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Perspectives of Overage Graduates: Issues that Affected their Schooling

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PERSPECTIVES OF OVERAGE GRADUATES: ISSUES THAT AFFECTED THEIR SCHOOLING

A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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University of North Florida

A dissertation submitted to the Department of Leadership, School Counseling, & Sports Management in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES

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Dedication

To the individuals that never stopped believing in me:

To my husband Melvin. Thank you for believing in me more than I believe in myself. In those moments of frustration and defeat, you have always been my biggest cheerleader, companion, and friend. There aren’t enough words to express the man you are and have been for me along this journey. To my mom and dad for instilling in me the courage to take risks and do things I think I cannot. To my best friend Shay for always making me feel like a million bucks, flaws and all. To all of my coaches and mentors that pushed me to be the best me no matter the circumstances.

Thank you
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“I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted”- Job 42:2. I started this journey as a single woman and I ended this journey a wife. Throughout the life changing events, my husband has been my rock from start to finish. Thank you for being understanding during the long nights of reading, writing, and research. On days when life demands were overwhelming, thank you for being my safe place and reminding me that I am capable. You are my sunshine.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Linda Skrla who motivated me with her genius and calm reassuring demeanor. I appreciate your willingness to take me as a doctoral candidate when I did not have a chair in the midst of your relocation to Florida. You are truly admirable and without your guidance and support, this dissertation would not have been a possible feat.

To my external committee member Dr. Sylvia Johnson, words cannot express what your kindness, mentorship, and guidance have meant to me. It was most certainly divine appointment. You are brilliant and an inspiration to so many and it is an honor to know you. I would also like to thank my committee member Dr. David Hoppey whose contributions to my dissertation journey have been remarkable, providing balance and teaching me how to be reflective. To my committee member Dr. Anne Swanson, thank you not only for your contributions, but also for the support, encouragement, and opportunities to grow you have extended to me over the years. Thank you coach Tommy Silas for everything, past, present, and future.

Lastly, I would like to give a special thanks to the University of North Florida for allowing me the opportunity to pursue what is essentially my life’s work. This journey has been crucial to my pursuit of educational distinction and I will cherish it forever.
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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the perspectives of overage graduates who completed years of schooling as an overage student. The following research question guided this inquiry: From the perspective of graduates who were two-or-three years overage for grade, what social, emotional, academic or other issues affected their schooling? Sequential qualitative interviewing of four participants that completed school overage for grade provided data for this study. The data was analyzed with the use of the constant comparative method and synthesized into emergent themes.

The participants reported their perceptions in the context of four specific areas: Interactions with peers, teachers, and administration during their years of schooling; Interactions with family during their years of schooling; description of the times they were retained in grade; a time they may have wanted to drop out of school; description of any other occurrences of events they wanted to share in light of the topic being overage for grade. The findings provided narrative insight into what it was like to experience schooling two or more years overage for grade. There is a lack of research in the area of overage students; therefore, this study seeks to help fill some of the gaps in current research.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This study explores the lived experiences of students who were two to three years behind their peers during their years of schooling with an emphasis on varying issues participants may have had as a result of being overage for grade. I am seeking to get an understanding of those experiences in a manner that can positively contribute to the literature on overage students, grade retention, and school dropouts. The basis, or underlying foundation of my interests in this study reside in the varying experiences I have had over the course of seven years working with students that have been two or more years behind their peers while obtaining an education. I have been able to view overage students from three differing points of view; as a teacher, as an instructional coach, and as a school administrator. Each provided a point of interest that contributed to the problem and the purpose of this study.

Background and Related Literature Summary

The dropout crisis is a continuing issue in American education and communities suffer because of it (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). For instance, students living in poor communities are more likely to have dropouts as friends, which increases the likelihood of dropping out of school thus producing high levels of joblessness, concentrated levels of crime, and family instability. Teachers, students, and administrators are blamed for the number of students who consistently fail to complete high school. When schools lack the tools, they need to properly prepare students for standardized assessments as they deal with the demand to improve academic performance, students suffer (Balfanz & Letgers 2004; Roderick 1994; Stone & Engel, 2004). Studies that have focused on the reasons students drop out shows that overage students face a significant deficit in opportunities compared to those who academically and socially develop to their potential. The issue of school dropouts should not be ignored by educators and societal policy
makers because students that fail to complete school are more likely to live in poverty, rely on public assistance, engage in crime, and generate other social costs (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015; Belfield & Levin, 2007).

The findings in the literature collectively indicate dropout causes to be defined and indicated in a student’s lack of engagement and motivation to succeed (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013). Discipline violation, poor behavior decisions, intrinsic factors that divert a student’s attention from school, and lack of academic progress are identified as factors that significantly impact school completion.

The influences that make a student decide to drop out have been identified in the review of literature citing events that occur in a student’s developmental history, experiences, and life circumstances (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002). A systematic review of seventeen studies examining dropping out of high school prior to graduation demonstrates that grade retention is one of the most powerful predictors of dropout status. Students retained two or more grades are more likely than their non-retained peers to drop out. If a multiple retainee is going to be reengaged, in hopes of graduating, it must happen long before high school. When a student fails to complete a grade, or multiple grades, they are five times more likely to discontinue their grade school education (Tuck, 1989).

A student retained in multiple grades becomes overage for grade. Studies have indicated that many students fall behind well before they reach high school and often before they reach middle school. This decision to retain children was often thought to be a remediation method for students who did not reach proficiency in the standard skills. However, early retention has caused disadvantages for children including low achievement, aggression, and the need for substantial
additional services after the decision to retain has been made (Hong, G., & Yu, B., 2007; Jimerson, 2007)

One such act that contributed to this notion is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In the year 2001, the NCLB Act was signed into law requiring states to develop basic skills assessments to establish measurable goals in order for schools to receive federal funding. If a student did not reach the academic standard, they were placed in at risk status for retention (Powell, 2010). If a student failed to master standards on their grade level, they were retained in an attempt to gain skills they may have missed. However, use of grade retention as a means to ‘capture prerequisite skills’, is not an adequate nor sufficient way to help a student recover who has fallen behind. Evidence from the more significant platform of research on grade retention cites more negative than positive results of this practice (Shepard & Lee, 1990). Presently, based on ESSA, the decision to retain a student is state specific and Florida’s legislation requires students not reading proficiently by the end of third grade to be retained.

The impact that overage students may have on the culture of a regular comprehensive grade school environment have been reported as negative in terms of their social interactions with peers and disruption of instruction (Reed, 1998). Teachers believe they need additional assistance to accommodate students that are two or more years overage for grade. These students become maladjusted in the traditional schooling environment and experience factors that affect their self-esteem, sense of belonging, and ambition (Finnan & Kombe, 2011; Jimmerson, 2001; Roderick, 1994). When a student becomes older than their peers due to retention, discouragement and difficulties may cause major disturbances in their motivation to keep working towards promotion. Furthermore, when a student becomes overage there is some bearing on their position in social groups as they struggle to identify how and where to fit in. Students that are comparatively older
than their peers in a comprehensive schooling environment are faced with the dilemma of
disguising their maturity in order to fit in or totally disengaging from the learning environment
with hopes they will be unnoticed (Pierson & Connell, 1992). Within the context of being
overage, future educational outcomes concerning exposure to factors unrelated to academia play
a significant role in a student’s personal development.

The social and emotional consequences of grade retention are quite scattered in the
literature. Most of the studies on grade retention provide literature on the adverse effects of
retention on a student’s self-perception, and social emotional coping. Not many studies
thoroughly provide evidence that there are concrete social emotional consequences that go
beyond the schooling experience.

Problem Statement

Overage students that are two to three grade levels behind have a perceived negative
impact on the environment of a primary comprehensive school and because of that, they lack the
motivation to engage in that setting (Balfanz & Letgers, 2004; Reed, 1998; Wells, 1989). When
students struggle in elementary and middle grades, the likelihood that they will drop out in or
before high school increases dramatically (Finnan & Kombe, 2011). Not enough is known from
the perspectives of the students that are the subject of this study. The purpose of this qualitative
study was to gather information based on the experiences of the participants who were considered
overage for grade.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to get an understanding from the perspective of
high school graduates who were two-or-three years overage for grade. With this lens, I will seek
to gather social, emotional, academic or other issues that may have affected their schooling. The
focus is on issues related to age for grade because the age of a student and grade level have a strong correlation in terms of placement and is ultimately what defines an overage student; they are older than their peers. The area of concern addressed in the study will focus on the interviewee as the primary source of information regarding possible social and emotional issues that may have affected their educational experience. My intentions were to gather experiences and perceptions that these participants have concerning being over-age for grade and any other related information that evolves during the process.

**Significance**

Through acknowledgment of the problem and articulation of participants’ experiences, results of the study can better inform the way overage students are educated, and how they engage in the learning environment during their years of schooling. The results of the study will be able to better inform policy makers, school districts, communities, school administrators, and educators on implications of grade retention with emphasis on what it means for the likelihood of a student who has experienced receiving an education while being years behind their peers. This study also has the potential to reveal any issues involving equity in the classroom, issues of race, and feelings of oppression that may exist. The significance of this research will also help practitioners and researchers to design more effective programs aimed at helping educators to understand the implications of grade retention, more specifically multi-grade retention, and inform best practices for educating students that may be two or more years overage for grade.

**Research Question**

From the perspective of graduates who were two-or-three years overage for grade, what social, emotional, academic or other issues affected their schooling?

Key terms: Dropout, Overage, Grade Retention, Social-emotional
Definitions

School dropout is defined as a social failure in keeping students in schools (Keum, 2008; Youngsik, Hyun, & Ssangcheol, 2018). Students that become overage attain greater potential for dropping out of school. Overage is defined as the description of a student that is over traditional school age for his or her grade level. Overage students are older than the official school-age range for the educational program in which they are enrolled. This group of students are also classified as students who have been retained.

Grade retention is the practice of enforcing the requirement to have a student repeat a particular grade (Duggan, 2014; Knevals, 2014) and a retainee is defined as a student who fails to meet the requirements of a specific grade (Bonvin, Bless, Schuepbach, 2008). Evidence from the larger body of research on grade retention is almost uniformly negative and according to the article "Grade Retention: Achievement and Mental Health Outcomes," retained students are more likely to display troubles with social and emotional adjustment. Social and emotional well-being is defined as allowing individuals to realize their full potential, develop self-esteem, internalize positive self-concept, and have the ability to cope with the stresses of life, work productively, and make meaningful contributions to their communities. Early childhood experiences have lasting, measurable consequences later in life; therefore, fostering emotional well-being from the earliest stages of life helps build a foundation for overall health and well-being (U.S. Department of health and human services, 2018).

Design of Study

The design of this study was qualitative with face to face interviewing that allowed me to capture the perceptions and experiences of the participants. Observation of their nonverbal communication also provided a more in depth understanding of the data as well as valuable
insight into the research study. The in depth phenomenologically based interviews were conducted in a three series sequence to explore a deeper meaning of participants’ experiences in the context of their lives (Seidman, 2013, p. 20). This method allows both the interviewer and the participant to explore those experiences by providing their viewpoint into realistic context.

**Participants**

In order to properly conduct research that is fitting for this qualitative study, participants were identified. Based on the nature of the research, the candidates needed to be high school graduates that have experienced schooling as an overage student in a comprehensive K-12 environment. The study contained a small number of participants due to the amount of information that needed to be collected via interview and then transcribed for analysis. Selection of the participants was based on their suitability to the chosen criteria and their understanding of the key characteristics involved in the study.

**Data Collection Methods**

Over a period of four months, semi-structured, private interviews were conducted. Four previously selected graduates participated in the interviews. The data was collected via audio recording of sequential in-depth interviews using a method that allowed for both description and reflection by the participant. The questions were primarily open-ended allowing the interviewee to reconstruct their lived experiences surrounding possible complex issues that emerged throughout the process. The three separate interviews were conducted; to provide the opportunity to focus on the participant’s life history; to gather concrete details about the participant’s experience; and to allow the participant to reflect on the meaning of their experiences (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2012; Seidman, 2013).
Providing the participant an opportunity to focus on their life history allowed them to put their experiences into context having them tell as much as they could recall about their years of schooling. The gathering of details in the interview segment allowed the participant to describe their lived experiences based on their years as an overage student. Lastly the intellectual and emotional connections between present day circumstances and life were explored. Interview questions provided an open outlet to obtain vivid meaning through transparency.

Data Analysis

Through my analysis of the qualitative data, I sought to find trends regarding the participants’ overage experiences, both past and present. Recordings, and anecdotal notes, were also analyzed in the process. The constant comparative method guided me through interpretation of the data while discovering themes. I also employed the constant comparison analysis to compare and interpret information as it emerged during the data analysis phase of the research process. Recordings were transcribed and coded to adequately prepare for analysis. Theming and synthesis allowed me to gather and create participant codes from multiple sources and present findings coherently. Synthesis was a crucial element in presenting the findings of the study in an organized manner.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Establishing trustworthiness was imperative to presenting sufficiently secure findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). If the findings are meant to influence social change and be impactful to social policy, they must be facilitated with careful attention to conceptualization, analysis, and interpretation. According to Merriam (1998) the methods employed to obtain understanding are pertinent to verifying that the research study’s findings were credible, transferable, confirmable,
and dependable. I sought to establish authenticity in the construction of the questions asked during the series of interviews and the questioning was aligned to any underlying assumptions.

The three series interview method helped me to enhance the dependability and confirmability of the research due to its process consistency. The interview structure possessed considerable benefits in establishing credibility with participants meaning making and identification of critical self-views. My position as researcher brings credibility as well because I first conducted a critical self-reflection protocol pinpointing aspects that may affect investigation. Only then was I able to use my skills to minimize distortion.

**Chapter Summary**

Students that drop out of school could negatively impact communities due to their lack of resources society deems necessary to make a living in America. Background and related literature collectively indicate that the students who are retained and become overage for grade face many challenges in pursuit of an education. Indications that a student may drop out of school become evident well before a student reaches the ninth grade. Grade retention hinders a student’s progress and future educational outcomes are bleak. In the literature, social and emotional consequences are much more prevalent among retained students in relation to their peers (Hughes et. al., 2017).

The problem is that students who are two to three years overage for grade have a perceived negative impact on the comprehensive classroom environment. When they struggle in the elementary and middle grades the chances that they will drop out increases dramatically. There is not enough literature from the perspective of overage students to indicate what it means to live this experience of failure and how they may have been affected by being overage for grade during their years of schooling.
The purpose of the study is to gather firsthand accounts from participants who experienced their years of schooling as overage students and were able to successfully graduate from high school against the odds. The perceptions of the participants will contribute to the larger body of research on grade retention, overage student experiences, and school dropout. With acknowledgement of the problem results of the study could also serve to inform policy in education.

I used reflexivity in order to present my stance as an individual in relation to my research and possible biases. I have taught overage students, served as an instructional coach at a school for overage students and provided oversight of instruction as assistant principal of overage students, but I now seek to know more about their personal experiences. The methods I used to gather valuable research will involve sequential interviewing and other use of resources such as journal to gather participants’ non-verbal data. The design of the study is qualitative, and the participants are students who have completed school, but were overage for grade during their years of schooling in K-12. Data collected was transcribed and analyzed to interpret participant responses. Theming and synthesis helped me to code the data as it unfolded. Establishment of trustworthiness and credibility will secure the rigor and relevance of the research.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

In the review of literature, the element of school dropout is addressed, specifically identifying the varying issues of why a student may decide to leave school. When an event occurs causing a student to repeat a grade once or multiple times, it can create adverse experiences in their educational journey that contribute to factors of disengagement. The overarching issue with grade retention is its contribution to school dropout. Background review and literature on this subject will be covered addressing the definition of dropout, issues with and impact of school dropouts, and factors that may cause a student to eventually drop out. The literature will then define grade retention and review the critical components of the literature on the NCLB, ESSA, and the educational outcomes of students who have been retained. In the final section of the review, overage is defined, and the literature also identifies what it means for a student to be overage for grade, how a student becomes overage, and its possible social-emotional outcomes. The background reviews how a student becomes overage, the relationship between being overage and becoming a school dropout, how grade retention results in a student being overage for grade and social and emotional factors as consequences of grade retention.

Dropout Crisis

The economic impact of students who fail to complete high school and secure stable employment is staggering. Based on calculations made by the Alliance for Excellent Education, high school dropouts are nearly three times more likely to be unemployed than college graduates. Even when employed, high school dropouts earn about $8,000 a year less than high school graduates and approximately $26,500 a year less than college graduates (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2020). While the data on the education attainment of inmates is scanty, a survey
completed in 2004 by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics found that of the 67 percent of inmates in America’s state prisons, 56 percent of federal inmates, and 69 percent of inmates in local jails are high school dropouts (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2020).

According to the Alliance for Educational Excellence, the disparity that exists between yearly federal spending on students and inmates is staggering: the national average for educating a student is $12,643 annually, while the annual state average cost to house an inmate is more than double that amount, at $28,323. That means if the nation decided to make the same investment in schools as it does in jails and prisons, the return would possibly produce decreased levels of criminal activity and incarceration as well as provide significant impacts for individuals and the nation (DeBaun & Roc, 2013).

The Alliance for excellent education article Well and Well-Off: Decreasing Medicaid and Health-Care Costs by Increasing Educational Attainment by DeBaun & Roc states the following concerning the economic impact of dropouts:

High school dropouts are also generally less healthy, require more medical care, and die earlier. Cutting the number of high school dropouts in half nationally would save $7.3 billion in annual Medicaid spending. When projected savings are added to society through improved productivity at work, decreased health problems, and the freedom from pain and suffering caused by illness and disease, you get even higher benefits: Nearly $12 billion in heart disease-related savings, $11.9 billion in obesity related savings, $6.4 billion in alcoholism-related savings, and $8.9 billion in smoking-related savings. On the other hand, ensuring that more students graduate from high school with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college and career would have tremendous benefits for the national economy. In fact, increasing the national high school graduation rate to 90 percent for just
one high school class would create as many as 65,700 new jobs and boost the national economy by as much as $10.9 billion. The nation would also see increases in home and automobile sales of as much as $16.8 billion and $877 million, respectively, and an annual increase in federal and state tax revenues of as much as $1.3 billion and $661 million, respectively. (p.5)

It is believed that without system reform, the nation’s economic future could be threatened; dropouts and undereducated graduates will eventually become the poorly educated workers of tomorrow and will also struggle to find jobs to support their families (National Center for Dropout Prevention, 2020). Larger numbers of dropouts will make it difficult for economies to sustain businesses and spending on social programs and the criminal justice system threaten to drain state and federal funds.

Students who do not graduate from high school face many negative consequences, such as higher rates of incarceration, lower lifetime income, poor health, and little to no civic engagement (Rath & Laferriere, 2012). Each year’s class of dropouts will cost the country over $200 billion during their lifetimes in lost earnings and unrealized tax revenue (Catterall, 1985). According to Thorstensen (2004), The estimated tax revenue loss from every male between the ages of 25 and 34 years of age who did not complete high school would be approximately $944 billion, with cost increases to public welfare and crime at $24 billion (Thorstensen, 2004). Students that come from low-income families have a dropout rate of 10% and students that come from middle income families have a dropout rate of 5.2%, and only 1.6% of students from high-income families dropout. (NCES, 2002). A cost of $10,038 for after-school programs produces benefits of $89,000 to $129,000 per participant (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2003d).
Although 9th grade has been identified as the threshold for dropping out, indicators (ie. grade retention, lack of engagement, attendance etc.) that a student will drop out of school can be identified as early as third grade. Middle school students who have been retained two or more grades and become overage eventually drop out (Koenig, Hausner, National Academic Press, National Research Council, National Academy of Education, 2010; Reed, 1998; Wells 1989).

Hiding the truth about dropout statistics will not do anything to support getting students back on track. There is also the question of what good will having a high school diploma do in present-day society? Economically, there is an overarching agreeance that there needs to be a shift in the paradigm from allowing some kids to drop out to recognizing that a high school diploma is now the bar (Leal, 2015). Student academic success protects against future negative consequences such as unemployment and prolonged dependence on social services (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007; Barile, Donohue, Anthony, Baker, Weaver, & Henrich, 2012).

The social and economic consequences such as high unemployment, heightened crime, high mobility, and lack of support services that are associated with a student who drops out of school highlight the relevance and importance of further preventing students from falling behind in school and being labeled at risk. Children who are retained have a higher incidence of drop out (Alexander, Entwisle & Dauber, 2003; Bowers, 2010; Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, and Heinrich, 2006; Grissom & Shepard, 1989; Roderick, 1994; Rumberger, 1995). Retained students can be two to eleven times more likely to drop out of high school than be promoted (Rumberger, 1995). Students that are retained and become overage for grade possibly face a significant hinderance to their self-esteem and educational trajectory beyond the middle school years (Hill & Weiss, 2005).
A continuing issue in education is the need to decrease the dropout rates for students (Diorio, 2015; Reed, 1998). The teachers, students, and administrators are often blamed for the dropout crisis that communities face. The increase in academic standards posed by legislation such as No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act has left many students vulnerable to grade retention and eventual drop out. The blame cannot be solely placed on schools because there are far too many under-resourced, economically and racially segregated schools that lack the tools they need to meet raised academic standards. Schools were left to meet the basic needs of students living in poverty and failed to satisfy expectations of state standards (Balfanz and Letgers 2004; Roderick 1994; Stone and Engel, 2004).

The negative impact of school dropouts both individually and socially is almost universally acknowledged. Studies of school dropout have found that students who drop out of high school lose opportunities, both educationally and socially to develop their potential, talent, and capability (Belfield & Levin, 2007; Rumberger, 2011). Failure to complete high school can result in severe economic and social problems. Therefore, the issue of school dropout should be of grave concern for educators, policymakers, and the public (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015, p. 205).

Understanding why students drop out of school on a national scale is quite complicated but as a whole findings consider drop out causes to be operationally defined and specifically addressed in a student's lack of motivation and disengagement (Jordan et.al., 1994; Watt & Roessingh, 1994). One such study, "Understanding Why Students Drop Out of High School," describes dropouts in the context of three realms; pushed out, pulled out, or falling out of school. A student being pushed out is defined in the context of an adverse situation that occurs in the school environment that leads to consequences such as long-term suspension, expulsion or placement in an alternative setting due to violation of discipline policies or poor behavior decisions. Students are regarded as
pulled out when extrinsic factors divert them from school completion such as tending to family matters and other environmental situations unrelated to school. Lastly, students defined as falling out of school are those that show significant lag in academic progress and schoolwork and become disillusioned with school completion (Doll et. al., 2013).

The influence of factors that cause students to be pushed out has grown substantially since the 1950's and 1960's where students were primarily pulled out based on pregnancy, marriage, and employment. According to a study conducted to find new push factors, students reported teacher-student relationship factors substantially higher in school problems, which means that lack of student connection with teacher drastically changes the student’s willingness to engage and stay in school. Without stating general reasons why this may have been the issue, it could also contribute to student fallout. Factors of falling out of school, on the other hand, cannot be directly attributed to the student nor school as the primary agent. Circumstances related to falling out exist that the school nor student can remediate, which results in a gradual loss of connection to school (Doll et. al., 2013; Watt & Roessingh, 1994).

Many researchers on the topic of dropouts have examined and identified the multiple influences on achievement trajectories and what makes a student decide to drop out (Rumberger, 1995). It has been suggested that dropping out just doesn't happen suddenly it is influenced by events that have occurred in one's developmental history (e.g., early family experience, home environment, individual characteristics), educational experiences, and current circumstances (Jimerson, Egeland, Sroufe, & Carlson, 2000). Longitudinal research also suggests that student drop out is a developmental process, not a sudden occurrence (Jimerson et al., 2002).
No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2001), a United States act of congress reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1965) which continued to set high standards and established measurable goals that were believed to improve individual outcomes in education (Klein, 2015). The Act required states to develop assessments in basic skills. For states to receive federal school funding, they had to give the created assessments to all students at select grade levels. It also included provisions that applied to disadvantaged students. The implementation of this act and the mandates were of great concern upon its initiation (Powell, 2010).

NCLB strengthened Title I accountability that required states to implement systems covering all public schools and public school students which required annual testing for grades three through eight. The act also highlighted President Bush’s unequivocal commitment to ensure every child can read. The Act was implemented to enhance educational statistics but for children that were deemed not ready or not measuring up in the grade were placed at risk for being in the retention pool. In that case many students were indeed “left behind” because they could not meet the expectations of the standardized assessments and held back in grade.

“It is paradoxical that more children have been ‘left behind’ since NCLB was passed than before” (Jimerson, et al, 2006 p. 86). During the NCLB era, AYP was paramount and the notion that retained students would make greater progress the year after their retention placed greater emphasis on the practice of retention (Peterson, DeGracie, & Ayabe, 1987; Alexander et. al., 1994).

ESSA was the reauthorization of NCLB. The purpose of ESSA is to ensure public schools provide a quality education for all students. ESSA provides state more autonomy in deciding how schools will account for student achievement which includes the achievement of disadvantaged students,
students in poverty, minorities, students with disabilities, and students with limited English language skills (Edgerton, 2019). ESSA also allows states to decide education plans for their schools within the guidelines set by the federal government. The law also allows parents the chance to weigh in on the decided plans.

Sixteen states and the District of Columbia have mandatory laws for students that fail to meet proficiency standards (Alvarez, 2017). In 2003, the first year Florida’s law was implemented, 21,799 third graders were retained for scoring below proficiency on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). According to the Education Commission of the States: Unless exceptions are made, students most likely to suffer from these laws are students of color, students living in poverty, English language learners, and students with special needs. What this mandatory retention law means for students who may have already been retained prior to third grade, and do not meet the criteria for good cause exemption, is they have fallen behind their peers by two grade levels. Recovery from such a setback is bleak and research suggests that a student that is two or more grades behind their peers have a ten percent chance of graduating from high school (Hauser & Koenig, 2010; Rath & Laferriere, (2012).

**Grade Retention and Overage Students**

Grade retention is one of the most significant opponents that overage students face, and research shows that retention may not be an effective way to remediate poor school performance (Roderick, 1994). Retention is the practice of enforcing the requirement to have a student repeat a grade (Duggan, 2014). One of the most distressing consequences of grade retention is its significantly high correlation to subsequent high school dropout (Powell, 2010). Grade retention was often used as a means to help raise educational standards. The assumption held that by
catching a student up on prerequisite skills, a student will be less at risk for failure when they move on to the next grade (Shepard & Lee, 1990).

On the contrary, evidence from the larger body of research on grade retention is almost uniformly negative. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 1995) reported that students who are retained have almost double the rate of dropouts who have never been retained, and males were two thirds more likely to be retained than females. Retention is also a costly endeavor with estimated billions of dollars annually to pay for the extra year of schooling (Anderson et. al., 2003; West, 2012). According to the article What’s Wrong with this Picture, “The financial rolls of schools with “grade retention” as an intervention costs the United states approximately $18 billion per year” (Xia & Glennie, 2005c). It also states that students of color were more likely to be retained which was the case in Florida’s test-based promotion policy (Greene & Winters, 2009), a policy stemming from NCLB that later gained momentum in a number of states.

Research concerning the determinants of grade retention is underdeveloped but there is some indication that students that are low achieving or have learning difficulties are at a much higher risk of being retained (Alexander et. al., 1994; Cadigan, Entwisle, Alexander, & Pallas, 1988). The decision to retain students based on standardized achievement assessments is one of the most controversial policies in education today.

"Dropping out of school is not a sudden act" (Rath et al., 2012). The most dramatic indicator of the standards raising movement is the rise in the proportion of students who are overage for grade (Diorio, 2015; Roderick, 1994). Many 9th graders have to repeat a grade to regain status based on the lack of special education services or possessing math and reading skills that are below the 7th-grade level. One of the most consistent findings in research conducted on
school dropouts is that students who eventually drop out of school are more likely than graduates to be overage for grade or to have been retained in a grade before high school (Roderick, 1994).

In Melissa Roderick's (1994) study titled "Grade Retention and School Dropout: Investigating the Association," the goal of the research was to determine whether grade retention may influence school dropouts because it makes students overage for grade. The study highlights the shift away from social promotion to the movement to raise standards in schools initiated with the 1983 publication of A Nation at Risk by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. The findings indicate that repeating a grade was associated with a significant increase in dropping out of school (Andrew, 2014). For students that tend to struggle and get retained in the elementary and middle grades, the likelihood that they will drop out once they reach the high school grades increases dramatically (Finnan & Kombe, 2011).

Research shows that many students begin to fall off the path for graduation at the beginning of adolescence and the exhibited behavior that often leads to dropping out becomes evident in middle school (Balfanz & Letgers, 2006; Rath et al. 2012; Reed, 1998). Retention rates increased as a result of standards-based reform in the 1980's and the wake of No Child Left Behind (Balfanz & Letgers 2004; Roderick 1994; West, 2012). There is a substantial percentage of students who leave school without obtaining a high school diploma which is a major concern for educators, policymakers, and society (Hughes, Cao, West, S, Allee, Smith, & Cerda, 2017).

Middle school students who have been retained in two or more grades and become overage eventually drop out (Reed, 1998; Wells, 1989). If a student is retained in one grade, the student's chances of dropping out may increase by 40 to 50 percent, and students who are retained two or more in grades may have a 90 percent greater chance of dropping out of school (Bachman,
Green, & Wirtanen, 1971; Massachusetts Advocacy Center, 1988; Stout and Christenson, 1999). Future dropouts can be identified based on the variables of attendance, behavior, retention, and failure of math and English courses (Jimerson 2001; Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1999; Stout & Christenson, 1999; Rath et al. 2012;). Many of the students identified as overage, disengaged, and possible dropouts have been struggling with disengagement in the school setting for three years or more.

Reed (1998), conducted a study to determine the impact of overage students in the middle school environment. The study collected quantitative and qualitative data answering (1) the extent of the problem of overage middle school students; (2) the impact that the problem had on schools; (3) what schools are doing about the problem; (4) effective strategies for all middle schools. Four groups of educators were surveyed with a Likert scale questionnaire to determine their perceptions of the impact of overage students on schools. The surveys were completed and returned by 183 teachers, 44 counselors, 24 principals, and 7 central office staff.

In the findings, teachers reported that overage students can have a negative impact on social interactions, teacher classroom management, teacher instruction, and the other students in the class (Reed, 1998). Counselors included in the study also reported negative impacts on social interactions and younger students. Principals noted overage students having an impact on allocation of funding, test scores, students’ attitudes, peer relations, school climate, discipline, staffing, and summer school. Teachers in the study stated that they need additional assistance to accommodate overage students and to provide them effective instruction. Overall the impact of overage students has the potential for having an adverse effect on school districts, the school, and students within the classroom setting. The National Education Association reports that a retained student is worse off on all measures of personal adjustment, self-perception, and psychological...
adjustment. Attendance then becomes an issue based on the student's self-dismissal and choice to disengage from the educational environment.

Janosz et al. (2000), conducted a typology cluster analysis with two longitudinal samples of middle school students. The student participants in the study completed a Social Inventory Questionnaire to predict the different types of dropouts. Based on the data, the eventual dropouts were split into four category types. The quiet dropouts were those who had no misbehavior problems, but achievement grades were low. The disengaged dropouts were students who had a low commitment to school and moderate misbehavior problems. Low achiever dropouts had very high levels of misbehavior and failing grades. Lastly, the maladjusted dropout had very high levels of misbehavior and low commitment. The results of the study indicated the quiet and maladjusted dropouts accounted for 77% to 85% of those students who drop out of school (Janosez et al, 2000). Considering the statistics of the varying types of students that drop out, grade retention is found to be one of the most powerful predictors of a high school dropout if they are retained two or more times before the eleventh grade (Jimmerson, 1999).

Researcher Kathy D. Tuck (1989) found that students that were retained two times or more were more likely than their non-retained peers to drop out of high school. The study also found that 78% of students who dropped out of school had been retained in elementary school, reporting feelings of alienation and isolation within the classroom climate and school environments. Tuck (1989) concluded that viewing dropouts in that manner may be the result of a prolonged experience of failure in school and alienation. She also reports that interventions to capture a student that may drop out must begin before the high school years.

Students that have been retained multiple times and extract themselves from the learning environment become at risk. The chances that student will discontinue their educational journey
increases dramatically. The National Center for Educational Statistics (1992) evaluated at-risk students within the National Educational Longitudinal Study of a 1988 data set. The research found that students who failed to complete a grade or were retained early in grade school (kindergarten through fourth grade) were nearly five times more likely to drop out of school between the 8th and 10th grades compared to students who had not been retained. Students who repeated a later grade (fifth through eighth grade), were almost 11 times more likely to drop out between the grades of 8th and 10th in comparison to students who had not repeated a grade. Even after considering a host of early risk factors (e.g., family structure, parent involvement, age, mobility, prior achievement, absences, ethnicity, parental literacy), retention in early grades continues to be a dominant risk factor of later drop out.

Similarly, Roderick (1994) discovers that students who are retained in grades kindergarten through eighth grade in an urban school system are twice as likely to drop out in comparison to their non-retained peers. She also discussed how being overage for grade during adolescence is a significant factor in high dropout probabilities among retained students. Reflecting upon outcomes associated with grade retention, Dawson (1998b) concluded "... it could be said, that we've won the battle but lost the war (p. 21).” In sum, educational professionals, researchers, parents, and policymakers would be doing a disservice if they were to overlook the implications of the research that demonstrates the strong association between grade retention and school dropout.

Grade retention can be highlighted as one of the most influential predictors of school dropout. The cause of a student dropping out is often termed as the antecedent of dropout because it refers to the pivotal event which leads to drop out (Doll et.al, 2013). Once a student has fallen behind, engagement, motivation, and attendance rates are immediately affected. Once a student
drops out of school, it is the culmination of a longer process of leaving school that began long before the date that a student decides to discontinue school attendance.

Those that oppose grade retention policies also cite the strong association between retention and early school leaving as evidence that lack of promotion does more harm than good. A student who faces retention experiences factors such as lower self-esteem, sense of belonging, sense of accomplishment, sense of engagement, and motivation (Finnan & Kombe, 2011; Jimmerson, 2001; Roderick, 1994). Youth that are older than their peers based on retention, entering grade school at an age that is years beyond the norm, returning to school after a period of absenteeism, or being placed below their modal grade upon entering a school system may experience discouragement. It is even reported that students retained in school have difficulties finding and maintaining employment, may experience mental health problems, explore chemical abuse, and participate in more criminal activities as an adult than those who are high school graduates (Anderson et. al., 2003).

Children who are retained are those that may exhibit academic difficulties or social-emotional behaviors that are considered to be immature (Powell, 2010). In a study titled "The Scarring Effects of Primary-Grade Retention? A Study of Cumulative Advantage in the Educational Career," the researcher seeks to find out if the scars of being retained in primary grades can disappear when a student reaches high school. Studies that compare retained students with promoted students typically report that retained students are more likely to exhibit poor self-regulation and adjustment in the classroom (Carlson et. al., 1997; Rhodes, 2011).

In the context of the study "scarring" is defined as the practice of holding a student back a grade and she describes it as a long-standing issue in the United States that impacts significant numbers of students. There has also been an increase in retention rates among students born after
1985, and retentions in later grades seem to be getting replaced by grade retentions in primary grades much more often (Frederick & Hauser, 2008).

Research on short-term effects of grade-retention is becoming extensive and has evolved over the years into a form of practice that questions whether it affects student outcomes positively, negatively or neither (Allen, et.al, 2009; Holmes, 1989; Jimerson, 2001). The author's analysis in the study "The Scarring Effects of Primary-Grade Retention? A Study of Cumulative Advantage in the Educational Career" highlights Grade retention and how it can act as what she calls a "specific triggering event" in an educational institution that hinders a students' mobility.

Parents, teachers, and peers may negatively evaluate retained students' present and future academic abilities within the context of being over age for grade and those evaluations could have implications for the overage students' future educational outcomes. Development and decision-making models of school disengagement highlight the importance of students self-evaluation regarding academic engagement and motivation (Finn, 1989; Morgan, 2005), and other research studies document teachers' low evaluations of low-achieving students' and their academic abilities (Kelly & Carbonaro, 2012).

Retained students' learning opportunities are often limited to low-level assignments and remedial coursework. The students may disengage by decreasing their academic effort and participate in risky behaviors inside or outside of school (Berends, 1995; Gamoran, 1987). Differences in their academic achievements concerning exposure to curriculum, stigma, motivation, effort, and other factors may accumulate over time and contribute to scarring the retained child's long-term educational success (Kerckhoff, 1993).

Regarding grade retention and peer relationships, the practice of grade retention indirectly forces students who have been retained to enter a new class group causing them to start all over
with making new friends (Demanet & Van Houtte, 2016). It could be likely that being retained has some form of impact on the retained students position in the social group of a new class (Pierson & Connell, 1992). At younger ages, retained students may be more likely to be popular among their new peers even though they are comparatively older, more mature, and possess more confidence concerning the subject matter (Pierson & Connell, 1992). When retention occurs in the later years of an educational path, retained students can be labeled a slow learner or a low achiever, which can ultimately lead to alienation from the class's social group (Hong & Yu, 2008). Researchers of grade retention have also pointed out that having the label of retainee can hinder a student's ability to form new friendships (Hong & Yu, 2008; Jimerson et al., 2006; Stearns et al., 2007). Research also asserts that students may face difficulty in attempting to rebuild their social relationships and therefore will have fewer classroom friends in comparison to promoted students.

According to the article "Grade Retention: Achievement and Mental Health Outcomes," retained students are more likely to display aggressive behaviors, have a history of suspension and expulsion, act out in the classroom, display behaviors associated with ADHD, and have conduct disorders. Overarching evidence has suggested that children who have some difficulty in getting along with their peers during younger years and elementary years are at increased risk of possessing a negative school outcome such as truancy, grade retention, and suspension (Chen et al. 2018). The temporary benefits of grade retention are misleading as the progress associated with repeating a grade does not continue beyond the grade that is retained (Anderson et. al., 2003).

Knowledge about the social-emotional consequences of grade retention is somewhat scattered and the research in this area is scarce. Although there are very few studies that show
positive effects of grade retention, the majority of studies on grade retention provide evidence that it may have an adverse effect on a student's self-concept and could lead to social and emotional problems (Alexander et al., 1994; Byrnes, 1986; Byrnes & Yamamoto, 1986; Carstens, 1985; Forster, 1993; Hagborg, Masella, Palladino, & Shepardson, 1991; Jimerson et al., 1997; Nason, 1991; Niklason, 1984; Setencich, 1994; Shepard & Smith, 1990).

Chapter Summary

In order to address possible social, emotional, academic, and other issues that may have affected students schooling, we first identified the significance of this research by reviewing, defining, and describing the impact of dropout a student experiences and reasons for dropping out of school. However, grade retention has a strong correlation to school dropout which is why it was important to review the literature on grade retention. A student that is retained becomes overage for grade. In this study, students have been retained multiple times and are two or more years behind their peers and social, emotional and psychological factors become prevalent which is why it was important to include in the review of literature studies that contribute to findings indicating social, emotional, and academic consequences of being overage for grade.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses methodology for a study of overage graduate perceptions during their years of schooling in a comprehensive K-12 environment. The impact of any relative issues related to participant experiences were explored as well. Topics covered in this chapter also consist of design of the study and the defining characteristics of a qualitative study in terms of meaning and understanding. Participant selection, the criteria for selecting candidates, and the rationale for method of selection have also been described. Interview design, process, data analysis, identification of themes, and organization of the data are described in detail in order to provide a clear view of the analysis that informed findings. Lastly, researcher credibility and positionality are described to set the stage for the research process and findings.

Research Question

This study explores overage graduates’ experiences including their perceptions of interactions with peers, teachers, administration and family during their years of completing school as an overage student. The following research question is explored: From the perspective of graduates who were two-or-three years overage for grade, what social, emotional, academic or other issues affected their schooling?

The following open-ended questions were used to guide research inquiry: Tell me about your interactions with peers, teachers, school administrators, and school employees during your years of schooling as an overage student. Describe your interactions with your family members during your years of schooling as an overage student. Tell me about the time you were retained. Tell me about a time when you thought about dropping out of school. If there is any significant past experience, I have not mentioned but you would like to share, can you reconstruct that experience for me? In order to obtain a rich, detailed and interpretative view of the participant’s
experience, phenomenological-oriented questions were used as the primary data collection method.

**Participants**

Participants in this study were four students who completed multiple years of schooling as an overage student. Participants were each black male students and high school graduates that were two or more years overage for grade at some point during their years of schooling. They attended comprehensive K-12 public schools, and each student attended a program that helped them to get promoted to their correct grade level prior to high school graduation. I chose black male participants because based on demographics of students who are most likely to be retained in grade, black males in the United States rank as the highest population of students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Black male students also rank highest in out of school suspension although the correlation of the two instances will not be explored in this study.

I believed it to be important to the essence of the study to choose overage students who successfully graduated from high school in order to capture the positive possibilities of what could happen for a student who has been retained. Statistically, students retained two or more grades have a 90 percent chance of dropping out in or before high school. Therefore, it is valuable to gain the perspectives of those that did not drop out but persevered. Three of the candidates were retained twice prior to the third grade and one participant was retained in the third and tenth grade. I wanted only participants who were retained in primary grades in order to gather the richest information from as many school years as possible during the participants’ terms as an overage student. I kept the participant who was retained in third and tenth grade to see if there may be a comparison in his experience to those who were retained twice prior to third grade. For the purpose of this study I termed this “years of overage experience.” The justification
for the number of participants was based on the nature of qualitative research. Qualitative analyses require a small number of participants and one that will be large enough to obtain enough data to sufficiently describe the area of interest I addressed through the research question.

All participants of the study signed an informed consent to participate in the study outlining the purpose of the study, interview process, and confidentiality. Federal regulations require that research projects involving human subjects be reviewed by an IRB, so once approval was received, I commenced with the participant communication to begin the research. Throughout the interview process, I made sure to allow the participant to feel comfortable enough to answer interview questions notifying them that if it was a question that made them uncomfortable, they did not have to respond. All interview recordings and transcriptions were confidentially stored and locked away for my review only.

Each participant that met the criteria of the study were contacted by phone, sent a follow up email for confirmation of the research study, and emailed informed consent for the interview process. I met with each candidate individually to assess the appropriateness of their interest in the study. “The major criterion for appropriateness is whether the subject of the researcher’s study is central to the participant’s experience (Seidman, 2013),” and I wanted to ensure the candidates were chosen properly. Interviews were conducted with the overage graduates so they could have the opportunity to fully describe their experiences (Cresswell, 2013; Seidman 2013). Throughout the interview process, I reviewed key characteristics I used to identify participants to confirm they met the criteria for answering the research question. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis by an outside company that specializes in audio transcription. After the interviews were transcribed, I sent a copy to each participant for their review.
Design of Study

The design of the study is qualitative providing insight into meanings of actions in social situations (Green, 2001) aiding in the understanding of a particular phenomena (Merriam, 1998). Qualitative research seeks to elucidate how isolated situations can come together forming a collective story that brings all the situations together. In this study of overage graduates, I examined the experiences of students that completed years of schooling that were two to three years older than their peers and ascertained meaning from those experiences through my own lens. Qualitative inquiry allows for inductively analyzing and defining the impact of our understanding of the research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Each participant interviewed in the study was able to tell their story from a different lens, which allowed the opportunity to examine situations, topics, and issues aligned to the research question, guiding questions, and interview questions. The number of participants used binds this study and is limited to four individuals. This study was conducted during a five-month period, conducting a series of interviews that allowed me to meet with participants once a month for a total of four times each.

The primary goal for this study is to provide an in-depth description of an experience stemming from each individual’s thoughts, perspectives, and emotional connection (Creswell, 2013). The goal of the researcher is to determine, based on participant perceptions, what each participant experienced and how they experienced it (Cresswell, 2013). The methodology for the study is a procedural sequence series of face to face interviewing which allowed me to explore the perceptions and experiences of the participants from their point of view. Qualitative research allowed for a deeper understanding of emergent data and helped me to capture a rich indication of the topic being studied. The gathering and analysis of data was based on grounded theory’s
constant comparative method of inductive coding and an analysis was employed to mobilize knowledge from the individual participant’s stories (Hayes, 2014). The constant comparative method is considered “grounded” because it is derived from everyday experience and initiated in the data. This allowed me to gather information to explore how the individuals constructed their understanding and knowledge of the world through their personal experiences (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Use of the phenomenologically based approach with open-ended, semi-structured interviews allowed me to gain an abundance of in-depth knowledge from participants concerning the phenomena, their experiences, and outcomes (Seidman, 2013). Irving Seidman describes this as the interview series that leads to an emphasis on exploring the meanings of peoples’ experiences in the context of their lives. The series also allows me the interviewer and the interviewee to place experiences into context and reflect on its meaning. Without context, there is no possibility of exploring the meaning (Patton, 1989; Schuman, 1982; Seidman, 2013). In this study, participants all share the commonality of having been 2 or more years overage for grade at some point during their K-12 education and they are all black males. Interview questions and the individual interviews in the sequence were created to have dialogue and rapport allowing for general conversation in a trusting and relaxed environment (Moustakas, 1994).

The combination of interviews and follow-up questions (Seidman, 2013) provided an opportunity for the participants to “reconstruct his experience within the topic of study (Seidman, 2013, p.14). The follow-up questions were created following interview number one of the interview sequence, adding to the depth and discovery in interview number two, thus helping to paint a complete picture of each experience. For example, in interview number one, a participant mentioned his mother passing away during a time he was retained. In interview number two,
introduced a follow-up question allowing him to give me a more in-depth reflection considering his true experience at the time of his mother’s death. The interviews with participants provided a comprehensive examination into their perceptions and reality based on experiences.

**Data Collection Methods**

Data was collected through in person interviews audio recorded with a voice tracer digital recorder and transcribed. There was a series of sequential in depth, face to face interviews conducted with each participant. Interviewing has been called the primary method utilized in qualitative research (Myers & Newman, 2007; Ryan, Coughlin & Cronin, 2009; Schultze & Avital, 2011) and "the most direct, research-focused interaction between research and participant" (Kazmer & Xie, 2008). Although there are different forms of interviews, I chose this interview process in particular because it allowed for moments of both description and reflection upon meaningful experiences. Individuals’ behavior is more meaningful and understandable when the context is centered around their lives thus allowing for a vast opportunity to explore the meaning of their experiences (Seidman, 2013). I used open-ended questions with the goal of having the participants reconstruct his experience within the scope of the question. I wanted to be able to explore more complex issues that emerged throughout the interview process by examining participants concrete experiences as overage students and the meaning that experience had for them.

The series of three separate interviews were conducted with each participant in an attempt to capture, through conversation, the social and personal interactions, time frames, emotions, and attitudes that contribute to the research study. The first interview focused on the participant’s life history. The task was to put the participant’s experience in context by asking them to tell as
much as possible about themselves in relation to being overage for grade during their years of schooling. I reviewed of the participants’ life histories until the time they became overage or until they realized they were overage for grade. The purpose of the second interview was to gather details of the participant’s experience. In this component of the interview series the task is to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants’ present lived experience as an overage student. They were asked to reconstruct these details. Here I asked the participant “What was it like being overage for grade?” gathering in-depth, rich details of their experiences. The third interview of the series was reflection on meaning in which I asked participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience. The third interview also addressed the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ present day circumstances and life. Making sense and making meaning required the participants to look at how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation (Seidman, 2006). The interview question I asked here was “What does it mean for you to have graduated from high school considering your life history and experience? Given what you have said in interviews number one and two, how do you make sense of your experience?”

Interviews were scheduled and conducted in-person. The interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes in time and the spacing of the interviews were 3 to 3.5 weeks apart. It was important for the participant to have enough time to share their experiences while keeping a time frame that would not diminish the richness of content shared within the time period. The contact visits, telephone calls, letters to confirm scheduled appointment dates, and the three interviews presented the opportunity to establish a substantial relationship with participants over time.

Throughout the interview process, probes were used to allow the participants to relate their loved experience in a clearer context (Siedman, 2013) and to keep the interview focused
accounting for the uniqueness of the participant. Examples of some of the probes used were conversational management probes and credibility. Some of the verbal probes used included “tell me a little more about that,” or “that’s interesting, tell me a little more about that.” Open ended questions are good at getting people to open up, and useful to get additional information the participant hasn't offered up which keeps the conversation going (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Probes were also used to allow participants the opportunity to clarify their answers in case I or the participant found the question to be difficult to follow. An example of the clarification probes used include “Can you say that for me again? I didn’t quite follow it” or “it’s okay, I can restate the question in a clearer way (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 141). The final probes are evidence probes used for credibility in determining how much the participant has gleaned from the event in asking him to provide an example of a particular experience. The overall goal was collection of a substantial amount of in-depth detailed data to enhance the richness of the analysis.

Once the interview process was complete, there was not a need for any follow up interviews. In interview two, follow up questions unique to each individual participant were used to delve deeper into relevant situations and issues that emerged during interview one in order to get further details and examples. According to Charmaz and Belgrave (2012), the analysis of data and collection of data happen simultaneously because the researcher must attend to questions and answers to determine the perceived relevance. Once the interview process was complete, listening to the interviews, reading, and re-reading the transcripts allowed me to immerse myself in the data in order to produce a successful analysis process.
Data analysis methods

The data collected was qualitative and collected via audio recording and transcribed. Analysis also included identification of themes helping to generalize regarding how being overage for grade during schooling was perceived or experienced. The transcriptions were then coded per participant for analysis based on individual review. For example, Isaiah Jackson interview one emergent data was coded as IJ1. Recordings of interview sessions and anecdotal notes from journaling were analyzed. A few of the things that were captured with a journal included emergent themes and the participant’s physical dispositions during the interview. It was important to me to not only capture the details but also body language, changes in tone, emotions, and possible resistance.

While remaining true to the participants, interpretation of the data was done through the constant comparative method and analyzed allowing in-depth exploration of similarities and differences with a view to supporting empirical generalizability and predictions based on the nature of the study (Lightfoot, 1983; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The constant comparative method is an inductive data coding process used for categorizing and comparing qualitative data for analysis purposes. It is the data-analytic process whereby each interpretation and finding are compared with existing findings. Completion of the comparison phase involved qualitative induction in an attempt to build general explanation that fits the individual cases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2014).

Data transcription of the recordings were used to convert the spoken word of the participants into written word to facilitate analysis. All audio recordings were transcribed verbatim through a transcription company. Coding of the data began once all of the research interviews were transcribed and checked by participant. Notes that were compiled during
interviews were used as a complementary source of information to facilitate the process of coding.

The interviews produced a significant amount of data. Open coding was utilized in order to adequately process the data. It was important for me to read and reread transcriptions in order to discern emerging themes within the data. As I analyzed the interview data, I made note of key attributes, phrases, and significant occurrences. I then coded the data displaying who said what and during which interview. The research question sought to discover what social, emotional, academic, or other issues the participants may have experienced during their years of schooling which provided an accurate framework for the interview findings. The categories social issues, emotional issues, academic issues, and other issues were used to synthesize the data.

Lastly, theming allowed me to use the codes developed from multiple transcripts to present the findings of the research in a coherent and meaningful way. Synthesis of the data was of crucial significance because it allowed me to organize the findings in a uniform way for the reader and other possible researchers of the topic of study. I designed a worksheet to help analyze the participants as individuals pinpointing emerging factors, and a worksheet which provided for an analysis of all four participants interview results collectively. Using the worksheets as a guide allowed me to identify key factors, terms, and phrases associated with each theme for the data analysis.

**Trustworthiness and Credibility**

In order to establish trustworthiness, I presented insights and conclusions that were sufficiently secure in the findings that could possibly impact school based, social, or district policy. As I facilitated the design of the study, I paid careful attention to being precise about how the study was conceptualized, the way the data is collected, and the way the data was analyzed
and interpreted. Since “understanding” is the primary rationale for a qualitative study, I also wanted to ensure that the method to obtain understanding of the findings was rigorous in nature.

Some of the strategies I will employ to establish the authenticity and trustworthiness of the study involved worldviews and questions that were congruent with the underlying assumptions of the study. In addition to interview data, I used debriefing and participant journals to confirm emerging findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The three-interview structure has features incorporated that enhance the credibility of the research. By placing the participants’ comments into context, it allowed for a more precise view of outcomes. It encouraged interviewing participants over the course of the 3 weeks to account for distinctive days and check for consistency in what they were saying (Seidman, 2013). Also, by interviewing a specific number of participants, I can connect their experiences and commentary against comments of others. The goal of the process is to understand how the participants make meaning of their experiences. If the interview structure works to allow them to make sense of events to themselves as well as to me, then it has considerable benefits in terms of credibility (Seidman, 2013).

Another strategy used to determine credibility was identification of my position as the researcher. According to Seidman (2013), every aspect of the structure, process, and practice of interviewing can be directed toward the goal of minimizing the effect the interviewer and the interviewing situation have on the participant’s ability to adequately reconstruct their experience. I included a critical self-reflection regarding my assumptions, my worldview, biases and relationship to the study that may affect investigation. Although I have the ability to strive to make meaning in the interview, I must consistently recognize that the meaning making is a function of the participant’s interaction with me as the interviewer. “Only by recognizing that interaction and
affirming its possibilities can interviewers use their skills to minimize the distortion that can occur because of their role in the interview (Seidman, 2006).”

**Researcher Positionality**

Positionality is critical to ensuring the credibility of my research. My beliefs, value systems, and moral stance are inseparable from the research process. I am a 32-year-old African-American female from Jacksonville, Florida. I completed my years of K-12 education in Duval County public schools where I am now a school administrator at Carter G. Woodson Elementary School. I have been an educator for eight years. Prior to becoming an elementary school assistant principal, I taught mathematics for three years at William Marion Raines High School and was an instructional mathematics coach for two years at the Bridge to Success (BTS) Academy at West Jacksonville, both in Jacksonville Florida. William M. Raines is considered to be a Title I turnaround school in the Urban Core. BTS is an alternative school for students that are two to three years overage for grade. The program is designed for double promotion so that students can promote to the grade level of their same aged peers. Carter G. Woodson is an elementary school that is also a Title I turnaround school located in the Urban core.

It is important for me to consider how my biases may affect the research. As an educator who has instructed students that were two or more years overage for grade and been an administrator at a school where students are two or more years overage for grade, I understand the implications of what it means to provide instruction and administratively oversee students that are overage. However, I have not personally experienced the understanding and perceptions of what it means to be an overage student, nor do I personally understand what social, emotional, or academic issues an overage student may have experienced over time.
Chapter Summary

The problem and purpose of the study were reviewed early in the chapter to provide clarity prior to the description of research methods. The research question was created to address the different elements that could possibly emerge during the study that are specific to students that were two to three years overage for grade during their years of schooling. The proposed design of study is qualitative in nature in order to explore perceptions, experiences, and reflections of participants from their point of view through the use of interviewing. The critical race theory was introduced in chapter one in the design of study due to possible issues on equity that may emerge influencing the data.

The participant selection was imperative to the nature of the research because they needed to have been two to three years overage for grade during their years of schooling and needed to be school graduates. Data was collected through participant interviews along with additional resources that may aid the process of gathering pertinent emergent data (i.e. nonverbal, body language) throughout the sequence of interviewing. Once the data was collected, it was analyzed, transcribed and the constant comparative method along with individual case analysis were used in to fulfill the requirements of rigor, trustworthiness, and credibility. My personal and professional stance were also described in order to contribute to the credibility of the research.
CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This section provides findings from the data analysis for each participant as well as the analysis of the combined data. In review, the researcher's purpose in this qualitative study was to understand from the perspective of graduates who were two-or-three years overage for grade, what social, emotional, academic or other issues affected their schooling. Research discussed in chapter two indicates overage students pose a problem to the classroom environment or have behavioral, social and emotional issues as a result of being overage for grade. Very few studies have gathered research from the perspectives of the students themselves who have experienced being overage for grade. In this study, the researcher conducted a series of in-depth interviews with four high school graduates who are African- American males who completed their years of schooling in Duval County Public Schools. After receiving IRB approval, candidates were contacted via phone to be selected participants in the study.

Before data collection commenced, informed consent was gained from each participant. In the informed consent, I thanked participants for allowing me the opportunity to give them information about the doctoral study. I described that in the study, there will be a sequential interview pattern containing three interviews that would take place where I will ask questions about their experiences completing years of schooling as an overage student. I let each participant know that each interview would be audio recorded and they would last no longer than 60 minutes. I also explained that each audio-recorded interview would be face to face, would take place in a safe and secure place of their preference, and their participation in this study is voluntary. My hopes are that this research can contribute to the field of education in a positive manner informing educators, administrators, school districts and educational policy. It was extremely important for me to let them know that their time, willingness, and consideration carries a magnitude of importance.
Background

Each participant was more than willing to participate in the study with three of the four to commenting that they have never been able to share this experience with anyone or never thought it was of any importance to do so. To ease any anxiety the participants may have about speaking during the interview, I started the interview by asking them about their day. I also asked them to describe to me an interview experience they may have had in the past. The question about past interview experiences offered the opportunity for me to clear any misconceptions they may have about what we were about to do in the study. I then introduced myself and provided them the opportunity to introduce themselves as well as telling me anything about themselves they wanted to share. I also asked demographic questions and clarifying questions so that I had accurate information about the grade levels in which they were retained and their age during those particular grades.

After each interview, I provided the opportunity for participants to share anything we may not have covered in the interview based on the guiding questions. Each time that a question was asked, participants were able to recall instances they felt were important to share for the sake of the topic being overage for grade. Along with the research question, four interview questions framed the focus of this study. The following open-ended questions were asked in interview number one with an emphasis on focused life history where participants placed their lived experiences into context in light of the topic of being overage for grade during their years of schooling:

- Question 1: Tell me about your interactions with peers, teachers, school administrators, and school employees during your years of schooling as an overage student.
• Question 2: Describe your interactions with your family members during your years of schooling as an overage student.
• Question 3: Tell me about a time you were retained
• Question 4: If there was a time you thought about dropping out of school, tell me about it
• Question 5: If there is any significant experience, I have not mentioned but you would like to share, can you reconstruct that experience for me?

Questions from interview number one were extended as needed for interview number two which had participants concentrate on the concrete details of their present lived experience on the topic of being an overage student. Based on the reconstruction of their past experiences in interview number one, we then wanted to look at the same questions, having them this time to provide fine details of their experiences. I also created question stems for each participant based on their responses in interview one to center the focus of detail exploration.

The final interview focused on reflection and making meaning of their experience. I sought to address the intellectual and emotional connections between their experience and their life. Given what they said about their life history and detailed experiences on being an overage student during their years of schooling, they then had to describe how they understood how this may have affected their success. Guiding questions for interview 3 were what sense does this make for you presently? What meaning does this have for you presently? Where do you see yourself in the future? Three of the participants have a pseudonym for the purpose of confidentiality. Participant Isaiah Jackson preferred to use his real name in the study.
Participants

Isaiah Jackson

Isaiah is an 18-year-old black male and a full-time college student at Florida State College of Jacksonville. He completed high school in 2019 graduating from BTS located on the campus of William M. Raines High School. BTS is a double promotion program created to help students that are two or more years behind in grade with the opportunity to catch up to their peers in grade. During Isaiah's years of schooling, he was retained in third and tenth grade. He was rather shy and timid upon first meeting me. We talked for a bit about something unrelated to the study so that he could get more comfortable. Initially, I was not going to choose Isaiah as a participant because he completed the least amount of years two or more years overage for grade due to him having been retained in tenth grade following retention in third grade whereas other participants were retained multiple grades before reaching 4th grade. I wanted to be able to complete a comparative analysis of his case with the other three participants in the event insightful information may have emerged.

Isaiah was quite reserved in his responses during the first interview. It was as if he wanted to make sure he was saying the right things. As the researcher, it was important to me to not sway the participant. I listened to his responses paying close attention to keywords and phrases that stuck out about the topic.

Walter Moore

Walter is a 19-year-old black male who works as a security guard at the neighborhood elementary school he attended as a 5th grade student. Before becoming the security guard, he volunteered to assist the administration at the school with operational duties and served as a mentor in a program for male students called 5000 role models. He also served as a school
monitor before getting the role of a security guard. Walter is also an after-school program teacher for 4th and 5th-grade students. He completed high school in 2019 graduating from William M. Raines High School. He was retained in the second and third grades. Like Isaiah, although he was more than willing to participate in the study, Walter was also very shy during the initial interview. I needed to describe to him how important it is for him to share his story. About the topic of discussion being overage, he stated: "I never thought this to be something someone would pay attention to because people were always so mean to me for being old, I just thought that it was my fault and I had to suffer because of it." This statement carried a significant amount of weight on the journey we were about to take to explore his experiences.

James Connor

James is a 20-year-old black male in a program at Florida State College of Jacksonville called Year-Up which enables underprivileged young adults to move from minimum wage jobs to post graduate work in meaningful careers. Like Isaiah, James also graduated from BTS William M. Raines location but in the year 2018. Initially, when I what grade in which he was retained during his years of schooling, he was not sure. I then asked him if he needed to give me an idea of those grades, what would those grades have been? He responded by saying "Let's say 2nd grade and 6th grade." After further research, I discovered that James was retained two times in the primary grades; the first grade and second grade. James was prepared for the interview and very willing to give his responses to the best of his knowledge. I engaged in conversation to make him more comfortable during the interview processes. He didn’t appear to be shy; I could tell by his hand gestures and body movement that talking about certain topics made him feel uncomfortable. It was often hard for him to look me in my eye when he talked about things that he may have deemed "traumatic" in his childhood and young adulthood. There were certain things he just
wanted to talk through and get it over with. He was resistant to showing emotions on certain matters, but I noticed through his body language and facial expressions he may have been holding back.

**Joseph Johnson**

Joseph is a 21-year-old black male who is a City Year Corp member at a Title I turnaround elementary school in Jacksonville Florida located in the Urban Core. City Year is an American education nonprofit organization founded in 1988 dedicated to helping students and schools succeed. The organization partners with public schools in 29 high-need communities across the US. Joseph graduated from BTS, Jean Ribault High School location, in Jacksonville, Florida 2017. Unlike the other participants, he is the only participant that was retained in the same grade twice; kindergarten. Joseph was very jovial and full of life and laughter upon first meeting him. He was comfortable, not shy, and particularly excited about being a part of the study. Joseph has a great rapport and relationship with the population of students he serves at the elementary school and is described by his boss as an irreplaceable asset to the City Year program. He was even chosen to be spotlighted by the City Year organization for his success throughout his short time being a Corp member. He is proud of his accomplishments thus far considering what he has chosen to do in life. I realized rather quickly through conversation he had not always been happy about chosen life experiences. Joseph was the participant that was most anxious to tell his story from a detailed perspective. It was almost as if he had been holding it in for years and wanted to make sure he explained it in its entirety as best he could. For him telling his story provided the opportunity and platform to help someone who may be going through the same things as an overage student in the public school system. He also stated that the interview process presented an opportunity for him to possibly let go of some of the anger and pain he harbored for
such a long stretch in his life based on his experiences in school as an overage student. Joseph was undoubtedly the most vulnerable participant during his years of schooling considering his challenges.

**Participant Findings**

The narrative account to follow represents an extensive review of responses to the interview questions as well as any responses that emerged during the interview process. Each of the questions posed during the first interview was designed to "set the stage" for each interviewee and allow them the opportunity to reflect on and construct their focused life experiences in light of what they recall from their years in school as an overage student.

**Isaiah Jackson**

“I actually had an advantage over the kids coming in.” In first asking Isaiah to tell me about his interactions with his peers, teachers, school administrators, and employees during his years of schooling as an overage student, he expressed feeling as if he had an advantage over other kids coming into the third grade for the second time. Isaiah’s account is as follows:

I would be able to show them certain things, like harder problems. With my teacher, it was a mutual respect thing and they already knew me, so I didn’t have to make a first impression. It was easier because I learned stuff twice.

In asking Isaiah to unpack the mutual respect statement further he stated It was his duty to stay after class, help teachers clean, rearrange desks, and earn their respect. At the time, he saw third grade as being “easier” because he was doing it for a second time. It wasn't explained to Isaiah why he was retained in the third grade. He thought at minimum his teachers would let him know specifically what he'd done to have to repeat a grade, but that day never came. His only thought was to "fix everything and be an overachiever" so his teacher would like him enough to ensure he
would not be retained in third grade for a second time. “It wasn’t really explained to me so I didn’t know what I’d done. I thought they would let me know what I did so I would know what I couldn’t do the next year and really take it serious.” Isaiah’s assumed retention in the third grade was due to not passing the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Beyond repeating the third, he felt more confident about his school experience because he knew that he needed to take school seriously moving forward, even though he had no idea why he’d failed third grade the first time. The “mutual respect” was evident between him and his third grade teacher the second time around. He revealed feeling that being a helper would allow him to have an advantage over the other students in his class.

His grandmother saw things a bit differently than he did. “Well, my grandma would call me stupid and try to motivate me.” Although it made him angry, he turned his anger into fuel because he knew no other way to cope with being called stupid, primarily because it was coming from someone he loved so dearly. The year Isaiah failed third grade was also the year that his mother passed away. “I didn’t really want to talk about it. Me failing third grade. That year my mom passed, and I just stopped going to school and stopped taking it seriously. That really messed me up” At that moment in time, there was an instant shift in reality for Isaiah. There was a period where he stopped going to school and could not find the motivation to take it seriously for the remainder of that school year. He was devastated and couldn't find the pieces of the puzzle to complete his third-grade journey as an eight-year-old. The school year following retention was also an opportunity for him to prove, in honor of his deceased mother, that he was not a failure.

“When I was held back in the third grade, and even in the tenth grade, I do not recall any teacher or administrator trying to help me. Most of them knew I was going to fail.” In this statement, Isaiah describes how he felt teachers viewed him the remainder of his elementary
school career. His friends faded quickly when they realized they’d all moved on to fourth grade and Isaiah was left behind. At that point in his life, he felt he was “more like the bullied kid.” “I just kept going on about it like we were in the same grade.”

Returning to third grade for the second time was not only hard because of the loss of his mother, or hard because of the loss of his friends and humiliation of being left behind, it was also having to be done with the same teacher from the previous school year. This teacher also happened to be the same teacher he had in the second grade. Internally, he’d always felt as if this particular teacher did not like him. “I was playful, and I didn’t really take school seriously in the second grade.” After promotion, Isaiah’s third grade teacher was now the same teacher from the second grade. After third grade retention, he was once again in the same teacher’s class. Repeating a grade with the same teacher and an entirely new set of peers seemed like a second chance to fail for Isaiah. “The first year I would always butt heads with the teachers because I was bad. So, when I returned the second year, I was a helper.” The only relationship Isaiah was determined to build was with his teacher, whom he was now facing for the third time.

Failing as a tenth grader was a much different experience for Isaiah. “It was easier to disguise yourself as a retained student in high school.” Many students did not know that he was overage and although he’d failed the tenth grade, he continued to have most of his general education classes with his classmates from the previous school year. As a high school student, interactions with peers, teachers, and administrators weren't as unpleasant because of the ease blending in with same grade peers. The response from family was not entirely negative during this time as well and his grandmother, although she knew he’d failed tenth grade, was optimistic because she'd watched him overcome the obstacle of grade retention in third grade. The grade retention in tenth grade was once again due to failing the Florida State Reading Assessment (FSA).
“I fell asleep on the test because I was working around that time. I worked overnight hours and I was only 16 at the time. I was not able to complete the assessment in the set amount of time.”

Isaiah never really thought about dropping out of school. “I told myself over and over to keep going, keep going.” Emotionally, failing a second time was extremely defeating for him, so he preferred walking in his disguise and keeping his true emotions buried inside. “As an overage student, you could tell when a teacher gave you ‘the look’ describing ‘you are probably going to be a problem for me.” Once again Isaiah invested in working to stay in his teacher’s good graces as he never wanted to be noticed for being two years older than his peers.

Isaiah’s first year in third was not much of a learning experience for him, whereas the second time in third, he’d gained new insight and determination to not become a failure again. "I believe it was because I already knew what to expect and it was the same teacher." He recalled taking the FCAT state standardized assessment where he thought the test to be easy. That was until the teacher called out individual student scores amongst the class saying, from what he recalls, "Isaiah you got a level one, stupid." This is also the time he recalls the start of bullying. The teachers would not call on him to answer questions in the classroom and if they did call upon him they would say things like “I already know you know this so I guess I will let you answer it.” They used grade retention as a means to ridicule students who were in the grade for a second time. Isaiah was determined, beyond the point of humiliation, to not allow himself to be a failure again the following year.

Family interactions during Isaiah's time as an overage student weren't very pleasant after failing the third grade. He recalls his grandmother and brother being the primary facilitators of negative experiences. Whenever he would do something wrong or make a mistake of any kind,
they would respond by throwing it in his face that he'd already failed. They still use him failing a grade as a source of ridicule (presently).

Isaiah mentioned his mother passing away as something he didn't think he should share with me. During that time in his life, he'd briefly stopped going to school and could care less about receiving an education. Upon returning to school, his family didn't see it important to notify his teachers that his mother was deceased. “I went to school, but I just stopped taking it serious. Basically I came to school for the lunch. Nobody at school knew my mom died. They thought that my mom was still in my life.” To Isaiah, his mom’s death was a personal matter that teachers and administration didn’t need to know even though he was suffering in silence feeling empty inside. When asked about his sorrow, he recalls stating that his sister passed away, and he doesn't have a sister. “I wanted to let them know so that I could get out of taking a test, but for some reason I was too afraid to tell them it was my mother that was deceased.” Although it was peculiar that he'd created a fake person, he viewed it as a protection mechanism. He did not want to have to explain his mother's death. It was not until his second year in the third grade that school officials learned of his mother's passing. Isaiah also expressed a direct correlation between the death of his mother and his poor performance on the FCAT, which is ultimately used to determine if a third-grade student will be promoted or retained.

After being retained in the 10th grade, Isaiah became two years overage for grade. That is until he found favor in being accepted into a double-promotion program called the BTS High School where all students were two to three years behind their same-age peers. BTS is a program designed to help students two or more years behind achieve placement in their proper grade and graduate with a high school diploma. “I was happy! I loved BTS. If I had to do my best years of school, BTS would be it because of the smaller class sizes and better chance to succeed with my
same age peers.” He was thankful because he did not desire to be that student that continued school far behind his same-age peers and he wanted the honor of saying he received a diploma instead of a GED in order to prove that he could achieve it. “I wasn’t afraid that I would drop out because I always wanted to be successful.” This chance to graduate on time with his peers provided him a new outlook not only on his educational career but also on life. He longed to graduate with a high school diploma and earn the opportunity to go to college. He wanted to prove to his family he was intelligent enough to persevere educationally despite setbacks.

Isaiah's initial grade retention experience caused him to look at school differently. Hope dwindled considering he would have to work twice as hard as his peers to succeed. It also made him realize he needed to take school seriously and be attentive to classroom instruction so that failure wouldn't continue to occur. Although failing a second time in the 10th grade was emotionally tough for Isaiah, outwardly it was much easier to disguise that failure by blending in the high school scheduled environment. “Since I was older than the students in my same grade, I felt I needed to be the leader and set an example.” He didn't carry a belief that his grade retention affected his success as a student until participating in the study. Through reflection, he came to the realization that the BTS offered him a new sense of self-actualization and a reason to want to be successful. The fast-paced nature of the workload and expectations presented a positive challenge for him and being in an environment of his same age peers provided the comfort he desired to be focused on his goal of graduating with a diploma.

"Take everything seriously at the start." Failing multiple grades was not something Isaiah saw as the teacher's fault, he blamed himself due to complacency and felt it his responsibility to prove others wrong by graduating from high school. In response to the negativity, he remains firm by reminding himself that there aren’t many people in his family who have graduated from
high school. Isaiah is the first in his family to attend college. He finds peace in knowing that his success is his responsibility and he’s come exceedingly farther than anyone imagined he would.

**Walter Moore**

I sensed a bit of apprehension during the first interview with Walter. Although he knew the topic of study and the questions we were going to explore, it became evident to me through his body language there may be some apprehension in telling me the depth of his experience being an overage student. One of the things I noticed right away while obtaining demographic information was how extremely transient, he had been as an elementary school student. Walter attended a total of six different elementary schools where he'd dis-enrolled and returned to two out of the six within one school year. We began with discussing interactions with peers, teachers, and administrators. “As far as being overage, I kind of gravitated to the that crowd that was also overage.” Walter chose his friendships based on students who were similarly experiencing being overage for grade. For him, it was awkward to hang out with students that were much younger than him and he became fearful of hanging with same age peers because they would tease him for being two grades behind. Walter gives an account of experiencing grade retention as a third grade student:

In elementary school, I was very disruptive. I was just horrible. My second time in the third grade, I didn’t care. During second grade, I was a grade behind, but I knew I would pass the next year, so I wasn’t concerned about only being one year behind. I’d already failed second, and I was confident I would pass third. When I got to third, I did classwork as if I thought I was doing everything right, but when it was time for everybody to go to the next grade level, I was held back again. So it hit me like…wow. At that point, I no longer cared..., about anything. I felt careless about everything.
Walter had consistent behavior problems throughout elementary and middle school. During his reflection, he came to somewhat of a self-realization that his behavior may have been a symptom of his being two years overage, noting that his poor behavior did not arise until he fell two years behind his same age peers. Walter recalls a time in the third grade where he wanted to be a better student and please his teachers by befriending them.

“To be honest, I thought my third grade teacher liked me enough to pass me. But it turns out, just because you are close to a teacher, that does not mean they are going to pass you to the next grade level. I did all of my work…and although I did not know if it was correct, I felt I did enough to not fail.” Walter was confident that he would not fail again. The positive rapport with his teachers led him to believe they would give him a passing grade. Teachers applauded him for getting all his work done, never letting him know his progress as a student. So naturally, in his ten-year-old mind, his beliefs in passing third grade were confidently verified through the bond he'd built with his teachers. To his dismay, he was held back in the third grade for a second time, and along with the retention came the behavior problems.

After completing elementary school, Walter was not optimistic about the journey and outcomes of middle school:

My sixth-grade year, I just went into school and did whatever I wanted. The only reason I was promoted is because I attended an alternative school where I earned straight A’s. Once I completed the alternative school and returned to Northwestern Middle School, I realized I could not make it in that environment anymore. I was tired of being with all the underage kids and their immaturity. I completed seventh grade at Northwestern and once that year ended, I was accepted into the Bridge to Success Academy at West Jacksonville. Once I was there, I was able to do eighth and ninth grade at the same time.
Walter was reprimanded and sent to an alternative school following an altercation in the 6th grade. "I was very disrespectful" he stated with a grin on his face. Walter's return to Northwestern Middle School, after serving 45 days at the alternative school, was not pleasant. He recalls feeling as if he was now being "targeted" by the administration. They would say things like, "do something else and we are sending you right back" or "we are going to get you out of here" concerning his being two years overage. "Oh, he is 15, he has to get out of here." Not only was the negativity of adults affecting him, but he was also uncomfortable being around the students and felt his level of maturity superseded that of his peers.

He felt as if the administration knew nothing about him and they weren't trying to know. “They knew nothing, not even how to do their jobs." Walter expressed his lack of respect for administration due to his belief that they were incompetent and feels that is ultimately why they made the firm decision to have him removed from the school setting while none of the other students involved were made to go to an alternative school. Walter recalls a situation where he was reprimanded for being disrespectful but not at fault:

I felt like administration acted as if they knew certain things, when they really knew nothing. They would tell me “stop doing this and stop doing that” but never said anything when the teacher was at fault. Because I felt that administration always took the teachers side, I would do things like walk out of class, say disrespectful things, and act out. It seemed like I was always being blamed for things.

“Taking teachers’ side” as he explained left him feeling rebellious. Trust issues had long developed overtime in regard to teachers and administrators at schools he’d attended and they began to manifest in negative ways during his middle school years.
During Walters’ time as an overage student, he felt alone. His parents were never involved educationally and were unaware of his in-school status in regard to being overage. Walter is one of seven siblings and five of them were school age at the same time. Not only was he two years overage, but his four other siblings were overage as well. Walter describes a time he was retained:

In second grade, I felt I was doing all of my work and getting good grades. I remember having a teacher that ate popcorn all day. She didn’t teach us much…it felt like babysitting. So when it was time for the next school year, I remember seeing all of my friends in the third grade while I was still in second. So I asked “why am I not in their class?” The teacher responded “because, you failed, and you are going to fail this year too.” When I went home to tell my mom, she didn’t say anything. The next year, I was in second grade again and I started to get bullied by third graders. That’s when all of my fighting started, and I was small, so people always ceased opportunities to bully me.

Walter developed feelings of anger toward his family and teachers because as he aged, he began to realize that grade retention was not his fault. He lied about his age often in an attempt to fit in and was "ready to fight" when others mentioned his age and grade. Walter attended seven different elementary schools in a three-year span and some of them for no more than a month. He and his siblings were also "kicked out" of one elementary school due to their collective negative behaviors. "We all acted the same and we were all bad."

Alternative school briefly provided an environment that allowed Walter to keep to himself focused on schoolwork it helped to maintain grades that would keep him on track once he returned to the regular comprehensive environment. In the seventh grade, Walter was admitted into the BTS Academy at West Jacksonville. This offered the opportunity for him to be promoted to his correct
grade level. Upon returning from alternative school, his discomfort at Northwestern Middle school made BTS an appealing opportunity for him to get back on the right track. BTS allowed him to excel, showing his true potential as a student. This was the moment that shifted his thinking in terms of what he could achieve as a student:

I knew I was smart so I felt like, well, I knew about the STAR program, but I didn’t want to go in there because people would say “dumb people go there.” I was not about to go there. I would much rather stay in grade school and work hard to graduate. When I heard about BTS, I was going into my eighth grade year and I knew that was my best option to graduate. I ended up going, pushing myself to the max and I succeeded because of it.

Once he was able to successfully reach high school, dropping out was not an option. That is until he reached his senior year of high school. The high school requirement in the state of Florida is to pass the FSA reading in the tenth grade which is the state of Florida reading assessment and equivalent to graduate high school. As a senior, Walter had not yet passed that assessment and was fearful that he may never pass. At this moment, he wanted to give up and drop out of school:

I never really thought about dropping out of school until my senior year, when it was a very stressful year. It was like everything hit me at once because I really never cared and I never really knew what the FSA was. So every time it was time to take the FSA, I would try to take my time, but midway through the test I’d tell myself “I cannot do this.” I would bubble in anything. Each time the result would always be FSA level 1. At that point, I knew an assessment may be the reason I wouldn’t get to graduate.

He would have been too ashamed to finish high school with only a certificate of completion and looked at dropping out as an option to save his pride from defeat. Thankfully the state of Florida accepts SAT or ACT concordance scores for high school students that can allow them to complete
high school and earn a diploma with a passing score. Walter was able to gain the score he needed on the ACT and graduate from school with a high school diploma.

The passion he displayed in reflecting on his experiences made it easy to grasp feelings, body language, and emotions as he spoke. Concrete details of Walter's experience allowed us to go deeper in regard to the key components of his journey. Walter believed he was a terrible student during his early years, but I wanted to know if he believed being overage had anything to do with his unruly behavior:

My seventh grade year, people would ask “how old are you?” Or ask others “how old is he?” This included students and adults. I would say I’m 15 and they would say things like “Oh he is 15, he has to go!” This upset me. Although I didn’t feel that old, I found myself lying about my age to fit in.

When he found himself in situations where others would talk about him being older or bully him because of it, he turned to anger and rage to solve his problems:

Teachers started to really treat me differently. If they heard me talking in class they would say “oh get out of my class. You got to go.” Or they would say “Oh I am going to call the officer.” I would say “I didn’t do anything so why are you accusing me?” It reached the point where I would go back and forth with teachers every day. “No, I am not getting out, call whoever you have to call, call security, they can’t move me. I not going anywhere!” I would tell them “I am not going to move; I came to school to learn not to get out of your class.” So, when they kicked me out, or called the police officer to remove me, I would get out and walk the halls. When I would hear the sound of keys, high heels, or walkie talkies, I would beg friendly teachers to allow me to come into their classroom so that I could stay out of trouble with administration.
Sitting in classrooms with students two years younger than him filled him with anger and resentment. Not only was he older and more mature than his peers, but he was also smaller in stature than his peers which caused him to be bullied for being older and small. "I just had to terrorize people to get my point across. Being over age caused me to feel depressed and I wanted to graduate on time, but I felt like the stress was a lot."

Walter not only believed there to be a direct correlation between his behavior and grade retention, but he also stated being over age made him feel like a bad person. In reflection, after failing the second grade, he was placed in the same teacher's class. He describes this as one of the worst possible things they could've done to him. "You failed me, so now I'm not going to do anything you say." He created a power struggle between him and his teacher just to be removed from the environment. He only did a select amount of work in his teacher's class based on his immensely negative feelings towards his teacher and the students in the class. Although they never took him out of the class, his teacher wanted to pass him along to the third grade so that she did not have to "deal with him" again the following year. After multiple retentions, teachers were no longer individuals he considered caring and he began to use opportunities to be disrespectful in order to get kicked out of class or simply walk out of class.

In middle school, Walter was fully aware that he was multiple grades behind his peers, had a bad attitude, and a hot temper. He was no stranger to getting into altercations and being reactive to negative situations. During the altercation that landed him in alternative school, in protection of his sister, he describes "blacking out" before the altercation. "Once I get mad, I am mad, and I do not know how to calm myself down." Rage is the word he used to describe how he felt during the altercation. After administration notified him that because he was the aggressor he would be punished for the incident occurrence, he felt attacked. Charged with exciting a riot on campus and
assault he'd realized he needed to have a change in attitude to create better circumstances for himself.

Walter has nine siblings and he was the oldest in the household. He believed it to be his responsibility to take care of them which forced him to oversee his siblings' wellbeing. Waking them, getting everyone dressed and prepared for school, and making sure everyone made it home safely from school. They were also protective of one another. Looking deeper into details of his interactions with his family during his time of being multiple years overage, he recalls how transient he and his siblings were during the time of his retentions:

Something happened in our family with my mom. So, she wasn’t staying places very long. We were kicked out of the house for not paying the rent, so we moved to the west side. Once we were on the west side, we were always late to school and missing days, so they kicked us out of the school. Schools would see us three to four times a week mostly because no one wanted to get up and take us to school.

Family was important to Walter, even though he did not feel he and his siblings could rely on their parents. In elementary school Walter and his siblings were put out of their home and moved to another side of town. Once they moved to the other side of town, they did not transfer to another school closer to home. Their mother only took them to school when she was able to do so and this caused them to be truant most of the school year. They were also extremely transient due to their mothers need to have them move from home to home so often. As a now adult there is a bit of bitterness toward his mother because of this occurrence and he attributes part of his retentions to lack of parental involvement. His father was initially never in their lives but once staying with his mother had taken a toll, he decided to live with his father. "Even though I lived with my father, he never did anything for me." Fending for himself became a way of life at an
early age and he believes feeling he had no one to depend on caused him to be rude, disrespectful, and rebellious. Walter did not feel failing multiple grades was his fault. As a child, he felt unsupported, unprotected, and abandoned by his teachers educationally.

Once he completed the BTS middle school, he moved onto BTS high school to reach the 11th grade. He described this time in his life to be high stress due to not only the workload but assessments. It was then, as an 11th grader, he realized he had a fear of assessments, believing that failing the FCAT was the reason he'd failed the third grade. Walter was able to achieve the concordance score on the ACT and earn his high school diploma. After so many years of failure, anger, hate, disrespect, and going toe to toe with teachers, Walter had achieved what he’d believed for so many years to be impossible by believing in himself. Although he believes his experience has produced lasting emotional scars, it has not deterred him from remaining hopeful for a bright future. The assistant principal that processed Walter out of his comprehensive middle school into alternative school for fighting is now his lifelong mentor. After he completed his time at the alternative school and the BTS, she offered him the opportunity to come back to the comprehensive school to volunteer. That was a life changing experience for Walter and having a caring adult in his life helped him to continue to navigate his educational journey beyond middle school successfully.

“In the future, I see myself doing a couple of things but ultimately, I want to be a school principal. That’s my ultimate goal.” Walter has a strong desire to work with the youth and does not want students with similar experiences to get discouraged on their educational journey. Presently, he views his overage experience as a setback but is thankful for the individuals he has met along the way. The same administrator that removed him from his comprehensive middle school environment and sent him to alternative school is also the same individual that gave him a
new lease on life with hopes for a prosperous future. Walter has an unceasing desire to volunteer with the youth and give back to his community. Based on his experiences, he now has the desire reach at risk youth, one day at a time.

**James Connor**

James was very well dressed during our initial interview and a sharp, well-spoken young man. He was very confident in how he conveyed his thoughts. James was what I would describe as "ready to dive in" with the interview. I could tell he was anxious to share his story.

I don’t believe I got as much support as I would have liked in Kindergarten, first, and second. If I would’ve received the proper support, I wouldn’t have been a failure. The teachers were just focused on other students. It was really hard for me to get individual help.

It was interesting to me James stated, “I wouldn’t have been a failure.” This implies to me that during that time in his life at such a young age, he felt as if he were a failure. Even though there was support for him in the early grades, from his perspective, it was insufficient. For example, teachers would isolate him to do individual assignments, but they would not check in to see if he understood the content.

As we continued, I noticed a shift in James’s responses which led me to believe he may have been trying to figure out my true purpose for the interview. It was almost as if he wanted to answer in a way that didn't "incriminate" his past teachers, but at some point, he internally decided to dig deeper and provide a true event of what he recalls experiencing as an overage student. During these moments of truth, it was difficult for him to look me in the face while he gave his reflective descriptions.
During James years of schooling, he had an Individual education plan (IEP) for speech. He was not sure at what age or grade he obtained an IEP but believed it to be first grade. Speech IEP’s normally do not involve any specific one on one accommodations for testing and instruction beyond assistance with speech. He was also under the impression that he may have had ADHD although he is not quite sure if that was a diagnosis that required an IEP. Overall, the components of his IEP were never discussed with him at any grade level throughout his K-12 education. As a student James was apprehensive about asking for help, preferring to try succeeding at things on his own.

Interactions with peers, teachers, and administration presented as a touchy subject for James. Dipping his head down and gazing at the table he stated: "I felt I didn't get the proper support, and maybe if there were a second teacher involved, I would've received more support." It became apparent to me that he somewhat struggled to talk about things that were less than ideal for him due to his success as a now adult. He was not thrilled to talk about the hurt of his past. As a young student, James felt ignored by teachers and school administration. It wasn’t until about 8th grade that he'd even realized he may have an individual education plan (IEP). "Everyone else would be allowed to go to the gym and I would be pulled for additional help and this made me feel like an outsider.” Classroom teachers were much less likely to help James, so he decided to silently blend in instead of seeking help from the instructor. James did not begin to “get the hang of things” until he reached high school, and although he was still two years overage, he had a better understanding of the effort he would need to put into what he was being taught, seeking help early and often:

In high school, I pretty much started to get the hang of things. By then I understood that I was the type of student that understood things right away. It takes some practice.
Although there were other students who didn’t understand and acted out with bad behavior to get attention, I knew I had to be 100% focused on what was being taught so that I could understand. Since we had a second teacher that would come in to help us, other kids knew me and other students had learning problems.

In his mind, as a then high school student, he realized that “being ESE does not determine anything because if you have your mind set on going to college, you can achieve going to college.” This statement made it evident to me James had a strong internal drive that allowed him to push beyond any learning disabilities or problems he faced. James did not talk much about interactions with peers, I could visibly tell it was a sensitive topic, and he preferred to move on to talking about his interactions with family.

James was adopted as a young child by his aunt. “There was a lot of drama between my mom and aunt which made it hard for me because I was not allowed to see my mom nor was I able to have either of my parents in my life.” He describes this as being very difficult for him to handle as a growing child. It affected him in school as a student as well as spurring behavior problems and subtle cries for the attention he longed to receive from his biological parents. In terms of his interactions with family during his years as an overage student, James did not have much support and none of his family members went to college. College was not a goal since no one in his immediate family had the opportunity to go. Although he never really had the chance to express to anyone what was going on educationally, he did and always has wanted more for himself:

It is important for me to get out of generational poverty and just want more for myself.

The year that I failed, my family picked on me and during those times it just pushed me harder to become better and to just focus more on school just to prove people wrong.
James went into the details describing his experience when he was retained:

It was horrible that year, even though I had some behavioral problems, I didn’t get any support. The teachers, whenever they would call my parents, knew that I would get disciplined, but there wasn’t really support from them. No one asked me if I needed to see a counselor or anything like that. I didn’t really get any type of support and that hindered me causing me to get bad grades. I didn’t know how to manage that. Teachers were teaching so fast and I couldn’t get it. At the same time, I was going through so much at a young age that it was just a lot for me to handle. I believed that I should not have been retained. I know I may have failed one grade, but I didn’t believe I was supposed to be retained again because teachers knew I had learning problems.

Even though James always knew he was smart, the second time he was retained affected him because his family began to make fun of him by calling him dumb, stupid, and reminding him that he failed, all while school continued to be an academic struggle. Overall, he wanted a better future for himself despite obstacles.

Dropping out of school became an option for James when it started to become evident, he was two grades behind:

My self-confidence went down because I would get picked on about it by family, and other kids that knew I was older than them. I didn’t really fit in because of my age. I didn’t want to keep using my age as an excuse to be bad at school, I had to do something else. In middle school, I knew I had to change my attitude because that was the only way I could stay on the football team.

In middle school, as James mentioned, he was introduced to the sport of football. "Football helped me with my life, my pain and things of that nature." It helped him to focus because, to
stay on the football team, he had to maintain a certain grade point average. In order to keep that average, he had to make up his mind about the type of student he wanted to be.

James began to talk about his time at BTS. When he first arrived at BTS, he was on a mission to graduate from high school. "I just got tired of hearing, I'm too old and I'm going to get kicked out of school because I'm too old." He wanted to be proactive instead of believing such negative things being said about him. BTS was difficult for James but it allowed him to create a network of friends with similar circumstances to help him maintain focus and do what he knew he was capable of doing as a then high school student:

I ended up getting a lot of support through the bridge. I feel I’ve gotten the most support in my life through the bridge, especially my high school counselor Mrs. Lawrence. She helped guide me so much. I was actually able to talk to her and let her know what I’d been through with everything. She really helped me through the college process. She was a big influence in my life, and I hope to one day become a counselor, because when she helped me, that meant a lot to me. I want to be able to help someone else. She taught me different things, staying humble, just doing what I have to do. The two years in one school year became a lot, because I was taking a bunch of classes. But I would tell myself “you can’t stop now, you made it this far.

James gives a great amount of credit to his high school counselor at BTS. She made it her priority to be his guide and help him through not only his circumstances but also the college process and for that he deems her to be the biggest influence in his life.

Interactions with family weren't educationally supportive of James. He recalls feeling like he had to fend for himself because he didn't feel his family members cared about his continuing
education. Although they were well aware that he was two years overage, they were busy with their own lives and could not make time to support him:

   It made me feel like I was by myself because they never really cared about my continuing education, so it was kind of hard for us to relate. I don’t think they really valued me wanting to continue my education. They were just too busy trying to live their own lives to be there for me.

In middle school, the lack of familial support caused him to display disruptive behaviors in school. What he'd gone through as a child, being overage for grade, and not having his biological parents in his life began to take a toll. He recalls feeling overwhelmed by the number of things that were going on he couldn't process it all at once. “I was going through so much at a young age and just seeing everyone else with their parents, I couldn’t really process what was going on because a lot was going on.” James’ focus was off, he began suffering academically, and feelings of depression due to his school experience and his parent's absence plagued his hopes to succeed as a student. "My parents hop in and out when I'm doing something well or I've reached a milestone, then disappear." This caused him to be bitter.

   The year James was first retained, he recalls not having a clue what was going on. At the end of that particular school year when report cards were passed out, other students report cards said promoted while his said retained. When he asked around about what the word retained meant, others began to laugh at him and make fun of him at school. To his dismay, when he got home to show his report card to his aunt, his family made fun of him as well. Putting him down and calling him names as if it were a joke. There was never any explanation as to what retention meant for James, and his guardian never seized an opportunity to find out why grade retention had occurred. "I was being degraded at a young age about failing, by family and others."
Believing that his speech problem may have caused him to be retained, he couldn't completely grasp why he needed to complete the same grade for a second time. James's aunt opened his report card and began yelling at him "How did this happen? How could you get retained?" He was a 1st grader at the time. He recalls it being a lot to take in at the time because emotionally he was going through so much at a young age. The experience “really tore me as a person.”

“I was always being told that I wouldn’t be smart enough to go to college.” People called him slow because of a learning strategy class he was taking in middle school that only ESE students were taking. The toughest comments began in middle school and carried over into high school. If it had not been for football, the relationships he’d formed with coaches and mentors, and his high school counselor, he does not believe he would have made it through high school. Football gave him an outlet to vent his frustrations and create new bonding friendships with his teammates who did not ridicule him because of his age. Reflecting on the meaning of his experience gave James a new perspective on what his journey truly meant to his present success. As an adult, he questions why he ever needed to be retained and feels that missing out on the opportunity to navigate his years of schooling with his peers caused him to have to reevaluate himself constantly.

In talking about how being overage affected his success, he doesn’t believe being overage affected his success because of his resilience and determination to not use his age and grade retentions as an excuse. He made it his motivation, knowing he would have to work harder than the next person due to his educational setbacks:

I applaud myself for not giving up because I could have. Something in me just wanted better and I just kept pushing and thinking about where I came from. I’d remind myself of how happy I would be for making it because normally people cannot push through. I have
many friends that dropped out of school. They just gave up and then tried to make excuses for themselves instead of trying to make it better while they could. So I am appreciative of myself and my own personal efforts to survive.

He never wanted to be a product of his environment or educational circumstances which he attributes to the reason he never truly saw failure as an option. “I just kept pushing through even in times of struggle.”

In the future, James sees himself taking advantage of opportunities to grow and continued his education. He also aspires to one day be a school counselor to help students who have had similar life and educational experiences in order to help show them that success and graduation is always an option no matter how far behind you are. "No one can believe in you more than you can believe in yourself and students should create a support system if there isn't one at home.” “Connecting to individuals that can help is vital to an overage student's success.” His advice for overage students is that "Family can sometimes be distracting if they aren't supportive, so seek help and think about what you want in life.” James also aspires to write a book about his life and journey as an overage student.

**Joseph Johnson**

"I was bullied.” The first three words Joseph stated in response to interactions with peers, teachers, and school administration. Not at all shy about jumping right into discussing his experiences as an overage student, I knew from the start he indeed wanted to make it clear that he was not at all thrilled about his educational journey. “Bullying started because I was overage. I wasn’t the coolest person in the room, so I was bullied the whole time. I was out of place.”
Bullying occurred the most for him in elementary and middle school, which he describes as the hardest times in his life. He wanted so badly to fit in and recalls constantly finding ways to do so:

When I got to high school, it wasn’t as much bullying as it was trying to be somebody I wasn’t. I wanted to be so cool simply because I was older than everybody in my class. I believe I was sixteen in the ninth grade, so since I wanted to fit in so badly, I worked hard to do so. Elementary and middle school, I was really bullied. I was in a bad situation. I was trying to be somebody who I wasn’t because I didn’t want to be bullied. I was trying to get the attention that I couldn’t have. While in high school, I developed into a pretender because I wanted to gain and keep friends. I wanted to be cool just because I was older than everyone in my class.

In elementary school, Joseph recalls having incompetent teachers. Most of his teachers treated him much differently than other students in the classroom. “They definitely thought I wasn’t going to make it. The first time I failed, my teachers told me that I was going to fail again. She said I wasn’t even going to graduate high school.” He was six years old at the time. The elementary teachers questioned his ability to continue through grade school from an early age. Not only did he feel bullied by his peers, but he also felt bullied by his teachers.

His middle school teachers were more caring, patient, and understanding of what he was going through as an overage student. Joseph also had dyslexia, so he began to receive attention from teachers, interventionists, and administrators during that time. “They were always there for me when I needed somebody to talk to.” Middle school is also where his interactions with his peers were poor and often resulted in fighting, gaining him unwanted attention from school administration.
Description of interactions with family during his time of being an overage student was tough for Joseph to describe. He did not want his family members to know he was overage, more specifically his siblings. Although his parents knew he'd been retained, to his recollection, they didn't care to hear about what he was experiencing as a student. Joseph recalls finding out he’d been retained:

I distinctly remember the feeling. I walked in the house and I was like “yeah school is over. Mom did I pass?” and she said “no.” I didn’t understand. When I got to school, all of the people that I was in kindergarten with were in first grade, and I realized I wasn’t in the same classes as them. They laughed at me and I did not understand. So I came home after the end of the second school year, I am six now, and I ask “Mom did I pass?” she says “No, not this time.” At this time my brain is moving. Why? Why am I not moving up? I now realize the people now in first and second grade are laughing at me. “Man you still in Kindergarten?” they would say. You are a seven-year-old kindergartener. At this time, I am now old enough to understand this is not right. I am in a class of five-year olds and I am seven years old. I am bigger than most of them. What is going on? Kids would ask, “why are you so much bigger than us?”

Joseph was bullied every day in kindergarten. “I remember kindergarten teachers telling me I would never get pass the 5th grade.” He felt no one understood what he was going through at the time, and he couldn't find the courage to talk about it with anyone. It wasn't until his sister got into a huge altercation protecting him from bullying at school that his experiences as an overage student became evident to family members. "My parents were the reason I didn't go to the first grade" Joseph stated. His parents had decided to hold him back in kindergarten due to some academic deficiencies they'd noticed at home. Unknown at the time by his parents and teacher,
Joseph had dyslexia. Dyslexia presented as a setback and being overage and dyslexic caused his self-esteem to suffer at such an early age. It would take suffering another grade retention in kindergarten before school officials noticed he would need additional academic support for his reading deficiencies.

By the time Joseph reached the 5th grade he was thirteen years old. This point in the interview process became an emotional journey for him. He was very passionate recalling the details but also tearful. He vividly explains his feelings from childhood while having his head down and eyes closed. He was then much bigger than his peers and the bud of every classroom joke. Teachers singled him out for his size and behavior bringing more unwanted attention:

I wanted to commit suicide around that time. It wasn’t even about school, I just felt so bad about myself. I couldn’t go home and tell my big brother that I wanted to kill myself. He was like my best friend. I wanted to be able to tell him about my good grades, not that I was depressed. I was going through a lot because I was getting bullied every day. Nobody knew what was going on. That was the worst part. I was the only person that knew what was going on. Nobody knew.

Upon entering middle school, Joseph wanted to drop out of school. He was now a 14year-old 6th grader, hitting puberty while others were not, and experiencing bullying like never before. He was unpopular by the standards of that time and did not have nice clothing items and shoes like students in his class. "Bullying happened all day every day.” He felt as if other students would look at him and find something to say just because it was the popular thing to do.

Although he was suffering from bullying, he began to excel academically due to the care of his middle school teachers. A reading assessment was given to the class, and Joseph failed the assessment. Another student caught wind of his assessment grade and decided to blurt out the news
to the entire class. The students in the classroom began to ridicule, laugh at, and make fun of Joseph publicly for hours that day and the teacher said nothing:

I’d reached a point where I was the smartest in the class and I was proud of that. So one day, I failed a test, and the class talked about me like a dog…like I was nothing. “How could you fail that test; it was so easy.” They literally talked about me all day.

The bullying began to take a toll on his emotional wellbeing. He was depressed and closed off from the world but still did not want his parents to know what he'd been dealing with at school.

One of Joseph's biggest fears was the fear of disappointment. He did not want to be a disappointment to his parents, more specifically his siblings. His brother was the "golden child" as he explained and having to face the noise of not amounting to the status of his brother made him afraid. The bullying he'd experienced in elementary and middle school was not as evident in high school and he felt pretty optimistic overall about completing high school to graduate. Amid his high school experience, he did feel the pressure of trying to be something he was not:

Back then I was a church boy. Well I am still a church boy; I am still really into church. So, I was a church boy, but I didn’t want to be a church boy at school because they told me if I was being that person, nobody would like me. I was really determined to be popular because I didn’t want to be bullied like I was in elementary school. I was doing anything. I would fight people for no reason at all. I walked up to a boy and punched him in the face for no reason. He turned around and asked, “why did you hit me?” I responded “yeah, my bad.” My friends told me, if I did not fight the boy, they were going to jump me. They were the coolest people in the school, so I had to do what they said so that I could be cool. I did things to draw attention to myself just so people could notice me. I used to do crazy stuff like lie and fall out on the floor for no reason. I wish you could have seen it! I just did things
so everybody would pay attention to me. It was really bad. I wanted people to care about me a lot. I felt like a nobody. I was going through those things trying to understand why I felt the way that I felt in my head. I wanted everyone to console me. I would even fake injuries for everyone to look at me and watch me. I just wanted someone to care about me.

Joseph still battles with attention seeking behaviors as an adult. “I have my days but feel I am mentally better because I know who I am.” He also believes he suffers presently from emotional problems due to the things he experienced being overage for grade. "I overthink a lot of things. Something will happen and I'll just get overly emotional." He also describes being very defensive when others say things to him, he does not like. Some things have occurred in the past that impact the way he communicates with others presently. “If I was not retained, I wouldn't be so emotional, nor would I have tried to pretend to be something I wasn’t for so long in my life.”

Joseph was anxious to deliver the details of his experiences because he remembered them so vividly and experienced them so intensely. I wanted to know more about his experiences of being bullied because of how passionate he was about recalling that period in his life. He specifically remembered the amount of bullying that occurred in elementary school but came to the realization that the bullying was not the most detrimental to him emotionally but trying to pretend to be something and someone he was not took a toll on his wellbeing. In middle school he recalls students telling him he was "big and soft" and that he wouldn't fight anyone. So, to prove himself, he would start fights with random people for no specific reason. He would act like a thug for attention claiming to have things that he did not have:

I used to act like I was hood. I used to sag my pants knowing that if my mom were around to see my sagging, I would’ve got into trouble. My identity at home and school were two different people. I used to act like I had things that I did not have so I could be popular.
Everything that others were doing to get attention, I was trying to do the same thing. Even though they were getting into trouble, I was trying to get into trouble too.

He did outlandish things for attention like behaving disruptively to get others to laugh. He wanted to be the popular guy because others told him if he'd be that person, nobody would bother him. Drawing attention to himself so others could notice him was a daily routine. Outwardly he wanted to show others he was this amazing, funny, and charming person but inwardly he felt like he was a nobody. Reflecting on this period in his life, he does not know why he was trying so hard to be someone he was not. "Getting held back two times, being bullied through elementary school and not understanding why people didn't like me led to me working hard to be another person."

It was not until the age of 14 or 15 that Joseph found out his parents voluntarily made the decision to hold him back in kindergarten. Out of respect for his parents, he did not question the decision they'd made to hold him back. However, in that moment he became filled with rage and bitterness recounting the humiliation, bullying, and pretending he'd unwillingly endured over the years:

I remember bringing up the fact that I was bullied, which I never told my parents. My mom asked “well when did you get bullied?” I responded “when I was in elementary school.” My mom stated “you never told us that.” I responded once more: “I tried to tell you when I was failing… did you all know that I was going to be failing?” my mom replied “yes because I am the one that held you back.” I did not want to challenge her authority. That caused resentment between my parents and I.

He became filled with anger and disbelief at that moment but never ventured to tell his parents all he'd experienced because he only wanted to please them. He wanted their approval and was
afraid of what they may think if he told them of the turmoil, he’d been experiencing due to being two grades behind his same age peers.

Joseph's social life suffered as a teen because his parents didn't allow him to publicly hang out with his peers beyond school. It was hard for him because it was embarrassing. “I was afraid to ask to go do things with my friends.” Not being able to thrive socially was a mental setback for him and his parents weren't aware enough of what he was going through to allow those opportunities to be amongst peers. Joseph once asked his parents could he go to counseling and they denied him the chance to do so. “I don’t think they thought anything was wrong with me.” They believed there to be a stigma attached to mental health counseling. His eldest brother was serving time in jail for a crime he'd committed, and he recalls his mother saying to him "you are either going to prison, or you are going to jail just like your brother." This said after they denied him the opportunity to receive mental health counseling. To get them to come to terms with the reality of what he was going through, he would do things at school to get teachers and administrators to call home. Their only response would be "he doesn't act like this at home." He did not act like that at home because he was too afraid to let his parents know how immensely his overage experience was affecting him.

In middle school and early high school, Joseph felt as if he was in a shell. He began to gravitate to troubled teens forming toxic friendships. He would sometimes go home and cry while listening to sad music to let out his emotional hurt. He just felt sad all the time. Recalling how his parent disowned his older brother that was in jail, Joseph was afraid of dropping out because his parents may disown him as well. He preferred instead to consider taking his own life. "I was either going to drop out and run away, or I was going to leave completely by taking my own life." No one around him asked if he was okay and he felt as if no one cared. "Why should I be here?"
No one was seeking to find out what was wrong with him. He felt invisible in the eyes of those who believed should care about his mental health. Joseph began lying for people to pay attention to him wanting others to see his hurt, pain, and self-rejection. He was convinced that through killing himself, everyone would feel guilty for not checking on him. If he was dead, mourners would go out and purchase a t-shirt with his face on it, and at the time, that is what he desired. He had reached what he described as an all-time low in the 8th grade.

The administration at his high school noticed he was entering 11th grade as a 19-year-old and offered him the opportunity to graduate with his same-age peers by attending the BTS. Joseph felt mentally unprepared to complete a double promotion program to graduate, but he felt compelled to take the chance since his parents urged him to do so. After getting into the BTS in order to achieve double promotion, Joseph felt the pressure of the academic workload but also did not want to leave the friendships he'd established in the general comprehensive high school environment.

“I really began to think dropping out would be the best move for me because I thought I would end up dead or in jail.” Joseph's dad would tell him that often feeling as if his son would be a failure. "Graduating early was hard on me because I wasn't ready for the world." Joseph described graduation and the period after graduation as the hardest part of his life. It was as if he was being snatched out of one life and being forced to fill the shoes of another and felt overwhelmed by the experience. He did not go to the regular high school prom, could not do the normal high school activities, and felt shut out from what he deemed the "high school experience." It caused him to feel the weight of being the one child of his parents that could not
live up to their expectations. “I thought to myself, I have got to graduate and get out of school even though that’s not what I want to do.” Looking back, he is now grateful to have a story to tell.

The resentment from failing kindergarten, not knowing his own identity, the things that occurred in high school, and the experience of wanting to kill himself is still unknown to his parents. Although his parents were present, he felt emotionally abandoned. Unpleasant familial situations occurred often and the pressure of feeling like he did not amount to be what his parents wanted him to culminate in feelings of disappointment and failure. It was not until becoming a City Year Corps member that he realized his power to make a difference, even though he still feels emotionally sensitive in certain social interactions.

After completing school two years overage for such an extensive period, it allowed Joseph to come to conclusions concerning how he would use the experience to further develop as a person. He believes having such a difficult experience as an overage student dashed his hope for college and caused him to be placed in a personally awkward position having to attempt to fit in and lie about his age among other things. Attending the BTS placed him in the position to graduate with peers, but in his eyes, it forced him to graduate early causing an insurmountable amount of stress.

Overall, being overage had an impact on Joseph:

Being an overage student dashed my hopes for college and messed with my emotions and mental state. Sometimes I wish I could go back in time because if I could take all that I know now and go back to ten years old, I think I would have been fine. Being that age… the age of 10, I think I was in the second or third grade, was extremely difficult for me. So going forward, I would hope that I can find out how to cope with that so that I can help kids that have the same difficulties that I do.
Presently, Joseph's experiences have filled him with a passion to help other students with similar educational circumstances. "I want to see the growth in kids that I could not see in myself." He has a strong desire to be that someone to others that he did not have in the public school system. "It's difficult to be older than everybody else and have everyone treat you differently." Joseph currently mentors an overage student and recalls an instance where the child had a rough day in class:

The student comes up to me and I asked him “why aren’t you doing any work?” he responded, “because I don’t care about myself…and I don’t got nobody to care about me, so why should I care.” I felt so passionate about helping him. I told him “I am not going to turn my back on you because everybody else did. I want to see you be great. You just have to want it more for yourself. More than anybody else can want for you. If I am putting in the effort for you, I want you to put in the same effort for me.” The young man broke down and cried in my arms. He was hurting and I knew that hurt.

"I love the fact that I can help kids now." Joseph is extremely passionate about working with children. His role as a mentor has given him the ability to candidly share his experiences without fear of ridicule and hurt from the past. He feels accomplished because he fought through his experience and is now preparing to go to college. It's amazing to him how much he has grown in the last two years. Joseph is not quite sure where the future will take him but has a desire to help get more mentors like himself placed in not only the schools in the urban core but all schools in his school district. He believes some students are having experiences similar to his in all schools, and they deserve a hero. Joseph considers the school in which he was retained to be more affluent and because teachers were accustomed to students with a strong knowledge base stemming from home, he was overlooked for an opportunity to receive the assistance he deserved.
He now has a platform to educate others and has a desire to influence educational leaders on matters of grade retention and mental health for elementary school students.

**Getting it Right…**

I asked each participant two final questions that were the most important questions for the completion of the study; what would you say to advise teachers, administrators, and policy makers based on having been retained multiple times and having experienced your years of schooling two or more years overage? What do educators need to do to assist students who are navigating their school experience two or more years overage? Each response was aligned to the direct support of school-based individuals. During participant’s overage experience, they felt ignored, isolated, unwanted, or unintelligent. Thankfully, they each experienced a time in their lives where they thought more of themselves than to just give up, drop out, and become a failure. Participants would like to advise teachers first, to not retain children that are trying. Isaiah states “surround yourself with people that can help you take your education seriously. Administrators should try to talk to students, especially those overage students they see struggling and those they see giving up.”

Secondly, they would like them to build relationships with all their students and know that even if a child is overage for grade, that does not mean he or she will not be successful in the classroom. They want to advise being kind to those students because feeling like a failure as a child can be traumatic. For participants like Walter, Joseph, and James, their experience manifested positively but each participant is aware that is not always the case. James provides the following insight:

When you are active in life, you do not pause to think about the journey. The more I think about the things this study allowed me to reflect on, I feel blessed because some people don’t
have the knowledge to want better for themselves. I could’ve dropped out, I could have potentially joined a gang or something, be in jail, or dead. I did not let begin old or behind define me. No one ever thought that I would be where I am today, so I am just really thankful that I had some sort of sign to continue to do great things, and opportunities to positively influence other students.

If you notice behavior problems for an overage student, talk to them find out what’s going on in their mind. Retention makes students hate school even more. They feel like they are not smart enough and it’s just not meant for them. Retention doesn’t give a student hope at all because they probably already see negative things around them. There needs to be student help instead of judging them for being behind. Let them know I am here to help you and not here to hurt you. Build a relationship with them and do not just let bullying occur and continue without saying anything.

Joseph was extremely passionate in his recommendation:

I want others to know specifically that they need to get kids help because mental health is very serious. When a child fails, the mental health toll that it takes on a child is very difficult to understand unless you get them help. It could save a child’s life. So get the kids the necessary help they need or stop failing them. If you are going to continue to fail them, you need to get them help. Put them in a situation so they can get better. Everybody learns differently. Everybody needs that support system. Educators need to know that every child that failed, they all go through something. I do not care what you all think, they each go through something even if you try to switch them to another school after they fail. All of them need help. Just a little something each day for their mental health and wellbeing.
Participants spoke about mentorship, mental health therapy, and dedicating extra time after school for help with deficiencies. Walter spoke about doubts others may harbor concerning overage students:

Overage is not what everyone thinks it is. Just because I was overage that did not mean that I couldn’t do it. Their first thought should not be “get rid of him or her.” They need to find alternative ways to help those students and not just kick them out or move them along. For overage students, it’s not that they can’t do it, it’s just a little more difficult doing it when you feel like you have already failed.

Lastly, the participants would like educators to know that reaching a child that is two or more years behind their peers may be tough, but not helpless. It is important for educators to not only be sensitive to what the student may be going through in school but also what they may be dealing with at home as a result of failing a multiple grade levels. They see it as important to motivate overage students and encourage them to engage in class. Joseph mentioned that leaving an overage student out is what he calls a “recipe for disaster” because that student will either behave negatively or shut down completely. Each participant wants to be able to tell a child in their similar situation with similar experiences that they are not alone.

Conclusively, it is about the children we serve daily. When a child is retained two or more grades, it goes beyond what it means for the classroom environment, or what it means for a school, district, or economy. Ultimately, what does that mean for that child? What does it mean for that middle school student who is being bullied and struggling to fit in with students he or she cannot relate to? What does it mean for the ninth grader who is being told “You are too old, you shouldn’t even be here”? What does it mean for that child who contemplates taking their life? All emerged from the data, but the perspective of overage graduates provides educators the
opportunity to get it right. To change a narrative for a little brown child who may be having trouble navigating their comprehensive K-12 environment. Based on the knowledge I have obtained from this study, I would venture to say, continuing this work is not only necessary, it is vital to our success as teachers, administrators and educators.

Summary of Findings

The induction process allowed for forming reasoning in pursuit of understanding during the analysis of the findings thus helping me to establish a relationship between participant experiences and the research question. Once the findings were categorized, I examined the similarities and differences in social, emotional, academic, and other issues. As mentioned in chapter three, patterns, resemblances, and regularities in experiences were gathered from participant interviews to reach conclusions. The following table outlines the differences and similarities of each of the four participants, name coded, to specify key factors. For example, JJ signifies Joseph Johnson. The differences identified are outliers mentioned by each participant.

Table 1. Similarities and Differences in Social, Emotional, Academic, or other Issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differences in Social issues</th>
<th>Participant code</th>
<th>Similarities in Social issues</th>
<th>Participant code(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preferred company of older students or other overage students</td>
<td>WM</td>
<td>Lying about age</td>
<td>IJ, WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretending to be someone else to fit in</td>
<td>JJ</td>
<td>Feelings of isolation/being alone</td>
<td>WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrespectful of authority</td>
<td>WM</td>
<td>Bullied</td>
<td>IJ, WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wanting to make a good impression on teachers</td>
<td>IJ, WM, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Attention seeking</td>
<td>WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Called stupid/dumb/other | IJ, WM, JC, JJ
---|---
Behavioral problems evident | WM, JC, JJ
Gravitated toward the wrong crowd | IJ, WM, JC, JJ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differences in Emotional issues</th>
<th>Participant code</th>
<th>Similarties in Emotional issues</th>
<th>Participant code(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Felt not good enough</td>
<td>IJ</td>
<td>Parental Resentment</td>
<td>WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violent</td>
<td>WM</td>
<td>Anger, hurt, pain</td>
<td>WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt put down by those around</td>
<td>IJ, JC</td>
<td>Feelings of alienation</td>
<td>WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicidal moments</td>
<td>JJ</td>
<td>Family issues beyond parents/guardian</td>
<td>IJ, WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>JJ</td>
<td>Resentment</td>
<td>WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebellion</td>
<td>WM</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Differences in Academic issues</th>
<th>Participant code</th>
<th>Similarities in Academic issues</th>
<th>Participant code(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speech impediment</td>
<td>JC</td>
<td>IEP/ESE</td>
<td>WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexia</td>
<td>JJ</td>
<td>No knowledge of retention reason</td>
<td>IJ, WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>JJ</td>
<td>Fearful of standardized assessments</td>
<td>IJ, WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Same teacher post initial retention</td>
<td>IJ, JJ</td>
<td>Lack of teacher help/support</td>
<td>IJ, WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt unprepared for the world</td>
<td>JJ</td>
<td>Thoughts of or told to be ADHD, Fear of being called upon in class</td>
<td>IJ, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>IJ, WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in Other</td>
<td>Participant code</td>
<td>Similarities in Other</td>
<td>Participant code(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>issues</td>
<td></td>
<td>issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother passed away</td>
<td>IJ</td>
<td>Felt retained because</td>
<td>WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>of behavior</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Football as an outlet</td>
<td>JC</td>
<td>Told they have ADHD</td>
<td>WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adopted</td>
<td>JC</td>
<td>No family support</td>
<td>IJ, WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Told they would go</td>
<td>WM, JJ</td>
<td>Picked on by family</td>
<td>IJ, WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to jail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transient home life</td>
<td>WM</td>
<td>Picked on by friends</td>
<td>IJ, WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blamed by parents/guardians for</td>
<td>IJ, WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>retention</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Family resentment</td>
<td>WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>presently</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Has a desire to work</td>
<td>WM, JC, JJ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>with students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Adapted from Stake (2006) Multiple Case Study Analysis
IJ: Isaiah Jackson; WM: Walter Moore; JC: James Connor; JJ: Joseph Johnson

**Individual Analysis Summary**
Once the similarities and differences were categorized and coded, I proceeded to synthesize the commonalities into themes. I created participant codes that identified what key factors emerged and during which interview they emerged. For example, WM1 indicates that a factor was mentioned by Walter Moore during interview one. The following table summarizes the initial differences and similarities data into nine conclusive themes based on the analysis of each individual participant. The similarities show the shared themes that emerged between each of the four participants.

Table 2. Theme, Factors, and Supporting Evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Merged Factor Clusters (themes)</th>
<th>Participant Codes</th>
<th>Key factors/Evidence from data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Theme 1: Desire to fit in     | WM1, JJ1, WM2, JC2, JJ2 | • Lying about age to peers  
                                |                               | • Trying to please teachers (teacher’s pet)  
                                |                               | • Attempt to hang with same age peers  
                                |                               | • Overt acts for attention  
                                |                               | • Trying to pretend to be a “thug” to fit in with others  
                                |                               | • People pleasing |
| Theme 2: Discipline Issues    | WM1, JC1, JJ1, IJ2, WM2, JC2, JJ2 | • Fighting  
                                |                               | • Sent to an alternative school  
                                |                               | • Classroom behavior issues  
                                |                               | • Discipline referrals  
                                |                               | • Combative with teachers  
                                |                               | • School suspensions |
| Theme 3: Bullying             | IJ1, WM1, JC1, JJ1, JJ2, IJ2, WM2, JC2, JJ2, | • Being called names: old, slow, dumb, stupid  
                                |                               | • Coercion to fight others  
                                |                               | • Being singled out by teachers and other influential adults  
                                |                               | • Intimidation  
                                |                               | • Verbal attacks |
| Theme 4:                  | WM1, JC1, JJ1, IJ2, WM2, JC2, JJ2 | • Feelings of disappointment, hurt, pain, depression, shame, isolation, invisibility and suicide.  
|                        |                                  | • Resentment towards peers, teachers, administrators, and parents/guardians  
| Damaging feelings/emotions |                                  |  

| Theme 5:                  | IJ1, WM1, JC1, JJ1, IJ2, WM2, JC2, JJ2 | • Parents lack of knowledge  
| Lack of Parental involvement |                                  | • Not showing care for participant’s retention  
|                            |                                  | • Transient lifestyle (constantly moving)  
|                            |                                  | • Asking for their child to be retained  
|                            |                                  | • Lack of knowledge about child’s learning deficiencies  

| Theme 6:                  | IJ1, JC1, JJ1, IJ2, WM2, JC2, JJ2 | • Lack of relationship with parents  
| Family hurt               |                                  | • No relationship with parents  
|                            |                                  | • Hurtful words from family (i.e. dumb, stupid, failure, you are going to end up in jail)  
|                            |                                  | • Absence of parents from life  
|                            |                                  | • Parent keeping student out of school due to personal reasons  
|                            |                                  | • Constant reminders of failure (grade retention)  

| Theme 7:                  | WM1, JC1, JJ2, IJ2, WM2, JC2, JJ2 | • Teacher stating, they would fail  
| Condemnation              |                                  | • Disregard from teachers  
|                            |                                  | • “You are too old”  
|                            |                                  | • “You shouldn’t be here”  
|                            |                                  | • “We need to get you out of here  

| Theme 8:                  | IJ1, WM1, JC1, JJ1, IJ2, WM2, JC2, JJ2 | • All participants attend program  
| Double Promotion program to achieve graduation (Bridge to Success Academy) |                                  | • All participant’s experienced successful graduation from the program  
|                            |                                  | • Had a much better experience amongst overage peers  

| Theme 9:                  | WM1, JC1, JJ2, WM2, JC2, JJ2 | • Working as an elementary school mentor  


A desire to work with children having similar experiences

- Working with youth ages 5-13 as a volunteer
- A desire to become a principal
- A desire to become a school counselor
- Working at the neighborhood elementary school

Note: Adapted from Stake (2006) Multiple Case Study Analysis

IJ1: Isaiah Jackson interview 1
WM1: Walter Moore interview 1
JC1: James Connor interview 1
JJ1: Joseph Johnson interview 1

IJ2: Isaiah Jackson interview 2
WM2: Walter Moore interview 2
JC2: James Connor interview 2
JJ2: Joseph Johnson interview 2

The desire to fit in. According to the literature, students that are overage tend to struggle to engage in the classroom amongst their peers who are typically one to three years younger (Balfanz, et.al., 2007; Jimerson, et.al., 1997; Reed, 1998). Based on the research findings, participants either chose to disengage within the classroom, or do things to get others attention. This is evident in the data based on participants doing things to please the teacher beyond academia in order to gain favor, acting in violence, pretending to be someone else to become popular to fit in, or trying to remain quiet and unseen so the teacher would not fail them in grade. Walter, in particular, preferred hanging out with his same age peers later in his schooling career by disengaging in class and preferring to only bond with students that were his same age. Joseph would do outlandish acts to gain the attention of his peers to become popular. Now as an adult, he feels he does this in certain settings for others to like him. As a third grade student, Isaiah played the role of teacher’s pet and would stay after in class to clean, fix desks, assist the teacher with tasks, all in order ensure he would not be retained for a second time. James chose extracurricular activities such as football to reform his image into one that was more socially acceptable amongst peers, teachers, administrators, and family. Each participant attributes being overage for grade to
having to ‘find themselves’ so to speak. It was not always easy to be the oldest, slowest, or least likely to succeed.

**Discipline Issues.** The occurrence of negative behaviors emerged as a commonality throughout the findings. Each participant recalled moments in their focused life history, as a student, where they experienced having discipline issues or having been reprimanded for unacceptable behavior. Walter, James, and Joseph shared the belief that their discipline issues may have been the result of what they were experiencing as overage students.

**Bullying** occurred with each participant throughout the span of their education as an overage student. Being older, and in some cases much larger than their classmates caused negative attention that contributed to a number of things such as intimidation, coercion, fighting, name calling, and ridicule. Teachers and other influential adults also contributed to bullying making statements such as “You aren’t going to make it to high school” or “You are going to end up in jail.” Words like stupid, slow, old, and worthless were all words used to describe participants along their educational journey. More specifically, Joseph was pressured into feeling he had to pretend to be someone he was not causing him to have suicidal thoughts.

**Damaging feelings and emotions.** Each participant experiences feelings of hurt, shame, pain, and isolation differently. As mentioned in chapter four, those students that experienced the most year’s multiple years overage for grade tended to experience emotional issues more frequently and in depth than the participant that had not. Isaiah is essentially an outlier in this category, although he was called names such as stupid, dumb, and failure. He did not let that deter him from moving forward with his education. Isaiah did however experience a significant amount of isolation when his mother passed away his third grade year. Walters’ emotions were displayed as rage. He could not handle the ridicule from others during his years as an overage
student. He is the participant that spoke most candidly about behavior problems in school and having to attend an alternative school as a middle school student. Defiance, walking out of class, debating teachers, disregard for administration were all reactions to Walters’ overage experience.

James, although more laid back during the interview process, spoke about his hurt and pain as a child due to both family issues and being behind his peers. As an adolescent, football provided him an outlet to release his hurts, be himself, and forget about the negative experiences of his educational realities. Joseph was magnificently transparent in discussing emotional issues he has due to his years of experiencing schooling as an overage student. He was retained twice in Kindergarten and specifically recalls the negative feelings experienced while he watched all his old friends move onto second grade. Joseph was large for his age and towered over his other kindergarten classmates. As a teenager, he recalls looking much older than his classmates and telling his parents that “mentally” he needed help. He expressed thoughts of suicide in 3rd, 5th, and 11th grade. He also suffered from depression as a middle school student. School was a constant emotional battle for him, feeling he needed to pretend to be someone else in order to fit in. According to Joseph, emotional issues of sensitivity, and wanting people to like him still exist present day.

**Lack of parental involvement.** Each participant experienced this phenomenon differently but assuredly. Isaiah lost his mom as a third grade student and his grandmother assumed the role of caregiver. Although his grandmother did the best she could, there were important things, educationally, she may not have possessed the where with all to attend to. Walter primarily lived with his mother and eight other siblings. His mother main priority was attending to the needs of her children and school was not a priority. This led to moving multiple times from neighborhood to neighborhood, and truancy. By the time Walter reached third grade,
he and all of his live-in siblings were one-year overage due to decisions made by their mother. The one-year setback was not an issue for his mom and even when retention happened for a second time, not much attention was paid to the matter.

James was adopted by his aunt at a young age. Once adopted, although his parents were around, they were not his primary caregivers and weren’t in his life. James deficiencies and education were not priority, and he could not recall a time any adult stepped in to inquire about his lack academic progress. Joseph was held back in Kindergarten by his parent who felt, without advice, he was not reading well enough to progress to the first grade. After completing kindergarten for a second time, his parents again felt he was not prepared to move forward. Having completed kindergarten three times, his parents never truly intervened for him during his years of education. They were content with knowing, and saying, he was their “struggling” child.

**Family hurt and condemnation.** Themes four and five were the most prominent during the research process. Each participant felt most strongly about their experiences and interactions with their family members during their years of schooling as an overage student. During the time of interview, discussing family often made participants uncomfortable. Each participant had a difficult time talking to the details of the things they experienced in regard to their parents, guardians, siblings, and other relatives. Family members used participants grade retention as a source of ridicule, putdown, and disappointment. Through the responses of participants, it became clear to me that family interactions have a strong correlation to the perseverance of a student who is experiencing setback educationally. Isaiah’s grandmother would call him stupid thinking it to be a source of motivation and his younger siblings undermined him by making him feel like the failure who did know anything. Walter, although not very vocal about what he was experiencing because he was the oldest child, yearned for assistance and comfort from family.
James never had the opportunity to have his parents in his life and it still bothers him as a now adult. Joseph’s relationship with his parents is severed and he still harbors a significant amount of resistance toward his parents for allowing him to be retained, but also not allowing him to seek help from a therapist and putting him down for a significant part of his life.

**Attended a double promotion program to achieve graduation.** Each of the participants attended the Bridge to Success Academy which is a double promotion program for students that are two to three years overage for grade. Students essentially have the opportunity to complete two grade levels in one school year in order to catch up with their same age peers in grade level. BTS is program committed to investing in continuous professional learning that is standards-based, results-driven, relevant and improves administrative leadership, teaching quality, and student achievement for students that are behind. Each of the participants spoke on the key role BTS played in having the achieve graduation.

**A desire to work with children having similar experiences.** Each participant expressed a desire to work with students due to the obstacles they faced as an overage student. While Joseph and Walter currently work with students, James would like to become a school guidance counselor based on the nurturing he received from his high school guidance counselor, and Isaiah is not sure of the capacity in which he will be able to work with students but does not want a student to feel isolated because they are older than students in their class. Joseph would like to dedicate his life’s work to mentoring other students and helping them to persevere and Walter wants to one day become principal of a school. James would like to become a published author and write a book about his life and experiences as an overage student.

Each participant studied is similar such as being African-American male students who completed school two or more years overage for grade, but they were able to tell their stories
from varying perspectives. While there are similar experiences, there are also differences. The graduate participants in the study, through their lens, were able to reflect and recall instances they viewed as relevant to their overage years of schooling.

**Unexpected Findings**

While some of the findings were along the lines of things, I suspected may emerge in the research process, there were a few things I did not expect to play a major role in the overage experience of the participants. The family was a salient talking point for each of the participants. I found that when an interview question and guiding question involving discussing the interactions with family occurred, it was difficult for participants to discuss. For each participant, there was a change in body language, it was hard for them to look me in the eye while speaking about certain family members, certain situations, but they each made it a point to let me know how the resented or experienced hurt from family members in some fashion. Although they may have had experiences in school with peers, teachers, and administrators, participants typically passionately discussed interactions with the family to include parents, guardians, or siblings.

Secondly, the experience of Isaiah was much different than that of the other participants. While Walter, James, and Joseph were all retained twice between kindergarten and third grade, Isaiah was retained in 3rd and 10th grade. Not having experienced multiple years of schooling may have been intricate in his differing experience. Although he possessed things in common with other participants, he did not experience the issues in the same manner as the other participants. There was much less depth to the details of his experience as well. There were points in the interview where Isaiah seemed to be searching his mind for the answers and responses for how certain interactions may have affected him, whereas, for the other participants, they were able to
explain hurriedly and much more vividly than Isaiah because they experienced situations intensely.
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The four participants provided insight into what it is like to be two to three years overage for grade during years of schooling in a K-12 setting. This chapter presents a summary of the research with the use of the constant comparative method, conclusions of the study, implications of the study, and recommendations for further research. During the course of the study, themes emerged and implications for grade retention and overage students in particular were evident. First, the discussion will present the analysis depicting the similarities and differences through factors identified in chapter four. Second, the discussion will identify key factors involved in the overage student experience. Finally, I discuss implications for further studies on the topic of grade retention and overage students.

Discussion

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, I have five recommendations for practice. Informing and educating parent/guardian prior to retention decision. With each participant in this study, to their recollection, their parent or guardian was not involved or aware of the grade retainations until after the process had already taken place. It is vital to the child to have an actively aware parent when it comes to not only grade retention but the implications of grade retention.

Mandatorily assess for learning deficiencies or disabilities prior to retention. The participants in the study that received an individual education plan (IEP) did so after they were retained multiple times. The IEP essentially creates an opportunity for teachers, parents, school administrators, related services personnel, and students to work together to improve educational results for children with disabilities. The IEP is the cornerstone of a quality education for each child that may disability. Receiving an IEP or direct assistance after retention has already taken
place may not work in favor of the student. Not only were the parents misinformed, but the participants themselves were not aware of what retention meant for them as a student, nor were they initially aware of learning disabilities and IEP accommodations.

**Training teachers on how to properly educate a student who is two or more years overage within the classroom environment.** Students that are two or more years overage for grade tend to struggle in their learning environment. It is vital for teachers to assess the deficits evident with their students, encourage differentiated forms of engagement, positively promote student support regularly, and remain in close communication with a parent or guardian.

**Mental Health therapy.** According to the American Psychiatric Association, mental health therapy helps build self-esteem, reduce anxiety, strengthen coping mechanisms, and improve social and community functioning. Support dealing with issues related to participant’s mental health could in turn affect the rest of their lives. Based on the findings, participants mentioned depression, anger, anxiety, and even suicide as thoughts, feelings, and emotions they harbored as young children and adolescence. Therapy offers the opportunity for overage students to better navigate their life and educational journey.

**Mentorship and guidance.** Research supports the implementation of mentoring programs as potentially successful approaches to meeting the needs of at-risk students. In the findings, participants mentioned having an influential adult in their lives as a key to their successes, they recalled times where they were alone, isolated, and lacked support, and they also in some cases became or desired to become that caring adult in the lives of other overage students that may be at-risk. Mentoring and having a supportive caring adult for at-risk overage youth has been shown to help students achieve better grades, establish obtainable goals, and enhanced their self-esteem.
when partnered with caring, supportive individuals (Clasen & Clasen, 1997; Flaxman, 1998; Johnson, 2006; Smink, 2000).

**Limitations**

The goal of this study was to provide a description of the perceptions of overage students’ life experience during their years of school but also presently making meaning of that experience. Overall, this study illuminates issues overage students may face as a result of being two or more years overage for grade. One limitation of the study and analysis is the fact that only four participants were interviewed three times each during the gathering of data. This provided a brief glimpse into the view of what an experience may be like for a student that is overage. The ethnicity and gender of each participant is also the same which does not account for how female students or students of other ethnicities may experience being multiple years overage. In order to paint a more detailed picture of the experiences of overage students, observations, interviews with a larger number of participants, and possibly survey data collected from overage graduates could provide more insight into the social, emotional, academic, or other issues that affect students completing school years behind their peers.

**Implications for Future Research**

Based on research in the area of overage being sparse, more research in the area of overage students is important to aiding the continued success of students that have been retained multiple grades. Additional research into the area of overage students could take many paths. Focusing on specific causes and issues will help teachers, administrators, and district employees gain more insight into the strategies and programs that will be useful for school-based interventions that will help teachers reflect on overage students’ needs by knowing the effects of multiple grade retention. Another avenue that is worth exploring based on the findings of this
study would be the role of parents, guardians, and families for students that are overage. Discussion of family was a sensitive subject for all participants but also the area where they displayed the most passion. Further study would also be beneficial in examining the general perceptions of teachers that teach students that are two or more years overage for grade.

Another area that has implications for further research is looking into programs or targeted interventions to specify the impact those programs may possess for students that are overage for class. Although there are programs that do exist, having and knowing the experience from the overage student’s perspective offers a new lens in which to clarify practices that serve the accurate purpose for students. Throughout this study, I learned more about grade retention, school dropout, and what it means to be a student that has experienced multiple retention. The goal of this study was to add to the literature and propose further areas of research that can fill the enormous gap that exists in the literature.

**Implications for School Leaders**

There are several implications for leadership that can be generated based on the findings of this study; first educating leaders on the implications of grade retention practices and also changing the teaching and learning protocol for overage students in schools and districts requiring professional development for teachers and administrators. The findings also uncover a need for school and district leaders to develop professional development that challenges teachers to create new content knowledge, unique pedagogical techniques, approaches to teaching and instruction, and classroom management for educating students who are multiple years behind their peers.
Implications for Policy

The findings present the need to encourage a shift in Florida legislation that mandatorily retains children for not reading proficiently by the third grade. Only 16 states plus D.C. require retention for students that are not reading at proficiency by the end of third grade (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2019). Other states have adopted legislation that allows for promotion to fourth of non-proficient readers but requires students to participate in intervention services, summer reading programs, and many other standards to reach proficiency. Students that have been retained prior to the third grade risk obtaining a second mandatory retention in third thus placing them two or more years behind their peers.

This study also has implications for special education practices in lieu of grade retention. If a student has an IEP and is a special education student, they can subsequently receive a good cause exemption not allowing for retention, but for students of color, creating and IEP in order to avoid retention or assist students with accommodations beyond multiple retentions is simply not the solution. The mandatory retention laws also suggest districts and states policies need to examine their special education policies and practices to identify those that unintentionally yield discriminatory results, and shine a light on groups in need of greater early intervention resources (Artiles et.al., 2010; Gordon, 2017; Morgan et.al., 2017). The unfortunate implication, that the true prevalence of disability may be higher for students of color, can get lost in the back and forth over measurement, sampling, and other methodological issues. We need to work towards better identification practices in special education.
References


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Rhodes, J. (2011). The predictive ability of demographic and psychosocial risk factors, school related characteristic, and service interventions on grade attainment among at-risk elementary school children in a truancy intervention program (Doctoral Dissertation) Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA


Leadership, 47, 84-88


Appendix A: Letter to Participant: Interviewee

Hello possible participant,

First I would like to thank you so much for allowing me the opportunity to tell you about my doctoral study at the University of North Florida. In this study, there will be a sequential interview pattern containing three interviews that will take place where I will ask you questions pertaining to your experiences completing grade school as an overage student. Each interview will be audio recorded and they will last approximately 90 minutes’ maximum. The audio recorded interviews will be face to face and will take place in a safe and secure place of your preference. Participation in this study is voluntary. All references to interview responses will be anonymously unless you would prefer that I use your name.

Discussing issues that may have been difficult could cause some people to get upset. Should you experience any emotional distress, we will immediately stop the interview unless you would prefer that we continue? Verified Psychology Today counselor LaToya St Pierre pre-licensed professional, MA, RMHCI, will be contacted at Redacted in the event that we need her services (Jacksonville, FL). My hopes are that this research can contribute to the field of education in a positive manner informing educators, administrators, school districts and educational policy. I would greatly appreciate an informed decision concerning your participation in the research study in 7 days from today’s date.

I can be notified immediately or as soon as you have made your decision. Once again I would like to thank you in advance for your time, willingness, and consideration. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to let me know. I can be reached via email at Redacted or by phone at Redacted. I look to hear from you very soon.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kindest regards,

Dione Thomas Webber
Appendix B: Interview Instrument

Script for interview number one

**Interview one: Focused Life History**

This interview is constructed to have the participant place their experience into context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic of being overage for grade during their years of schooling.

Question 1: Tell me about your interactions with peers, teachers, school administrators, and school employees during your years of schooling as an overage student.

Question 2: Describe your interactions with your family members during your years of schooling as an overage student.

Question 3: Tell me about the time you were retained.

Question 4: Tell me about a time when you thought about dropping out of school.

Question 5: If there is any significant past experience I have not mentioned but you would like to share, can you reconstruct that experience for me?

Script for interview number two

**Interview two: The Details of Experience**

The purpose of the second interview is to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants’ present lived experience on the topic of being an overage student.

Question: Based on the reconstruction of your past experiences in interview number one, we now want to look at the fine details of your experience covering as much as you can in a 90-minute span.

Question 1: Tell me about interactions with peers, teachers, school administrators, and school employees during your years of schooling as an overage student. This time with concrete details of that experience that you vividly remember? Were there specific experiences that stuck out for you during that time.

Question 2: Describe your interactions with your family members during your years of schooling as an overage student giving concrete details of that experience.

Question 3: What fine details of the experience can you tell me about when you were retained a grade level.

Question 4: If there was a time when you thought about dropping out of school, describe that experience with the concrete details.
Question 5: Are there any other experiences that may have come to mind at this time? If so, can you tell me about the concrete details of that experience?

Script for interview number three

*Interview three: Reflection on Meaning*

The focus of interview number three is to ask participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience. It seeks to address the intellectual and emotional connections between their experience and their life.

Question: Given what you have said about your life history and your detailed experiences pertaining to being an overage student during your years of schooling, how do you understand how this may have affected your success?

Guiding Questions:

Question 1: What sense does this make for you presently?

Question 2: What meaning does this have for you presently?

Question 3: Where do you see yourself in the future?
Appendix C: IRB Approval

UNIVERSITY of NORTH FLORIDA.
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
1 UNF Drive
Jacksonville, FL 32224-2665
904-620-2455 FAX 904-620-2457
Equal Opportunity/Equal Access/Affirmative Action Institution

MEMORANDUM

DATE: October 24, 2019

TO: Ms. Dione Thomas

VIA: Dr. Linda Skrila
      Leadership, School Counseling & Sport Management

FROM: Dr. Jennifer Wesely, Chairperson
      On behalf of the UNF Institutional Review Board

RE: Declaration of Exempt Status for IRB#1456020-1
    “Perspective of Overage Graduates: Issues related to age that affected their schooling”

Your research study, “Perspective of Overage Graduates: Issues related to age that affected their schooling” was reviewed on behalf of the UNF Institutional Review Board has been declared “Exempt” Category 2.

Please be advised that any subject complaints, unanticipated problems, or adverse events that occur are to be reported to the IRB as soon as practicable, but no later than 3 business days following the occurrence. Please use the Event Report Form to submit information about such events.

While the exempt status is effective for the life of the study, any substantive changes must be submitted to the IRB for prospective review, including personnel changes. In some circumstances, changes to the protocol may result in alteration of the IRB review classification.

To submit an amendment to your approved protocol, please complete an Amendment Request Document and upload it along with any updated materials affected by the changes via a new package in IRBNet. For additional guidance on submitting an amendment, please contact the IRB administrator.

Upon completion of this study, please submit a Closing Report Form as a new package in IRBNet. Please maintain copies of all research-related materials for a minimum of 3 years following study closure. These records include the IRB-approved protocol, approval memo, questionnaires, survey instruments, consent forms, and all IRB correspondence.

Should you have questions regarding your study or any other IRB issues, please contact the Research Integrity unit of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs by emailing IRB@unf.edu or calling (904) 620-2455.
Appendix D: Informed Consent

University of North Florida Research

REQUEST FOR INFORMED CONSENT

To the participant:

My name is Dione Thomas Webber and I am a doctoral student at the University of North Florida. For your consideration, please read the following information carefully. If you understand it, please send an email in response to the following information.

First I would like to thank you so much for allowing me the opportunity to tell you about my doctoral study at UNF.

1. In this study, there will be a sequential interview pattern containing three interviews that will take place where I will ask you questions pertaining to your experiences completing grade school as an overage student.
2. Each interview will be audio recorded and they will last approximately 90 minutes’ maximum. The audio recorded interviews will be face to face and will take place in a safe and secure place of your preference.
3. Participation in this study is voluntary. All references to interview responses will be anonymously unless you would prefer that I use your name. Discussing issues that may have been difficult could cause some people to get upset. Should you experience any emotional distress, we will immediately stop the interview unless you would prefer that we continue? Verified Psychology Today counselor LaToya St Pierre pre-licensed professional, MA, RMHCI, will be contacted at 904-637-8014 in the event that we need her services (Jacksonville, FL).
4. My hopes are that this research can contribute to the field of education in a positive manner informing educators, administrators, school districts and educational policy.
5. I would greatly appreciate an informed decision concerning your participation in the research study in 7 days from today’s date. You can simply respond to this email stated “Yes I agree to be a participant.” I can be notified immediately or as soon as you have made your decision.

Once again I would like to thank you in advance for your time, willingness, and consideration. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to let me know. I look to hear from you very soon.

Dione Thomas Webber M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate, University of North Florida

Redacted
Appendix E: Resume

Dione R. Thomas Webber Ed.D.  
thomasd11@duvalschools.org

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### Education

**University of Central Florida, Orlando, FL**  
*Bachelor of Science Degree in Management*  
August 2005 - May 2009

**University of North Florida, Jacksonville, FL**  
*Masters in Educational Leadership (M.Ed.)*  
Educators Preparation Institute; Alternative Teacher Certification  
Jan 2010 - August 2012

**University of North Florida, Jacksonville, FL**  
Doctorate of Educational Leadership  
Aug 2015 - April 2020

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### Experience

**Duval County Public Schools: Carter G. Woodson Elementary School**  
*Assistant Principal*  
July 2017 - Present

Major Duties: Instructional leadership, Discipline, Operational oversight (morning and afternoon), Bus Hub Oversight, PBIS, management and facilitation of community initiatives, build and facilitate ongoing community and faith based partnerships, Create and implement Medical Magnet programs/initiatives, Mathematics Department oversight, Monitor instruction and assessment, Title I program and event creator, Title I Designee, Testing Coordinator, Strategic Planning Lead (Mathematics), monitor LPQ, monitor overage students (behaviorally and academically-PPDP); I’m a Star mentor program coordinator with Overage population of students.

*Acting Principal (September 2019 - November 2019)*

In addition to the duties of Assistant Principal, I acted as principal in all matters regarding budget, FTE, monitoring student achievement, hire and evaluate staff, systems facilitation and management, revision of policies and procedures, emergency protocols, and reporting to an executive director until a principal was assigned.

**Duval County Public Schools: Bridge to Success Academy at West Jax; Program for Overage students grades 4th through 8th**  
*Instructional Mathematics Coach*  
July 2015 - July 2017

Certifications: Math 5-9;6-12; Educational Leadership (All Levels)

**Duval County Public Schools: William M. Raines High School**  
*Certified Math Teacher (Mathematics 6-12)*  
Oct. 1, 2012 - June 2015
• (12-13) Advanced Algebra II with Financial applications; Algebra II
• (13-14) Algebra II; Pre-calculus
• (14-15) Algebra I (High Accountability); PLC Lead Teacher 2014-2015

Certifications: Mathematics 5-9; Mathematics 6-12;

Sylvan Learning Center
• Math Tutor
• Learning Styles analyst

Leadership

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) Holmes Scholar: UNF Chapter
February 2020-Present
• Participate in the AACTE Annual Meeting, including the Holmes Scholars preconference events • Submit proposals to present my research at the AACTE Annual Meeting each year I am in the program• Propose and implement a project that relates to or forwards the goals of AACTE and authentically engage them in advocacy, policy, service, or research work that furthers high-quality and equitable educator preparation • Participate in activities and meetings sponsored by the National Association of Holmes Scholars Alumni (NAHSA)

DCPS Rising Leaders Academy: level II principal certification (student) July 2019-Present
I’m A STAR: Overage student program Aug 2018-Present
-Site coordinator at Carter G. Woodson Elementary

Duval County Assistant Principal Preparation Program September 2016-2017
-Program that prepares leaders to enter the role of assistant principal in Duval County Public Schools

International Teacher Leadership Conference 2017 (UF Lastinger Center for Learning)
-Presenter
-March 2-3 2017 in Miami Florida; Conference bringing together scholars and practitioners from across Florida, the country and the world to examine the emerging field of teacher leadership, which aimed to increase teacher involvement and influence over school policies, practices and outcomes to improve teaching and learning.

Teach for America Community Learning Exchange
-Facilitator
-Engage with leaders affiliated with the Center for Urban Education and Policy at UNF who are doing similar work in education, pedagogy, and diversity.

Awards
• UNF AACTE Holmes Scholar inductee 2020
• UNF COEHS Foundation Scholarship Recipient 2018-2019
• UNF Delores A. Auzenne Scholarship Recipient Fall 2011-Spring 2012
• Mary Robinson Hayes Scholarship Recipient 2005
• UCF Track and Field Scholarship Recipient 2005-2009
• 2007-08, 2008-09 **UCF Women’s Track and Field MVP**;
• 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09 Iron Athlete of the Year
• Named USATFCCC all East Region Team 2008 and 2009
• All Conference long/triple jump indoor 2009;
• **Indoor Conference Champion** in triple jump 2009; Indoor NCAA qualifier 2009
• 2009 **Indoor Track & Field All American Team**: Triple Jump
• **Conference USA Athlete of the Year 2009**; 2009 Outdoor National qualifier
• Recipient of the Conference USA Spirit of Service Award 2009; **UCF Presidential Recognition**