improved technical, academic and social skills (Brown, 1996). Teachers have incorporated practical employment skills with academic skills into the curriculum and have provided data to students about careers and work
opportunities. They work with people from business and technical areas to bring their experiences into the classroom (Brown, 1998). According to the National School-to-Work Learning and Information Center (cited in Brown, 1998), students learn the practical side of employment through job shadowing, mentoring, volunteering, internships, and actual work experiences. They also gain experience through apprenticeships (Brown, 1996).

There are some obstacles to school-to-work programs. Some employers have concerns about cost efficiency regarding productivity, training, child labor laws and insurance. Parents may be fearful that such a program will detract from the academic setting and college goals. High schools may avoid the programs because of control issues and administrative efforts for coordination. Teachers may be reticent to change their old methods of teaching. However, these programs which give students another choice to be successful, can be implemented with the help of interested parties (Brown, 1998).

One more possibility for schools to help students get acclimated to the work force is through Career Academies (Burnett, 1992). This program involves forming small groups of students, counselors, and teachers with one designated as the leader. Students volunteer to work in definitive career areas such as in computers, electronic or health, as opposed to specific traditional vocational tracks. Careers chosen for the program are those which have good growth potential and will lead to future employment. Academic and vocational coursework is integrated into block scheduling and students in these classes are kept together. Tracking is eliminated and replaced with challenging academic,
yet occupational-related courses. Students are still required to meet traditional graduation requirements while learning about interviewing, work expectations and ethics with the support of parents, businesses and the government. Unfortunately, Career Academies are expensive to initiate and personnel costs are high (Burnett, 1992). Nevertheless, the financial commitment may be worth it when considering the financial costs from crime and incarceration (Abdal-Haqq, 1993).

For schools that do not have school-to-work programs, some offer their students an opportunity to learn about the working world through Career Day. This event provides students with a realistic picture of a particular profession, including risks and disadvantages, such as the long workday (Mellor, 1999). Any time individuals in the community can present career information to youngsters, better choices can be made for the future.

**Computer Technology**

Schools can use computer technology to assist at-risk students to begin to feel successful in their academic endeavors (Ryba & Selby, 1995). Computer usage can empower students, make them feel they have control over their learning capabilities, and enable students to work together. Students are able to learn more by working together than alone. Computers improve social skills and intellectual abilities especially with the socialization of children who are hyperactive (Ryba & Selby, 1995). Computers have provided students with feelings of success in several areas including writing poetry, creating art (Casey,
1992), and learning word-processing skills (Aburime, 1999). Computers provide students the chance to get answers to the questions that they were embarrassed to ask in front of others (Casey, 1992; Aburime, 1999) and to have fun at the same time (Ryba & Selby, 1995). By using computers, students feel they have received recognition and support, and experience an increase in self-esteem, confidence and motivation (Ryba & Selby, 1995). Computer games have provided success for learning disabled students and for those speaking a different language. Another advantage of students using computer programs and software is that they are already comfortable with that medium (Casey, 1992).

Homework Assistance Programs

Students who do their homework have proven to have more success at school. There are numerous ways that schools can assist students towards accomplishing this goal. One program funded by Ascension Collegiate in Bay Roberts, Newfoundland, Canada, and Newfoundland Telephone and the Human Resource Development Commission is the Homework Hotline (1995) that is accessed by dialing a telephone number and three-digit access code. This hotline provides homework assignments for the 900 students at Ascension Collegiate on a message recorded each night. Due dates, tips on effective study habits, suggestions for students and parents (Flynn, 1994) and information about tests and quizzes are available (Homework Hotline, 1995).
Another useful homework program has been established by South Junior High School in Grand Forks, North Dakota (Club Helps Early Risers Finish That Homework, 1994). Students who join the Homework Club are given an opportunity to come to school one hour before classes begin in order to finish their homework. If they require help, teachers are there to assist them 30 minutes before school actually starts. As an added incentive community members provide prizes such as videos, food and passes to certain activities (Club Helps Early Risers, 1994).

Modern technology can also help students with homework. A television program called Homework Hotline airs on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday nights at 6:00 p.m. for one-half hour to assist students in the math and science areas at all grade levels. As individuals watch the show, they can call a telephone number to ask questions of teachers during the show. After the show is over, teachers return the phone calls that were not aired or students can get help through the Internet and e-mail (Homework Hotline Online Schoolhouse).

The Effects of School Activities on Adolescent Self-Esteem

School activities offer adolescents an opportunity to feel better about themselves at school. During the 1960s, research indicated that the positive effects of participation in school activities, which were viewed as yet another curriculum, were improved social abilities, character and middle-class moral development, and school and community pride (Steitz & Owen, 1992). Past research showed that most dropouts had not participated in school activities.
Students who stayed in school were more active in school activities and were leaders. In addition, girls were more involved in activities, and their likelihood of dropping out was reduced (Steitz & Owen, 1992).

According to Steitz & Owen (1992), one recent study analyzed part-time working sophomores and juniors in a southern urban public high school. It looked at the relationships of school activities, adolescent self-esteem, and an element that had not been taken into account in past studies, part-time employment (Steitz & Owen, 1992).

This study showed that the type of school activity and gender were critical components. It was not proven that participating in school activities was related to higher self-esteem. The study did show that working girls did suffer from lower self-esteem regardless of their grade level at school or if they were engaged in school activities (Steitz & Owen, 1992). Self-esteem for girls was affected by the number of hours they were employed, their age and the type of curriculum in which they were enrolled. When girls worked less hours, were older, and were in a business or vocational track, rather than a general or college preparatory program, they had higher self-esteem. Girls involved with music or athletics had higher levels of self-esteem than girls who were engaged in other school activities. There was no significant correlation for boys except that those involved in music programs had lower levels of self-esteem than boys involved in athletics or even than those involved in no activities. This might be related to the somewhat feminine stereotype of those associated with music programs (Steitz & Owen, 1992). According to Brown (cited in Steitz & Owen, 1992), school
activities are not all the same in terms of their interest level for students or their effects upon them.

Summary

Adolescents today require support. Adults can help by studying the causes of adolescent academic and social difficulties. It is critical to understand the causes and methods to correct low self-esteem, the effects of gender on this issue and the benefits of resilience. Teachers can and do make a difference by providing support, maintaining a comfortable environment with kindness and possibly humor, and by being mentors to youngsters. School programs offer a variety of healthy options in which students can engage once they find their niche. Positive academic alternatives emerge when students have exposure to work within the community. In addition, school activities, whether through music, drama, or leadership roles provide more opportunities for students to grow. Lastly, an involvement in school activities can impact how students feel about themselves.

Not all programs are effective for all students. Students and their parents need to be able to ask for help and access to school programs. It is important that all young people today find their own individual sources of support. No individual can or should try to survive on his or her own. Everyone can benefit in some way with support.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Purpose

The purpose of the study was to design guidelines to improve adolescent self-esteem, while avoiding at-risk behaviors, through adult support systems and programs at school. This was accomplished by investigating current literature and analyzing results from a survey of current high school seniors at an upper middle-class southwestern high school. It was important to get high school students’ perspectives on the benefits of support services and whether these services encouraged him or her to have positive self-esteem.

The information collected will be made available to the administration of that school to provide an opportunity to reevaluate and improve its programs. The school has an advisory, or mentoring program, for freshmen and senior students. The concept behind this advisory program is that the administration believes that students need more one-on-one assistance as they enter high school and exit to college or the work environment. This program has been in effect for approximately six years. Parent surveys were administered on several occasions when the program was first introduced to determine their opinions about the new counseling services. Also, in the past, advisors have completed surveys and have met several times throughout each school year to offer suggestions on how to improve programs to assist students. The questionnaire
used in this study, however, offers an opportunity to hear directly from the students. For that reason, the administration is especially interested in using the results for possible reevaluation of student services.

**Research Design**

A descriptive research methodology was used in this study. The main point of this type of research is to study various facts about peoples’ opinions and attitudes, and to gather data about the people themselves (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). The research through the survey was designed to analyze the effects of programs and support systems on adolescent self-esteem and allow for expression of their opinions and attitudes about these issues. Using this research design, the environment was not controlled, nor were any variables affecting the study manipulated. Instead, the study was, in a systematic method, designed to describe the facts and characteristics of the actual phenomenon, population and areas of interest (Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

Students at the high school completed a written survey or questionnaire (Appendix A) in order to provide their perceptions of the effectiveness of the adult support systems and school programs at their school. There were numerous advantages to using this type of descriptive design. Accurate descriptive data could be collected from the students in order to make changes to encourage more student participation. This method provided broad student representation and the anonymity necessary for students to honestly voice their opinions.
Another advantage was that it was an easy way to gather accurate, representative and reliable data. In addition, it allowed for an exploration of numerous specific variables, and it also provided an opportunity for additional and perhaps unexpected variables to surface (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). One more advantage was the ability to show a relationship between the numerous variables which impact students on a daily basis in a natural environment, the classroom setting. A disadvantage of this method was that it did not allow for predictions for the future (Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

**Population and Sample**

The population for this study was senior students currently attending an upper middle-class southwestern high school. The survey was administered at the end of the students' senior year, in May, which allowed most students an opportunity to have exposure over a four-year period to the adult support systems and programs offered at this high school.

All students had the availability of clubs, sports, after school help programs, and support groups at some point in their high school careers. However, the design of the survey questions made allowance for the fact that not every student who would complete the survey would have participated in every program or activity mentioned in the survey. Therefore, not all students would be able to provide input for every question regarding school programs and activities. On the other hand, all questions regarding support personnel were relevant since
all students were provided the same services from freshmen year through senior year.

The school-designated student identification numbers were used to help randomly choose the students for the survey. The sample population was 109 of the approximately 670 current high school seniors at the high school. Although 109 surveys were designated for distribution, only 94 students actually participated in the survey. There were 44 males and 50 females surveyed. The other surveys were not completed because those students were absent on the day of survey distribution.

**Assumptions and Limitations**

It was assumed that the survey distributed to high school seniors was effective in assessing student perceptions of the adult support systems and school programs at this school. It was also assumed that students reported their opinions honestly because they were aware that the survey was anonymous. In addition, since these students were graduating in two weeks, they had nothing to lose by being totally forthright. In fact, traditionally, many students feel nostalgic at this point in their lives and might feel they are making a valuable contribution to their school by reporting their opinions.

The design of the questions suffered from a couple of limitations. Although it has been acknowledged that not all of the questions might affect every student, it was important to know how students participating in specific activities and programs felt about the effectiveness of those programs. It was expected that
some students would choose the $N/A$ option based on that lack of participation. Another limitation was that the researcher works in the targeted school environment and is interested in improving student programs, which may bias interpretation of results.

**Procedure**

The faculty at Ottawa University and the administration at the high school approved the testing instrument. A pretest of the survey assured the instrument did not have problems (Merriam & Simpson, 1995). Six surveys were given to senior students who were available because they were working as office aides. They were asked to complete the survey and indicate if there were any ambiguous questions or concerns about the testing instrument. One student indicated that she was unsure if she was supposed to choose several or just one option for the first question. The question was changed to indicate that students were to choose as many answers as they believed applied to them. This seemed to be the only ambiguity about question formation. It was also discovered that the first question had the answer options listed in a strange lettering sequence and this too was corrected before the final copies were made. The results from students who took the pretest were not included in the final tabulation.

The sample population of this random survey was chosen by querying the four-digit student identification numbers assigned to each student by the school at the beginning of each school year. A random selection was obtained of
students whose identification number had a three or seven within the four-digits. These numbers were chosen because they were in the middle of the zero through nine ranges of numbers. The only required senior classes are Economics or Government so this was the most logical place to access senior students. A computer query of all senior students with the numbers mentioned above produced too many names to survey. Therefore the search was narrowed down to those with a three or seven as the last digit. This resulted in a list with 112 names. Of these 112 names, three were enrolled in Special Education classes that rely heavily on the one-on-one services offered within that department. An administrative decision was made that the three students would not be surveyed because it was unlikely that they used the traditional counseling services often.

The specific Economics or Government teachers of the selected students were asked if they would cooperate with the survey distribution. All readily agreed. They were given instructions to distribute the surveys on a specific Friday in May, the last week of school before these seniors were scheduled to graduate. Students were told that they had been randomly selected through their student identification numbers and that their identity would remain anonymous. They were asked to take the survey seriously since the results would be used by the school administration to evaluate and improve programs. They were informed that a staff member would also be using the data for a research project. At the end of the hour the teachers collected the surveys and placed them in an
envelope to ensure anonymity. The envelopes were then returned to the researcher. All teachers followed through as requested. Unused surveys left over from absent students were returned. Teachers volunteered to distribute the surveys to the absent students upon their return the next day. However, their suggestion was declined because having them do so would compromise the validity of the surveys, as absent students might discuss the surveys with those who had already participated in the study.

Of the 109 students selected, 94 completed the survey. An attempt had been made to have a 17 percent sample. However, due to the previously mentioned reasons, the sample surveyed was actually 14 percent of the overall senior student population.

Instrumentation

The survey that the researcher designed is included in Appendix A. The first part of the 21-question survey asked students to indicate their gender. The instructions at the top of the page asked the students to provide their opinions about the activities, programs and counseling/advising services at the high school. The questionnaire was constructed through a seven-point Likert Scale. The numbering system started with number one, which indicated the student Strongly Disagreed with that statement, and following the continuum, ended with number seven, which indicated that the student Strongly Agreed. If the question did not apply to the students, they were asked to circle N/A. In trying to
abbreviate the instrument, some of the questions were combined and the $N/A$ option was added, giving students the opportunity to either indicate a lack of participation or show that the question did not apply to them. No assumptions could be made about the $N/A$ responses. This format not only provided a range of answers, but also made it easier to compile and analyze the data. It is expected that students will provide valuable subjective information when answering the open-ended questions asking for lists of choices or suggestions.

The first major category was School Activities. The first question gave the students an opportunity to choose the activities that made them feel good about being at school. In addition to being able to choose one of five options, they were also given the option of Other and then the opportunity to list that specific activity. All students should have been able to list some option if they felt good about being at school. There were four other questions in this category asking about club membership, and participation in participatory classes and sports. These activities were optional for all students.

The next major category of the survey was School Programs. Questions were designed to access student opinions about their comfort level as freshmen. Other questions asked about their participation in leadership programs, support groups and after school help programs. None of these programs were mandatory and did not necessarily involve the majority of the student population.

The last major category was the School Personnel Support System. The first ten questions should have been able to be answered by all senior students.
Every senior was assigned to a Senior Academic Advisor and also the Senior Academic Technician in the Counseling Department. In addition, all freshmen had a Freshman Academic Advisor and the Freshman Academic Technician to help them. Every sophomore and junior student was assigned to a Counselor whom they were required to see several times a year. The numbers of answers in this section was expected to be the highest of the three sections since the questions affected all students. The last question was open-ended. It asked for students to comment on strengths or areas of improvement regarding the Counseling/Advisement Services at the school.

The internal validity was ensured through the pretest that was executed and external validity was accomplished through random assignment that allowed for generalizability. Reliability was assured through the assumption that students would answer honestly knowing the responses were anonymous (Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

**Method of Analysis**

The results of each question were tabulated by the number of responses for each category of the Likert Scale using the raw scores. Results were also analyzed by calculating the arithmetic mean of each item. Calculation of the mean response was done by subtracting the N/A responses from the total (94) number of responses per item. For the purposes of this study, responses with numbers below 4.0 (Agree), suggestions from the open-ended question, and
data from the literature review will be used to make recommendations to improve programs to increase student self-esteem at the school. Anything above 4.0 was regarded as identifying programs that should be continued. For each open-ended question each response is listed.
CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Demographics

This chapter presents the responses to the 21-question anonymous survey of high school seniors at a southwestern upper middle-class high school (Appendix A). Questions asked for data on how students felt about School Programs, School Activities and School Personnel Support Services. Questionnaires were completed by 94 senior participants during the school day in May, several days before graduation.

Ninety-four questionnaires were returned. An adult assistant helped the researcher tabulate the number of answers per category. Spelling errors made by the students have been edited for easier interpretation and offensive statements and compliments regarding specific staff members were also omitted.

Findings

Questions 2 through 10 and 12 through 20 presented a Likert scale, and number 11 was a true/false question. Students who Strongly Disagree could start at the far left end of the continuum with choice 1 and those who Strongly Agree could choose number 7 at the far right. They were able to choose any
numbers between 1 and 7 to express some disagreement, or some agreement. During the tabulation of the questionnaire results, it was discovered that while the word Agree appeared over number 4 on the scale, the word Disagree had been omitted from the questionnaire’s scales. Since none of the pilot respondents noticed, and students could indicate a range of disagreement by circling several number choices to the right of Strongly Disagree on the continuum, this omission is considered immaterial.

If the question did not apply to the students, they were asked to circle N/A. No assumptions could be made about the N/A responses. However, upon analysis, it became evident that there were numerous N/A answers. Of special note are the six items wherein more than 50 percent of the responses were in the N/A columns. In trying to abbreviate the instrument, some of these questions about participation were combined and the N/A option was added, giving students the opportunity to either indicate a lack of participation or show that the question did not apply to them.

Students were asked to indicate their gender at the top of the page. There were 44 males and 50 females participating in the survey. The following instructions were given to students:

We are interested in how you feel about the activities, programs and counseling/advisement services at this high school. Please take a few minutes to complete this survey. If the question does not apply to you, please circle N/A. Thank you for your valuable input.

The survey (Appendix A) consisted of 21 questions. The first question read as follows: “Which of the following helped you feel good about being at
school?” The choices were *Elective Classes (optional classes)*; *Required Classes*; *After-school activities*; *A school-to-work class (Co-op)*; *Being an office or classroom aide*; *Other (specify)*; or *N/A*. The most frequent response was *Elective Classes (optional classes)* with 59 students choosing this option. The second most frequent responses were *After-school activities* with 41 students choosing this option.

The third most popular response was “Other” with 21 students specifying the following choices: friends (7 respondents); sports (2 respondents); nice teachers (2 respondents); band (2 respondents); the people; sports (manager of a team); teachers; AP classes with friends; school spirit; choir and drama; girls; graduating; sociality; and going home.

Eighteen respondents chose *Required classes*; sixteen students chose *Being an office or classroom aide*, and seven students chose *A school-to-work class (Co-op)*. Overall results from question 1 indicated that 92 percent of students chose some school activity that piqued their interest enough to say that it made them feel good about being at school, while eight students chose the *N/A* response.

Table 1 (p. 46) shows the results of this first question that gave students an opportunity to discuss what made them feel good about school. It was a question that allowed students to provide some subjective information.
**Table 1**

**Senior Survey – Question 1**

The bold numbers represent raw scores.

Male 44  Female 50

*WE ARE INTERESTED IN HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT THE ACTIVITIES, PROGRAMS AND COUNSELING/ADVISEMENT SERVICES AT THIS HIGH SCHOOL. PLEASE TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO COMPLETE THIS SURVEY. IF THE QUESTION DOES NOT APPLY TO YOU, PLEASE CIRCLE N/A. THANK YOU FOR YOUR VALUABLE INPUT.*

**School Activities**

1) Which of the following helped you feel good about being at school? (Check as many as apply.)

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>a. Elective classes (optional classes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>b. Required classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>c. After-school activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>d. A school-to-work class (Co-op)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>e. Being an office or classroom aide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>f. Other (specify) ____________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- friends (7)
- sports (2)
- nice teachers (2)
- band (2)
- the people
- sports (manager of a team)
- teachers
- AP classes with friends
- school spirit
- choir & drama
- girls
- graduating
- sociality
- going home

8 g. N/A
The next section, School Activities, inquired about student participation and utilized a seven-point Likert Scale. The first question, number 2, made the statement, *By joining a club(s), I felt that I belonged at this school.* It showed that the highest number of responses (22 students) chose option 4 (Agree). The mean response was 4.6 (Agree).

Question number 3, stated: *Being in a participatory class (i.e. Band, Chorus, Drama, Student Council, Yearbook) made me want to attend school.* The largest number of respondents (18 students) chose option 4 (Agree). The mean was 4.7 (Agree).

Several questions covered the area of sports participation. In response to the statement number 4, *Being on a sports team improved my self-esteem,* shows most students (15) choosing option 7, *Strongly Agree.* The mean was 5.3 (Agree). Question, number 5, *Being on a sports team encouraged me to do better academically,* showed 12 students choosing option 3 (*Disagree*) and 12 of them choosing option 4 (Agree). The mean response was at 4.4 (Agree).

The next category was School Programs. The first in this series, was intended to have seniors remember their state of mind when first coming to the high school. Question 6, *When I first entered high school as a freshman I felt nervous and unsure of myself,* showed option 3 (*Disagree*) as the most popular response, with 26 students responding. The mean response was 3.8 (*Disagree*).

Question number 7, *Attending Freshman Camp made my adjustment to high school easier,* shows the highest number of students (6) responding to
option 1, Strongly Disagree. The mean was 2.9 (Disagree). Note that 79 of 94 responded N/A.

Question 8 addressed the area of leadership at the high school. Being involved in Leadership Programs (i.e. Student Council, Cultural Diversity Awareness, Peer Facilitation) at school improved my self-esteem, showed the majority of responses (6) found in options 3 (Disagree) and 5 (Agree). The mean response was 4.2 (Agree).

Question 9 dealt with the possible benefits of high school support groups. The largest number of responses to Support groups at school helped me feel better about myself, was 6 choosing option 4 (Agree). The mean was 4.0 (Agree).

Question 10 in the School Programs category addressed the issue of students seeking after school assistance. School programs like the After School Help Program improved my confidence, had the most students (5) choosing option 4 (Agree). The mean was 3.7 (Disagree).

School Personnel Support Systems was the last major category investigated. As predicted, more students gave viable answers to this section, with fewer students choosing the N/A response based on the fact that every student had an acquaintance with adult support systems at this high school.

Question 11 in this series, a true/false question, stated, I feel that there is at least one adult at this school with whom I feel comfortable talking. Ninety students, or 97%, chose the True option.
There were several questions regarding the issue of support. Question number 12, was: *Every student needs some kind of a support system at school to be successful.* The highest number of responses (27) was for option 7 (*Strongly Agree*). The mean was 4.7 (*Agree*). Question number 13, *This school provides a great deal of support for students*, indicated that options 4 (*Agree*) and 5 (*Agree*) had the highest number of responses with 23 each. The mean for this question was 4.4 (*Agree*).

The next area of interest was to analyze how teachers approach students with the use of humor in the classroom. Question number 14 read: *When my teachers use humor in the classroom, I feel more comfortable participating.* The response for option 7, *Strongly Agree*, had the largest number of responses (44) with a mean of 6.0 (*Strongly Agree*).

Question 15, *I felt that I had ample opportunities during my high school career to meet with counseling personnel (Freshman and Senior Academic Advisors, the Freshman and Senior Academic Technicians, and Counselors)*, indicated that the most popular options were 4 (*Agree*) and 6 (*Strongly Agree*) with 19 respondents each. The mean response was 4.6 (*Agree*).

For question number 16, *I avoided discipline problems at school by discussing any conflicts I had with school personnel or a peer mediator*, the highest number of students (24) chose option 1, *Strongly Disagree*. The mean was 2.6 (*Strongly Disagree*).
The next question, number 17, dealt with the area of academic assistance towards the goal of graduation. It read: *My Senior Academic Advisor or the Senior Academic Technician in the office helped me make sure my credits were in order for graduation.* The most popular choice was option 7 (*Strongly Agree*) on the scale, with 24 students choosing this option. The mean response for this question was 5.3 (*Agree*).

Question number 18, *Having an Academic Advisor, or mentor, as one of my classroom teachers made it easier for me to approach that person for advice,* showed that the largest number of respondents (32) picked option 7 (*Strongly Agree*), with a mean of 5.4 (*Agree*).

Ten seniors chose option 4 (*Agree*) for question number 19, *If I received failing grades, my Senior Academic Advisor intervened in some manner which included encouragement and support.* The mean for this question was 4.4 (*Agree*).

Question number 20 read, *Based on the information my high school has provided me on colleges, technical schools, the military, and career opportunities, I have established post-high school plans for myself.* Twenty students chose option 3 (*Disagree*) as the highest number for this question. The mean showed a 4.3 score (*Agree*).

Descriptive statistical data such as the frequency of responses are used to present the findings of the study in Table 2 (p. 52-53) which shows responses to the 18 questions that utilized the seven-point Likert Scale, the mean responses,
and the response to the one true/false question. An asterisk with number one next to it indicates that there was one respondent who skipped that particular question.
### Table 2

**Frequency of Responses and Mean Responses**

Numbers 1-7 represent the continuum from *Strongly Disagree* at 1, with *Agree* at 4, to *Strongly Agree* at 7. *N/A* does not apply as a response. The numbers in parenthesis represent raw scores. Mean responses of the 94 participants (after removal of the N/A numbers) are indicated under the *Mean* column. *1* indicates there was one respondent who skipped this question.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) By joining a club(s), I felt that I belonged at this school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(13)</td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(10)</td>
<td>(14)</td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Being in a participatory class (i.e. Band, Chorus, Drama, Student Council, Yearbook) made me want to attend school.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(13)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Being on a sports team improved my self-esteem.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(8)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(15)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Being on a sports team encouraged me to do better academically.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
<td>(12)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>(9)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Programs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) When I first entered high school as a freshman I felt nervous and unsure of myself.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(26)</td>
<td>(24)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Attending Freshman Camp made my adjustment to high school easier.</td>
<td>*1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(79)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Being involved in Leadership Programs (i.e. Student Council, Cultural Diversity Awareness, Peer Facilitation) at school improved my self-esteem.</td>
<td>*1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(67)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Support groups at school helped me feel better about myself.</td>
<td>*1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) School programs like the After School Help Help Program improved my confidence.</td>
<td>*1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(75)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### School Personnel Support System

11) I feel that there is at least one adult at this school with whom I feel comfortable talking. *1  
   - True: 90  
   - False: 3  
   - %: 97  
   - %: 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 N/A</td>
<td>(5) (6) (12) (21) (14) (5) (27) (3)</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12) Every student needs some kind of a support system at school to be successful. *1  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 N/A  
   - (4) (4) (15) (23) (23) (14) (8) (2)

13) This school provides a great deal of support for students. *1  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 N/A  
   - (6) (6) (12) (19) (15) (19) (16) (1)

14) When my teachers use humor in the classroom, I feel more comfortable participating.  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 N/A  
   - (14) (7) (6) (5) (2) (1) (2) (57)

15) I felt that I had ample opportunities during my high school career to meet with counseling personnel (Freshman and Senior Academic Advisors, the Freshman and Senior Academic Technicians, and Counselors).  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 N/A  
   - (1) (7) (23) (10) (23) (24) (4) (5)

16.) I avoided discipline problems at school by discussing any conflicts I had with school personnel or a peer mediator.  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 N/A  
   - (1) (7) (23) (10) (23) (24) (4) (5)

17.) My Senior Academic Advisor or the Senior Academic Technician in the office helped me make sure my credits were in order for graduation.  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 N/A  
   - (1) (7) (23) (10) (23) (24) (4) (5)

18) Having an Academic Advisor, or mentor, as one of my classroom teachers made it easier for me to approach that person for advice.  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 N/A  
   - (1) (5) (5) (20) (8) (16) (32) (7)

19) If I received failing grades, my Senior Academic Advisor intervened in some manner which included encouragement and support.  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 N/A  
   - (3) (5) (4) (10) (5) (6) (8) (53)

20. Based on the information my high school has provided me on colleges, technical schools, the military, and career opportunities, I have established post-high school plans for myself.  
   - 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 N/A  
   - (2) (11) (20) (16) (18) (10) (12) (5)
Number twenty-one was an open-ended statement: *Please comment on strengths or areas of improvement for the Counseling/Advisement services at this school.* There were positive and negative comments and suggestions for improvement. These comments are listed in Table 3 (p. 55-57). All but one student surveyed made an attempt to answer every question.
Table 3

Question #21

21. Please comment on strengths or areas of improvement for the Counseling/Advisement Services at this school.

School Programs

--Strengths: Student Government does a really good job in making people feel school spirit (female)

--Through my high school years, band has made all my experiences more fun and enjoyable. I have not had any of the “typical” problems a high school student has. I would like to see more funding go towards our Arts Programs (band, choir, drama). (male)

School Activities

--I really enjoyed being involved in activities after school. (female)

--Clubs need to better inform members when meetings are and not just think they know when they are. (female)

School Personnel Support Systems

Positive comments

--Very good at informing the student body on their academic future. They keep you informed about your road to graduation. (male)

--They are good with students. They can meet with you any time. Good job! (male)

--There is no need for improvement. I think everyone is doing just fine. (male)

--I think it is great as it is. (male)

--Counselors are very helpful with my credits & grades. (male)

--They really seem to care about the students and need to stick with what they are doing. (male)

--You guys are doing a good job! Keep it up Boys!! (male)

--The freshman and senior advisors were a great help! (female)

--They do a good job. (female)

--The school does an all right job, but it’s probably like that because it’s hard with so many students. (female)

--When I had a problem at school, teachers intervened before any counselor/advisor did. (female)
Students to take more responsibility

--The resources are there, and the counselors are great. It's up to the students to utilize them. Maybe increased awareness could help. (male).

---I think an equilibrium has taken place. Counselors shouldn't do too much for the students because we need to learn to grow. (male)

--People need to be strong on their own. They shouldn't have people baby them like they are in high school. Don't let them use any excuses and they will pull through sooner or later. If not, well they are weak and the strong are the survivors! (male).

More one-on-one meetings – more personalized – more humor

----If individual meetings could be set up to talk with every student, even if they were very short, it might help. All the advisors/counselors were very nice and helpful throughout all of my high school. (male)

--I think we should have more opportunities to meet with them instead of trying to get passes and wait for us to be called up. (female)

--More one-on-one opportunities with counselors/advisors, not personal enough. (female)

--Get more personal with all students. Check upon them at least once a quarter not when they come to you. I also think school should be fun and not just for strict learning. Bring fun and humor in classes because the students get much more involved. (male)

--Could reach out and talk to the students to at least get acquainted with them. You feel more comfortable when a counselor or advisor knows who you are and tries to develop a friendship. (male)

--There needs to be more meetings with advisors...one on one meetings would be a plus! (female)

--Should have scheduled meetings with counselors during the year to discuss students concerns. (male)

--My advisor was not one of my teachers, I barely know who he is! (female)

--It's ok. Could be more in tune with students on a regular basis. (male)

--Stay available for one on one discussions about school and colleges. (male)

--As a sophomore and a junior advisors seemed very impersonal—just an opinion. (female)

--Needs to get to know all students a little better, more humor. But overall fairly good. (male)

More advertising of services – more accessibility

--I don't think many kids know that they can go to the counseling office for their problems, school related or not. (female)
Make it more accessible. I would have to take the initiative to go get help. A lot of people won't take the initiative that need help. (male)

Please make it more known to seniors to go to their counselors and when they should go. (female)

I think the people need to be more involved. (female)

The counseling department is good; however, many times it is hard to talk to someone right away. They always have too much to do. (female)

More counselors for a smaller number of students. (female)

Less time to wait. (male)

We need more counselors for problems rather than just scheduling. Who is a troubled kid supposed to go to if the counselors' office is closed for a week of registration? Have separate registrars and counselors. If I needed one I would probably not be able to get an appointment. (female)

**Academic advisement**

I think that you should be informed when it looks like you might be at the verge of failing a class by the teacher. (male)

More help keeping kids on track to graduate and keeping grades up. (male)

Talk more about universities instead of pushing community college. (female)

I think the second semester of your senior year is such a joke. It should be used to prepare you for college. They should go over stuff like class registration which myself and a few of my friends found to be a big hassle and if I had known what to expect it would have been a big help. (male)

**Other suggestions**

Skip the advisory session days and just hand the packet of information to students. (male)

To enforce the rules more (i.e. truancy, unexcused absences). (female)

Listen more to some of the parent’s advice as well. (female)

Better teachers means a better school. (male)

They need to take an updating class every 1-5 years to keep updated on current teen issues. (female)
Summary

The purpose of the study was to design guidelines to improve adolescent self-esteem, while avoiding at-risk behaviors, through adult support systems and programs at school. This was accomplished by investigating current literature and analyzing results from a survey of current high school seniors at an upper middle-class southwestern high school. The survey sought to get the high school student's perspective on the benefits of support services and whether these services encouraged him or her to have good self-esteem.

Current literature emphasized that schools need to provide support systems as early as possible to encourage student self-esteem and academic success while working as a team with parents and the community. In providing this support, educators need to be aware of gender issues and their effect on student motivation. From a societal point of view, instead of labeling students at risk, there appears to be a need to encourage resilience or promoting individuals to initiate positive changes for themselves regardless of the risks involved. Resilience entails learning how to problem solve, create relationships, and establish goals. Teachers can assist all students by offering support, respect, bolstering student self-esteem, and using humor in the classrooms. An especially
important aspect to providing support is through the mentoring process, or providing each student with an adult who will offer support and guidance. Mentoring programs have been proven to be successful and are becoming popular throughout the country.

School activities can assist adolescents in numerous ways. Research shows that drama and music programs allow students to feel better about themselves and may result in improved academics. Schools that offer community service programs see an increase in student self-esteem and responsibilities. In addition, when support groups and computer technology programs are offered at schools, students, especially those at risk, may begin to feel success, possibly for the first time. Schools and communities offer various programs to encourage youngsters to complete homework assignments and consequently improve their feelings about themselves. Such programs can expand feelings of confidence and competence in youngsters. There is also a relationship between student activities, self-esteem, gender and part-time employment. Although not all school activities can be clumped together in terms of positive effects or interest levels for all students, depending on the activity and gender, there are certain activities, which do promote self-esteem.

The senior survey from this study presented some valuable data. Tables 1, 2, and 3 in Chapter 4 show how students responded to the survey. Students stated that membership in clubs and certain participatory classes had positive effects. They felt that membership in sports programs not only improved their
self-esteem, but also, to a lesser degree encouraged them to do well academically. Survey results were consistent with the literature about the positive aspects of support groups.

The survey results supported the literature that students profit when they have support systems at school. Students felt that this school does provide assistance in numerous areas. Ninety-seven percent of the students admitted that there is at least one adult at the school with whom they feel comfortable communicating. The results overwhelmingly agreed with the literature that when teachers use humor in the classroom, everyone benefits. The majority of those students surveyed agreed that they believed that they had enough opportunities to meet with counseling personnel throughout their high school careers, and that staff members had been available to assist them with credit analysis to ensure they had met graduation requirements. Also, they concurred, for the most part, that staff members had done an adequate job of providing a variety of information for post-high school goals involving colleges, technical schools, the military and career opportunities. Many seniors stated that programs to support students are in place. Several felt students need to take more responsibility in pursuing them.

Conclusions

The research question to be answered was as follows: What is the content of guidelines to improve adolescent self-esteem, while avoiding at-risk behaviors,
through adult support systems and programs at school? Current literature shows the need for school programs and support systems for students. The senior survey results showed some agreement regarding this need. Respondents stated that there are some current programs in place to promote and improve self-esteem as evidenced by the fact that 14 out of the 18 questions in Table 2 had a mean of 4.0 (Agree) or greater.

The seniors who were surveyed reported that some of the programs make students feel good about being at school. There are numerous elective classes such as drama and music classes in which students can enroll beginning the freshman year continuing through the senior year. Students have the opportunity to be office or classroom aides. That experience can make students feel that they are contributing to the structure of the school. The school works closely with members of the community to offer school-to-work classes. The literature and students agree that these classes are beneficial for students. The school offers a myriad of opportunities for membership in clubs and sports programs for students. The survey results and literature review are unified in the conclusion that support groups contribute to promoting positive feelings for students. Most of the students felt that adult support is necessary at school. They reported that this support was available at this school with ample opportunities to meet with counselors and to receive encouragement from advisors or mentors. In addition, adults provided these students with information for post-high school planning. Overall, this school seems to be effective in its delivery services.
Recommendations

The literature review offered some novel suggestions for schools to implement. The senior survey, although overall positive, indicated some areas that could be improved. This was evidenced by questions that showed a mean score below 4.0 (Disagree) in Table 2 and the comments and suggestions from the open-ended question in Table 3. Input from all these sources has generated the following guidelines for improving adolescent self-esteem, while avoiding at-risk behaviors, through adult support systems and programs at school.

1. There should be more one-on-one meetings with advisors or counselors, even if they are short meetings.

2. Meetings with counselors and or advisors should be more personalized which would make students feel more comfortable.

3. An increase in the use of humor when advising and counseling students would make the school experience more fun.

4. An improved delivery system is suggested for meeting with students. One student believed that the use of passes should be eliminated. Students would like to reduce the time students are forced to wait for counselors by having specifically timed scheduled meetings. Currently students schedule appointments for some time within a 50-minute class time interval.

5. Advisory and counseling services could be routinely advertised through announcements and posters so those students who might not readily access routine services, would be reminded that assistance is available for academic and non-academic issues. Presently the biannual advisory sessions and beginning of the year support groups are on the school’s video announcements.

6. Students with serious issues need to be reminded that immediate help is readily available through numerous resources at this school.
7. During the peak times when counselors are assigned to locations throughout the campus working on registration and non-student related tasks, one counselor could be stationed in the office to help students with immediate needs. Currently counselors are located in the building and asked to return to the office for emergencies.

8. Have a smaller number of students assigned to each counselor to ensure more personalized attention.

9. Consistently assign students to advisors who are their classroom teachers so that they have an acquaintance with them.

10. Reassure students who are worried about graduation requirements that school personnel will help them stay on track for graduation.

11. One student felt that she needed more information on university rather than community college requirements. Although sheets with this information are disseminated at all grade levels several times a year, advisors and counselors should continue to offer this information when meeting with students.

12. Enhance student programs to promote high school adjustment before students enter school.

13. Initiate more at-risk programs to promote resiliency and self-sufficiency.


15. Augment music programs and increase the fine arts teaching staff to help increase student math and verbal SAT scores.

16. Intensify mediation programs for students to discuss conflicts with school personnel or trained peers in order to avoid discipline problems.

17. Consider new and improved programs to assist students with homework completion and better study habits. The literature suggested a homework hotline, and teachers being available to help via telephone, email or the Internet. It also discussed the success of a before school teacher-assisted homework program.

18. Encourage all teachers, staff members and administrators to be more consistent in enforcing school rules.
19. Make more of an effort to include parental input in decision making and goal setting for students. This would supplement the Site Council meetings which allow parents and community members as board members and participants to provide input to improve the school.

20. Have more technical programs available for non-college bound students.

21. Increase community relations and school programs to better prepare youngsters for the workplace.

22. Investigate Career Academies to teach students about interviewing and the work ethic.

23. Promote Career Days to teach youngsters about future career goals.

24. Expand computer technology programs at school to enhance student self-esteem and success.

25. Continue to survey students, faculty and parents to ensure that the best services possible are being offered to students.

26. Continue to have counselors attend workshops to better advise students.

As a result of some of these recommendations originating from the senior's input from the survey, it is necessary to make one last comment regarding Table 2 and the N/A responses that surfaced. Although no interpretation can be given to the N/A response, it is recommended that special attention be directed to the six items that had more than a 50 percent N/A marking. The reason for this is the possibility that programs may not be reaching sufficient numbers of students.

In conclusion, student perceptions, though not always consistent with actual reality, need to be solicited and acknowledged. Many of the student
suggestions for improvements are currently in place at this high school.

However, some students may not be aware of all of the services or may not fully comprehend the limitations of some of their suggestions for improvements.

According to student ratings in general, the school seems to be doing a good job of providing support services to help improve student self-esteem while reducing at-risk behaviors. On the other hand, there is room for improvement. Researchers are constantly producing new studies and their findings are always worth pursuing and considering. Current programs should continue to be evaluated to see if they remain valid, and modified if necessary.

All adults, especially those who work with youngsters, must be willing to make a commitment that they will continue to find the most effective support systems possible to help today's youth. Dedication to this goal is a necessity to ensure that society is preparing today's youth for the future. The youngsters of today are the leaders of tomorrow and need all the help they can get. It appears as though, and the literature review substantiates, that no man is an island. There is no doubt that support is an essential aspect in helping students achieve improved self-esteem.
REFERENCE LIST


APPENDIX A

SENIOR SURVEY
APPENDIX A

SENIOR SURVEY

Male ____ Female ____

WE ARE INTERESTED IN HOW YOU FEEL ABOUT THE ACTIVITIES, PROGRAMS AND COUNSELING/ADVISEMENT SERVICES AT THIS HIGH SCHOOL. PLEASE TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO COMPLETE THIS SURVEY. IF THE QUESTION DOES NOT APPLY TO YOU, PLEASE CIRCLE N/A. THANK YOU FOR YOUR VALUABLE INPUT.

School Activities

1) Which of the following helped you feel good about being at school? (Check as many as apply.)

___ a. Elective classes (optional classes)
___ b. Required classes
___ c. After-school activities
___ d. A school-to-work class (Co-op)
___ e. Being an office or classroom aide
___ f. Other (specify) __________________
___ g. N/A

2) By joining a club(s), I felt that I belonged at this school.

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<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
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3) Being in a participatory class (i.e. Band, Chorus, Drama, Student Council, Yearbook) made me want to attend school.

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4) Being on a sports team improved my self-esteem.

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5) Being on a sports team encouraged me to do better academically.

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School Programs

6) When I first entered high school as a freshman I felt nervous and unsure of myself.

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7) Attending Freshman Camp made my adjustment to high school easier.

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8) Being involved in Leadership Programs (i.e. Student Council, Cultural Diversity Awareness, Peer Facilitation) at school improved my self-esteem.

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9) Support groups at school helped me feel better about myself.

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10) School programs like the After School Help Program improved my confidence.

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School Personnel Support System

11) I feel that there is at least one adult at this school with whom I feel comfortable talking.

   True ____    False ____

12) Every student needs some kind of a support system at school to be successful.

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13) This school provides a great deal of support for students.

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14) When my teachers use humor in the classroom, I feel more comfortable participating.

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15) I felt that I had ample opportunities during my high school career to meet with counseling personnel (Freshman and Senior Academic Advisors, the Freshman and Senior Academic Technicians, and Counselors).

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16) I avoided discipline problems at school by discussing any conflicts I had with school personnel or a peer mediator.

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17) My Senior Academic Advisor or the Senior Academic Technician in the office helped me make sure my credits were in order for graduation.

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18) Having an Academic Advisor, or mentor, as one of my classroom teachers made it easier for me to approach that person for advice.

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19) If I received failing grades, my Senior Academic Advisor intervened in some manner which included encouragement and support.

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20) Based on the information my high school has provided me on colleges, technical schools, the military, and career opportunities, I have established post-high school plans for myself.

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21) Please comment on strengths or areas of improvement for the Counseling/Advisement Services at this school.