WHO LEAVES AND WHY: AN EXAMINATION OF LATINO STUDENT ATTRITION FROM A SELECTIVE PUBLIC SCHOOL THEMATIC CHOICE PROGRAM IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the University of North Texas in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Kathryn Thomas, B.S., M.Ed.

Denton, Texas

December, 1996
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This study was conducted to examine the problem of attrition from a public middle school foreign language enrichment program by students who were admitted on the basis of superior grades, test scores, and recommendations from their teachers, counselors, and parents. The study took place in inner-city San Antonio and involves Latino sixth and seventh graders from mostly low-income families. Literature pertaining to school choice options, education of Latino students, and student attrition was reviewed. Research questions pertained to the differences in characteristics of students staying in the program and leaving it and in the reasons students gave for their decisions to stay or leave. In addition, the efficacy of an existing student attrition model, modified for this study, was tested for organizing data. Data sources included surveys of students and teachers, interviews with administrators and counselors, and school records. Logit regression analysis revealed two factors linked to student persistence in the program to be significant to the .01 level: student involvement in the initial decision to apply to the program, and the presence of a student's best friend at the school the student attended. A third variable approached significance (at the .10 level): the student's score on the math subtest of a criterion-referenced test given statewide. Recommendations to the district program
administrators include incorporating the math subtest score on the statewide instrument into the screening process and providing more and better information to parents and students who are eligible and wish to apply for acceptance into the program.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to acknowledge the contribution of my major professor and mentor, Frank Kemerer, for his caring guidance and encouragement throughout my doctoral studies. In addition, committee members Cathleen Norris, Kenneth Godwin, Steven Tipps, and Frank Halstead provided much-needed assistance and advice. Thanks also to Mike Ault for his expert and patient contributions to the data analysis effort, to Joy Wimsatt for her generous help as research assistant, and to Ziba Hooshdaran and Kathleen Smith for their painstaking coding and editing work.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study is an investigation of factors influencing decisions by Latino students and their families to continue in or to leave a choice program in an urban public school district. It utilized an adaptation of the Explanatory Sociological Model of the Dropout Process developed in the late 1960s by William Spady, who was then a member of the University of Chicago's Committee of Admissions and Awards (Spady, 1970, 1971). Spady's model assumed that the decision to leave a social system results from a complex social process. Accordingly, the elements included in the model are family and previous educational background, academic potential, normative congruence, friendship support, intellectual development, grade performance, social integration, satisfaction, institutional commitment, and dropout decision. Modifications of specific indicators for the 10 variables comprising Spady's model allowing for its use in the study of attrition among middle school students rather than university freshmen are shown in chapter 3. Each variable was analyzed to assess its independent contribution in the explanation of the decision to continue or leave the program.

For this study, attrition was examined in a selective middle school thematic program offering intensive second language study that includes cultural enrichment. The program is offered by the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD), which enrolls 60,000 students, 81% of whom are Latino, 12% African-American, and 7%
Anglo. SAISD is a poor district: 80% of the district's students receive free or reduced-price meals.

The SAISD multilingual program was initiated in 1983 to provide intensive instruction in foreign language and culture. Alonso Perales, who founded the program and was its first director, believed that attendance and achievement of Latino students would be enhanced by a curriculum stressing language, culture, and values and that students who become literate in two languages would perform better than students who speak, read, and write only English (Perales, n.d.).

The SAISD multilingual program began as a separate academy with its own faculty; however, after 5 years, it was integrated as a thematic program involving sixth-grade students for one class period per day and seventh and eighth graders for two class periods per day in intensive language and culture study. Political infighting and charges of elitism and skimming led to this change in the program's structure. Although now, theoretically, multilingual students take classes with students who are in the regular education program, there often remains a de facto separation from students in the regular education program because many of the multilingual students are also in the gifted/talented program or take honors classes together.

For students in Grades 6 through 8 the multilingual program is housed at two locations, S. J. Davis Middle School and Fidel Tafolla Middle School. The program includes the elements required in all Texas public schools, as well as language enrichment, honors classes, accelerated pacing, and individualized instruction. In addition, program participants choose among Spanish, French, German, Japanese, Latin,
and Russian for their language and culture emphasis. Teachers at all middle school grade levels are expected to work in teams in order to incorporate cultural concepts and materials into academic subjects. An example of this type of interdisciplinary teaching is to have students in eighth-grade U.S. history classes research and identify political and economic relationships between this country and the one whose language they study (Perales, n.d.). Students enrolling in the multilingual program as sixth graders may participate throughout high school, where the program continues through 12th grade on the Brackenridge High School campus.

Students qualify for the multilingual program on the basis of their grades, test scores, and recommendations from counselors, teachers, and parents at the end of the fifth grade. Their grade average in academic subjects must be 80 or higher, they must be proficient in their native language, and they must score at or above the 50th percentile on standardized reading and language arts achievement tests. For the 1992-93 school year, SAISD admitted approximately 380 students to the program. Almost that many qualified applicants were not admitted because of space limitations. During the 1992-93 school year, over 1,100 students participated in the program, 76% or approximately 850 at the middle school level, with slightly more than half (approximately 460) attending Tafolla Middle School and slightly fewer than half (around 390) at Davis Middle School (Cadena & Walling, 1994). Beginning with sixth graders, the district transports middle school students from 17 attendance-zone schools to the two middle school campuses that house the program: Those living on SAISD's east side attend Davis Middle School, and those living on the west side go to Tafolla Middle School. The three campuses that house the
multilingual program—Tafolla and Davis middle schools and Brackenridge High School—are attendance-zone schools as well; that is, nonprogram students from the surrounding neighborhoods attend them.

Tafolla Middle School serves approximately 1,000 students: 94% Latino, 4% Anglo, and 1% African-American. Nearly 70% receive free lunch. Of the 1,000 students, approximately 460 (or 46%) participate in the multilingual program. During the 1992-93 school year, the last year that students were required to take the Norm-referenced Assessment Program for Texas (NAPT), average scores for all students tested ranged between the 40th and 60th percentile for the total Tafolla student body. During that same school year, fewer than half of the seventh-grade students at Tafolla passed the reading or math section of the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), a state-mandated criterion-referenced test, whereas 58% passed the writing section.

Davis Middle School has approximately 900 students: 52% African-American, 42% Latino, and 6% Anglo. Over half receive free lunch. Approximately 390 (or 43%) of Davis students are in the multilingual program. Average scores on the NAPT for the total Davis student body were below the 50th percentile during the 1992-93 school year in all subjects at all grade levels except for sixth-grade science. As was the case at Tafolla, fewer than half of all seventh-grade students at Davis passed the reading or math portion of the TAAS, whereas 57% passed the writing section.

At the time of this study’s initiation (February 1995), the multilingual program was the only public intradistrict choice program available for middle school students in SAISD. Because of concern among SAISD teachers and administrators that removing
talented students from attendance-zone schools results in lower achievement in these schools, district officials conducted a study that examined how achievement test score averages would change if multilingual students were returned to their neighborhood schools. They found that there would be little effect on test scores for neighborhood schools because the number of talented students leaving any one school was small. However, when the contribution of multilingual students from other attendance areas was removed from the aggregate achievement test scores for Tafolla and Davis Middle Schools, it was found that both would have been rated as “low performing” by the Texas Education Agency (Cadena & Walling, 1994).

The Problem

The problem addressed by this study is the attrition of inner-city Latino students from a selective public middle school thematic choice program.

Research Questions

This dissertation study addresses three basic questions:

1. How do the characteristics of students who continue in the SAISD multilingual program (stayers) compare with characteristics of those who withdraw from it (leavers)?

2. What factors influence the decisions of stayers and leavers?

3. Can Spady’s Explanatory Sociological Model of the Dropout Process be adapted for use in understanding the decision-making process among middle school stayers and leavers? If so, what adaptations make it most effective?
Definition of Terms

1. Multilingual Program—the SAISD’s 7-year intensive foreign language program, which allows qualifying students to choose among six languages for intensive study beginning in the sixth grade.

2. Chooser—a student (or his or her parent) applying to the SAISD multilingual program, regardless of whether the student is accepted to the program and eventually participates. Since multilingual choosers must apply at the end of Grade 5 in order to participate, it is unlikely that the decision to apply is made by the student alone. Instead, it is more often made jointly by the student and his or her parents. Therefore, the term chooser may refer to the family rather than to the student alone. As is explained in chapter 2, choosing and nonchoosing families differ in several important ways.

3. Leaver—a student from a choosing family who applies for, enrolls in, and participates in the multilingual program but subsequently withdraws from it. Leavers may withdraw voluntarily, or they may be asked to leave. Leavers in this study include students leaving the SAISD multilingual program in Grade 6 or 7 but still residing in the district—either returning to their neighborhood schools or transferring to private schools.

4. Stayer—a student from a choosing family who applies for, enrolls in, and participates in the multilingual program without leaving it. This study is concerned only with students in sixth and seventh grade during the 1994-95 school year; therefore, some students who were stayers at the time the study was carried out may eventually have left the program.
5. Thematic—a type of public choice school that resembles a magnet school in that it recruits students by offering a specialized curriculum such as emphasis on science, the arts, or languages, but differs because it does not intentionally assist racial integration. The SAISD multilingual program is a form of thematic public school choice. Chapter 2 contains a discussion of thematic and other school choice options and their consequences.

6. Latino—because distinctions are frequently made among groups, such as Latinos, Chicanos, Hispanics, Tejanos, and Mexican-Americans, the research literature pertaining to ethnic labelling of Latino students is reviewed in chapter 2, which also contains a discussion of the educational implications for students from different ethnic subgroups and for students who are first-, second-, or third-generation immigrants.

Methodology

The review of the literature pertaining to student attrition yielded several different theoretical models designed to explain the attrition process. The particular model (see Figure 1 on page 8) selected for adaptation for use in this study is the Sociological Model of the Dropout Process developed by William G. Spady (1970, 1971). A rationale for its selection is included at the end of chapter 2.

The literature pertaining to the education of Latino students and to public school choice was also reviewed. This background information, combined with suggestions gathered from preliminary interviews with school officials, provided specific modifications that were used to adapt Spady’s attrition model for application to the problem of thematic public school choice program attrition among Latino middle school students.
Variables from the modified Spady (1970, 1971) attrition model are defined and measured by indicators; for example, the variable labeled academic potential has five different indicators which are used to determine the influence of that particular variable in the attrition process. Table 1 (shown on the page 9) contains the indicators and variables and how the model predicts their effect on the dropout decision. Chapter 3 contains lists of indicators and data sources for all 10 variables used in the attrition model.

Guided by the adapted Spady attrition model, this study is a comparison of the characteristics and motivations of stayers and leavers who began participating in the SAISD multilingual program in Grade 6 in the fall of 1993 or 1994 at one of the two
middle schools housing the program. Names of leavers were obtained from withdrawal lists maintained in school attendance offices. A sample of stayers was compiled from 1994-95 multilingual class lists. Stayers were selected in a ratio identical to that of leavers in terms of student gender, grade level, language studied, and school attended.

Table 1

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Potential Variable</th>
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<td>Indicator</td>
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<td>Student questionnaire</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second language fluency</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study skills</td>
<td>Teacher questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>Teacher questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAAS scores</td>
<td>Office records</td>
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After questionnaires and interview guides based on the Spady attrition model were developed, three separate techniques were used to gather data. First, stayers and leavers were surveyed by mail, using a questionnaire. Nonrespondents were contacted by phone. Questionnaires were also distributed to multilingual teachers via school mailboxes.
Second, school administrators, counselors, and attendance clerks were interviewed. Finally, student performance data were collected from school records.

After the collected data were coded and processed, they were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequencies and percentages, as well as Chi-square and regression analyses, were employed. The study sought to identify similarities and differences between groups and to determine which variables were more important in describing the decision-making process among students and their families as they determined whether to leave the program or continue in it.

Limitations of the Study

Factors that limit the generalizability of this study include the following:

1. The public school choice program in this study is academically selective. Findings may not be transferable to nonselective programs.

2. The subjects of this study are primarily low-income Latinos living in inner-city San Antonio, Texas. The characteristics, behavior, and attitudes of these students and their families are not necessarily consistent with those of other populations.

3. The thematic choice program in this study offers students intensive instruction in a foreign language and the culture of a foreign country. Findings may not be transferable to choice programs with other themes.

4. Students who left the multilingual program because their families moved out of SAISD are not included in this study.

5. Access to leavers was limited by the difficulty of locating addresses and phone numbers. Findings may be skewed to reflect the responses of those whose families had
telephones and who had not moved since withdrawing from the multilingual program.

6. Because this study is an autopsy (leavers having left during the preceding school year), responses to questions given by leavers on questionnaires or during telephone interviews may have portrayed perceptions or rationalizations rather than actual reasons for leaving the program. That is, determining whether a response was a reason rather than a rationalization was difficult. For example, in the case of poor performance, did unhappiness with the program lead to poor performance and eventually to leaving or did poor performance lead to unhappiness with the program and then to leaving? Did students report what actually happened or what they would prefer to have happened?

Significance of the Study

This study grew out of a multifaceted research project evaluating both public and private school choice programs in San Antonio (Martinez, Kemerer, & Godwin, 1993; Martinez, Godwin, & Kemerer, 1996). The larger research project investigated socioeconomic and attitudinal factors involved in family decision making, student achievement and family satisfaction, effects of choice options on institutions, and student persistence. This study served to address partially the latter goal of the larger project by determining the characteristics which distinguished Latino stayers from leavers in the SAISD multilingual program and by identifying which factors were most influential when the students persisted in it or withdrew from it. Student attrition literature from other venues (high schools, community colleges, and universities), research involving the education of Latinos, and preliminary investigations in SAISD schools yielded a set of indicators relevant to the process of leaving. These indicators were used with Spady’s
model to examine its value for explaining the interrelationships among factors that seem
to affect attrition among sixth- and seventh-grade Latino students in the SAISD
multilingual program.

This study identified characteristics of stayers and examined the reasons that they
gave for continuing in the multilingual program. Those characteristics and reasons were
contrasted to those identified for leavers. The information was intended to assist program
designers and administrators in developing appropriate strategies to prevent and/or
respond to student attrition. In addition, findings could aid parents and eligible students in
making informed decisions about whether to participate in a program and what types of
problems they may experience. Moreover, the conclusions added to the general
knowledge of attrition, especially as it pertains to urban Latino students. Finally, the
utility of Spady's (1970, 1971) model was tested for a distinct setting and population.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This study of Latino student attrition from a thematic public choice program includes three elements: school choice, education of Latino students, and student attrition. Each of these elements has its own body of literature. Therefore, a section of this chapter is devoted to each, with particular attention to instances in which elements overlap. A fourth section of this chapter contains a rationale for the application of a sociological model of student attrition developed in 1970 by William Spady to this study's research questions. The chapter ends with a description of the contributions of the study to the research literature and to practice.

The Concept of School Choice

Simply stated, school choice involves giving parents the right to decide whether, where, when, and with whom their child should attend school. When the term school choice is mentioned, it most commonly refers to one of two systems of options: public choice or private choice. The first section of this chapter is devoted to differentiating between these two systems, explaining how each works, and illustrating each system with examples.

Public School Choice

Public school choice may be interpreted as a system of educational options for families that is supported by state funds and that is, at least in theory, accessible to all
students. Depending on the legislation in their state, an array of public school choice options may be available to families. Among the options are magnet schools, thematic schools, alternative schools, charter schools, interdistrict or intradistrict transfers, open enrollment, and postsecondary options. Each option is briefly explained below.

1. Magnet schools began as an alternative to forced busing for integration. These schools offer specialized curricula and/or teaching methods. A student may have to show evidence of special aptitude to attend a magnet school.

2. Thematic schools, like magnet schools, offer specialized curricula and/or teaching methods. However, their purpose is to increase the range of educational electives available to all students rather than to achieve racial balance.

3. Alternative schools offer options for students considered to be at risk of dropping out before graduation. Features may include flexible or shortened hours, a nontraditional setting, small classes or one-on-one instruction, or self-paced learning.

4. Charter schools are organized by individuals or groups. Approval to operate for a limited period of time is granted by a sponsoring agent on the basis of a contract that specifies student outcomes. Charter schools not fulfilling the terms of their contract must close. They typically have special themes or offer alternatives for students at risk.

5. Interdistrict or intradistrict transfers usually occur by agreement of administrators and/or school board members. In interdistrict transfers, the family must often pay tuition and provide transportation.

6. Similarly, open enrollment allows students to transfer, but without paying tuition. Open enrollment plans may restrict student movement based on capacity and
racial balance in the attendance-zone schools and in the receiving schools. An open enrollment option passed during the 1995 Texas legislative session allows low-income families in low-performing schools to transfer to schools out of their districts without charge.

7. Postsecondary options allow high school students to take and receive credit for college courses before graduation.

Public choice options are offered state-wide, district-wide, school-wide, or as special programs within a regular school, as is the case with the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) multilingual program.

The first public choice program in the United States was the Alum Rock School District's alternative schools experiment, instituted in California by the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) in 1972 as a way to offer poor families educational choices. Although four districts were eligible to participate, only Alum Rock, a K-8 district comprised of over 50% Latinos, accepted. The program began with 6 out of 24 district schools offering two or more distinct "mini-school" options. At its height, the district offered 50 such options.

Although the OEO originally intended to include private schools in the voucher system, the Alum Rock experiment more closely resembled open enrollment with alternative public schools (Capell, 1981). A study of the Alum Rock program by the Rand Corporation found more involvement among high-income than low-income families, a trend toward racially balanced schools, parent preference for neighborhood schools, and positive attitudes by participating parents (Bridge & Blackman, 1978; Weiler, 1992). The
most important finding, however, was the absence of any significant differences in students' reading achievement, perceptions of themselves and others, or social skills between traditional and alternative schools (Capell, 1981).

The first state-wide public choice program began in Minnesota in 1987. As was the case in the Alum Rock experiment, a study of this interdistrict open enrollment program, in which students are allowed to switch districts on a space-available basis as long as racial balance is maintained, shows a greater percentage of children from higher-income families taking advantage of the program. The most common reasons given by families or by students for participating include the learning climate, educational services offered, and the academic reputation of the school (Rubenstein, Hamar, & Adelman, 1992).

Magnet schools are the most common of the public school choice options, enrolling an average of 20% of high school students in large urban districts (Blank, 1990). Parental expectations concerning innovative curricula and high-quality teaching, in combination with ethnic quotas, assure a mix of students from across attendance zones who have talents and skills superior to those found among students in an average school in the district. There is evidence that magnet schools improve racial balance and help reduce white flight (Rossell & Clark, 1987).

Another feature of magnet schools--their tendency to be organized around a central theme--may increase their potential for serving to strengthen the social culture among participants. Several researchers have argued that schools with specialized themes
may be "characterized by a strong sense of community and a unifying purpose" (Gamoran, 1996, p. 3).

According to Doyle and Levine (1984), the fact that students or their parents have chosen a school with a particular focus makes greater unity possible. Wehlage and Smith (1992) studied programs for at-risk students in "schools-of-choice" and "school-within-a-school" magnets. Effective programs promoted students' sense of membership in the school's community, and several were organized around a particular academic or vocational theme. . . . According to Wehlage and Smith (1992, p. 97), "Within this socially supportive and academically focused setting, students who might be overlooked and neglected in conventional classrooms become willing to step forward to assert themselves and share their talents in ways that encourage further involvement and engagement." (Gamoran, 1996, p. 3)

Gamoran (1996) described a connection between student buy-in and academic progress. In schools such as those described by Wehlage and Smith (1992), which have a central unifying theme that encourages involvement and engagement on the part of students, an "intensive academic climate" develops. Within this enriched atmosphere, students tend to pursue their particular academic interests to advanced levels. In such schools, according to Crain, Heebner, and Si (1992), there is an expectation for high achievement, regardless of whether the school's focus is academic or vocational. Another factor that serves to elevate student achievement is the greater potential for a sense of membership or social bonding in thematic schools (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). This sense of belonging reflects the students' values and promotes
achievement by increasing their commitment and engagement with their studies. Case studies conducted by Metz (1986) revealed a common purpose among students and teachers in some magnet schools, resulting in cohesive learning communities.

Hill (1996) argued that universal public school choice "would strongly benefit all children . . . by promoting candid and demanding relationships" among participants (p. 671). His claim is based on the premise that, "once a school has established an identity, it must deliver on its promises well enough to keep current students from transferring out, to create 'brand loyalty'" (p. 672). According to Hill, teachers have strong incentives to cooperate with one another and to support the school's mission, because their success and well-being is tied to the school's ultimate output and to its reputation. Magnet schools, because of their greater funding and elite status, "must continually justify their existence in the face of pressures for uniformity" (p. 672). Teachers who value their jobs in these schools know that the status of their jobs depends on their performance and upon that of their colleagues. They are, therefore, "very reluctant to give up on a student, knowing that too many stories of failure can wreck a school's reputation" (p. 672). Hill contrasted this attitude with that of teachers in "compulsory attendance" public schools, in which staff members have no such incentives.

As long as there are students in the neighborhood, they will be assigned to attend the school. Even if . . . the state intervenes to close the school, the teachers and administrators will be assigned to a similar school in the local system. The school's reputation may be a source of pride, but people's livelihoods do not depend on it. (Hill, 1996, p. 672)
Hill (1996) also described the reciprocal demands that parents and teachers make on one another in public schools of choice. "Students . . . benefit from their parents' commitment to the school and from the school's consequent ability to make demands on their parents and themselves" (p. 674). In addition, according to Hill, students gain from "being in a situation in which they must make commitments and take them seriously" (p. 674). Similarly, they gain "from observing adults working in a common enterprise in which performance matters and both success and failure have real consequences" (p. 674).

Research on student performance in magnet schools is not consistent. Earlier studies failed to establish that magnet schools increase student achievement once the impacts of student selection factors and the overall socioeconomic composition of the student body are controlled (Blank, 1990; Moore & Davenport, 1989). A more recent study, however, has found that the opposite may be true. When Crain, Heebner, and Si (1992) compared reading scores of students who entered a public magnet school by "winning" a lottery with those who "lost," they found that those who attended the magnet school had greater improvements in their reading scores, that they had earned more credit toward graduation, and that they were less likely to drop out of high school than the similar group of students who were not able to attend the magnet school. Moreover, Gamoran's (1996) examination of the National Educational Longitudinal Survey data revealed that public magnet schools outperformed other schools in several academic areas:

I found that magnet schools are more effective than regular schools at raising the
proficiency of students in science, reading, and social studies; Catholic schools have a positive impact on math skills, while secular private schools do not offer any advantage, net of preexisting differences among students. (p. 1)

A system of public thematic schools which has received much publicity is District No. 4 in East Harlem, New York. This poor and minority district gained the national spotlight when the superintendent instituted thematic choice at the junior high level, seeking out parents interested in the schools' various offerings (Fliegel, 1993). District records showed that test scores, parental involvement, student and teacher attendance, and staff morale increased, while dropout rates and vandalism decreased. This choice system is frequently cited as successful; however, the absence of statistical controls for student attrition from and migration into the district of more qualified students casts doubt on the magnitude of the improvements (Clune, 1990; Kirp, 1992).

The information discussed in the preceding sections pertains to public choice options including entire schools or schools-within-schools, but not to public choice programs. References to choice programs—as opposed to schools—were notably absent throughout this search of the research literature: No usable references for public school programs comparable to the SAISD multilingual program were found, nor were there any references to conclusive studies addressing attrition from choice programs within public schools.

Private School Choice

Vouchers and private schools. The term voucher generally refers to funds that a family receives to send their child to a private school. The funds may come from either a
public or a private source.

Nearly three quarters of a century ago, the U.S. Supreme Court gave parents the right to send their children to private schools in Pierce v. Society of Sisters.¹ Now, approximately one tenth of American students are educated in private schools, 85% of which are religiously-affiliated (Kemerer & King, 1995). Two state-funded and several privately-financed voucher systems exist, and the movement continues to spread. There are several voucher programs currently operating in which private sources provide funds that families may use at private schools. The first began in 1991, when the Golden Rule Insurance Company in Indianapolis formed the Educational Choice Charitable Trust scholarship program. During its first year of operation, it provided partial-tuition vouchers for 774 students from low-income families to attend private schools, including religious schools (Hudson Institute, 1992).

Another example of a private source is the Children’s Educational Opportunity (CEO) foundation, which began providing half-tuition vouchers to approximately 900 low-income San Antonio families in 1992. Families may use the vouchers at any San Antonio private school. An overwhelming majority of families have opted to use the vouchers to send their children to religious schools (Martinez, et al., 1993). Privately-funded voucher programs modeled after San Antonio’s CEO program now exist in a number of locations, including Dallas, Houston, Midland, and Austin, Texas; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; Orlando, Florida; Little Rock, Arkansas; Omaha, Nebraska; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Bridgeport, Connecticut; Grand Rapids and

Detroit, Michigan; Seattle, Washington; and Oakland and Fresno, California.

Voucher programs using public money to send students to private schools have been proposed in several state legislatures. In 1995 legislation providing for voucher initiatives in which public money would be used to send students to private schools—including religious schools—was proposed in the District of Columbia and in California, Colorado, Illinois, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, and Texas. In March 1995, two U.S. senators introduced a plan allocating $30 million of federal funds to finance a limited number of voucher projects for low-income, inner-city families to use in private schools, including religious schools.

So far, only two state-financed voucher programs exist. The first was initiated in 1990, when the Wisconsin State Legislature established a pilot program providing $2,500 each for up to 980 children from low-income Milwaukee families to attend any private nonreligious school (Witte, 1991). In July 1995, the program was expanded to include private religious schools and to increase the number of eligible families. However, the initiative was halted by court action.

Until the fall of 1996, the Milwaukee program stood alone as an operational system in which a public entity provided vouchers for students to attend private schools. Now a state-funded voucher program exists in Cleveland, Ohio. The Cleveland program differs from the Milwaukee program in that it currently allows families to use state money to send their children to religious schools. By September 1996, over 1,700 children had enrolled in 49 schools under the program (Walsh, 1996).

Perplexing issues of legality and autonomy arise when public funds are used to
send students to private schools. First, does a system of vouchers provided by the state to pay for students to attend private religious schools violate constitutional prohibitions against government assistance to religion? The answer may depend on how the funds are dispensed:

A review of key cases suggests that a publicly funded voucher program encompassing private religious schools is more likely to be upheld in federal court if the money is in the form of a scholarship going directly to parents, if parents have a wide choice of public and private schools, and if no preference is given to private religious schools. (Kemerer & King, 1995, pp. 308-309)

A second question relates to whether private schools—both religious and nonsectarian—accepting state-provided vouchers will be subject to excessive regulation, which threatens institutional autonomy. The debate that began in regard to the Milwaukee program will undoubtedly continue with the establishment of similar programs. Currently, it remains unresolved:

Given [Wisconsin’s] historic parents patriae involvement in the establishment and operation of public schooling and given the fact that a substantial portion of its budget is devoted to education, it is likely that the state will assert strong regulatory authority over participants in a voucher program to be assured that public interests are served. This is most likely to be apparent when such programs move beyond the experimental stage and substantial amounts of state money are involved. . . . Whether the voters initially or over time will allow taxpayer dollars to flow to largely unregulated schools remains to be seen. It seems inevitable,
however, that once abuses appear in a largely regulated system, the demand for accountability will increase. (Kemerer, Hairston, & Lauerman, 1992, pp. 621-622)

Although broader consideration of these complicated questions is beyond the scope of this study, their implications are important to consider when examining the issue of private school choice.

Research on School Choice

Student achievement in private schools of choice. Two groups of researchers have analyzed achievement data from the Milwaukee program. Using methods involving dissimilar comparison groups, the researchers have reached “dramatically differing conclusions” (Olson, 1996, p. 20). Research conducted by John Witte of the University of Wisconsin-Madison (1991) found “mixed results” and no significant test score gains. However, in a follow-up study, Paul Peterson of Harvard and Jay Greene of University of Houston analyzed the same data in a different manner, concluding that students enrolled in the program for at least 3 years outperformed a public school control group. The disagreement has attracted much attention from both proponents and opponents of vouchers, and recently made front page headlines in the Wall Street Journal (Davis, 1996).

Choice by schools. It is possible to view school choice from two perspectives: Either the school may choose, or the family may choose. In the first instance, school choice is the school’s prerogative. For example, most private schools have entrance criteria for students. Moreover, they often have provisions for removing students who do not conform to the school’s standards.
By contrast, the common notion of a public school is that it must open its doors to all students. Although this is generally the case for the public school designated as an attendance-zone or "neighborhood" school, some public school choice programs are quite selective, particularly those magnet schools catering to students' achievement, skills, or aptitude. A performing arts magnet school, for example, may require students to audition or submit samples of their artistic work, while gifted and talented magnet school may require students to have high scores on achievement tests and a series of recommendations before they will be considered for admission.

Public schools may be selective in less conspicuous ways. Some charter schools, for example, require parents to donate a number of hours per week to the school, thus precluding participation by families in which both parents work full time. Similarly, schools or programs of choice that do not offer transportation from the attendance-zone school to the school or program site may be inaccessible to families who cannot transport their students, thus creating a de facto entrance requirement of living in the neighborhood or owning a car or being able to afford to pay for transportation (Wells, 1993).

Choice by families. Assuming that a school of choice is accessible to a family and will accept their child, the prerogative of choice can belong to a family. When a family chooses to send a child to a particular school, the degree to which the decision belongs to the parents or to the child is in part a function of the age of the child. A study of parental choice among public alternative schools in Cincinnati revealed that parents are primarily responsible for choosing the child’s school. Only after sixth grade do parents view their child’s desires as an important factor in school selection, and even at this level the
percentage of parents who do so is small (Collins, 1987).

Not all families have equal access to choice options. For an affluent family, choosing may be a simple matter of moving to a neighborhood that has a desirable school system or of paying tuition at a private school and transporting the child to it. For a low-income family, however, choosing usually involves a sacrifice. Because moving to an affluent neighborhood with good schools is often impossible, private school is the only option left. Unless the family is fortunate enough to be selected to participate in a voucher program or is awarded a scholarship or reduced tuition by the private school, choosing means that the family must bear the burden of tuition payments. When low-income parents must pay part or all of the tuition for private schools, the financial sacrifice may be substantial (Martinez, Thomas, & Kemerer, 1994).

Implications of Choice

Critics of choice are concerned that choosing families differ in important ways from nonchoosing families, both in their characteristics and in their motivations for choosing. A review of choice programs in San Antonio, Milwaukee, Indianapolis, and in the state of Minnesota indicated that parents from low-income populations who exercise choice, although resembling their peers in race/ethnicity, are better educated, have relatively higher incomes, and are less likely to be underemployed than nonchoosing parents in the low-income group (Hudson Institute, 1992; Martinez et al., 1993; Rubenstein et al., 1992; and Witte, 1991). Examined alone, choosers in the SAISD multilingual program were found to differ from nonchoosers in similar ways. Differences in students occurred in the child’s gender (more females) and the child’s
achievement test scores in reading and math (higher for both). As was true for all programs reviewed, the mother’s education level and the family’s expectations and involvement in the child’s education were higher for SAISD multilingual program choosers than for nonchoosers (Martinez, Godwin, & Kemerer, 1996).

In its study of choice programs in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, the Carnegie Commission (1992) concluded that many parents choose for nonacademic reasons. Among reasons cited are convenience, the school’s location, sports and other extracurricular activities, and students’ preference for attending school with their friends. However, in the choice programs reviewed by Martinez et al. (1994), parents overwhelmingly picked educational quality or learning climate as their major reason for choosing, with discipline and the general atmosphere of the school also highly rated factors.

It is possible that some families may forego the opportunity to participate in a public school choice option outside their neighborhood because of concerns about their child’s safety, either at school or in transit to and from school. An analysis of the 1993 National Household Education Survey data revealed that about half the 6th through 12th graders surveyed reported that they had personally witnessed bullying, robbery, or physical assault at school (Chandler, Nolin, & Davies, 1995). About one out of eight students reported being personally victimized while at school. There are differences in the level of perceived danger for students, depending on the type of school:

Resorting to a strategy to avoid harm or harassment at school is more common for students attending public schools than for those attending private schools, and
there is a significant difference between students at public schools to which they have been assigned and those at public schools chosen by the family. More than half of students at public schools of choice reported strategies (57%) versus 50% of students at assigned public schools and only 31% of students at private schools. Public schools chosen by the family... may be in areas that are perceived as less safe than other schools... The programs offered by magnet schools, for instance, may attract students and their parents despite requiring youths to travel to less familiar surroundings. (p. 2)

More Latino students reported using strategies to avoid harm at school than did African-American or Anglo students in the study: 11% reported that they sometimes stayed home from school because they worried about harm.

As described above, family decision making regarding participation in school choice has been addressed by several studies. However, the research literature is silent on the issue of family decision making when students withdraw from school choice programs. In other words, while something is now known about who chooses to participate in school choice programs and why, little is known about who leaves them and why.

Latino Students

Latinos are the youngest and fastest growing group in the country’s population. According to Census Bureau projections released in the summer of 1996, Latino children constitute the second largest group of children (next to Anglos) in the United States (Levine, 1996). There are 12 million Latinos aged 18 or younger, 50.8 million Anglo
children, and 11.4 million African-American children. Across the nation, 64% of Latino families with children are headed by two adults, and 94% of Latino children are legal residents. Texas has the second-largest population of Latinos in the nation. Recently, almost as many Latino babies have been born every year as Anglo babies: Latinos comprised nearly 40% of all births in Texas from 1990 to 1995, compared to nearly 45% for Anglos during the same period (Villafranca, 1996).

Although African-American and Anglo students also participate in the SAISD multilingual program, this study is limited to the Latino students who participate for three reasons:

1. The intent of the program's founder was to appeal to Latino students by offering the study of language and culture (Perales, n.d.).

2. San Antonio has a large Latino population, and SAISD is mostly Latino (Cadena & Walling, 1996).

3. Latinos are the group considered to be most at risk of dropping out of school before graduation (Romo & Falbo, 1996).

Categories of Latino Students

Because the term Latino can be used to identify a diverse group, it is important to be specific when using it. The following two sections describe the different groups that are commonly subsumed by the term Latino and attempt to delimit what is meant by Latino in this study. Two sections that follow explore the implications of group identity and review the literature relative to Latinos in academic programs.

Latinos may belong to any race. Although it is convenient to identify students as
Latino on the basis of their surnames, one may not assume that any student with a Spanish surname is Latino. For some, the ancestor responsible for the name goes back several generations. Succeeding generations may contain no Latinos at all, yet the surname may still be carried through fathers in the family. At the same time, some Latino students have surnames that do not sound Spanish. Latino students selected for this study were identified on the basis of the racial/ethnic group indicated on official SAISD student records by parents at the time of enrollment.

Among Latinos there are several groups: Velez (1989) used national origin to separate groups of Latinos—Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and those of Mexican descent. An important difference among these groups is their tendency to concentrate in different geographic locations. Because the setting for this study is South Texas—much nearer Mexico than Cuba or Puerto Rico—this study focuses on students of Mexican descent.

Categories of Mexican-descent students. Within the group of Latinos of Mexican descent, there are several categories. In her study of high school students in southern California, Matute-Bianche (1986) identified five distinct subgroups among students of Mexican descent.

1. “Recent-Mexican-immigrant” students speak Spanish, dress differently from other groups, and name Mexico as their permanent home. Students among this group who are proficient in Spanish are more academically successful than those who are not. Teachers often describe recent Mexican immigrant students as courteous, serious about schoolwork, eager to please, and naive compared to other students.

2. “Mexican-oriented” students typically speak Spanish at home, use Spanish and
English interchangeably with their peers, but speak English exclusively with school personnel. They take pride in their Mexican culture and identify themselves as Mexican. They do not consider themselves Mexican-American and consider terms such as Chicano and Cholo to be associated with gang membership or otherwise derogatory.

3. “Mexican-American” students are most often born in this country. They typically do not speak Spanish well and are identified by teachers as totally assimilated. This is the group most likely to be involved in mainstream school organizations and in student government.

4. Students in a “Chicano” group are much less likely to participate in school programs or to aspire to go to college. Teachers characterize them as much more concerned with loyalty to their peers than with school, and although some say they would like to do well in school, they behave in ways that lead to failure—being absent, disrupting class, or coming to class unprepared. Chicano students, unlike the first three groups, are not offended by the term Chicano and often call themselves homeboy or homegirl and use the terms schoolboy or schoolgirl to deride the more academically-oriented groups described above.

5. A small but distinctive group known as Cholo is often associated with gang membership. Cholos and Chicanos often have low status and may be held in fear or contempt by other Mexican-descent students in the school. They do not participate in school activities and are not usually successful students.

Implications of group identity. A study of immigrants and education by the Rand Corporation tracked the performance of four groups: Asian, black, white, and Latino
(Schnaiberg, 1996). The study found that immigrant children were as likely as native-born children to attend school up to the high school level and that a significant portion of those who did not attend high school were Latino immigrants, particularly those from Mexico. The lower high school attendance for teenaged Mexican immigrants did not result from students dropping out; instead, it was a result of those young people never enrolling in the first place. Many Mexican teenagers who immigrate to the United States have been out of school for a year or more. They often fail to enroll in U.S. schools because they believe that it will be too difficult to catch up or because their family needs their income from a job.

Latino students who do attend high school may experience different types of problems, depending upon their immigration status. Among many Mexican-immigrant and Mexican-oriented students, academic difficulties arise from limited English proficiency and lack of familiarity with school expectations, rules, and curriculum. On the other hand, according to Matute-Bianche (1986), the Chicano and Cholo groups’ problems stem from their tendency to resist behavioral and normative patterns required for scholastic achievement:

These norms, assumptions, and codes of conduct are associated with being white or gringo... or "rich honkie." To adopt these cultural features—that is, to participate in class discussions, to carry books from class to class, to ask the teacher for help in front of others, to expend effort to do well in school—are efforts that are viewed derisively, condescendingly, and mockingly by other Chicanos. Hence, to adopt such features presents these students with a forced-choice
dilemma. They must choose between doing well in school or being a Chicano. From this perspective, it is not possible or legitimate to participate in both the culture of the dominant group, that is, the school culture, and in the Chicano culture. To cross these cultural boundaries means denying one's identity as a Chicano and is viewed as incompatible with maintaining the integrity of a Chicano identity. Hence, the school policies and practices are viewed as forces to be resisted, subverted, undermined, challenged, and opposed. Often the opposition takes the form of mental withdrawal, in which the students find themselves alienated from the academic content of the school curriculum and the effort required to master it. (p. 255)

Because selection for the SAISD multilingual program is based on high grades and test scores and because participation is viewed as an academic status symbol, Chicanos and Cholos would not be likely to apply or to meet eligibility requirements. Therefore, students in this study are expected to fall into either the Mexican-oriented or Mexican-American category. Recent-Mexican-immigrant students are excluded because the entrance criteria stress high performance on standardized tests. This study distinguishes between Mexican-oriented and Mexican-American students by examining the language spoken at home and the birthplace of students, parents, and grandparents. The analysis of data in chapter 4 examines whether stayers and leavers in the SAISD multilingual program tend to belong to either of these categories more often than the other.
Latino Students in Academic Programs

The Rand study cited earlier found that immigrant students who enrolled in high school were more likely than their native-born peers to follow an academic track (Schnaiberg, 1996). However, Latinos, whether in the immigrant or native-born group, were the least likely to be on a college-preparatory track. Latinos have the lowest high school graduation and college enrollment rates of all races and ethnic groups. Of all racial/ethnic groups, theirs were the only Scholastic Aptitude Test scores to drop between 1991 and 1992 (DeWitt, 1992).

In his examination of the High School and Beyond data, Velez (1989) found that, while Cuban and Puerto Rican students who made good grades were less likely to drop out than those who did not, the same could not be said for the non-Cuban, non-Puerto Rican group of Latino students (called Chicanos by Velez) who were enrolled in an academic curriculum:

Unexpectedly, Chicano students . . . were more likely to drop out than were their counterparts in nonacademic curricula. I can only speculate that Chicanos enter these programs with less-adequate preparation than do non-Hispanic white students and thus that the uneven competition strikes a blow to their academic self-esteem, leading them to withdraw. An alternative explanation may be that Chicanos in academic programs are more discriminated against by peers and teachers than are their counterparts in nonacademic tracks or are more vulnerable to unfair treatment (perhaps because they are proportionately fewer in number).

(p. 129)
As stated above, the Latino students who participate in the SAISD multilingual program are more likely to be of Mexican than of Cuban or Puerto Rican origin. If these students follow the pattern observed by Velez (1989) in his examination of the *High School and Beyond* data, then they may still be considered to be at risk of dropping out of school before graduation, even when they are successful at making good grades while enrolled in an academic curriculum.

Student Attrition

The available research information on student attrition consists almost exclusively of studies of dropouts; that is, the research literature pertains almost exclusively to students who leave school rather than those who leave educational programs. Although many studies have examined who drops out of school and why, no study was found that has addressed the issue of who leaves a choice program and why. Nonetheless, the attrition literature related to dropouts is still useful for studying program attrition: Students who leave the SAISD multilingual program do not drop out of school, yet they still may share some of the same characteristics or motivating pressures that have been found among dropouts. For this reason, the following sections reviewing the research literature on dropouts are included.

Public School Attrition

A number of recent studies agree that leaving school is the final stage in a long-term process of disengagement from the educational experience (Finn, 1993; Newmann, Wehlage, & Lamborn, 1992; Wehlage et al., 1989). Factors important in this process are early and recent school performance, academic and social behaviors, and educational as
well as general attitudes. After reviewing the literature on dropouts, Finn concluded that dropping out, absenteeism and truancy, disruptive behavior, and delinquency usually appear concomitantly in one student (Finn, 1989).

Finn (1993) proposed two alternative models of this long-term dropout decision process: The first he called the frustration-self-esteem model. It suggests that early school failure leads to low self-esteem, which in turn leads to problem behaviors such as absenteeism. Similarly, in their meta-analysis of the developmental process of dropping out, Rush and Vitale (1994) found that academic achievement, standardized test scores, and retention identify students at risk as early as elementary school, that these same variables influence students in later grades, that the number and magnitude of variables increases from elementary to high school, and that the gap between students who are at risk and those who are not becomes compounded from elementary to high school. The variables with the most significant differences from elementary to high school are locus of control and self-concept.

Rush and Vitale (1994) found that the magnitude of variables related to academic achievement and ability to set academic goals exceeded the magnitude of variables related to family income, mother's education, parent support, ability to get along, and family structure. In their analysis of the High School and Beyond data, Ekstrom et al. (1987) found that the gap between students who dropped out and those who continued until graduation was greater in the area of school performance as measured by report card grades than it was for tested achievement. However, other studies of dropouts have stressed the importance of such family background factors as parent educational level,
parent or sibling dropout status, parent occupation, and whether the family has a single parent or is a step-family (DeJung, 1988; Gastright, 1987; Grissmer, Kirby, Berends, & Williamson, 1995; Rumberger, 1995).

The second model proposed by Finn (1993) for the dropout decision, the participation-identification model, suggested that the lack of participation in school activities leads to poor performance and then to alienation from school. Other studies (Newmann, 1991; Newmann et al., 1992; Wehlage et al., 1989) have emphasized the manner in which educational engagement and school membership or social bonding seem jointly to influence educational outcomes; that is, both social and academic integration influence a student’s commitment to the institution and decision to finish school. While truancy, absences, suspension, poor performance, and retention in a grade seem to have the most immediate effect on at-risk classification (DeJung, 1988; Goll, 1989; Rumberger, 1995), other major factors include boredom (Martinez, 1986; Naylor, 1993), low self-esteem or expectations (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986), poor attitude on the part of the dropout (DeJung, 1988) or on the part of his teachers (Martinez, 1986), and feelings of alienation (Naylor, 1993; Wehlage et al., 1989). Naylor (1993) reported that dropouts tend to view schools as institutions that are unresponsive to individual needs. They express a sense of boredom with teaching methods, see the curriculum as irrelevant, and describe the environment as unsafe. Conversely, Paredes (1993) found a positive climate to be the most significant factor related to lowering dropout rates among Austin high school students.
Wehlage and Smith, in an interview with Anne Lockwood (1989) reported that feelings of alienation among students at risk of dropping out have a variety of forms and causes:

[These include] either alienation from teachers or peers, difficulty doing the work, or a real disregard for the importance of the kind of schoolwork that the school asks the students to do. As a result, the students can't identify with the school as an institution committed to their welfare. They feel it's a place they're being forced to attend, it brings very little satisfaction and often a great deal of grief. And, as a result of continual negative experiences with teachers, peers, or schoolwork, they withdraw from the whole process of education. . . . One of the impediments to membership and engagement is what we call "incongruence."

Incongruence is the gap in social class or cultural orientation between the origins of the kid and the school, which is essentially middle class in its orientation. I've run into kids who came from stable families, but their identities were not related to the kinds of outcomes school people had in mind. (pp. 52-53)

Elements of Finn's (1993) two models—frustration-self-esteem and participation-identification—are incorporated into the adaptations of the attrition model used in this study to examine the processes involved in staying in and leaving the SAISD multilingual program. The model is described at the end of this chapter.

Postsecondary School Attrition

A review of literature relevant to postsecondary (college and university) attrition pertains to this study because it raises questions about why students leave institutions at
which their enrollment is noncompulsory, as is the case with the SAISD multilingual program, where program participation is voluntary, in contrast to participation among students attending public schools in general.

A wide variety of factors influence a student's decision to leave an institution he or she attends voluntarily. Some studies of attrition at the postsecondary level employ conceptual models that take into account variables exerting an influence on student decisions. Examples of these variables are student/family background, high school academic performance, social integration, distance from home and other transportation issues, obligations to job and/or family, finances, satisfaction with the educational program, and commitment to institutional, educational, or career goals (Bean, 1980; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975). After examining each of these conceptual models, Spady's was selected as being that best suited for adaptation and use in this study. This model and the rationale for choosing it are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Conclusions of community college and university attrition studies are somewhat inconsistent, perhaps because of the differing populations of students involved. For example, Harris (1993) found that the most powerful predictor of attrition for students at a small rural Maryland community college is the student's commitment to attend that college and that the academic variables are not significant, whereas Blong (1993) found the academic variables to be the strongest predictor among his subjects in Iowa. Students at a California community college, on the other hand, leave because of problems with finances, course availability, and scheduling (Grossmont-Cuyamaca Community College
District, 1994). Studies of attrition among university students reveal additional factors. Ralsner (1991) found recurring themes of uncertainty: Students are unsure what to expect from college and what the rewards will be. Her study also revealed problems with transition, personal adjustment, finances, and academic underpreparation. A study of retention among nursing students found environmental variables to be more influential than academic variables (Jeffreys, 1994). Although the variety and range of factors that influence students to leave postsecondary institutions make it difficult to generalize or draw conclusions, these factors serve as a rich resource pool for providing measurements for variables used to explore decisions among SAISD multilingual students to continue in or withdraw from the program.

Attrition Among Latino Students

An examination of high school dropout rates for the nation revealed that attrition is disproportionately high for Latino students:

Recent research on American dropouts by the U.S. Department of Education indicates that while the proportion of American youth earning high school diplomas has improved overall since 1972, the proportion of Hispanic youth who have not completed high school remains high. In 1991, 35.3% of Hispanics ages 16-24 were not in school and had not received a high school diploma, about the same percentage as in 1972. In contrast, the dropout rates for Whites and African Americans have shown steady improvement over the same period. For non-Hispanic Whites in 1972, 12.3% were not in school and had not graduated, and in 1991, this percentage had dropped to 8.9%; for African Americans, this shift was
from 21.3% to 13.6%. (Romo & Falbo, 1996, p. 1)

Arias (1986) stated that the three factors most useful for identifying a student at risk of dropping out of high school are (a) low socioeconomic status, (b) language minority status, and (c) Hispanic ethnicity. One problem is the tendency for the student to be racially and linguistically segregated:

The nation’s Hispanic population is highly concentrated in urban areas. As of 1984, 88% of Hispanics live in metropolitan areas. A recent report by Orum notes that 68.1% of Hispanic children attended school with minority enrollment of 50% or more. This means that the majority of Hispanic students attend schools in which the student population is predominately minority. Orum states, “Hispanics now have the dubious distinction of being not only the most undereducated group of American children, but also the most highly segregated.” (p. 26)

Latino students experience more academic difficulties than other students because they face multiple barriers in receiving an education: poverty, language, cultural incongruencies, and institutional racism. Some factors that appear to inhibit Latino educational achievement are low self-efficacy and external efficacy (Tomás Rivera Center, 1993). Bandura (1986) has argued that self-efficacy, the belief that one can perform adequately in a particular situation, plays a central part in learning theory. External efficacy, the belief that one can have an impact on social institutions, also has a strong impact on the willingness to participate in various public or private programs (Abramson, 1983). Both self-efficacy and external efficacy influence an individual’s trust of institutions and their representatives--lower levels possibly discouraging families from
participating in school choice. A number of studies, including a large survey conducted in San Antonio (Hazuda, Stern, & Haffner, 1988), have shown that Latinos have substantially lower self- and external efficacy scores than Anglos (Abramson, 1983). Valverde (1987) found less self-motivation, self-direction, and self-discipline among urban Latino high school students who drop out than among those who eventually graduate.

Factors linked to Latino attrition. Several researchers have studied the factors linked with Latino students who drop out. In his examination of the High School and Beyond data, Velez (1989) reported that the most important factors among non-Cuban and non-Puerto Rican Latino dropouts were confrontation, such as cutting classes and getting suspended; accelerated role taking, such as dating; and background attributes, such as being female or being older than other students.

A 30-month study of Latinos in the Dallas Independent School District revealed that students are more likely to drop out if their mothers were not born in the U.S., if their parents' education level is low, if the father is unemployed, if they have problems with school personnel, if they become pregnant, if they change schools often, if they work more than 15 hours per week, if they miss more than 11 days in a school year, if they feel "out of place" or bored, if they use alcohol or drugs or are involved in gangs or criminal activities, or if they believe their parents expect them to drop out and work in order to help support the family. Students are less likely to drop out of school if they live with both parents, if their first language is Spanish, if their parents encourage bilingualism, if they like school personnel and feel positively about teachers and administrators, if they
are involved in school and/or community activities, if they attended a pre-school program, if they ask questions in class when they do not understand a lesson, if there is a quiet place at home to study, or if they say they know what they will be doing in 5 years (Intercultural Development Research Association, 1989).

In a study of over 100 Latino high school students in an urban Southwestern district, Valverde (1987) examined attrition among students who were similar on measures of family education and occupational levels and academic abilities, regardless of gender, ability to speak English, and graduation or dropout status. Among these students, Valverde found that the most notable differences between the dropout and graduating groups were their friendships (relationships with peer group). Students who graduated tended to have more friends—some stating that their friends were what kept them from dropping out of school. On the other hand, the dropouts expressed feelings of alienation and rejection. Graduating students participated in school-related activities such as sports, clubs, choir, band, and school-sponsored dances, whereas the dropouts reported spending their leisure time at community-sponsored dances or neighborhood sports and "hanging around" with friends, few of whom tended to be graduating students. (Unfortunately, students at risk of dropping out were often prevented from participating in school-sponsored activities because of poor grades.)

Valverde (1987) also found that parents' graduation status was not a significant predictor of dropping out but that older siblings' graduation status was. Students with limited English proficiency were more likely to graduate than those for whom English was a native language. Similarly, she observed that students born in Mexico had a higher
graduation rate than students born in the United States, and she speculated that this may
be because of a cynicism among longer-term U.S. residents brought about by their
perception of a "job ceiling" for lower socioeconomic groups.

Rumberger's (1995) analysis of the middle school student component of the
National Educational Longitudinal Survey 1988 data included separate analyses for
different ethnic groups. He found that Latinos, along with African-Americans and Native
Americans, were significantly more likely to drop out than were other groups, but that,
among Latinos, first-generation immigrant students are no more likely to drop out than
are native (third-generation or more) students; in fact, second-generation students are
considerably less likely to drop out than are native students. However, students from non-
English-speaking families have significantly higher odds of dropping out than other
students (Rumberger, 1995). This latter finding seems to contradict the Dallas ISD
(Intercultural Development Research Association, 1989) and the Valverde (1987) studies
cited above, which find students whose first language is Spanish less likely to drop out.

Parents of Latino students were found to be less likely than other groups to be
involved in PTA or to help with homework but more likely to have rules about homework
and grades and to supervise their children. Latino students were more likely than Anglo
students to have been held back, to have a low locus of control, to report low levels of
teacher quality, and to find their academic subjects of doubtful future utility (Rumberger,
1995).

A recent study of Latino high school attrition (Romo & Falbo, 1996) included a
survey of over 2,000 Latino students from Austin ISD, asking them this question: "If you
know students who are seriously considering dropping out of school or who have already dropped out of school, why do you think they are dropping out?” The reasons students gave most commonly were lack of interest in school, serious personal and/or family problems, poor grades, substance abuse problems, discipline problems, involvement with gangs or criminal behavior, lack of support at school, financial problems, and lack of academic help at school. The study found that, in many cases, policies and procedures at the high schools made it particularly difficult for the 100 at-risk Latino students they tracked to graduate. They found that schools often expect more of low-income families than the families can provide. On the other hand, the parents of the students in the study, many of whom were uneducated, expected the school to assume the responsibility for motivating their children to achieve. Moreover, although Latino parents were found to value education, Romo and Falbo observed that they often lacked the resources for helping their children succeed in school.

During the time we observed them, most of the parents were doing the best they could for their children. And yet, in many cases, their “best” was so constrained by their own lack of mental and physical health and financial resources that they could do little to help their adolescent children. (“At-risk,” 1996, p. A44)

As was true in the section above on postsecondary school attrition, the variety and range of findings related to attrition among Latino students do not lead easily to generalizations or conclusions. Instead, they suggest many possible angles for examining the variables involved when Latino students and their families make decisions pertaining to their education. This study incorporated those that seemed most applicable to the
SAISD multilingual program setting and population into its methodology, which is described in chapter 3.

The value of choice in preventing attrition. Public school choice--particularly the magnet school option--is an educational strategy that has been found to have a positive impact upon graduation rates among students. In a study of retention in the Los Angeles Unified School District, schools of choice were found to have the highest stability and lowest transiency rates (Oliver, 1990). Similarly, Joubert (1986) found magnet schools to have the lowest dropout rate of all non-special education programs. Doyle and Levine (1984) reported that student achievement, attendance, and participation were highest in magnet schools and that magnet schools tended to show higher levels of parental control and involvement than nonmagnet programs. One may reasonably expect, therefore, that offering Latino students and their families choice options is a sensible strategy for reducing their dropout rate. Support for this idea may be inferred from a recent finding from a Rand analysis of two large data bases, the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) and the National Education Longitudinal Survey (NELS). Grissmer et al. (1995) noted that math and reading achievement improved for all racial and ethnic groups between 1970 and 1990, but that performance for African-American and Latino high school students registered greater gains than did that for Anglo students. Moreover, gains made by Latino students were far greater than family background characteristics alone can explain. The researchers suggested that the unexplained gains resulted from efforts being made by institutions; that is, the schools these students attended did something that made a positive difference in their achievement.
Attrition Among SAISD Students and Enrollment in the SAISD Multilingual Program

During the 1993-94 school year, the overall SAISD dropout rate was 5.5%, the highest dropout rate in Bexar county and the second highest among Texas' largest 12 school districts (Calderón, 1996). The 1992-93 SAISD dropout rate for Latinos, 5.3%, was lower than that for other groups: African-Americans 6.3%, Anglos 9.1%, and Native Americans 14.3% (S. Walling, personal communication, February 1996). These figures contrast sharply to the trend across the nation, where Latinos are more likely than other groups to drop out of high school before graduation (Romo & Falbo, 1996). Part of the reason for this contrast is that the district’s Anglo population is so small that a few dropouts can significantly raise the dropout rate. Perhaps more importantly, according to SAISD Superintendent Diana Lam, is the majority status of Latino students: “When the Hispanic culture is the majority culture, you need to be more culturally sensitive to the learning styles of Hispanic students” (Calderón, 1996).

Attrition among the general student populations at Tafolla and Davis Middle Schools, where the SAISD multilingual program is housed, is estimated to be less than 2% annually. That figure does not indicate, however, that 2% of students from these two middle schools have dropped out; it reflects instead a tendency for some students to move out of state or out of the country, neglecting to formally withdraw, request their records, or leave a forwarding address (multilingual school administrator, personal communication, February 1996).

During the 1992-93 school year, over 1,110 students participated in the SAISD multilingual program. Of those students, roughly 78% were Latino, 15% were African-
American, and 8% were Anglo or from other ethnic groups. (For the district as a whole, the breakdown is 81% Latino, 12% African-American, and 7% Anglo or other ethnic groups.) According to the 1992-93 totals, the percentage of students from low-income families participating in the multilingual program was slightly higher than that of their grade-level peers in the district overall. Program students were much more likely to be female than male and were more likely than nonprogram students throughout the district to pass all their core subjects, to pass sections of the TAAS (Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, a criterion-referenced test administered statewide), and to have scored at or above grade level on all sections of the NAPT (Norm-Referenced Assessment Program for Texas, a statewide achievement test that is no longer used). Multilingual program students were much less likely than their classmates to have been retained, to be at risk of dropping out of school, or to have limited proficiency in English. Program participants had better attendance records than nonparticipants (Cadena & Walling, 1994).

There is much interest among SAISD parents in the multilingual program. To illustrate, approximately 1,400 people, representing about 500 families, attended an orientation meeting at Tafolla Middle School in February 1996. If all applied for their sons and daughters to participate in the program, then these 500 families competed for the 380 places available in the multilingual program in August 1996.

SAISD does not maintain separate statistics on attrition among students in the multilingual program from Grades 6 through 8 (S. Walling, personal communication, February 1996); however, as explained in the following sections, background investigations at the two middle school campuses have revealed the attrition rate was
between 10% and 10.5%, not including students moving from the district.

**Attrition from the multilingual program at Tafolla Middle School.** An overwhelming majority of students attending Tafolla Middle School--94%--are Latinos. Accordingly, nearly all Tafolla leavers are Latinos. The rate of attrition from the Tafolla multilingual program for reasons other than mobility was estimated by the principal at 10% to 11% (multilingual school administrator, personal communication, February 1996). This figure corresponded to the number counted by this researcher for the 1994-95 multilingual cohort: 10.5%, or 20 students, half boys and half girls, left the Tafolla multilingual program during that school year.

**Attrition from the multilingual program at Davis Middle School.** About the same percentage of students--10%--withdrew from the Davis multilingual program during the 1994-95 school year for reasons other than mobility. However, the ethnic or racial composition of the Davis student body is more diverse: 52% African-American, 42% Latino, and 6% Anglo, and this racial diversity was reflected among Davis leavers. Table 2 (see p. 50) identifies the gender and race or ethnicity of Davis leavers during the 1994-95 school year.

As is apparent from Table 2, a total of 38 students left the Davis multilingual program during the 1994-95 school year. Those 38 students represent 10% of the students who participated in the Davis multilingual program. Among those 38 leavers, 20 (53%) were Latinos; 15 (39%) were African-Americans; and 3 (8%) were Anglos.
Table 2

Gender and Ethnicity or Race of Davis Leavers for the 1994-95 School Year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>6th grade</th>
<th>7th grade</th>
<th>8th grade</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latino boys</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino girls</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American boys</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American girls</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo boys</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglo girls</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total students</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Attrition during the transition to Brackenridge High School.** The principal at Brackenridge High School estimated that the attrition rate from Grade 8 to high school is typically about 33% (Hoover, 1996). A variety of new magnet programs—a different one at each of the eight SAISD high schools—is planned for the near future. There is a concern that the presence of these new programs will probably increase the attrition rate for the multilingual program when students who have participated in the program through Grade 8 choose other options (multilingual school administrator, personal communication, February 1996).
A Sociological Model of the Attrition Process

As mentioned earlier, current research supports the concept of attrition as the culmination of a long-term process of disengagement from school, involving a wide variety of variables. In order to study attrition among SAISD multilingual participants as an ongoing process, it is necessary to examine characteristics, attitudes, expectations, achievement, and events at different stages of the student's experience. A theoretical framework or conceptual model can facilitate the organization of many pieces of information and the analysis of many disparate bits of data.

After several models were examined and their relative merits compared, an attrition model developed by William G. Spady (1970, 1971) to explain the undergraduate dropout process among University of Chicago freshmen was selected for use as an organizational tool in this study. Spady's model regards attrition from a sociological viewpoint. In an exhaustive review of literature concerning dropouts from higher education, Spady found academic potential, ability, and socioeconomic status to be mentioned consistently as powerful predictors of attrition (Spady, 1970). However, citing a lack of theoretical and empirical coherence, he recommended a movement toward a "more interdisciplinary-based, theoretical synthesis of the most methodologically satisfactory findings and conceptually fruitful approaches" to the dropout problem (p. 64). Acknowledging that no single theoretical model is adequate for all circumstances and situations, Spady attempted to combine several distinct approaches within the framework of a single design in order to treat several clusters of relevant variables simultaneously. The result of his effort is the model he alternatively calls an "Explanatory Sociological
Model of the Dropout Process" (Spady, 1970) and a “Theoretically Based Model of the Undergraduate Dropout Process" (Spady, 1971). The model was shown in chapter 1 (see Figure 1).

It is apparent from the model’s construction that Spady viewed the dropout decision as the culmination of a process that takes place over time and that may be influenced by many factors. One of the features of this model that distinguished it from previously existing models was the recognition of the importance of social interactions. The model was based partially on Durkheim’s (1951) theory of suicide, in which the concept of “social integration” was examined. The premise of the social integration concept is that, when social integration is absent, a person is faced with these conditions: “a lack of consistent, intimate interaction with others, holding values and orientations that are dissimilar from those of the general social collectivity, and lacking a sense of compatibility with the immediate social system” (Spady, 1970, p. 78). Spady’s idea was that social integration interacts with other variables influencing dropout but that its link with dropout is indirect—that commitment to the institution and satisfaction with experiences at the institution are intervening variables.

Spady’s model moves beyond the “comfortable and familiar generalizations” about academic performance and family background to examine the more affective factors involved in student attrition:

[It] treats the successful assimilation of entering college students into the full life of their institution as problematic rather than as given. According to this view, each student enters college with a definite pattern of dispositions, interests,
expectations, goals, and values shaped by his family background and high school experiences. It is assumed that this entire range of experiences and attributes may influence his overall ability to accommodate the influences and pressures he encounters in his new environment. The diffuse patterns of interaction that result... may either facilitate or impede the establishment of more consistent and formal patterns of interaction with specific individuals in the college. These two factors, normative congruence and friendship support, parallel the two elements that Durkheim uses to account for high degrees of social integration in the common life of society: moral consciousness and collective affiliations. Since so much of a college student's social role overlaps with his academic role, however, these two factors in conjunction with his academic aptitude and previous training (e.g., academic potential) may also influence his intellectual development and formal academic performance. In my view, then, full integration into the common life of the college depends on successfully meeting the demands of both its social and academic systems. (Spady, 1971, p. 38)

Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the variables Spady (1970, 1971) used to study attrition, indicators used to measure the indicators, and changes among the indicators adapting the model to the population and setting of the SAISD multilingual program.
Contributions of This Study

This study contributes to the literature in three areas. First, it investigates a thematic public school choice program. Second, it examines public choice as it pertains to Latino students. Last, it determines which variables in an attrition model best serve to predict Latino student attrition from a thematic public choice program.

Public school choice appears to have much popular support and a high level of participation among students as well. For years, many inner-city public school districts have operated magnet schools and offered educational alternatives. Open enrollment is increasingly available. As of October 1996, 25 states, including Texas, have passed public charter school legislation. Because of widespread interest in choice options and because of their rapid proliferation, educational policy makers need information on how participation in choice programs will affect students and their families. However, as the previous discussion of student attrition reveals, scholars know little about the characteristics of families and students who eventually withdraw from schools of choice.

This study’s contribution to the literature of attrition from public schools of choice is further enhanced by its focus on Latino students. Latinos have been identified as the largest minority group and as the group of students most at risk of dropping out before graduation. As noted earlier, at least three studies identified public school choice as an effective strategy to retain high school students or to promote their attendance achievement, as well as involvement with the school on the part of their parents.

Finally, this study adapts and employs a conceptual model to the examination of attrition from a public school program of choice. Several researchers have presented
evidence leading to the conclusion that a student's withdrawal from the educational process takes place gradually and that what happens in elementary and middle school may have a strong effect on his or her later decision to stay or leave a school system.

Accordingly, this study investigates the effect of a public school choice program at the middle school level, using an attrition model that views the process of disengagement over time.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND REPORTING OF DATA

This study examines student attrition in a districtwide choice program in the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD). The SAISD multilingual program, a thematic choice program, is open to students who have high ability in language arts, offering intensive study of the language and culture of another country. Students may apply for acceptance in the program at the end of Grade 5. Applicants qualify on the basis of achievement test scores, report card grades, and recommendations by teachers, counselors, and parents. At the beginning of Grade 6, a limited number of students who have been accepted and have enrolled in the program are bused to one of two SAISD middle schools. After eighth grade, those still enrolled in the program may continue at a single SAISD high school. At both the middle school and high school level, the multilingual program is housed within regular neighborhood schools.

This study is concerned with students who have participated at the middle school level at either Davis Middle School or Tafolla Middle School, where multilingual students comprise approximately half the student body, 390 students and 460 students, respectively. This study seeks to determine how the characteristics of students who stay in the program through Grade 6 or Grade 7 compare with the characteristics of students who withdraw from it. It also investigates the factors that influence the decisions of students to leave or continue in the program. Finally, the study examines an attrition model for
university freshmen developed by William Spady (1970, 1971) in order to assess its usefulness in understanding attrition among middle school students participating voluntarily in a public school choice program. For three reasons, the study was limited to Latino students. First, the program was intended by its founder to engage the interest of, and broaden the horizons of, Latino students (Perales, n.d.). Second, SAISD is overwhelmingly composed of Latino students: SAISD is 81% Latino, 12% African-American, and 7% Anglo or other ethnic groups (Cadena & Walling, 1994). Finally, attrition is a more serious problem for this group than for any other; Latino students have been identified as those most likely to drop out of high school before graduation (Romo & Falbo, 1996).

Population and Sample

This study focused on Latino participants in the SAISD multilingual program who were in Grade 6 or Grade 7 during the 1994-95 school year either at Davis or Tafolla Middle School. The study included any student enrolled in the SAISD multilingual program on the first day of the 1994-95 school year whose ethnicity was designated as Latino or Hispanic on school records. There were several reasons for selecting the 1994-95 sixth and seventh graders for the study. First, addresses and phone numbers contained in attendance office files were fairly current; therefore, students were likely to be accessible for mail surveys and/or telephone interviews. Second, students could recall details about decisions to participate in and, in the case of leavers, withdraw from the program because it was a recent occurrence. In addition, school personnel were more likely to give meaningful responses to questions about a particular student’s educational
history from the 1994-95 school year than from a preceding year. The rationale for
limiting the study to students in Grade 6 and 7 is that the students are much more likely to
withdraw than students in Grade 8.

Names of leavers for this study were obtained from records of student
withdrawals maintained by attendance clerks at Davis and Tafolla Middle Schools.
Numbers encoded on each withdrawal form indicated whether students transferred back
to their attendance-zone school after withdrawing from the multilingual program or
whether they left the program because their families moved from the district. Because
there was no reason to assume that students whose families moved from the district
would have withdrawn from the multilingual program if they had stayed, they were not
included in this study.

Combined, Davis and Tafolla school records yielded 48 names for Latino sixth-
and seventh-grade leavers for the 1994-95 school year. Of those leavers, 38 were located
and contacted, and 33 eventually responded to the survey in time to be included in the
study. Together with a sample of 33 Latino stayers, the total number of students whose
questionnaire responses are included in this study is 66. The sample of stayers was
selected in such a way that it was comparable to the leaver group; that is, students chosen
for the stayer sample matched students in the leaver group according to four criteria:

1. The number of stayers selected for the sample at each middle school was equal
to the number of leavers from that school.

2. Within that sample, the number of stayers taking a particular foreign language
class was equal to the number of leavers who withdrew from that language class.
3. Stayers and leavers for language classes were matched by grade.

4. Stayers and leavers for grades were matched by gender.

To illustrate with an example, the number of seventh-grade girls selected for the sample who were still taking German at Tafolla Middle School was equal to the number of seventh-grade girls in the sample who had withdrawn from German classes at Tafolla Middle School.

Development of Survey Instruments

Choice of Instrument

As explained below in the Data Collection section, part of the information about stayers and leavers needed for this study came from documents; however, most came from people—from school personnel and from the students themselves. When considering whether to use interviews or printed questionnaires to collect information from the people involved in the study, it was necessary for the researcher to examine the relevant advantages of each information-gathering technique. For the 66 middle school students (33 stayers and 33 leavers), mail questionnaires were the clear choice for several reasons:

1. Mail questionnaires allowed widest possible coverage of the sample for the minimum expense. It was possible to include every leaver who could be reached by mail. If interviews had been attempted, their costs in time and money would have permitted the gathering of data from only a fraction of the leaver and stayer groups.

2. Mail questionnaires best permitted respondents to think over their answers and to check the facts. This was especially important in answering questions about parent expectations, education level, occupation, and immigration history.
3. Respondents who know each other are sensitive to the opinions of their peers. Mail questionnaires offered the students in the study a measure of privacy and precluded the pressure that might have influenced their answers had they been asked direct questions in the presence of peers.

4. The use of a mail questionnaire allowed greater uniformity of questions and of responses—an important advantage because of the large number of items. The absence of an interviewer also prevented the possibility that an interviewer’s bias or faulty recording technique might distort the returns.

Questionnaires were used to gather information from the multilingual teachers of the students in the leaver and stayer samples as well, for reasons similar to those given above and the following:

5. Greater cooperation was expected from teachers using questionnaires because teachers could respond to them at their convenience, whereas a scheduled interview might have been viewed as an imposition on their time, thus creating an unwillingness to participate or biasing their responses.

For school administrators and counselors, an individual personal interview seemed most appropriate for these reasons:

1. Because schedules of administrators and counselors are far more flexible than those of teachers and because only 2 or 3 persons were interviewed at each school, time constraints were not a hindrance.

2. The flexible format used in an individual interview permitted the collection of supplementary information beyond the scope of predetermined questionnaire items.
3. An individual interview allowed for the discussion of information about
students too confidential or delicate in nature to bring up in a group or too complicated to
write on a questionnaire.

Development of Student Questionnaire

The student questionnaire was designed to explore issues relevant to student
participation in—and attrition from—the SAISD multilingual program. Several sources of
data were used in this design. The review of the literature pertaining to school choice, to
dropping out, and to the education of Latino students contained in chapter 2 uncovered a
number of issues that eventually were incorporated into the study as questionnaire items.
Similarly, preliminary interviews with the principals at the middle schools and high
school that house the multilingual program furnished locally relevant information useful
for focusing the instrument’s scope. Moreover, because the present study is part of an
extensive study of school choice in San Antonio, this researcher was able to draw upon
experience in analyzing data from related parent and teacher surveys and interviews to
discover additional areas of inquiry. Finally, the attrition model developed by William
Spady (1970, 1971), described in the last section of chapter 2 and which is examined in
greater detail later in this chapter, provided a theoretical framework for handling the
information gathered on students. In addition, Spady’s study of attrition offered a rich
source of indicators by which the contribution of each variable to the attrition decision
might be assessed. Some of these have been incorporated as questionnaire items as well.

A particular feature of the Spady model (1970, 1971) that made it appropriate for
a study of this type was its capacity for measuring the contribution of events, perceptions,
and attitudes over time. This concern with attrition as a long-term process was manifested on the questionnaire as a series of questions asking students to remember conditions that existed before they entered the multilingual program and to compare them to conditions that exist for them at the school they now attend.

Preliminary drafts of the questionnaire were examined by several teenagers for redundancy, interest and visual appeal, flow of ideas, clarity of instructions for responding to items, and the possibility of misinterpreting items. A revised version was field tested on a group of 45 sixth graders, mostly Latinos, participating in the Mansfield ISD Gifted and Talented Education (GATE) program at Timber Creek Intermediate School in Arlington, Texas. Feedback from those students was used to further refine the instrument.

The end result was a detailed 10-page questionnaire containing 39 questions—many with subquestions—asking students to respond in a yes/no format or to choose the best response or responses from a list of choices. A few open-ended items allowed students to express opinions or to add comments. “Not sure” or “prefer not to answer” were available as choices for items of a personal nature. The student questionnaire has four versions: Davis stayers, Davis leavers, Tafolla stayers, Tafolla leavers (see Appendix A for examples of student questionnaires).

Development of Teacher Questionnaire

The questionnaire distributed to multilingual teachers resembled the student questionnaire but was much shorter—only four pages. It asked about student motivation, maturity, participation, involvement in school activities, ability, family support and
encouragement, and factors that might have made the student’s participation in the program difficult. The teacher questionnaire had a multiple-choice format and was available in four versions: boy stayer, girl stayer, boy leaver, and girl leaver (see Appendix B for an example of the teacher questionnaire).

Interview Guide for Administrators and Counselors

The process of interviewing administrators and counselors at the two middle schools involved a format much less structured than that of the written survey. During the private face-to-face interview, the educator was given a list of student names and asked questions similar to these about individual students:

1. Does this student have a record of discipline referrals? If so, what is the nature of the disciplinary problem? Did it (might it) lead to his or her dismissal or withdrawal from the multilingual program?

2. [For any student who has a record of poor academic performance] What factors might have contributed to this student’s poor performance? Did it (might it) lead to his or her dismissal or withdrawal from the multilingual program?

3. Did this student have transportation, family, or social problems which resulted in (might have resulted in) his or her withdrawal from the multilingual program?

Data Collection

As noted in chapter 1, this study’s two research questions pertaining to student attrition asked how characteristics of Latino stayers differ from those of leavers and what factors influence the decisions of Latino stayers and leavers. Three kinds of data were used to address these questions: (a) information from students about themselves, (b)
information from students about their school and the multilingual program; and (c) information about students provided by school records and by school personnel--teachers in the multilingual language/culture classes, principals, assistant principals, and counselors--who knew the students and were familiar with the circumstances of their decisions to continue in or to leave the program.

**Student Survey**

The information from students about themselves, their school, and the multilingual program came from questionnaires administered to students in one of two ways. After permission was obtained from parents, students responded to a mail survey by filling out a questionnaire and mailing it back. Survey packets mailed to students included the following items (see Appendix C for sample copies): (a) cover letter for students; (b) cover letter for parents, including informed consent form; (c) monetary incentive (new uncutlulated two-dollar bill); (d) stamped self-addressed return envelope; (e) appropriate questionnaire; and (f) turn-down note. Students were asked to mail back the turn-down note if they wished to indicate that they would not participate in the survey, either because they chose not to or because their parents refused to give permission. Those sending the turn-down note were removed from the master list so that they would not receive a reminder letter or a telephone call. Only 2 students opted to use the turn-down note; 1 declined to participate and the other's parent would not allow him to participate.

After 2 weeks, reminder letters were mailed to nonrespondents (see Appendix D for a sample copy of the reminder letter). If there was still no response after 2 more
weeks, students were contacted by telephone and asked verbatim survey questions. Responses were recorded on questionnaire forms and coded in the same manner as the questionnaires returned by mail.

**Document Analysis**

Additional information about each student drawn from records in school offices included (a) number of days student attended (out of number of days enrolled); (b) report card grades for reading/language arts, math, and foreign language classes for 1994-95; (c) standardized test scores in reading and math for the 1994-95 school year; (d) date of student’s birth; and (e) date student left the multilingual program (for leavers).

**Interviews With School Personnel**

Interviews with principals, assistant principals, and counselors took place individually and privately. As explained in the Development of Survey Instruments section above, the information obtained from interviews included (a) the nature of disciplinary referrals, if any; (b) factors related to low grades, if applicable; and (c) other problems making it difficult for students to participate in the program.

**Teacher Survey**

Class schedules for stayers and leavers in the sample listed the names of the teachers the students had for their multilingual classes during the 1993-94 and 1994-95 school year when the students in the sample began participating in the program as sixth graders. After permission was obtained from the campus administrators, a questionnaire for each student was distributed via school mailboxes to his or her multilingual teacher from that year, along with a cover letter and a $2 bill (see Appendix B for copies of the
The questionnaire asked teachers to respond to items involving the following: (a) observations about study skills, motivation, maturity, social adjustment, attitude, and family support for individual stayers and leavers in the sample; (b) degree of involvement in co-curricular and extracurricular activities for individual stayers and leavers; (c) degree to which stayers and leavers participated in the language class activities and kept up with assignments; (d) degree to which stayers and leavers engaged in critical thinking in the classroom; and (e) problems complicating stayers' continuation in the program or leading up to leavers' withdrawal from the program.

Theoretical Model

This study has three research questions. The first two relate to student characteristics and factors influencing the decision-making process. The third research question asks: Can Spady's Explanatory Sociological Model of the Dropout Process be adapted for use in understanding the attrition process among middle school Latino leavers? If so, what adaptations make it most effective?

In this section, the use of Spady’s (1970, 1971) model as a theoretical framework is described, both as employed in his original study of attrition among University of Chicago freshmen in 1965 and as adapted and utilized in the present study of attrition among Latino middle school students. As illustrated in Figure 1 (see chapter 1), the model consists of 10 variables. Nine are independent variables that influence each other in a set sequence. The culmination of this sequence is the 10th variable—the decision to stay or leave—in Spady's study, to stay at or leave the University of Chicago; in this study, to stay in or leave the SAISD multilingual program.
Development of the Model

During the time in which he conducted his study, Spady (1970, 1971) was employed by the University of Chicago as an admissions officer and had access to students' admission applications, to their achievement records, and to students themselves, therefore, he was able to contact students easily by mail or phone. His study consisted of document reviews and surveys conducted at several stages of 683 students' freshman year. His model, emerging from the findings in his initial study, utilized multiple regression analysis to address the independent contribution of several factors in the explanation of important outcomes in the attrition process.

Construction of the Model

The diagram of Spady's (1971) model (see Figure 1 in chapter 1) includes 10 variables and is deceptively simple in its appearance. Although the rectangles representing the 10 variables in the model contain only a word or two, each subsumes a collection or cluster of conditions, events, attitudes, perceptions, or other data—called indicators by Spady—that define or assess each of the 10 variables. For example, the variable Spady named "Intellectual Development" is constructed from several indicators reflecting such factors as the students' stimulation in their course work, the expansion of their intellectual and cultural perspectives, their ability to think systematically and critically, and their perceived excellence in academic work. In a later section, the variables and their indicators are described in greater detail.

Because the variables—and, especially, their specific indicators—Spady (1970, 1971) used in his study of attrition among University of Chicago freshmen are not
uniformly applicable to SAISD middle school students, several changes and substitutions were made in the model at the indicator level to better fit the present situation. Indicators that seem more appropriate for this study's setting and population emerged from a review of the literature on school choice, education of Latino students, and student attrition; from preliminary investigations at the middle and high school levels in SAISD; and from the baseline data and the interviews with parents that are part of the larger study of choice in San Antonio (Martinez et al., 1993).

If one were to attempt to describe the variables and their indicators without referring to a diagram of Spady's model (see Figure 1 in chapter 1), some might seem redundant. However, an examination of the model reveals that it is constructed to reflect Spady's view of attrition as an ongoing process—a decision not made in haste but in stages over time. Accordingly, the reexamination of similar facets of the decision to drop out or to continue made at different phases of the student's experience helps the researcher to understand how the dropout decision evolves. Moreover, the model's construction allows the researcher to examine influences of variables associated with the student's background, expectations, and prior schooling on subsequent events and outcomes at the institution which he or she presently attends or has recently left. Spady put it this way: "The model . . . both implies a definite time sequence and depicts the assumed direct causal connections between pairs of variables" (Spady, 1970, p. 78).

**Specific Variables and Indicators Used in the Model**

Spady's model consists of 10 variables. As explained in the section above, each variable was defined or assessed by one or more indicators representing a collection or
cluster of conditions, events, attitudes, perceptions, or other data related to the variable. Each of the 10 variables and the variable’s associated indicators are described below, both as used by Spady (1971) and also as modified for the study of middle school students in the SAISD multilingual program. For easy reference, variables and indicators used in this study are presented in a table format, with data sources identified for each.

Family background. Indicators for this variable are clustered into two main groups which Spady referred to as cosmopolitanism and family relationships.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Home language</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration status</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent education</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent occupation</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spady’s (1971) cosmopolitanism indicator group (see Table 3) included religious-ethnic origin, degree of urbanization, father’s education, mother’s education, and father’s occupation. For the first two of these, religious-ethnic origins and degree of urbanization, only minimal variance was expected among members of the homogeneous inner-city
Latino population involved in this study; therefore, they were deleted from the list of data to be collected for the cluster of cosmopolitanism indicators for the family background variable. However, due to changes in family responsibilities and structure since the time of Spady’s study, mother’s occupation was added as an indicator for the cosmopolitanism group within the family background variable. The following items from the SAISD multilingual program student questionnaire addressed cosmopolitanism:

Home language: “Which languages are spoken most often in your home?”

Immigration status: “Were you born in another country? Were either of your parents born in another country? Were any of your grandparents born in another country?”

Parent education: “What is the highest level of education your father has reached? What is the highest level of education your mother has reached?”

Parent occupation: “What work does your father do? What work does your mother do?”

The cluster or indicators that Spady (1971) used to define and assess the family relationships aspect of the family background variable (see Table 4) included information about family stability, the students’ view of the general happiness of their home life, their perceived freedom from family rule, and psychological independence from their parents. Because middle school students are less free and independent than are college freshmen, the latter two indicators were addressed by asking students how the decision was made for them to participate in and subsequently, to continue in or withdraw from the multilingual program. The following items from the student questionnaire addressed the
Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Background: Family Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family stability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decision to apply</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

family relationships indicator cluster for the family background variable:

- **Family structure**: "Which adults live at home with you? How many brothers, sisters, or other kids live at home with you?"

- **Family stability**: "How many schools have you attended since kindergarten?"

- **Home atmosphere**: "How would you rate the happiness of your home life?"

- **Decision to apply**: "Who decided that you should apply for the multilingual program? If the decision to apply wasn’t yours, did you agree with the decision? [If no] Why not?"

A measure of socioeconomic status based on students’ free or reduced-price lunch program eligibility was originally planned; however, government regulations protecting families’ privacy prohibited access to information on student eligibility. Because SAISD includes neighborhoods that are uniformly poor, and because the free/reduced eligibility
for the district overall is extremely high—over 90%—the lack of access to these data may be viewed as less damaging to this study than if much variation in family income level had been expected.

**Normative congruence.** This variable, which Spady (1971) considered the most “troublesome and complex” in his model, attempted to symbolize:

... not only the entire set of personality dispositions, values, attitudes, aspirations, and expectations with which the student first enters a new social system, but also the influences, expectations, values, and attitudes that he encounters in that system. Students whose personal attributes are compatible with the dominant norms and influences in the college environment should perceive a greater sense of affinity and identity with the college, be able to establish close relationships with others, achieve intellectual and academic success, and feel more tightly integrated into the fabric of campus life. (pp. 41-42)

In the SAISD multilingual middle school student attrition study, this variable provided the beginning point for examining the match between expectations and attitudes toward the school and toward the multilingual program that the student and his or her family had before starting and the actual conditions prevailing at the school and in the program. It did so by asking students and school personnel about conditions, events, and perceptions relative to the time the students entered the program. For example, several questions contained a phrase such as, “when you started Grade 6 at Davis/Tafolla” and asked students to recall what they and their parents believed or expected before starting the program. By contrast, present-day conditions, events, and perceptions were addressed
by indicators subsumed under the variables friendship support, social integration, and intellectual development. Their placement to the center and right of the model shown in Figure 1 (see chapter 1) indicates that they pertained to more recent occurrences and conditions. Accordingly, questions addressing these variables might contain the words “now” (for stayers) or “now at your present school” (for leavers).

Indicators for the normative congruence variable included patterns of relationships and expectations (see Table 5) generated within the previous context--high school for the Spady (1970, 1971) study, fifth grade for this study; personality dispositions and characteristics, intellectual, moral, and vocational values, attitudes toward the institution; and orientation toward campus subcultures.

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friends in program</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation from friends</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with school personnel</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement/leadership in activities</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The cluster of indicators that Spady (1971) used to define and assess patterns of relationships and expectations within the normative congruence variable included information about relationships with peers and faculty members, dating, involvement in extracurriculars, and leadership roles. Since fifth graders are less involved in dating than high school seniors, these factors were modified by concentrating on close friendships rather than dating partners. The following items from the student questionnaire addressed the patterns of relationships and expectation aspect of the normative congruence variable:

Friends in program: “How many of your close friends from elementary school applied for admission to the multilingual program? How many of your close friends started the multilingual program with you in Grade 6?”

Separation from friends: “Were you worried about your friends attending a different school when you started Grade 6 at Davis/Tafolla?”

Relationships with school personnel: “Were you worried that it might be hard to get along with the adults at Davis/Tafolla when you started Grade 6?”

Involvement/leadership in activities: “When you were in elementary school, how involved were you with sports, music lessons, art, Scouts, Campfire, clubs, and church or other activities? Did you hold a position of leadership in any of those activities?”

The personality dispositions indicator cluster within the normative congruence variable (see Table 6) included indexes of friendliness, motivation, flexibility, and autonomy. The following items from the student questionnaire addressed personality dispositions:
Table 6

**Normative Congruence: Personality Dispositions.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friendliness</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social fit</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to participate</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>Teacher questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maturity</td>
<td>Office records</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Friendliness: “Were you worried that it might be hard to make new friends at Davis/Tafolla when you started Grade 6? Before you started the multilingual program, did you think it would be easy for you to make new friends at Davis/Tafolla?”

Social fit: “Before you started the multilingual program, did you think you would fit in OK at Davis/Tafolla?”

Desire to participate: “Before you started the multilingual program, was it really important to you to be accepted into it?”

Maturity: “How mature were you when you started Grade 6?”

Additional measures of student maturity came from birth dates, which were taken
from office records, and from the teacher questionnaire:

"In your opinion, how mature was this student when he entered the multilingual program in Grade 6?"

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest in language</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family orthodoxy</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of grades</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study atmosphere</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational/career goals</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/leisure balance</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The value orientations indicator cluster (see Table 7) that Spady (1971) used to define the normative congruence variable included moral and religious orthodoxy, aesthetic orientations, and occupational goals. These concepts were adapted for use among SAISD middle school students. The following items from this study's student questionnaire addressed value orientations:

Interest in language: "Before you started the multilingual program, did you believe
you would enjoy studying the language and culture of another country?"

Family orthodoxy: "How does your family feel about values such as honesty, responsibility, hard work, and fairness? Do members of your family attend religious services? [If yes] About how often? How important to your family are cultural traditions such as celebrations, feasts, or national holidays?"

Importance of grades: "Before you started the multilingual program, how important was it to you that you earn high grades? How important was it to your family?"

Study atmosphere: "Is there a quiet place for you to study at home? Which study aids do you have there?" [Students choose from a list of study aids, marking those available in their homes.]

Educational/career goals: "What level of education does your family expect for you? What level of education do you expect for yourself? What type of career does your family expect for you? What type of career do you expect for yourself?"

Work/leisure balance: "How many hours a week do you work or help with chores at home? When you started Grade 6 at Davis/Tafolla, did you worry about the extra work involved in taking multilingual classes? Did you have enough free time for hobbies, goofing off, watching TV, reading, and being with friends?"

The attitude toward the institution aspect of the normative congruence variable (see Table 8) was defined and assessed by asking students questions concerning their feelings about participation in the multilingual program and about being at Davis or Tafolla Middle School. The following items from the student questionnaire addressed
Table 8

Normative Congruence: Attitude Toward the Institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safety concerns</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation concerns</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from school personnel</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic standards</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude toward school</td>
<td>Teacher questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

attitude toward the institution:

Safety concerns: "Were you worried about your personal safety at Davis/Tafolla when you started Grade 6? Were you worried about safety on the way to or coming home from Davis/Tafolla?"

Transportation concerns: "Were you worried about the extra cost of transportation to and from Davis/Tafolla when you started Grade 6? Were you worried about the extra time you would spend in transportation to and from Davis/Tafolla?"

Support from school personnel: "When you started Grade 6, were you worried that the adults at Davis/Tafolla might not help you when you needed it?"

Academic standards: "Before you started the multilingual program in Grade 6, did you believe that it had high standards?"
The following items from the teacher questionnaire provided information for the attitude toward the institution indicator cluster:

**Attitude toward school:** “While he was in your class, how would you rate this student’s attitude towards education in general, the school, and/or the multilingual program?”

**Academic potential.** Spady (1971) used math and verbal scores from the Scholastic Aptitude Test and high school senior class rank to assess the academic potential variable (see Table 9) among the University of Chicago freshmen in his study. For this study, elementary school grades prior to participation in the multilingual program were irrelevant for two reasons. First, class rankings were not available because elementary students’ grades are not rank-ordered at the end of Grade 5. Second, in order to be eligible for admission into the multilingual program, elementary students were required to have grade averages above 80. Thus, they all had grades that were roughly comparable and that would not have been particularly meaningful for assessment of the academic potential variable.

Standardized test scores were more useful for assessing this variable. Unfortunately, the set of scores that would have been optimal for this cohort of students was not available. In order to have had test score data from Grade 5 for all of this study’s subjects, it would have been necessary to collect scores from the 1992-93 school year for seventh graders in the sample and from the 1993-94 school year for the sixth graders in the sample. Unfortunately, the 1992-93 school year was a transition year, marking the statewide conversion from the Norm-referenced Assessment Program for Texas (NAPT)
to the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). Therefore the two groups did not both take the TAAS that year. Instead, TAAS scores for 1994-95 were used.

Aside from test scores, several subjective measures were used to define and assess the academic potential variable.

Table 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic preparation</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second language fluency</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study skills</td>
<td>Teacher questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family support</td>
<td>Teacher questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized test scores</td>
<td>Office records</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following items on the student questionnaire provided information relevant to the academic potential variable:

Academic preparation: "Before you started the multilingual program in Grade 6, did you believe that your elementary school had prepared you to do the work that would be expected of you?"
Second language fluency: "Before you started the multilingual program, could you speak a second language? Could you write in a second language?"

These indicators of the academic potential variable appeared on the teacher questionnaire:

Family support: "When this student entered the multilingual program in Grade 6, what kind of support and encouragement did he receive from his family?"

Study skills: "When he was in your class, how would you rate this student's study skills?"

As noted, standardized 1994-95 test scores for reading and math were also gathered from school records.

Friendship support. Students in Spady's (1970, 1971) study were asked about the quality and quantity of their relationships (in their present institution) with their peers and with faculty members and about the nature of their involvement with extracurricular activities. This study shifted information about co-curricular and extracurricular involvement from this variable to the social integration variable and added a question about whether the student developed a special rapport with a teacher or other adult at Davis or Tafolla Middle School.
The following items pertaining to the friendship support variable were included on the student questionnaire:

Maintenance of friendships: “Where does your best friend attend school? How long has this person been your friend? Who do you like to spend time with? How many of your close friends applied to the multilingual program? How many started the program with you in Grade 6? Do you have many friends in the multilingual program? Do you have many other friends at Davis/Tafolla who are not in the multilingual program?”

New friendships: “Has it been easy for you to make new friends at Davis/Tafolla? Do you worry that it’s hard to make new friends at school? Do you worry that most of your friends go to another school?”

Relationship with adults: “Is there a teacher or some other adult at Davis/Tafolla with whom you have a particularly close relationship?”
**Intellectual development.** In Spady's (1971) study, this variable reflected the student’s stimulation in class work, intellectual and cultural perspectives, and critical thinking. For this study, questions about the student’s fluency in the language studied and about the overall educational effectiveness of the multilingual program were added.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual and cultural perspective</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal development</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking</td>
<td>Teacher questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following items pertaining to the intellectual development variable were included on the questionnaire:

**Intellectual and cultural perspective:** “Do (did) you find the lessons in the multilingual classes interesting and stimulating? Do (did) you still want to learn about the language and culture of another country? Can you speak a second language? A third language? Can you write in those languages?”

**Program effectiveness:** “Do (did) adults at Davis/Tafolla do a good job of helping students to excel in areas of special interest? Of helping students learn to make
decisions and think for themselves? Do (did) you believe your neighborhood school could better prepare you for high school?"

This question pertaining to the intellectual development variable was included on the teacher questionnaire:

Critical thinking: "When he was in your class, how would you rate this student's ability and/or willingness to engage in critical thinking?"

**Grade performance.** Spady (1971) measured this by a standard grade point average. Neither middle school in this study computes grade point averages, nor do they rank students. Report card grades in reading/language arts and math were used for this variable, since virtually every student takes these core classes. In addition, grade

Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>Teacher questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment completion</td>
<td>Teacher questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>Office records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>Office records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
averages for the student’s foreign language class were used.

Because grades are frequently influenced by factors such as attendance, participation, and assignment completion, these were added for the study of multilingual program attrition among SAISD middle school students.

The following items pertaining to the grade performance variable were included on the teacher questionnaire:

Class participation: “When he was in your class, how willing was this student to participate in class activities?”

Assignment completion: “While he was in your class, to what extent did this student prepare for class and complete his assignments?”

The following information pertaining to grade performance was gathered from school office records:

Grades: Report card grades in reading/language arts, math, and foreign language

Attendance: Number of days in attendance out of days enrolled

Interviews with counselors and assistant principals included these questions pertaining to the grade performance variable:

Problems: “Does (did) this student have a record of discipline referrals? If so, what is (was) the nature of the disciplinary problem? Might it (did it) cause his dismissal or withdrawal from the multilingual program? Did this student have a record of poor academic performance? If so, what factors might have contributed to it? Might it (did it) lead to or cause his dismissal or withdrawal from the multilingual program?”
The attrition model shown in Figure 1 (see chapter 1) has a direct line from the grade performance variable to the end point, dropout decision. Spady (1970) explained:

Unlike the other connections in the model, the arrow moving directly from grade performance to dropout decision should be interpreted as implying an absolute condition rather than a normal relationship between variables. It is reserved for those students whose performance is so low that institutional policy (dismissal) overrides the theoretical pattern of the model. In other words, a student doing failing work may be forced to leave despite his having a high degree of integration, satisfaction, or commitment to the institution (p. 79).

Since many students who leave the multilingual program are asked to do so—or choose to do so on their own—because of poor grades, it is appropriate to keep the direct line from the grade performance variable to the decision point.

Social integration. As noted earlier, the Spady model's structure allowed change over time to be examined. The social integration variable (see Table 13) and its indicator clusters served as follow-up measures for several indicators first examined under normative congruence, where students responded to questions by recalling expectations they had when they entered the multilingual program. The follow-up items included under this variable asked students to respond to questions pertaining to topics similar to those addressed by the normative congruence variable but as they perceive the situation now rather than at the beginning of Grade 6. As with normative congruence, indicators are grouped under these broad headings: patterns of relationships and expectations, personality dispositions, values orientations, and attitude toward the institution.
Table 13

Social Integration: Patterns of Relationships and Expectations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts with others</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human relations</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement/leadership in activities</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spady (1971) defined social integration as "a subjective sense of belonging and fitting in [to the institution] . . . reactions to the general warmth of interpersonal relationships . . . and the perceived absence of pressures arising from normative differences between the respondent and other students" (p. 44). The following questions from the SAISD student questionnaire pertain to the patterns of relationships and expectations aspect of the social integration variable:

Conflict with others: "Is (was) it hard to get along with some students in the multilingual program? With some non-multilingual students? With some teachers in the multilingual program? With some non-multilingual teachers? Have you had problems with other adults at Davis/Tafolla?"

Human relations: "Do you think the adults at Davis/Tafolla do a good job of helping students learn to get along with each other? Of helping students learn to become responsible citizens? Of counseling students who are having problems?"
Of communicating with parents?"

Involvement/leadership in activities: "How involved are you with athletics, music and art, Scouts or Campfire, student government, service organizations, clubs, and church or other activities? Have you been a captain, an officer, or a leader in any organization? [If yes] Please describe briefly what you do or did as a leader."

Table 14

\begin{tabular}{|l|l|}
\hline
\textbf{Indicator} & \textbf{Data source} \\
\hline
Social fit & Student questionnaire \\
Desire to participate & Student questionnaire \\
Attitude & Teacher questionnaire \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

The following questions pertaining to the personality disposition indicator cluster for the social integration variable appeared on the student questionnaire:

Social fit: "Do (did) you seem to be fitting in OK at Davis/Tafolla?"

Desire to participate: "How important is (was) staying in the multilingual program to you? To your family?"

The following question pertaining to the personality disposition indicator cluster for the social integration variable appeared on the teacher questionnaire:
Attitude: “While he was in your class, how would you rate this student’s attitude towards education in general, the school, and/or the multilingual program?”

Table 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest in language/class</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of language study</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work/leisure balance</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity of values</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following questions pertaining to the values orientations indicator cluster for the social integration variable appeared on the student questionnaire:

Interest in language: “Is (was) the study of the language and culture of another country as enjoyable as you thought it would be? Did you get to enroll in the language you wanted to study?”

Relevance of language study: “Do (did) you believe that what you are learning in your multilingual classes will be useful some day?”

Work/leisure balance: “Do (did) you have enough free time for hobbies, goofing off, watching TV, reading, and being with friends? Is (was) there too much extra
work involved in taking multilingual classes?"

Similarity of values: "Do the adults at Davis/Tafolla do a good job of rewarding students for honesty and hard work? Do (did) you think you might transfer to a private school?"

Table 16

Social Integration: Attitude Toward the Institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual fit</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from adults</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of instruction</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety concerns</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation concerns</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School image</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following questions pertaining to the attitude toward the institution aspect of social integration appeared on the student questionnaire:

Intellectual fit: "Do you think the multilingual program's academic standards are high enough? Too tough? Do the adults at Davis/Tafolla do a good job of encouraging high academic standards?"
Support from adults: “Do the adults at Davis/Tafolla do a good job of helping students when they need help?”

Quality of instruction: “Do you think the multilingual teachers are qualified to teach about language and culture?”

Safety concerns: “Do (did) you worry about your personal safety in school? About your safety on your way to school or going home from school?”

Transportation concerns: “Do (did) you worry about the extra cost of transportation to and from school? About the extra time it takes?”

School image: “Do you think the adults at Davis/Tafolla do a good job of building strong school spirit?”

**Satisfaction.** Students in Spady’s (1970, 1971) study were asked how satisfied they were with the year at the institution and whether they considered their studies to be relevant and interesting. This study narrowed the focus of the satisfaction variable by asking questions specific to the multilingual program, the middle school in which it is housed, and the grades the student received.

The following questions pertaining to the satisfaction variable appeared on the student questionnaire:

Language: “Are you satisfied with the language you enrolled in?”

Grades: “Are you satisfied with the grades you received in the multilingual classes? Is your family satisfied?”

Alternative worse: “Is Davis/Tafolla better than the school you would attend if you left the program?”
Table 17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative worse</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with program</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School in general</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Satisfaction with program [For leavers]: “Do you wish you were still in the multilingual program?” [For stayers] “Do you wish you could leave the program?”

School in general: “Do you sometimes wish you could quit school altogether?”

Institutional commitment. The diagram in Figure 1 (see chapter 1) shows a broken line leading from the institutional commitment variable back to normative congruence. According to Spady (1970),

It implies that the model is cyclical and flexible rather than immutable. We are suggesting here that the result of this whole process may lead to changes in attitude, interest, goals, or motivation that will in turn have repercussions at later stages of the college career. By definition, these changes in personal attributes will
alter the conditions subsumed under normative congruence and will affect the remainder of the process as well (p. 79).

Students in Spady’s (1970, 1971) study were asked how important it was for them to graduate from the University of Chicago. For this study, questions about the decision making process regarding participation in the multilingual program were added.

Table 18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Desire to stay</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to continue</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locus of control</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following questions pertaining to the institutional commitment variable appeared on the student questionnaire:

Desire to stay: “Do (did) you want to stay at Davis/Tafolla until eighth-grade graduation? Would quitting the multilingual program be more trouble than staying in?”

Intention to continue: “Do (did) you want to continue in the multilingual program at Brackenridge High School?”
Locus of control: “Is your decision to participate in the multilingual program influenced by teachers wanting you to stay? By members of your family wanting you to stay?

[for stayers] “Whose decision is it for you to stay in the multilingual program?”

[for leavers]: “Whose decision was it for you to leave the multilingual program?”

Decision. For this study, the variable Spady (1970, 1971) called dropout decision was renamed decision because students do not drop out of school when they leave the multilingual program. Instead, upon leaving the program, a student may do one of the following: (a) transfer back to the neighborhood public school; (b) continue at Davis or Tafolla Middle School in the regular (non-multilingual) program; (c) transfer to a private school; (d) continue his education at home; or (e) move from the district. Students who exercised the fifth option were not included in this study because they might have continued in the multilingual program had they stayed in the district.

The decision variable is of particular importance because it served as the dependent variable for the study’s second research question: “What factors influence the decisions of Latino leavers?” Measurement of the dependent variable in Spady’s (1970, 1971) study was complicated by the possibility that students might return after a period of years. In the SAISD multilingual program, however, once students withdraw, they are almost never allowed to re-enter. Therefore, the decision was simple and dichotomous; this study’s subjects either stayed in the program or they withdrew from it.
### Decision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Data source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for staying/leaving</td>
<td>Student questionnaire</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The following questions pertaining to the decision variable appeared on the student questionnaire:

[For stayers] Reason for staying: “What is your number one reason for staying in the multilingual program?”

[For leavers] Reason for leaving: “What is your number one reason for leaving the multilingual program?”

#### Analysis and Presentation of Data

Collected data were examined by a chi-square analysis in order to determine which, if any, of the variables examined served to distinguish Latino stayers from Latino leavers. In addition, logistic regression analysis was used to assess the independent contribution of each of these factors as predictors of persistence in or attrition from the multilingual program. In chapter 4, findings from the study are presented in text and table formats. Quantitative data are incorporated into tables indicating unique contributions of each variable or indicator. Qualitative data are organized as concepts and presented anecdotally.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This study examined attrition among Latino middle school students from a districtwide choice program. Its purpose was to determine why students stay in the program or leave it and what differences exist between students who stay and those who leave. In addition, this study tested the efficacy of an existing attrition model when applied in a different setting.

This chapter includes the study’s findings. It is divided into three parts. Part 1 contains a brief review of the attrition study, its purpose, and its methodology. Part 2 contains information about responses among the groups surveyed and interviewed, and about data gathered from student records. Part 3 contains a review of the study’s research questions and a presentation of findings related to each question.

Review of the Study, Its Purpose, and Its Methodology

The San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD) offers a thematic choice program—the multilingual program—for middle school students with high ability in language arts. Applicants may qualify at the end of Grade 5 on the basis of achievement test scores, grades, and recommendations. Approximately 380 students enter the SAISD multilingual program as sixth graders every year, either at Davis or Tafolla Middle School. After eighth-grade graduation, students may continue the program at Brackenridge High School. This study focuses on Latino program participants who were
Enrollment in the SAISD multilingual program is limited. Students compete for a
limited number of seats. Many more students apply than can be accepted: Half of the
qualified applicants are turned away. Optimally, therefore, students who are selected for
the program should stay in it. When principals and attendance clerks at Tafolla and Davis
Middle Schools were interviewed in February 1995 in anticipation of this study, however,
each expressed concern about attrition from the program. Specific records are not
maintained about SAISD multilingual program attrition, but the consensus among the
interviewees was that many students who enter the program in the sixth grade typically
leave before eighth-grade graduation for reasons other than mobility. An attrition figure
of 10% to 10.5% was calculated for this study for the 1994-95 school year. Moreover, of
the approximately 320 students who graduate from the multilingual programs at both
middle schools annually, another 10 to 15% usually choose not to attend Brackenridge
High School to continue with their language and culture study. When the number of
students who leave the program is combined the number of students who leave, it is
estimated that by the end of their senior year, fewer than 20% of an original cohort of
students remains in the program.

This study was concerned with the question, Who leaves and why? As discussed
in chapter 1, three research questions guided the study. The first question addressed the
problem of whether stayers and leavers differ, and if they do, in what ways. Question 2
investigated the reasons students give for leaving the program or continuing in it. The
third question asked whether and how a model developed to study attrition making among
university students might be adapted for middle school students who choose to participate in a public school program. Findings related to these research questions are discussed later in this chapter.

Data Collection

Information needed to investigate this study's research questions was gathered through a series of interviews, an examination of school records, and two surveys. Both students and teachers responded to surveys.

Survey response: students. As reported in chapter 3, names of students to be surveyed were obtained from the attendance clerks at Davis and Tafolla Middle Schools. This researcher was given unlimited access to all school records except those pertaining to free or reduced lunch status. When combined, the withdrawal records at Davis and Tafolla Middle Schools yielded 48 names for Latino sixth- and seventh-grade leavers for the 1994-95 school year. Of those leavers, 38 were located and contacted, and 33 eventually responded to the survey in time to be included in the study. Together with a sample of 33 Latino stayers, the total number of students whose questionnaire responses are included in this study is 66. As reported in chapter 3, the sample of stayers was selected in such a way that it is comparable to the leaver group; that is, students chosen for the stayer sample match students in the leaver group according to four criteria: There are equal numbers of stayers and leavers (a) from each school; (b) of each gender; (c) from each language class; and (d) at each grade level. Information about the student sample is shown in Table 20. All students were presumed to have met the multilingual program admission requirements that were applicable when they applied: language arts
scores above 50th percentile on the Norm-Referenced Assessment Program for Texas (NAPT); grade averages of 80 or above in academic subjects; and recommendations from parents and from elementary school teachers or counselors.

Table 20

Student Respondents: Gender, Grade Level, School, and Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level and language studied</th>
<th>Davis Middle School</th>
<th>Tafolla Middle School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6th</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table continues)
As noted in Table 20, more girls than boys and more students from Davis than Tafolla Middle School responded to the questionnaire. This response rate reflects the fact that more girls than boys generally participate in the multilingual program. It also reflects a slightly higher overall program attrition rate for the 1994-95 school year at Davis than at Tafolla. Finally, more students in the study were enrolled in French and Spanish than in other languages. Again, this distribution reflects the situation at both middle schools, where almost twice as many students take those languages rather than the others offered.

Survey response: teachers. The SAISD multilingual language teachers who taught these students as sixth graders were surveyed by means of questionnaires distributed via school mail boxes. A total of 16 usable responses pertaining to leavers were collected.
from teachers, and 16 teacher responses pertaining to stayers were added to the sample, for a total of 32 teacher responses. There were several reasons for the low response to the teacher survey:

1. Many leavers left the multilingual program during the first 6 weeks of school. Teachers had difficulty recalling the identity of students who attended their classes for only a short time.

2. Even when able to recall the identity of a student who had attended their classes for a short time, teachers sometimes said that they had learned little about that student and did not feel qualified to respond to questions about the student’s maturity, skill level, or social and family situation.

3. Several teachers had moved from the district or had retired and could not be contacted.

4. Two teachers were out on medical leave and could not be contacted.

Information about teacher respondents is shown in Table 21. As noted in Table 21, there were more teacher responses pertaining to students from Davis than from Tafolla. This trend resembles that found among the students responding to the survey (see Table 20); that is, responses were obtained from more students from Davis than from Tafolla Middle School.

The teacher respondent group differed from the student respondent group in two ways. First, the sample of students surveyed overlaps with, but is not identical to, the sample of students reported on by teachers. As shown in Table 22, individual students discussed in questionnaires returned by teachers are not necessarily the same students
Table 21

**Teacher Respondents: School and Language**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language taught</th>
<th>Davis</th>
<th>Tafolla</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>14</strong></td>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Number of teachers includes those reporting on stayers and leavers combined.

As Table 22 shows, only student questionnaire responses were obtained for 44 students; no response was obtained from their teachers. For 8 students, only teacher questionnaire responses were obtained; no response was obtained from the students themselves. For 22 students, both student and teacher questionnaire responses were obtained. The total number of students in the sample is 74, counting those with student
Table 22

Questionnaires Returned.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire returned by student and by teacher</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire returned only by student</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire returned only by teacher</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

survey responses, teacher survey responses, and both types of responses.

Another difference between the student and teacher survey involves students and teachers of the French language. Although French was the language studied by the largest group of students in the sample, no French teacher responded to the survey. One had retired, 2 were on medical leave, and 1 did not respond to the survey.

Information Gathered from Student Records and School Personnel

Information was gathered from student records and from interviews with school personnel for as many as possible of the 74 students for whom data from student and/or teacher surveys were available. The information sought included: (a) attendance records; (b) date of birth; (c) grades for reading/language arts, math, and foreign language; (d) reading and math scores for the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) for the 1994-95 school year; and (e) history of disciplinary or other problems affecting program participation.
It was possible to obtain this information for most of the stayers in the sample because their records were still located either at Davis or at Tafolla Middle School. For the leavers, however, obtaining this information was difficult, for a variety of reasons:

1. In order to obtain information concerning attendance, grades, and achievement test scores on leavers, it was necessary to persuade attendance clerks in the attendance zone schools to which the students had transferred to release it. Some of these attendance clerks, not being familiar with the larger study\(^1\), were unwilling to cooperate.

2. Even when attendance clerks were willing to cooperate, scores and grades for leavers were often unavailable because of student absences or inconsistent record keeping by school personnel.

3. Subsequent to leaving the multilingual program and returning to their attendance zone schools, several leavers transferred to private schools or moved out of SAISD, taking their records with them.

4. Administrators and counselors at Davis and Tafolla Middle Schools did not utilize a uniform system for keeping track of office referrals; therefore, it was necessary for them to attempt to remember details about students in the study. Their efforts yielded inconsistent results. Consequently, there are not enough data on student discipline and other problems--especially for leavers--to contribute meaningfully to the study.

Because information on student history of disciplinary and other problems is not uniform across stayers and leavers, it is used only anecdotally in the reporting of findings.

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\(^1\)See Chapter 1 for a description of the larger study.
Examination of Findings

Data from student and teacher questionnaires, from student records, and interviews with school personnel were coded and entered into a Statistical Program for the Social Sciences (SPSS) file using Windows 6.1. During the analysis, the decision was made to omit the data from the teacher survey because the sample was small. Findings reported in this chapter, therefore, are based on survey data from 66 student questionnaires—33 from stayers and 33 from leavers—and on information from grade and attendance records for all 74 students for whom it was collected.

In this section, findings are presented for each of the study’s three research questions:

1. How do the characteristics of Latino stayers compare with characteristics of leavers?

2. What factors influence the decisions of Latino stayers and leavers?

3. Can Spady’s (1971) Explanatory Sociological Model of the Dropout Process be adapted for use in understanding the decision-making process among middle school Latino stayers and leavers? If so, what adaptations make it most effective?

Research Question 1

As explained in chapter 3, survey responses and data gathered from office records pertained to indicators that were used to assess and define the variables in the adapted attrition model. Table 23 contains variable indicators tested by a difference of means between stayers’ and leavers’ responses. This simple statistical measure provides information about the importance of the contribution each variable made to the decision
Table 23

Contribution of Examined Variables to Attrition Among SAISD Multilingual Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language spoken in student’s home</th>
<th>Native-born, first-generation, or second-generation immigrant (Mexican-American or Mexican-oriented)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent education level</td>
<td>Parent occupation category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-parent family</td>
<td>Number of schools student has attended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE DECISION TO APPLY**</td>
<td>BEST FRIEND AT MULTILINGUAL SCHOOL**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with school personnel</td>
<td>Involvement in activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to participate</td>
<td>Religiosity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of grades</td>
<td>Home study atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational goals</td>
<td>Concerns about safety at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation problems</td>
<td>Spoke second language already when entered program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) reading score</td>
<td>TEXAS ASSESSMENT OF ACADEMIC SKILLS (TAAS) MATH SCORE*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintenance of friendships</td>
<td>New friendships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class grades</td>
<td>Attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>Conflicts and fighting with peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in learning a foreign language</td>
<td>Alternative school considered worse option</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*indicates $p < .10$; ** indicates $p < .01$. 

Note: *indicates $p < .10$; ** indicates $p < .01$. 

process. As is apparent from an examination of Table 23, only two variables made a significant contribution to the attrition process, while one other variable approached significance. That is, analysis of the data from the student survey and from student records revealed three main differences between stayers and leavers. As explained in the following sections, these differences involved the decision-making process, the presence of friends, and achievement scores in math.

Table 24

Person(s) Making the Decision to Apply to SAISD Multilingual Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Teacher, counselor or parents alone</th>
<th>Student alone or student and family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stayers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The Pearson chi-square value for this comparison is 14.5, with one degree of freedom. The significance level is .00014.
**Decision to apply.** As shown in Table 24, stayers and leavers differed in how they made the initial decision to apply to the SAISD multilingual program. Stayers were much more likely than leavers to say that the decision to apply was theirs alone or that they and their family had made the decision together. More leavers than stayers said the decision for them to apply had been made by a teacher or counselor at their elementary school or by their family. (Only two students—both stayers—indicated that the parents were solely responsible for making the decision to apply.)

As is apparent from an examination of Table 24, when the student was involved in the decision to participate in the multilingual program, he or she was more likely to stay in the program. When someone else made the decision, the student was more likely to leave it.

**Presence of friends.** The second of the three major differences between stayers and leavers pertains to their friendships. As noted in Table 25, there was a difference in the way stayers and leavers responded to the question, “Where does your best friend go to school?”

The percentages in Table 25 reveal that stayers were much more likely than leavers to say that their best friend attended one of the multilingual schools. While 70% of stayers’ best friends attended one of the multilingual schools, only 30% of leavers’ best friends attended a multilingual school. Moreover, data from the student survey (not shown in Table 25) indicated that fewer leavers than stayers said that it was easy for them to make friends at the multilingual school. More leavers said they had worried about being able to make new friends before starting the program (65% as compared with 53%).
By the time they withdrew from the program, 61% of leavers reported that it was not easy to make new friends, whereas only 39% of stayers said so when surveyed.

Table 25

School Attended by Student’s Best Friend

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Other School</th>
<th>Davis or Tafolla</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayers</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavers</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The Pearson chi-square value for this comparison is 14.8, with one degree of freedom. The significance level is .00012.

Academic achievement. The last of the three major differences between stayers and leavers was found in their performance on indicators of academic achievement during
the 1994-95 school year. A gap in their achievement levels was found for class grades for two core subjects taken by all sixth and seventh graders—math and reading or language arts—and for their foreign language classes. These differences are shown in Table 26.

Table 26

| Class Grades in Core Subjects and Foreign Language Classes for 1994-95 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Reading/language arts and math grades</th>
<th>Foreign language grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Median</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayers (n = 37)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavers (n = 21)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An examination of the student grade averages reported in Table 26 reveals that leavers' grades were lower in the two core subjects and in foreign language classes. Because many leavers' withdrawals were due to low grades, this finding was consistent with expectations.

Another set of achievement measures was available in the form of scores on a
statewide criterion-referenced test. A criterion-referenced test measures performance or levels of knowledge on specific content to determine whether the student's performance or mastery level meets an established criterion. Scores are expressed in terms of the level of knowledge or skills achieved (National Education Goals Panel, 1996).

The 1994-95 scores for the criterion-referenced test used in Texas to assess achievement in reading and math, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) are shown in Table 27. As was explained in chapter 3 in the section pertaining to the academic potential variable, Grade 5 scores for sixth- and seventh-grade leavers were not

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 27</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading and Math Scores on the 1994-95 Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Math scores</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavers (n = 25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stayers (n = 36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Scores are reported as converted to a student learning index, a 0-99 scale where 99 is the highest score attainable.
available as a matched set because of a transition in the statewide testing program. Had they been available, they would have been used instead of the 1994-95 scores, because the prior measure of ability would have been unaffected by student participation in the multilingual program and would have been of more use in discerning initial differences.

Table 28

Average Percentile Ranks for Math Scores on 1994-95 Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS): Comparison of Groups Relative to 70th Percentile Cut-Off

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentile Rank</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Less than 70th</th>
<th>70th or higher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stayers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leavers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The Pearson chi-square value for this comparison is 3.52, with one degree of freedom. The significance level is .06.
between stayers and leavers. Although it may be supposed that scores from the 1993-1994 school year would predict student success as well as—or better than—the 1994-95 scores did, there is no way of testing that assumption because the earlier scores were not available.

Although little difference was noted in reading scores between stayers and leavers, a larger difference appeared between the math scores for the two groups. As shown in Table 27, there is a larger spread in mean scores between stayers and leavers in math than in reading. A different analysis of the same scores, using the 70th percentile as a cut-off point, is presented in Table 28. As indicated by the data shown in Table 28, a greater proportion of stayers’ than leavers’ scores on the math portion of the TAAS placed above the 70th percentile. The positive relationship between high math performance and the likelihood of staying in the multilingual program was unexpected. Its implications are discussed in chapter 5.

Research Question 2

Students were asked about the reasons for their decisions for staying in or leaving the SAISD multilingual program. Questionnaires for both stayers and leavers contained open-ended questions. Stayers were asked, “What is your number one reason for staying in the multilingual program?” Leavers were asked, “What was your number one reason for leaving the multilingual program?” Responses were categorized, coded, and counted. The results appear in Table 29.

Several observations can be made about the data presented in Table 29. First, leavers left most often because of low grades. As noted in Table 26, the average
Table 29

Categories of Responses Given by Students for Staying in or Leaving the SAISD Multilingual Program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason category</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stayers (N = 36)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Wants to learn second/third language</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Participation is good for future</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Friends are in program</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Important to parents</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Likes program/teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Doesn’t like neighborhood school</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leavers (N = 29)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Low grades</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Transportation problems</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Disliked school/program/language</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Conflict with others</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Attendance problems</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
combined grade for leavers in their math and reading/language arts classes was 80, and for foreign language classes, 73. By contrast, the average combined grade for stayers in their math and language arts classes was 88, and for foreign language classes, 85. Stayers' grades are clearly higher than those of leavers. A related factor is whether or not the student liked the program language or the language they studied. While 17% of leavers said they disliked the program or the language or both, 57% of stayers said they were interested in learning the language, and another 23% said they thought that participating in the program would help them get into a good college or get a better job in the future.

It is also apparent from Table 29 that relationships with other students and with adults were important factors for decision making for both groups--more so for leavers than for stayers. This information supports the finding reported previously that the school attended by a student's best friend was important to his or her staying or leaving.

The questionnaires used for surveying students included several open-ended items, which provided opportunities for respondents to comment on factors influencing whether they continued in the multilingual program or left it (see student questionnaire in Appendix A, items 3a, 4a, 38, and 39). The following sections contain a sampling of the comments from students. These comments serve to enhance the quantitative information reported in previous sections of this chapter by illuminating and clarifying students' decision-making process and providing concrete examples for reason categories used in Table 29.

Factors influencing students' staying in the SAISD multilingual program. In this section, the most important factors influencing students' decisions to stay in the
multilingual program as discussed. Excerpts are included from questionnaires returned by stayers, who responded to the question, "What is your number one reason for staying in the ML program?" (For responses with elements belonging to more than one reason category, the reason mentioned first determined its classification.)

1. A majority of stayers (57%) indicated that they wanted to learn second/third language. The comments of a sixth-grade girl exemplify those written by several students: “I really like [the program], and enjoy being in it. I’m learning not only a language but their culture, and it fascinates me about the differences of their way of life compared to ours.”

2. Nearly a quarter of stayers (23%) indicated that they believed that participation in the multilingual program would be good for their future. According to a sixth-grade boy, “My first reason is I have a better chance for a scholarship for college. The multilingual program prepares me better for high school than most regular schools would.” Seventh-grade girls wrote, “To look good on my records and to help me in my career. To learn more about the language and to get credits for high school,” and “To have a faster pace of education. I have an advantage over other people who aren’t learning a third language.”

3. As noted previously, having friends in the school or in the program is very important to students. This factor was named as by 11% of stayers as their most important reason for staying in the program. The comment of sixth-grade boy is representative of priorities typical among adolescents: “I have a lot of friends and I’m sort of happy studying French.”
A smaller number of students indicated that they stayed in the program because it was important to their parents, because they liked the program and its teachers, or because they would rather attend the multilingual school than their neighborhood school.

Factors influencing students withdrawing from the SAISD multilingual program.

In this section, the most important factors influencing students' decisions to withdraw from the multilingual program are discussed. The following excerpts were taken from the questionnaires returned by leavers. Students responded to the question, "What was your number one reason for leaving the ML program?" (As was true for stayers' responses, some contain elements belonging to more than one reason category. Again, the reason mentioned first determined its classification.)

1. The largest number of students (41%) said they left the multilingual program because of low grades. A seventh-grade girl attributed her low grades to the program's high standards. Another wrote, "My number one reason for leaving was my bad grades. I really didn't like it that much. It was hard. The program teaches good but it just wasn't for me."

2. Nearly a quarter (21%) of leavers said they left because of problems with transportation. A sixth-grade girl wrote that she "had no ride or way to get there." Another wrote that "My parents had problems with my transportation. [My mother] was pregnant and nobody was able to take me on time." A seventh-grade boy wrote, "My mom didn't like the way I got there. Sometimes I took the route buses and sometimes the city bus."
3. Some students (17%) said they left because they disliked either the school, the program, or the language. A sixth-grade girl wrote, "I didn’t like the language I was taking. That was the only reason." Another wrote, "It was hard work. . . . I didn’t like the teachers. They were mean." A seventh-grade boy wrote, "I didn’t like how school was over there. I was bored. I wasn’t learning a lot."

4. Another 17% reported that they left the program because of conflict with peers or with adults. Several students complained of rudeness on the part of teachers or school authorities. A sixth-grade girl wrote, "I think the [non-multilingual] teachers were very disrespectful to the students. They treated the students unequally." A seventh-grade boy wrote, "The way the adults treat the students—disrespectful— they talk to the students like dogs and they dress with short dresses and bosom hanging out." A seventh-grade girl wrote, "I got tired of [the principal]. I had got into a fight and had problems getting along with people. There is prejudice and too much trouble." Other students blamed themselves for the conflict. A sixth-grade girl wrote, "I caused too much trouble." A sixth-grade boy who transferred to a private Catholic school wrote, "I wanted a fresh start. I had been in too many fights, and I didn’t want to cause more trouble. It’s a good school, but they should be more strict with discipline."

One student reported that he left the program because of attendance problems.

**Research Question 3**

As was explained in chapter 3, Spady’s (1971) model of attrition was selected and adapted for use in this study. The model contains 10 variables; each variable is assessed and defined by indicators, which vary in number from two to eight. The model was used
in this chapter to compare characteristics and attitudes for Latino stayers and leavers in the SAISD multilingual program. A diagram of the model was shown in chapter 1 as Figure 1.

Spady developed the attrition model for use among University of Chicago freshmen to predict which students would continue until graduation. The model was useful in two ways. First, it allowed Spady to utilize baseline data from a variety of sources. Second, it provided a means of viewing the attrition process over time. Multiple regression analysis was used to assess the independent contributions of the model's variables in the explanation of important outcomes in the decision-making process; that is, for making predictions about attrition based on the data.

For this study of decision making among middle school Latinos in the SAISD multilingual program, the model served as an excellent theoretical framework for use in classifying and organizing information. Additionally, for this study, an analysis similar to that used by Spady (1970, 1971) was attempted. To confirm the findings suggested by the crosstabulations discussed in the previous section—that is, to predict stayers and leavers, further tests were conducted on the data, using an extension of the multiple regression technique. The dependent variable was a dichotomous variable measuring whether a student continued in or withdrew from the multilingual program. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression produces unbiased estimates in the presence of a dichotomous dependent variable, but the standard errors are typically deflated (Aldrich & Nelson, 1984). An extension of OLS known as the logistic regression, or logit, was employed to correct for this potential problem.
The results from the logit regression supported the results from the crosstabulation analysis. In fact, the inclusion of three particular indicator variables predicted 77% of the students' decisions correctly. These indicator variables are (a) whether the student was involved in the decision to participate in the multilingual program, (b) whether the student's best friend attended the multilingual school, and (c) the student's math score on TAAS.

To put it simply, the prediction of the student's decision to stay or leave could be improved 27% over blindly guessing, based on the modal category (50% correct). These results indicated that a parsimonious model using three key variables supported by the literature did a better job of predicting than the null model, or blind guessing. Specific recommendations for adapting the Spady model are discussed in chapter 5.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This study adds to a body of information connected with a larger study that began in 1991 and has continued through 1996 (Martinez et al., 1993, 1996). The Martinez study examined several issues relevant to school choice, both public and private, and addressed questions concerning characteristics and motivation of choosing families and the consequences of choice for the students, families, and institutions involved. This study extended the Martinez study by investigating the consequences of choosing after students had enrolled in an institution other than their neighborhood school.

This study examined student attrition from a public middle school thematic choice program in the San Antonio Independent School District (SAISD). It was conducted to accomplish three objectives: (a) to compare characteristics of Latino students who stayed in a public middle school thematic choice program with those who left it; (b) to examine reasons those students gave for staying in or leaving the program; and (c) to judge the efficacy of an established attrition model in studying attrition of Latino students from the middle school program.

The Study Population and Methodology

SAISD, where this study was conducted, serves inner-city families, the majority (81%) of whom are Latinos. Most (80%) families whose children attend SAISD schools have incomes low enough to qualify for free or reduced-priced school lunches.
SAISD offers an intensive foreign language instruction program called the multilingual program for students who qualify on the basis of grades, standardized test scores, and recommendations by teachers and parents. In Grade 6, students accepted into the multilingual program begin studying a foreign language and the culture of countries where the language is spoken. The multilingual program is housed in two middle school campuses—S.J. Davis Middle School and Fidel Tafolla Middle School—for students in Grades 6 through 8. Students who are still eligible and who wish to continue the program when they enter high school may continue their foreign language study at one of the SAISD high school campuses. At both Davis and Tafolla, multilingual students constitute approximately half the student body. The remainder of the student body is drawn from the surrounding neighborhood and follows a regular middle school curriculum.

The subjects of this study were students who enrolled in the multilingual program as sixth graders at Davis or Tafolla in the fall of 1993 or 1994. The study was limited to Latino students because (a) the program's original intent was to offer a school option that would appeal to Latino students (Perales, n.d.); (b) Latinos are most likely to leave school before graduation of any racial or ethnic group (Romo & Falbo, 1996); and (c) students attending SAISD are predominately Latino (Cadena & Walling, 1994).

Names, addresses, and phone numbers for students withdrawing from the program during the 1994-95 school year (leavers) were obtained from lists maintained by school attendance clerks. After leavers were contacted and had indicated their willingness to participate in the study, a comparable sample of students still enrolled in the program (stayers) was obtained from current class rolls. Stayers and leavers filled out similar
questionnaires or were asked survey questions by telephone (see Appendix A for copies of stayer and leaver questionnaires). Students were asked, among other things, about their initial expectations of the multilingual program and about their experiences while participating in the program. They indicated how the decision was made for them to apply to the program and gave their reasons for staying in the program or for leaving it. Aside from the student survey, additional information was obtained from students’ permanent records and from teachers, counselors, and administrators in their schools. The data gathered from these surveys, interviews, and records were presented in chapter 4 along with related findings.

The Importance of the Study

The study is important for two main reasons. First, public school choice options are becoming increasingly available, and school choice issues are more prominent in political debates on a local, state, and national level. Second, this study is important because it concerns Latinos, who constitute the nation’s fastest-growing group of students and are more likely than students of any other racial or ethnic group to drop out of school before graduating (Romo & Falbo, 1996).

Programs such as the SAISD multilingual program would appear to have some potential for engaging Latino students in the educational process and, ultimately, reduce the chances that they will drop out before graduation. Research has suggested that the availability of public school choice—particularly thematic choice options—may be able to reduce student attrition: Gamoran (1996) cited its “unifying purpose” and its capacity for building a “strong sense of community”; while Wehlage and Smith (1992) highlighted its
“socially supportive and academically focused setting.” Moreover, SAISD Superintendent Diana Lam told a newspaper reporter that the district’s schools already provide a learning environment favorable to Latinos. Because they constitute the majority, the tendency among teachers in district schools is to be more culturally sensitive to the learning styles of Latino students (Calderón, 1996).

Still, many families who participated in SAISD’s choice program found that it did not work well for their children. Principals and attendance clerks at the multilingual middle schools estimated that, every year, 7% to 10% of all students who entered the multilingual program in the sixth grade would leave before eighth-grade graduation for reasons other than mobility. The count of leavers from the 1994-95 school year in this study resulted in a slightly higher figure: 10.5% for one middle school and 11.0% for the other.

School personnel reported that attrition is undesirable for several reasons. First, it harms students by engendering feelings of disappointment and failure. In addition, moving back to the attendance-zone school disrupts students’ educational process and their networks of friendships. Finally, because of the limited number of opportunities available for students to participate, the attrition rate is of concern to district officials and administrators of the SAISD multilingual program, who would prefer to enroll students who would stay in the program throughout their middle school years rather than drop out. According to the principal at one multilingual middle school campus:

There are 700 applicants for 380 seats. We use the TAAS and the Renzulli maturity scales for the students. Observing who comes to orientation night helps us determine which parents are informed and interested. Students are fairly well
screened, but the selection process is not perfect (multilingual school administrator, personal communication, March 1995).

An anticipated outcome of this study is that its findings will assist SAISD officials in reducing the attrition rate among students in the multilingual program. Recommendations for modifications to the screening process are included at the end of this chapter.

Research Findings

In this section, the study’s three research questions are reviewed in light of findings presented in chapter 4.

Research Question 1: Differences Between Stayers and Leavers

This study’s first research question asked: How do the characteristics of Latino students who continue in the SAISD multilingual program compare with characteristics of those who leave it? As was explained in chapter 4, analysis of data gathered from surveys, interviews, and student records revealed three notable differences between stayers and leavers.

1. Stayers were more involved in the decision to participate in the multilingual program than leavers. As Table 24 (see page 107) showed, stayers and leavers differed in their levels of involvement in the decision-making process. Students attributing the decision to teachers, counselors, or parents were more likely to be leavers than stayers (81% compared to 19%). Conversely, students indicating that they had made the decision alone or with their family were more likely to be stayers than leavers (69% compared to 31%).
2. Stayers’ best friends were more likely than leavers’ best friends to attend a multilingual school. As shown in Table 25 (see page 109), students whose best friend attended the multilingual school were more likely to be stayers than leavers (70% compared to 30%). Students whose best friend attended a school other than the multilingual school were more likely to be leavers than stayers (79% compared to 21%).

3. Stayers scored higher on the math portion of a standardized achievement test than leavers. Differences appeared in the achievement levels of stayers and leavers on each of the measures used: in class grades in reading or language arts, math, and foreign languages; and in standardized achievement test scores for reading and for math. The most notable differences were in the scores on the math section of a standardized criterion-referenced test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). TAAS is taken by all Texas students in Grades 3 through 8 and in Grade 11. Table 27 (see page 110) shows that the difference in means for the percentile rankings\(^\text{1}\) of stayers and leavers for the math section of the 1994-95 TAAS was 7 percentage points. As shown in Table 28 (see page 111), the majority of students scoring at or above the 70th percentile on the math section of the 1994-95 TAAS were stayers (67% compared to 33%). By contrast, more of the students scoring below the 70th percentile were leavers than stayers (58% compared to 42%).

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\(^1\text{Although the TAAS is a criterion-referenced test, its scores are converted to a “student learning index,” a 0-99 scale based on the normal curve where 99 is the highest attainable score.}\)
Research Question 2: Factors Influencing Stayers' and Leavers' Decisions

The second research question asked: What factors influence the decisions of Latino stayers and leavers? For stayers, this question was addressed by a survey item asking, "What is your number one reason for staying in the multilingual program?" As presented in Table 29 (see page 114), the majority of reasons stayers gave for continuing in the multilingual program fell into three categories.

1. The reason given for staying in the program by more than half (57%) of stayers was a desire to learn a second or third language. Some students indicated that they found the study of language interesting and enjoyed learning about the culture of other countries. Several had specific reasons for wanting to learn the language. One said, "I could go to Paris and understand what they are saying." Another expressed a desire to talk to members of her family in Spanish. A third indicated that she wanted to be a pediatrician when she grew up and take care of Latino children.

2. Nearly a quarter (23%) of stayers expressed a belief that their participation in the program would eventually help them gain access to a good college and career. Students indicated that their participation in the multilingual program would "look good" on their records or give them "some sort of recognition or certificate." Several noted that they expected to get credits for high school. Others mentioned that being bilingual could help them get better jobs in the future. Individual students indicated a desire to "be somebody," to have a "better start," or to "make something of myself." A seventh-grade girl wrote, "I want to be smarter than my parents!"
3. For 11% of the students, the presence of friends in the multilingual school was their main reason for staying in the program. This supports the finding from the first research question that students are more likely to stay in the program if their best friend attends the multilingual school.

Other reasons stayers gave for staying in the program included pleasing their parents, being well-treated at the school, liking their teachers, or disliking their neighborhood school.

For leavers, research question two was addressed by a survey item asking, "What was your number one reason for leaving the multilingual program?" As noted in Table 29 (see page 114), most of their responses fell into four main categories.

1. Low grades was named by 41% of leavers as their main reason for leaving the multilingual program. This corresponds with the finding reported in Table 26 (see page 110), which contrasts stayers’ and leavers’ class grades in language arts/reading and math, and in their foreign language. As noted in the table, there is an 8-point gap in stayers’ and leavers’ average combined grades in language arts/reading and math. The difference is even greater for foreign language classes, where the grades of stayers averaged 12 points--more than a letter grade--higher than leavers’ grades.

2. Transportation was the main problem for 21% of leavers. Several students reported problems with the bus. Others said it was difficult for parents to drive them to school.
3. Seventeen percent of leavers indicated that they disliked the language or the multilingual teacher. Some complained of the work load, others indicated that they were bored, and another reported that he was “not learning very much.”

4. Another 17% said that they left because of conflicts with other students or with adults at the multilingual school. Several said that they considered the teachers’ attitudes toward the students to be disrespectful. Others were involved in fights with peers or had problems adjusting socially.

Poor attendance was mentioned as factor in program withdrawal by several students.

Research Question 3: The Efficacy of the Adapted Spady Attrition Model

The third research question asked: Can Spady’s (1971) Explanatory Sociological Model of the Dropout Process be adapted for use in understanding the decision-making process among middle schools stayers and leavers? If so, what adaptations make it most effective?

Spady’s attrition model (see Figure 1 on page 8) includes 10 variables arranged along a continuum from the beginning of a student’s experience in an institution to the decision point at the end. The first 9 variables are independent variables thought by Spady to have either a direct or indirect effect on the tenth variable, called “dropout decision” by Spady but renamed simply “decision” for this study. For Spady’s study (1970, 1971) of attrition among University of Chicago students, this model accomplished two tasks: first, 

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3The chi-square analysis of students’ responses to the item, “I got to enroll in the language I wanted to study: yes/no” revealed that 56% of stayers got to enroll in their language of choice, whereas only 41% of leavers did.
it logically grouped factors related to the student attrition; second, it portrayed the dropout decision as a long-term process.

Specific adaptations of Spady's model for use in examining student attrition from a middle school program were described in chapter 3. For this study, the model adequately served as a theoretical framework within which the attrition process might be examined. It was easily adapted from the university setting to middle school and provided an organized system within which data related to student attrition were sorted and grouped. Its variables were useful and appropriate as concept labels for related indicators of student characteristics and attitudes.

**Interpretation and Discussion of Findings**

**Students: Their Characteristics and the Factors Influencing Them**

Several themes emerged from this study's examination of stayers and leavers in the SAISD multilingual program. These themes, pertaining to several issues raised by the review of literature reported in chapter 2, include student self-concept, the importance of the peer group, achievement and motivation, and the logistical problems of attending a school outside the neighborhood. Because elements of the findings related to research questions 1 and 2 tend to overlap, the discussion of both questions is combined in the following discussion.

**External- and self-efficacy and the decision-making process.** In chapter 2, two concepts pertaining to efficacy were defined: external efficacy was defined as the belief that one can have an impact on social institutions; and self-efficacy as the belief that one can perform adequately in a particular situation (Abramson, 1983). Low external efficacy
and low self-efficacy are not uncommon in Latino families and may serve to discourage them from participating in school choice programs (Hazuda, Stern & Haffner, 1988).

It is reasonable to assume, however, that the external efficacy of parents whose children enrolled in the SAISD multilingual program, at least in regard to their children's education, would be high rather than low. A rationale for that assumption is that the parents, by successfully enrolling their children in the multilingual program, have negotiated a competitive system by winning a coveted place for their son or daughter in a desirable program. Because of their success, the family has had a positive impact on a social system. Regarding students, another assumption is that, because they have been accepted for the program, that their external efficacy is high as well. Students were accepted on the strength of their efforts in their elementary school work; they must have made high grades and test scores; and they must have earned the support of their fifth grade teacher to the extent that the teacher gave a good recommendation.

When the second concept—that of self-efficacy—is considered, however, the picture changes. Students have a large new responsibility: They must “measure up” to an expectation by proving that they can perform the work required in the multilingual program's rigorous course of study or risk making poor grades and being asked to withdraw.

Although applying for the multilingual program was a decision of great consequence to the students' future and added a new burden of responsibility to their lives, their responses to survey questions revealed that many did not participate in that decision. As noted in chapter 2, a study of family decision making determined that parents
are primarily responsible for making decisions for their children to participate in school choice programs up to the seventh grade (Collins, 1987). Similarly, this study found that many students were not involved in the decision process: 30% of the students reported that someone else—their elementary teacher or counselor, or, in a few instances, their parents—had made the decision for them to apply to the multilingual program and that they had not participated in the decision.

It seems reasonable to suppose that a student's sense of self-efficacy would be related to whether he or she participated in the decision to apply to the multilingual program. As was reported in chapter 4 (see Table 24 on page 107), stayers were more likely than leavers to have been involved in the decision process for participation in the multilingual program; conversely, leavers were more likely than stayers to have had the decision made for them by someone else. Among students in this study who were not involved in the decision to apply to the multilingual program, 81% had withdrawn. Conversely, among students who were involved in the decision to apply, 69% continued. This finding was consistent with the suppositions advanced by both middle school principals during interviews conducted at the outset of this study. These principals noted that, in many cases, a student's recommendation for the program by a teacher or counselor at the elementary school—or, lacking that, a parent's ambition for his or her child—was often sufficient to launch an aggressive application process for the program (multilingual school administrators, personal communication, March 1995). They were concerned that the student, in such cases, might have little awareness or interest in the educational plans the adults made for him or her. Without a strong desire to learn a foreign language or
sufficient motivation to succeed at accomplishing a goal, which was, in fact, not self-selected, many students became overwhelmed by the difficulty of language study and the volume of work demanded by their teachers. As the data analysis revealed, outcomes for many students included poor grades and eventual withdrawal from the program.

It is interesting to note the low self-efficacy that was apparent in passive and victim-like phrases used by several leavers when explaining their reasons for withdrawing from the program. Students used phrases such as, “it was their decision,” “I had no choice,” “if [my teacher] had wanted me to be successful . . . she would have given me the extra point,” “the program just wasn’t for me,” “they didn’t want me to stay,” and “the school made up my mind for me--my grades were being changed . . . they accused me of doing bad things,” in describing their decisions to withdraw.

Motivation, requirements, and achievement. Balancing excitement about the program's prestige with awareness of the program’s requirements was problematic for some students. Ironically, a factor which may have contributed to some students’ lack of success in the multilingual program was their parents’ interest in their scholastic opportunities. According to a multilingual school principal,

Some of the attrition is due to the parent wanting this more than the child. The child gets in the program and finds that he doesn’t want to study a foreign language after all. So the child doesn’t keep up to standards. (multilingual school administrator, personal communication, March 1995)

As noted in chapter 3, teachers were surveyed about stayer and leaver characteristics and behaviors. Although the response from the teacher group was not
sufficiently large to include in the quantitative analysis, their comments, like those of the administrators and counselors who were interviewed, were useful as an adjunct to the student data in interpreting the findings reported in chapter 4. Two teachers who responded to the survey used the white space on their questionnaires to write comments expressing concern about students who were still in their classes. The first serves as an excellent illustration of a student who, though lacking in motivation, will probably continue in the program through eighth-grade graduation.

[This seventh-grader] is an intelligent girl. She is exactly what a multilingual student should be as far as grades are concerned. She lacks the enthusiasm that multilingual students come in with in sixth grade. She does her work because she believes in completion, but she never goes beyond what she is supposed to do. In class she is laid back and answers when called on but rarely volunteers.

Another teacher’s comment regarding a sixth-grade boy was more blunt, “He’s a nice fellow but on the lazy side.”

Many parents view selection for the multilingual program as an honor and want it for their son or daughter. While the child may have found his or her parent’s enthusiasm contagious in the beginning, the excitement was not sufficient to sustain the student through the program’s rigorous requirements. A counselor at one of the multilingual schools summarized the problem eloquently:

The excitement from fifth grade to want to apply I’ve never understood. I can’t believe it’s from the students. I think it’s “I’m going to [the multilingual school]-- I’m going to be privileged,” not “I’m going to learn a foreign language.” Then they
get here and it’s just another hard subject. (multilingual school counselor, personal communication, February 1996)

The student’s ability to discern long-term benefits arising from their participation in the program appeared to be a powerful incentive for persistence. As reported among the findings from research question 2 (see Table 29 on p. 114), the overwhelming majority (81%) of stayers reported that they had chosen to continue in the multilingual program because they wanted to learn a foreign language or because they believed that their participation in the program would lead to a better future.

As noted above, the multilingual program is a demanding course of study. The importance of families and students understanding the rigors of foreign language study was emphasized by the assistant principal at a multilingual middle school, who apparently would prefer that fifth grade teachers and students themselves be responsible for program nominations, bypassing parent input. Her concerns underscored the need for an improved assessment of aptitude as well as interest among program applicants:

Some kids barely qualify. It would be better to let teachers make the recommendations. Parents want their kids at Davis and Tafolla and have high expectations, not realizing that the transportation problem is hard enough on students . . . then having to deal with a foreign language! When kids are borderline, they won’t make it unless they are really determined. (multilingual school administrator, personal communication, February 1996)

Similar ideas were echoed by a teacher whose comment also raises the concern that students in the multilingual program experience varying degrees of challenge because
some languages may be harder for students to learn than others: “As students grow up, and as the difficulty of the German language (versus Spanish, for instance) becomes clearer, many are drawn to other interests which have lesser difficulty and more immediate rewards.” Another teacher’s comment about a sixth-grade boy, however, indicated that the course work may provide insufficient challenge for some students:

[He] is extremely bright and quick to learn new concepts. I believe he sometimes appears or is inattentive and will not do assignments because he is bored. His feeling of not being sufficiently challenged may lead to an indifference towards academics or his dropping out of the multilingual program.

Another source of conflict arises when family expectations and course content do not match. A teacher wrote, “The father [of a sixth-grade girl] told me he didn’t agree with the ‘Spanish’ I was teaching because in San Antonio ‘Tex-Mex’ is spoken.”

A final source of conflict related to academic requirements is related to improper screening of students for the program. A teacher of a sixth-grade girl wrote, “She told me that she didn’t know how she even got into the program with her poor grades.” Another wrote, “[This sixth-grade boy] was clearly not someone qualified for the program, and perhaps he had emotional problems.”

As noted above, differences were found between the stayer and leaver groups in terms of their academic achievement. The differences found in achievement level were not unexpected for class grades, because low grades were the primary reason for part of the attrition among leavers. Predictably, the gap between groups was greater for foreign language class grades than for language arts and math grades.
Surprisingly, however, stayers' and leavers' scores on the standardized achievement test, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skill (TAAS) presented in Tables 27 and 28 (pages 111 and 112), showed a larger spread in math than in reading. Although this finding was unanticipated, it seems quite reasonable in view of the ethnicity of the student population. Because the students in the study were all Latinos, they came from family backgrounds with varying degrees of English proficiency, a situation which may be presumed responsible for introducing a certain amount of error into the analysis. The implication of this finding for the use of the math score as a program screening tool is discussed later in this chapter.

Statements written by two students—a leaver and a stayer—both attributed their low grades on the poor instructional performance of their multilingual teacher. A seventh-grade girl wrote:

The teacher did not make the lessons fun and not even all that interesting. I also dropped my grade in [foreign language class] because I just wanted to upset the teacher by not doing my work since we just couldn't get along.

A sixth-grade boy wrote:

I want to be in the multilingual program because I want to learn another language. I also want to stay in because I get high school credit. . . . The only thing I have to say is that I don't really like my [foreign language] teacher, and I wish they could do something about her. I don't think she is doing a very good job of teaching us. She makes everything we do boring. I would like the language if there were a little more excitement in the class, and I would agree that my grade would go up. I'm
not trying to be mean. I'm just saying what I feel and think.

Several educators named immaturity of students as a barrier to their success in the multilingual program. A counselor at one of the multilingual middle schools provided a statement written by a sixth grade boy who eventually withdrew from the program. The boy’s words reveal his priorities to be of a more social than academic nature:

First period I do not talk alot because I am really tired. The only way I talk is if the teacher ask me something. Second period I am still asleep I do not talk all I do is my work. Third period I am really awake so I am jolly so I talk alot but I am surroundid by girls. I am so jolly I don’t want to do my work but I still do sometimes. Fourth period I talk alot because I used to talk to my friend Raymond but now I have a sceduler change. I still talk a little bit to my friend Alfred but when I talked to either one I still did my work. Fifth period is gym. It is alwright, sixth period is cool. Mrs. Mays is cool she is very nice, seventh good.

Importance of the peer group. The above statement by the sixth-grade boy is evocative, not only of an adolescent’s immaturity and lack of academic focus, but also of his or her characteristic preoccupation with the peer group. The presence or absence of friends has been a dominant theme throughout this study’s findings.

As explained in chapter 2, Valverde (1987) found the most notable difference between Latino high school students who graduated and those who did not were their friendships—that students who graduated tended to have more friends and those who dropped out expressed feelings of alienation and rejection. Similarly, a major finding from this study was that a student’s persistence in or withdrawal from the multilingual program
was related to his or her system of friendship support. One of three differences found between stayers and leavers involved the presence of friends in the multilingual program; moreover, 11% of stayers gave the presence of friends as their main reason for their continued participation in the program, while 17% of leavers said they had withdrawn primarily because of conflicts with others.

The absence of friends was a source of stress for several students. Two seventh-grade girls wrote comments recalling their anxiety about enrolling in a school none of their friends attended: "I knew I wasn’t going to be popular when I started the program"; "I missed my friends, and I felt that I didn’t fit in. I felt alone and depressed.” Anxiety about friendships was also apparent in the comments of a sixth-grade boy, who wrote, “I felt that those were not my kind of people in friends. I sort of felt uncomfortable.”

The peer group remained an important theme throughout a student’s experience. A section later in this chapter discusses the hardship caused for withdrawing students who had to leave new friends and return to their neighborhood schools.

Several students--particularly seventh-grade girls--experienced peer group problems related to puberty. An account of one girl’s difficulties written by her teacher illustrates the complexity of the withdrawal process:

[This student] left [the multilingual school] and my class before the year was half over. Initially she did very well, and I identified her as a quick study—one who learns quickly with relatively little study. However, she lost ground very rapidly, had numerous absences, and was in trouble not connected with the classroom. Her manner of dress, makeup, and way of carrying herself brings to mind the old
"oversexed and underaged." She was clearly more boy oriented than any of
her classmates, by a large margin. I do not know what her home life was like, but
school attendance was clearly a social setting for her. The educational component
was more and more disconnected as the days progressed. Since I was never
informed of the specific reasons for her departure by our administration, I can offer
no illumination there. I believe it was for fighting over a boy, but that may be only
a piece of a larger problem.

Other difficulties in multilingual school participation. Other concerns that arose in
connection with student attrition were poor attendance and problems with transportation.
Two teachers wrote comments about attendance. One reported that a student's illness-
related absences led to his withdrawal from the program: "[This sixth-grade boy] was a
very responsible child. I was sorry to see him go. He was absent a lot due to illness." By
contrast, the teacher of a sixth-grade girl did not believe claims that the student's absences
were health-related: "[This student] was rarely in school because of 'health problems,'
usually on Mondays and Fridays. When the attendance clerk and I raised questions about
this, her mother withdrew her from the program."

Transportation problems, as reported in chapter 4, were named as the number one
reason for withdrawing by 21% of leavers. As noted in that chapter, several students
commented that, for them, it was hard to get to the multilingual school. Moreover, for
three different sixth-grade girls, commuting from the neighborhood to the multilingual
school involved the perception of personal risk: "I was afraid if I caught the bus something
might happen or I might get lost"; "I was followed by a man"; "I left because it was bad
on the bus. There was no supervision... they cussed and sprayed mace.”

**Relationship of this study’s findings with findings of other studies.** The themes suggested by the findings of this study relative to student attrition may be compared to attrition reports from other sources. For example, the former principal of Brackenridge High school, where many students continue their language studies after eighth-grade graduation from Davis or Tafolla Middle School, said he believed that students at the secondary level tended to leave the program because of poor academic progress, student burnout and/or loss of interest in foreign language study, desire to participate in sports or other after-school activities (the bus leaves the multilingual high school campus before sports are over in the afternoon), and tradition--it is important in many families that the students graduate from the same high school as parents and grandparents. (multilingual high school administrator, personal communication, March 1995).

Interviews conducted with parents of leavers in May 1995 as part of the larger San Antonio study described in chapter 1 confirmed that transportation, discipline problems, poor academic progress, scheduling problems, and student burnout were indeed important factors in leaving, as were conflicts with students who were not in the program and with teachers and administrators at the multilingual schools.

Findings from this study corroborated several of those from other settings. Table 30 compares the factors involved in SAISD multilingual program attrition as articulated by the students themselves, by their parents, and by their teachers, counselors, and administrators.
Table 30

A Comparison of Factors Influencing Latino Students who Withdrew from the SAISD Multilingual Program: Different Perspectives.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor category</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>School staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low grades/poor achievement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disliked school/no interest in program</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with others/discipline problems</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation problems</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student immaturity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As is apparent from an examination of Table 30, there was general agreement among all parties that program attrition was influenced by low grades or poor achievement, by conflicts with others or discipline problems, and by problems with transportation.

Table 31 is presented for comparison. It displays data from three studies which examined reasons for dropping out of high school by Latino students. It is apparent from
Table 31


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor category</th>
<th>Austin ISD(^a)</th>
<th>Dallas ISD(^b)</th>
<th>HSB data(^c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low grades/poor achievement/over age</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disliked school/bored or alienated</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict with others/discipline problems</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance problems</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal/family problems/marriage/pregnancy</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol/drugs/gang/criminal involvement</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial problems/had to go to work</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Romo and Falbo, 1996: case studies of students at risk of dropping out.

\(^b\)Intercultural Development Research Association, 1989: surveys of graduates and dropouts.

\(^c\)Velez, 1989: analysis of the *High School and Beyond* data.
the information in Table 31 that several factors influencing Latino high school dropouts were similar to those influencing the middle school students withdrawing from the SAISD multilingual program. All groups named “conflicts with others” as important in student attrition.

Simplifying the Spady Attrition Model

As noted previously, the model developed by Spady (1970, 1971) to study attrition among University of Chicago students and selected for use in this study was successfully adapted and utilized to group and classify the variable indicators related to Latino stayers and leavers.

The model’s capability exceeded what was required for this study for two reasons. First, there were too few subjects in this study to support the type of data analysis utilized by Spady and facilitated by the model. For example, Spady used the correlations among the indicators for each of his variables to validate their utility as indicators for the variables. Unfortunately, this study contained too few subjects to achieve any significant correlations among the indicators for the variables.

Second, Spady’s model surpassed the needs of this study with its ability to measure change over time. Spady began before the University of Chicago students arrived as freshmen and tracked them for four years, until they graduated, transferred, or dropped out. Theoretically, the same could have been done with students in the SAISD multilingual program; that is, students could have been contacted at the end of their fifth grade year and tracked until the end of grade eight, or even until high school graduation. However, constraints of time and resources prevented such an extended study.
As explained in chapter 4, logit regression showed that three indicator variables correctly predicted over three-fourths of student decisions: (a) student involvement in the decision making process; (b) school attended by student’s best friend; and (c) student’s math score on a standardized test. In the adapted Spady attrition model used to guide this study, these indicator variables are subsumed under the broader variable categories shown in Figure 1 (see page 8). The first indicator variable, referring to family involvement in the decision process, is part of the broader variable called "Family Background." The second indicator variable, referring to the best friend’s school, is part of the broader variable called "Friendship Support." The third indicator variable, referring to the math achievement score, is part of the broader variable called "Academic Potential."

Because this study resulted in more of a snapshot than a long term view of attrition among its subjects, these three variables were adequate for use as a theoretical framework for organizing and interpreting the data. Therefore, Spady’s model, for a study of this type, may be made more parsimonious by reducing the number of independent variables from nine to three.

Implications of Research Findings for Schools and Students

There are consequences of student attrition for both the students themselves and for the schools involved.

How students are harmed by leaving. As noted earlier in this chapter in the discussion of external and self-efficacy, students are honored when accepted into a prestigious, competitive program such as the SAISD multilingual program. Once enrolled, however, students take on potentially burdensome responsibilities: in many cases, they
must leave their friends and travel into an unfamiliar neighborhood to attend school; and they must maintain their academic performance at an acceptable level in a rigorous course of study.

Students in this study had several opportunities to respond to open-ended survey questions. The overwhelming majority of comments written by leavers reflected emotions such as sorrow, regret, anger, and self-recrimination. Several leavers who indicated that they had disagreed with the decision for them to withdraw from the multilingual program responded to an open-ended survey question which asked, “Why didn’t you agree with the decision?” by commenting on their feelings concerning the new friendships they had established while attending the multilingual school. They expressed sorrow about leaving behind the friends they had made while in the multilingual program. Sixth-grade girls wrote, “I was starting to make more friends, and to get along with more teachers,” and “I was looking forward to staying with my friends.” A seventh-grade boy wrote, “I was used to the school already. And I also had a few of my best friends going there and I liked the teachers.” A seventh-grade girl wrote, “I was comfortable where I was and I knew practically everybody, and I fit in pretty good, and I had no enemies, also the faculty and staff were like a second family.” Finally, a sixth-grade boy described his feelings about starting anew at his neighborhood school after withdrawing form the multilingual program, “I was scared to leave and have to meet new people all over again.”

The withdrawal process was particularly painful for students when it occurred as a result of poor grades. A multilingual school counselor described the process and its effect on students this way:
There's a time line for students with poor grades. They get a warning letter in mid-semester saying "you're in danger of being exited; if you don't do this, this will happen." The kids don't take it seriously because they don't think the school will follow through, so when it happens they're shocked but they shouldn't be (multilingual school counselor, personal communication, February 1996).

During the 1994-95 school year, between 10% and 10.5% students withdrew from the multilingual program for reasons other than family mobility. Many of those students--at least 41% by their own account--withdrew because of poor grades. A multilingual school assistant principal revealed her distress about the harmful effects of withdrawing from the program:

"It hurts them because, number one, it's a failure. Also they have to leave their friends. I've seen so many disappointed, and I've heard a few say, "Good, I didn't want to come anyway." (multilingual school administrator, personal communication, February 1996)

Most leavers responded to the last item on the questionnaire, which asked, "Is there anything else you would like to say about the multilingual program or [Davis or Tafolla] Middle School?" The comments of several students indicated that they particularly regretted their withdrawal from the multilingual program because of the failure it represented. A sixth-grade girl had attempted to bargain in order to stay, "I said I would try harder." Two seventh-grade girls wrote of their withdrawal: "I really wanted to learn [the language] fluently"; "I really wanted to stay, but I wasn't trying hard enough, but I wish I were in it still." Another wrote:
Just because you get low grades shouldn’t mean you can’t learn... The teacher I had was strict on us and I didn’t understand the lessons but I didn’t feel that asking her was a good idea and I am very shy actually I can’t believe I’m even writing this letter but I don’t think what happened to me should have to happen to other kids!

Only one or two students responding to the questionnaire’s last item wrote unfavorable comments about their experiences at either school. Several leavers wrote very favorable comments and expressed regret at having left the multilingual school. A seventh-grade girl wrote:

What I would like to say is that [the multilingual school] is an excellent school. When I went to [the multilingual school], I looked forward to getting up and going to school, but now that I go to [the neighborhood school] I don’t even want to go because the majority of those people act like they still are in third grade. Plus they don’t have any school spirit. I mean it is just dead. When I went to [the multilingual school] they had spirit, dances, I mean you were happy all day but now I am just tired all day at [the neighborhood school].

Comments by a seventh-grade girl and boy and a sixth-grade girl are also favorable: “I really liked being there. It was a very nice environment. I would like to go back”; “It was a good school, and I really regret leaving that wonderful school”; “I would like it very much if I could go back to [the multilingual school] or get back into the multilingual program at Brackenridge.” Another student, a sixth-grade boy, made these comments:
I think this program is really great. I just wish I could have stayed in it a little bit longer, until I passed the eighth grade. I hope they keep this program forever so the people can have the experience to be in a school where everyone is as smart as they are.

Two girls, a sixth-grade leaver and a seventh-grade stayer, urged participants to persevere: "For those who are still in it, keep up the good work because you are gonna become a great success in life"; "It's a great program and I suggest you stick with it."

Recommendations: how schools could better accommodate student participation.

Three strategies suggested by this study's findings might serve to reduce attrition among students in the SAISD multilingual program. One involves screening of students and the other involves the recruitment process.

The first recommendation involves the process used to screen students for consideration for acceptance into the multilingual program. Presently, SAISD officials use Renzulli Maturity Scales completed by parents and teachers as well as a standardized test score. The test score used for screening purposes is the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) reading subtest. Based upon the findings in this study, the recommendation is made to include the TAAS math score in addition to the reading score for screening. The rationale for this recommendation is that a greater gap in achievement was found between stayers' and leavers' math scores than between the two groups' reading scores.

A second recommendation for preventing attrition is to aid parents and students in the decision-making process. A grandmother acting as a parent to a seventh grade boy who left the program expressed the need for more awareness among students of what
program participation will entail:

They don’t get prepared enough, especially in elementary school before they start this program. They need a little orientation as to the different languages. They go into a language blindly. We talked about it at home, but it’s so strange and so different. If someone could go to class and let the kids hear the language . . . He only had two weeks to think about it; the decision had to be done quickly. Going to middle school is difficult, and going to a school that is not your own makes it harder. It would help too if the people at the school were easier to deal with. They were not very friendly. (grandparent, personal communication, March 1996)

A counselor at one of the multilingual schools agreed that students should understand more about the difficulty of learning a foreign language before they commit themselves to study it:

The language itself is not as exciting as they thought it would be. It’s structured, it’s a drill. The format of teaching a foreign language--the grammar and sentence structure--are hard. They come to realize how hard it is. Some tell me they just can’t learn it. (multilingual school counselor, personal communication, February 1996)

Implicit in these comments, as well as in several students’ comments, is the notion that many students are overwhelmed by the logistics and requirements of participation in the multilingual program. It seems apparent that students and their families would benefit from an improved orientation to the program. Students who qualify for, and are interested in participating in the multilingual program, should be given opportunities to visit Davis or
Tafolla Middle School during the spring of Grade 5 to observe the classes and to interview the students. In addition, typical class days in multilingual classrooms should be videotaped and made available to students to check out and view with their parents at home.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Continuing research on student persistence in, and attrition from, school choice programs is necessary to aid practitioners and policy makers in the design of choice programs and in the development of recruitment and selection processes for those programs. Because this study was limited by resource constraints and involved a small population of students, several areas of potentially fruitful research remain unexamined.

**Expand the Time Frame**

It would be beneficial to conduct the study over a full two or three years so that the long-term aspect of the Spady model can be utilized. As noted above, the Spady model's design allows the researcher to observe and measure trends over time. A future study could utilize that capability by collecting data on students at differing points in their progress through the multilingual program.
Explore Consequences of Cultural Group and Generations for Program Persistence and Foreign Language Study

Other avenues of research that merit examination are related to Latino students’ particular cultural groups—Mexican-oriented or Mexican-American—which are often linked to their status as first-, second-, or third-generation United States-born (Matute-Bianche, 1986; Velez, 1989). A future study could investigate the relationship between the persistence of Latino students of differing groups or generations in school choice programs. In addition, a study could investigate the likelihood of success for Latino students of differing groups or generations in classes of foreign language study.

Examine Relationships between Learning Math and Learning Foreign Languages

An unanticipated finding of this study was that the Latino students who persisted in the SAISD multilingual program had higher scores on the math subtest for a standardized criterion-referenced test than students who withdrew from the program. Moreover, the difference in math scores was greater than the difference in scores on the reading subtest. This relationship suggested that, for Latino students, math scores are more useful as screening tools for a program of foreign language study than are reading scores. Future studies could (a) utilize test scores from the year previous to program entry to determine whether a predictive relationship was still evident between high test score and program persistence, and (b) investigate the connection between the way in which students learn math and the way they learn a foreign language.

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3See chapter 2 for a discussion of Latino groups.
Extend the Study for Other Ethnic/Racial Groups

Two major findings from research question 1 do not appear to be related to the fact that the students in the study were Latinos: (a) Students are more likely to continue in the program if they are actively involved in the initial decision to apply; and (b) students are more likely to continue if their best friend attends the multilingual school. It is recommended that this study be replicated with racial/ethnic groups other than Latinos to determine whether these factors are important in the decision-making process of those groups.

Conclusion

This is an era in which school choice options—public and private—are proliferating rapidly. Half of this country’s states have passed charter school legislation, and two have approved the use of state funds for sending students to private schools, including religious schools. In addition, private groups have sponsored voucher programs in at least 18 cities in 12 states that assist low-income parents in sending their children to private schools, including religious schools. Presumably, the purpose of offering school choice options to students and their families is to enhance opportunities for involvement, engagement, commitment, and, ultimately, achievement, in an equitable manner. Although there is still much to learn about the consequences of school choice, some progress has been made to that end. For example, the Martinez et al. (1993, 1996) study and the Martinez et al. (1994) review of research have effectively addressed issues of who chooses and why.

Until now, no published research study has examined the aftermath of choosing. Looking beyond a family’s decision to exercise a choice option, this study has examined
the consequences of choosing and has determined that both students and institutions are harmed when choice fails. Future research should focus on how choice programs are designed and the impact of that design on participating students, families, and institutions.
APPENDIX A

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE
STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Your name was chosen for this survey group because you are in the San Antonio multilingual (ML) program. Some of these questions ask you to remember when you entered the program. Because time has passed, this may be hard. The answer "Not sure" appears after some questions. Please feel free to choose it. If a few of the questions seem personal, please remember that your name will not be used in any report. Still, you may wish to skip these questions or mark "Prefer not to answer."

If you have any problems while filling out this questionnaire, please call (817) 891-4371. You may call collect if you wish.

DIRECTIONS: PLEASE ANSWER EACH QUESTION. REMEMBER, YOUR NAME WILL NOT BE USED IN ANY REPORTS.

1. When a student switches to a new school, there are often problems which must be faced. Were you worried about any of these WHEN YOU STARTED GRADE 6 AT Davis?

   CHECK ONE BOX FOR EACH
   My personal safety at Davis
   Safety on the way to or going home from Davis
   Extra cost of transportation to and from Davis
   Extra time spent in transportation to and from Davis
   Most of my friends went to my neighborhood middle school
   It might be hard to make new friends at Davis
   Adults at Davis might be hard to get along with
   Adults at Davis might not help me when I need help
   Extra work involved in taking ML (multilingual) classes

2. Do you worry about any of these NOW?

   CHECK ONE BOX FOR EACH
   My personal safety in school
   Safety on the way to or going home from school
   Extra cost of transportation to and from school
   Extra time spent in transportation to and from school
   Friends go to a different school
   It's hard to make friends here
   Adults here are hard to get along with
   Adults here don't help me when I need help
   Extra work involved in taking ML classes

3. Who decided that you should APPLY FOR the ML program?

   CHECK ONE OR MORE
   • I made the decision alone
   • I made the decision along with my family
   • My family decided
   • Teacher or counselor at my elementary school wanted me to apply
3a. If the decision to apply wasn't yours, DID YOU AGREE with the decision?

☐ Yes ☐ No  [If no] Why not? ________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

4. Whose decision is it for you to STAY IN the ML program?

CHECK ONE OR MORE

☐ My decision
☐ A decision I made with my family
☐ My family's decision
☐ Teacher or counselor at Davis wants me to stay in

4a. If the decision to stay in isn't yours, DO YOU AGREE with the decision?

☐ Yes ☐ No  ☐ Not sure

If you answered no, why don't you agree with the decision? ______________________

_____________________________________________________________________

5. Which of these were true BEFORE YOU STARTED THE ML PROGRAM?

I really wanted to get into the ML program ☐ Yes ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
It was really important to my family for me to get into the ML program ☐ Yes ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
Making high grades was really important to me ☐ Yes ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
My family expected me to make high grades ☐ Yes ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
I believed I would enjoy learning the language and culture of another country ☐ Yes ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
I believed the ML program had high academic standards ☐ Yes ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
I believed my elementary school prepared me for the work I would be expected to do in my ML classes ☐ Yes ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
I could speak a second language already ☐ Yes ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
I could write using a second language already ☐ Yes ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
I thought it would be easy for me to make new friends at Davis ☐ Yes ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
I was pretty sure I would fit in OK at Davis ☐ Yes ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
I had enough free time for hobbies, goofing off, watching TV, reading, and being with friends ☐ Yes ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
6. Which of these are true NOW?

CHECK ONE BOX FOR EACH

- Staying in the ML program is as important to me now as it was when I started it
- My family wants me to stay in the ML program as much now as they did at first
- I enjoy studying the language and culture of another country as much as I thought I would
- I believe that what I am learning in my ML classes will be useful some day
- I think the teachers in my ML classes are qualified to teach about language and culture
- I find the lessons in my ML classes interesting and stimulating
- I am satisfied with the grades I make in my ML classes
- My family is satisfied with my grades in my ML classes
- I think the ML program's academic standards are high enough
- I believe the ML program's academic requirements are too tough
- I believe my elementary school prepared me well for the work I do in the ML classes
- I can speak a second language
- I can speak a third language
- I can write using a second language
- I can write using a third language
- There is a teacher or other adult at Davis with whom I have an especially close relationship
- It has been easy for me to make new friends at Davis
- I seem to be fitting in OK at Davis
- I really like Davis and want to stay here
- I had enough free time for hobbies, goofing off, watching TV, reading, and being with friends
- I got to enroll in the language I wanted to study
- I am satisfied with the language I am enrolled in
- I'm thinking of transferring to a private school
- Sometimes I wish I could quit school

7. Learning languages seems to be easier for some people than for others. How easy or hard is it for you to learn the language you study in your ML classes?

☐ Very hard ☐ Pretty hard ☐ Pretty easy ☐ Very easy ☐ Not sure

8. Compared to languages other ML students take, how hard is the language you are studying?

☐ Very hard ☐ Pretty hard ☐ Pretty easy ☐ Very easy ☐ Not sure

9. Is there a quiet place for you to study at home? ☐ Yes ☐ Sometimes; it depends ☐ No
9a. Which of these do you have at home?  CHECK ANY YOU HAVE

- Desk
- Reading lamp
- Typewriter
- Computer
- Dictionary
- Encyclopedia
- Atlas
- School supplies

Other

10. Do you think the adults at Davis do a good job of these?

CHECK ONE BOX FOR EACH

- Providing a safe environment for students
- Encouraging high academic standards
- Making learning interesting for students
- Communicating with parents
- Rewarding students for honesty and hard work
- Helping students keep special traditions and values of their culture
- Helping students learn to become responsible citizens
- Helping students learn to get along with each other
- Helping students learn to make decisions and think for themselves
- Building strong school spirit
- Helping students to excel in areas of special interest
- Counseling students who are having problems

11. Which are the main reasons you have stayed in the ML program?

CHECK ONE BOX FOR EACH

- Actually, I am thinking about leaving the ML program
- I am still interested in learning the language and culture of another country
- I want to continue in the ML program at Brackenridge High
- I have many friends in the ML program
- I have many other friends at Davis (not in ML program)
- I like Davis and want to graduate from 8th grade here
- Quitting the ML program would be more trouble than staying in
- My family wants me to stay in the ML program
- My teachers want me to stay in the ML program
- I don’t like the school I would attend if I left the ML program

Other
12. Check any of these that you DON’T LIKE about the ML program or about Davis Middle School.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHECK ONE BOX FOR EACH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The ML classes require too much work or don’t interest me</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Yes □ No □ Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s hard to get along with some students in the ML program</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Yes □ No □ Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>It’s hard to get along with some non-ML students</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Yes □ No □ Not sure</td>
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<td>It’s hard to get along with some teachers in the ML program</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Yes □ No □ Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>The athletic teams at my neighborhood school are better</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Yes □ No □ Not sure</td>
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<tr>
<td>I believe my neighborhood school could better prepare me for high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Yes □ No □ Not sure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are activities I want to participate in at my neighborhood school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Yes □ No □ Not sure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other

13. How many of your close friends from elementary school APPLIED to the ML program?

□ Most □ Many □ A few □ None □ Not sure

14. How many of your close friends STARTED the ML program with you in grade 6?

□ Most □ Many □ A few □ None □ Not sure □ None applied

15. Who do you like to spend time with?

CHECK ONE OR MORE

□ Students in ML program □ Other Davis students

□ Kids from my neighborhood □ I like to spend most of my time alone

□ Prefer not to answer

16. Have you had any serious problems with these people at Davis?

CHECK ONE OR MORE

□ Students in ML program □ Other students

□ Teachers □ Other adults

□ I haven’t had any serious problems with people

□ Prefer not to answer

17. Where does your best friend go to school? CHECK ONE

□ Davis Middle School □ Neighborhood middle school

Other
18. How long has this person been your friend?  CHECK ONE

☐ Since elementary school  ☐ Since I started middle school

Other ________________________________

19. Not counting Davis, how many schools have you attended since Kindergarten?

☐ 1 - 2  ☐ 3 - 4  ☐ 5 - 6  ☐ 7 or more  ☐ Not sure

20. WHILE YOU WERE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, how involved were you with sports, music lessons, art, Scouts, Campfire, clubs, and church or other activities?

CHECK ONE

☐ I was busy with them all the time
☐ I spent a lot of my time doing these things
☐ I did a few things that interested me
☐ I didn’t spend much time in group activities

21. How involved are you NOW with athletics, music and art, Scouts or Campfire, student government, service organizations, clubs, and church or other activities?

CHECK ONE

☐ I’m busy with them all the time
☐ I spend a lot of my time doing these things
☐ I do a few things that interest me
☐ I don’t spend much time in group activities

22. Have you been a captain, an officer, or a leader in any organization?

CHECK ONE

☐ No, I haven’t held a leadership position.
☐ I am not sure if my position could be classified as a leadership position.
☐ Yes, I have been (or am) a leader.

22a. [If yes] Please describe briefly what you do or did as a leader. __________________________________________________________

23. Middle school students mature at different rates. Some grow faster than others. Some act older than others. How mature were you when you came to Davis IN GRADE 6?

CHECK ONE

☐ I’d say I was mature in most areas
☐ I was mature in some areas and not so mature in others
☐ I was not too mature at the beginning of grade 6
☐ Not sure
24. What languages are spoken in your home? □ English □ Spanish □ Other

25. Were you born in another country? □ Yes □ No □ Not sure

25a. Were either of your parents born in another country? □ Yes □ No □ Not sure

25b. Were any of your grandparents born in another country? □ Yes □ No □ Not sure

26. Which adults live at home with you?

CHECK ONE OR MORE
□ Mother □ Grandparent □ Other relative
□ Father □ Stepparent □ Other adult
□ Not sure □ Prefer not to answer

27. What level of education have your parents reached?

CHECK ONE
Father or male guardian:
□ Elementary
□ Some high school
□ Graduated from high school
□ Some college
□ College degree
□ Graduate degree (Master’s or above)
□ Professional (Doctor, lawyer, minister)
□ Prefer not to answer
□ No father or male guardian
□ Not sure

CHECK ONE
Mother or female guardian:
□ Elementary
□ Some high school
□ Graduated from high school
□ Some college
□ College degree
□ Graduate degree (Master’s or above)
□ Professional (Doctor, lawyer, minister)
□ Prefer not to answer
□ No mother or female guardian
□ Not sure

28. What level of education is expected for you?

CHECK ONE
My family expects for me:
□ Some high school
□ High school graduation
□ Some college
□ College degree
□ Graduate degree (Master’s or above)
□ Professional (Doctor, lawyer, minister)

CHECK ONE
I expect for myself:
□ Some high school
□ High school graduation
□ Some college
□ College degree
□ Graduate degree (Master’s or above)
□ Professional (Doctor, lawyer, minister)

29. What work do your parents do? EXAMPLE: TEACHES AT DAVIS MIDDLE SCHOOL

Father or male guardian: ____________________________________________

Mother or female guardian: ____________________________________________
30. What type of career is expected for you? EXAMPLE: TO BE A TV NEWS REPORTER

My family expects for me:  

I expect for myself:  

31. How would you rate your home life?  

CHECK ONE  
☐ Very happy  ☐ A little difficult  ☐ Not sure  
☐ Pretty happy  ☐ Difficult  ☐ Prefer not to answer  

32. How many hours a week do you usually work or help at home with chores?  CHECK ONE  

☐ None  ☐ 1 - 9  ☐ 10 - 19  ☐ 20 or more  ☐ Not sure  

33. How many brothers, sisters, or other kids live at home with you?  CHECK ONE  

☐ None  ☐ 1 - 3  ☐ 4 - 6  ☐ 7 or more  

34. Has an older brother or sister enrolled in the ML program before you?  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  

[If yes] Did he or she stay in the ML program through grade 8?  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure  

35. Do members of your family attend religious services?  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Prefer not to answer  

[If yes] About how often?  ☐ 1 - 2 times/year  ☐ 1 - 2 times/month  ☐ 1 - 2 times/week  ☐ Daily  

36. Some families are strict about values such as honesty, responsibility, hard work, and fairness. Others are a bit more relaxed. In your opinion, how does your family feel about values such as these?  CHECK ONE  

☐ Strict  ☐ Neither strict nor relaxed  ☐ Relaxed  ☐ Not sure  ☐ Prefer not to answer  

37. Some families observe cultural traditions such as feasts, national holidays, and special celebrations. Other families do not observe them. Are traditions like these important for your family?  

CHECK ONE  
☐ Yes, they’re important  
☐ Neither important nor unimportant  
☐ No, they’re not especially important  
☐ Prefer not to answer
38. What is your number one reason for staying in the ML program?

What is your number two reason?

39. If there is anything else you would like to say about the ML program or Davis Middle School?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH
FOR FILLING OUT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.
PLEASE USE THE RETURN ENVELOPE, OR SEND IT TO:

Kay Thomas, Senior Research Associate
Center for the Study of Education Reform
University of North Texas Box 6394
Denton, TX 76203
STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

You have been included in this survey group because you used to be in the San Antonio ISD multilingual (ML) program. Some of these questions ask you to remember when you first entered the ML program. Because time has passed, this may be hard. The answer “Not sure” appears after some questions. Please feel free to choose it.

If a few of the questions seem personal, please remember that your name will not be used in any report. Still, you may wish to skip these questions or mark “Prefer not to answer.”

If you have any problems while filling out this questionnaire, please call (817) 891-4371. You may call collect if you wish.

DIRECTIONS: PLEASE ANSWER EACH QUESTION. REMEMBER, YOUR NAME WILL NOT BE USED IN ANY REPORTS.

1. When a student switches to a new school, there are often problems which must be faced. Were you worried about any of these WHEN YOU STARTED GRADE 6 AT TAFOLLA?

CHECK ONE BOX FOR EACH

- My personal safety at Tafolla □Yes □No □Not sure
- Safety on the way to or going home from Tafolla □Yes □No □Not sure
- Extra cost of transportation to and from Tafolla □Yes □No □Not sure
- Extra time spent in transportation to and from Tafolla □Yes □No □Not sure
- Most of my friends went to my neighborhood middle school □Yes □No □Not sure
- It might be hard to make new friends at Tafolla □Yes □No □Not sure
- Adults at Tafolla might be hard to get along with □Yes □No □Not sure
- Adults at Tafolla might not help me when I need help □Yes □No □Not sure
- Extra work involved in taking ML (multilingual) classes □Yes □No □Not sure

2. Do you worry about any of these NOW AT YOUR PRESENT SCHOOL? (If you still attend Tafolla, please answer anyway.)

CHECK ONE BOX FOR EACH

- My personal safety in school □Yes □No
- Safety on the way to or going home from school □Yes □No
- Extra cost of transportation to and from school □Yes □No
- Extra time spent in transportation to and from school □Yes □No
- Friends go to a different school □Yes □No
- It’s hard to make friends here □Yes □No
- Adults here are hard to get along with □Yes □No
- Adults here don’t help me when I need help □Yes □No
- Extra work involved in taking ML classes □Yes □No
3. Who decided that you should APPLY FOR the ML program?

CHECK ONE OR MORE
☐ I made the decision alone
☐ I made the decision along with my family
☐ My family decided
☐ Teacher or counselor at my elementary school wanted me to apply

3a. If the decision to apply wasn’t yours, DID YOU AGREE with the decision?

☐ Yes  ☐ No   [If no] Why not? __________________________

4. Whose decision was it for you to LEAVE the ML program?

CHECK ONE OR MORE
☐ My decision
☐ A decision I made with my family
☐ My family’s decision
☐ I left because of low grades
☐ I left because of attendance and/or disciplinary problems
☐ Other __________________________

4a. If the decision to leave wasn’t yours, DID YOU AGREE with the decision?

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Don’t remember

If you answered no, why didn’t you agree with the decision? __________________________

5. Which of these were true BEFORE YOU STARTED THE ML PROGRAM?

I really wanted to get into the ML program ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
It was really important to my family for me to get into the ML program ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
Making high grades was really important to me ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
My family expected me to make high grades ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
I believed I would enjoy learning the language and culture of another country ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
I believed the ML program had high academic standards ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
I believed my elementary school prepared me for the work I would be expected to do in my ML classes
I could speak a second language already
I could write using a second language already
I thought it would be easy for me to make new friends at Tafolla
I was pretty sure I would fit in OK at Tafolla
I had enough free time for hobbies, goofing off, watching TV, reading, being with friends

6. Which of these were true WHEN YOU LEFT THE ML PROGRAM?

Staying in the ML program was still as important to me when I left as it was when I started in grade 6
My family wanted me to stay in the ML program
I enjoyed studying the language and culture of another country as much as I thought I would
I believed that what I was learning in my ML classes would be useful some day
I thought the teachers in my ML classes were qualified to teach about language and culture
I found the lessons in my ML classes interesting and stimulating
I was satisfied with the grades I made in my ML classes
My family was satisfied with my grades in my ML classes
I thought the ML program's academic standards were high enough
I thought the ML program's academic requirements were too tough
I believed my elementary school prepared me well for the work I did in the ML classes
I could speak a second language
I could speak a third language
I could write using a second language
I could write using a third language
There was a teacher or other adult at Tafolla with whom I had an especially close relationship
It was easy for me to make new friends at Tafolla
I seemed to be fitting in OK at Tafolla
I really wanted to stay at Tafolla
I had enough free time for hobbies, goofing off, watching TV, reading, being with friends
I got to enroll in the language I wanted to study
I was satisfied with the language I was enrolled in
The decision for me to leave was made quickly
I was thinking of transferring to a private school
7. Learning languages seems to be easier for some people than for others. How easy or hard was it for you to learn the language you studied in your ML classes?

☐ Very hard  ☐ Pretty hard  ☐ Pretty easy  ☐ Very easy  ☐ Not sure

8. Compared to languages other ML students take, how hard was the language you were studying?

☐ Very hard  ☐ Pretty hard  ☐ Pretty easy  ☐ Very easy  ☐ Not sure

9. Is there a quiet place for you to study at home?  ☐ Yes  ☐ Sometimes; it depends  ☐ No

9a. Which of these do you have at home? CHECK ANY YOU HAVE

☐ Desk  ☐ Reading lamp  ☐ Typewriter  ☐ Computer
☐ Dictionary  ☐ Encyclopedia  ☐ Atlas  ☐ School supplies
☐ Other

10. Do you think the adults at Tafolla did a good job of these?

CHECK ONE BOX FOR EACH

Providing a safe environment for students  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
Encouraging high academic standards  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
Making learning interesting for students  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
Communicating with parents  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
Rewarding students for honesty and hard work  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
Helping students keep special traditions and values of their culture  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
Helping students learn to become responsible citizens  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
Helping students learn to get along with each other  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
Helping students learn to make decisions and think for themselves  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
Building strong school spirit  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
Helping students to excel in areas of special interest  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
Counseling students who were having problems  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure

11. DID YOU WANT TO STAY in the ML program for any of these reasons?

CHECK ONE BOX FOR EACH

I still wanted to learn the language and culture of another country  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
I wanted to continue in the ML program at Brackenridge High  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
I had many friends in the ML program  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
I had many other friends at Tafolla (not in ML program)  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
I liked Tafolla and wanted to graduate from 8th grade here  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
At the time, quitting the ML program seemed like more trouble than staying in  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
My family wanted me to stay in the ML program  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure
My teachers wanted me to stay in the ML program □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
I didn’t like the school I would attend if I left Tafolla □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
Actually, I wish I were still in the ML program □ Yes □ No □ Not sure

12. Which of these WERE IMPORTANT FACTORS IN THE DECISION for you to leave the ML program?
CHECK ONE BOX FOR EACH
The ML classes required too much work or didn’t interest me □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
It was hard to get along with some students in the ML program □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
It was hard to get along with some non-ML students □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
It was hard to get along with some teachers in the ML program □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
It was hard to get along with some non-ML teachers □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
The athletic teams at my neighborhood school were better □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
I believed my neighborhood school could better prepare me for high school □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
There were activities I wanted to participate in at my neighborhood school □ Yes □ No □ Not sure
Other

13. How many of your close friends from elementary school APPLIED to the ML program?
□ Most □ Many □ A few □ None □ Not sure

14. How many of your close friends STARTED the ML program with you in grade 6?
□ Most □ Many □ A few □ None □ Not sure □ None applied

15. Who do you like to spend time with?
CHECK ONE OR MORE
□ Students from ML program □ Other Tafolla students
□ Kids from my neighborhood □ I like to spend most of my time alone
□ Prefer not to answer

16. Did you have any serious problems with these people at Tafolla?
CHECK ONE OR MORE
□ Students in ML program □ Other students
□ Teachers □ Other adults
□ I haven’t had any serious problems with people □ Prefer not to answer
Other
17. Where does your best friend go to school? CHECK ONE

☐ Tafolla Middle School ☐ Neighborhood middle school
Other ____________________________

18. How long has this person been your friend? CHECK ONE

☐ Since elementary school ☐ Since I started middle school
Other ____________________________

19. Not counting your present school, how many schools have you attended since Kindergarten?

☐ 1 - 2 ☐ 3 - 4 ☐ 5 - 6 ☐ 7 or more ☐ Not sure

20. WHILE YOU WERE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, how involved were you with sports, music lessons, art, Scouts, Campfire, clubs, and church or other activities? CHECK ONE

☐ I was busy with them all the time
☐ I spent a lot of my time doing these things
☐ I did a few things that interested me
☐ I didn’t spend much time in group activities

21. How involved are you NOW with athletics, music and art, Scouts or Campfire, student government, service organizations, clubs, and church or other activities? CHECK ONE

☐ I’m busy with them all the time
☐ I spend a lot of my time doing these things
☐ I do a few things that interest me
☐ I don’t spend much time in group activities

22. Have you been a captain, an officer, or a leader in any organization? CHECK ONE

☐ No, I haven’t held a leadership position.
☐ I am not sure if my position could be classified as a leadership position.
☐ Yes, I have been (or am) a leader.

22a. [If yes] Please describe briefly what you do or did as a leader. _______________________________
23. Middle school students mature at different rates. Some grow faster than others. Some act older than others. How mature were you when you came to Tafolla IN GRADE 6? CHECK ONE

- I'd say I was mature in most areas
- I was mature in some areas and not so mature in others
- I was not too mature at the beginning of grade 6
- Prefer not to answer
- Not sure

24. What languages are spoken in your home? □ English  □ Spanish  □ Other

25. Were you born in another country? □ Yes  □ No  □ Not sure

25a. Were either of your parents born in another country? □ Yes  □ No  □ Not sure

25b. Were any of your grandparents born in another country? □ Yes  □ No  □ Not sure

26. Which adults live at home with you?

CHECK ONE OR MORE

- Mother  ☐ Grandparent  ☐ Other relative
- Father  ☐ Stepparent  ☐ Other adult
- Not sure  ☐ Prefer not to answer

27. What level of education have your parents reached?

CHECK ONE  
Father or male guardian:
- Elementary
- Some high school
- Graduated from high school
- Some college
- College degree
- Graduate degree (Master’s or above)
- Professional (Doctor, lawyer, minister)
- Prefer not to answer
- No father or male guardian
- Not sure

CHECK ONE  
Mother or female guardian:
- Elementary
- Some high school
- Graduated from high school
- Some college
- College degree
- Graduate degree (Master’s or above)
- Professional (Doctor, lawyer, minister)
- Prefer not to answer
- No mother or female guardian
- Not sure
28. What level of education is expected for you?

CHECK ONE

My family expects for me:
☐ Some high school
☐ High school graduation
☐ Some college
☐ College degree
☐ Graduate degree (Master’s or above)
☐ Professional (Doctor, lawyer, minister)
☐ Not sure

I expect for myself:
☐ Some high school
☐ High school graduation
☐ Some college
☐ College degree
☐ Graduate degree (Master’s or above)
☐ Professional (Doctor, lawyer, minister)
☐ Not sure

29. What work do your parents do? EXAMPLE: TEACHES AT TAFOLLA MIDDLE SCHOOL

Father or male guardian: ____________________________________________

Mother or female guardian: _________________________________________

30. What type of career is expected for you? EXAMPLE: TO BE A TV NEWS REPORTER

My family expects for me: ____________________________________________

I expect for myself: _________________________________________________

31. How would you rate your home life?

CHECK ONE

☐ Very happy
☐ Pretty happy
☐ A little difficult
☐ Difficult
☐ Not sure
☐ Prefer not to answer

32. How many hours a week do you usually work or help at home with chores? CHECK ONE

☐ None  ☐ 1 - 9  ☐ 10 - 19  ☐ 20 or more  ☐ Not sure

33. How many brothers, sisters, or other kids live at home with you?

☐ None  ☐ 1 - 3  ☐ 4 - 6  ☐ 7 or more

34. Has an older brother or sister enrolled in the ML program before you? ☐ Yes  ☐ No

[If yes] Did he or she stay in the ML program through grade 8? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

35. Do members of your family attend religious services? ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Prefer not to answer

[If yes] About how often? ☐ 1 - 2 times/year  ☐ 1 - 2 times/month  ☐ 1 - 2 times/week  ☐ Daily
36. Some families are strict about values such as honesty, responsibility, hard work, and fairness. Others are a bit more relaxed. In your opinion, how does your family feel about values such as these? CHECK ONE

☐ Strict  ☐ Neither strict nor relaxed  ☐ Relaxed  ☐ Not sure  ☐ Prefer not to answer

37. Some families observe cultural traditions such as feasts, national holidays, and special celebrations. Other families do not observe them. Are traditions like these important for your family?

CHECK ONE

☐ Yes, they’re important
☐ Neither important nor unimportant
☐ No, they’re not especially important.
☐ Prefer not to answer

38. What was your number one reason for leaving the ML program?

What was your number two reason?

39. Is there anything else you would like to say about the ML program or Tafolla Middle School?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR FILLING OUT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.
PLEASE USE THE RETURN ENVELOPE, OR SEND IT TO:
Kay Thomas, Senior Research Associate
Center for the Study of Education Reform
University of North Texas Box 6394
Denton, TX 76203
APPENDIX B

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

COVER LETTER
TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE
MULTILINGUAL PROGRAM STUDENT ATTRITION SURVEY
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS SCHOOL CHOICE RESEARCH PROJECT

INSTRUCTIONS: PLEASE ANSWER AND RETURN QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE STAMPED ENVELOPE BY TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20. REMEMBER, NO NAMES OF ANY STUDENTS OR TEACHERS WILL BE USED WHEN THE FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY ARE REPORTED. THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP WITH THIS SURVEY.

If you have any questions or concerns about the UNT study or about this questionnaire, please call collect: (817)891-4371.

Student name: ____________________________________________ (Note: Although this student was in your class last year, he may not be in your class this year. Please answer based on what you can remember.)

1. When this student entered the Multilingual Program in grade 6, what kind of motivation did he seem to have at that time? CHECK ONE
   □ He seemed quite determined to fulfill the program's requirements and to meet its expectations.
   □ He seemed fairly intent upon fulfilling the program's requirements and meeting its expectations.
   □ He seemed somewhat tentative, hesitant, uncertain about, or uninterested in, participating in the program.
   □ He seemed not to want to be involved in the program.
   □ Not sure

   Other ____________________________________________________

2. When this student entered the Multilingual Program in grade 6, what kind of support and encouragement did he receive from his family? CHECK ONE
   □ It seemed that his family was very enthusiastic and supportive of his participation in the program.
   □ It seemed that the family was willing to cooperate with the school and assist their son in fulfilling the requirements of the program.
   □ It seemed that the family had some reservations about, or was uninterested in, their son's participation in the program.
   □ It seemed that the family preferred that their son not be involved in the program.
   □ Not sure

   Other ____________________________________________________

3. Middle school students mature at different rates. Some grow faster than others. Some act older than others. In your opinion, how mature was this student when he entered the Multilingual Program in grade 6? CHECK ONE
   □ He seemed pretty mature in most areas.
   □ He seemed pretty mature in some areas and not so mature in others.
   □ He did not seem mature at all.
(Note: In the following questions, please ignore present tense if this student is no longer in your class. Answer on the basis of the student’s performance last year.)

4. How willing is this student to participate in class activities?
   CHECK ONE
   ☐ He is always willing to participate.
   ☐ He is frequently willing to participate.
   ☐ He is rarely willing to participate.
   ☐ He is never willing to participate.
   ☐ Not sure

   Other

5. To what extent does this student prepare for class and complete his assignments?
   CHECK ONE
   ☐ He always prepares for class and does his assignments.
   ☐ He usually prepares for class and does his assignments.
   ☐ He rarely prepares for class or does his assignments.
   ☐ He never prepares for class or does his assignments.
   ☐ Not sure

   Other

6. How would you rate this student’s study skills? CHECK ONE
   ☐ Superior ☐ Adequate ☐ Poor ☐ Not sure

7. How would you rate this student’s ability and/or willingness to engage in critical thinking?
   CHECK ONE
   ☐ Superior ☐ Adequate ☐ Poor ☐ Not sure

8. How would you rate this student’s attitude towards education in general, the school, and/or the Multilingual Program? CHECK ONE
   ☐ Cheerful and cooperative ☐ Indifferent ☐ Hostile ☐ Not sure

9. How involved is this student with athletics, music and art, clubs, student government, service organizations, or other activities? CHECK ONE
   ☐ It seems that he spends a lot of his time doing these things.
   ☐ It seems that he does a few things that interest him.
   ☐ It seems that he isn’t very involved in activities.
   ☐ Not sure

   Other
10. What kind of social adjustment has this student made to middle school? CHECK ONE
- He seems to get along well with people and to have many friends.
- He seems to get along OK with people and to have some friends.
- He seems not to get along too well with people and to have few friends.
- He seems to get along poorly with people and to have no friends.
- Not sure

11. Based on the information you have, do any of these factors make it difficult for this student to stay in the Multilingual Program? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY
- Problems with transportation
- Misses his friends back at his neighborhood school
- Inadequate study skills
- Poor grades
- Problems with other students or fighting
- Poor attendance
- Family problems
- Lack of interest in learning a second language

Other

12. If there is any other information regarding this student that would be relevant to the University of North Texas study, please write it below.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR FILLING OUT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE. IF YOUR RETURN ENVELOPE HAS BEEN MISPLACED, PLEASE MAIL THIS QUESTIONNAIRE TO:

Kay Thomas, Senior Research Associate
Box 6394, University of North Texas
Denton, TX 76203
TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE
MULTILINGUAL PROGRAM STUDENT ATTENTION SURVEY
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS SCHOOL CHOICE RESEARCH PROJECT

INSTRUCTIONS: PLEASE ANSWER AND RETURN QUESTIONNAIRE IN THE STAMPED ENVELOPE BY TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20. REMEMBER, NO NAMES OF ANY STUDENTS OR TEACHERS WILL BE USED WHEN THE FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY ARE REPORTED. THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR HELP WITH THIS SURVEY.

If you have any questions or concerns about the UNT study or about this questionnaire, please call collect: (817)891-4371.

Student name: ___________________________________________ (Note: this student was in your class last year but has withdrawn from the Multilingual Program. Please answer based on what you can remember about this student.)

1. When this student entered the Multilingual Program in grade 6, what kind of motivation did she seem to have at that time? CHECK ONE
   - She seemed quite determined to fulfill the program’s requirements and to meet its expectations.
   - She seemed fairly intent upon fulfilling the program’s requirements and meeting its expectations.
   - She seemed somewhat tentative, hesitant, uncertain about, or uninterested in, participating in the program.
   - She seemed not to want to be involved in the program.
   - Not sure
   Other ___________________________________________

2. When this student entered the Multilingual Program in grade 6, what kind of support and encouragement did she receive from her family? CHECK ONE
   - It seemed that her family was very enthusiastic and supportive of her participation in the program.
   - It seemed that the family was willing to cooperate with the school and assist their daughter in fulfilling the requirements of the program.
   - It seemed that the family had some reservations about, or was uninterested in, their daughter’s participation in the program.
   - It seemed that the family preferred that their daughter not be involved in the program.
   - Not sure
   Other ___________________________________________

3. Middle school students mature at different rates. Some grow faster than others. Some act older than others. In your opinion, how mature was this student when she entered the Multilingual Program in grade 6? CHECK ONE
   - She seemed pretty mature in most areas.
   - She seemed pretty mature in some areas and not so mature in others.
   - She did not seem mature at all.
4. While she was in your class, how willing was this student to participate in class activities?
   CHECK ONE
   □ She was always willing to participate.
   □ She was frequently willing to participate.
   □ She was rarely willing to participate.
   □ She was never willing to participate.
   □ Not sure

   Other ________________________________

5. While she was in your class, to what extent did this student prepare for class and complete her assignments? CHECK ONE
   □ She always prepared for class and did her assignments.
   □ She usually prepared for class and did her assignments.
   □ She rarely prepared for class or did her assignments.
   □ She never prepared for class or did her assignments.
   □ Not sure

   Other ________________________________

6. While she was in your class, how would you rate this student’s study skills? CHECK ONE
   □ Superior □ Adequate □ Poor □ Not sure

7. While she was in your class, how would you rate this student’s ability and/or willingness to engage in critical thinking? CHECK ONE
   □ Superior □ Adequate □ Poor □ Not sure

8. While she was in your class, how would you rate this student’s attitude towards education in general, the school, and/or the Multilingual Program? CHECK ONE
   □ Cheerful and cooperative □ Indifferent □ Hostile □ Not sure

9. While you knew this student, how involved was she with athletics, music and art, clubs, student government, service organizations, or other activities? CHECK ONE
   □ It seemed that she spent a lot of her time doing these things.
   □ It seemed that she did a few things that interested her.
   □ It seemed that she wasn’t very involved in activities.
   □ Not sure

   Other ________________________________

10. While you knew this student, what kind of social adjustment did she make to middle school? CHECK ONE
    □ She seemed to get along well with people and to have many friends.
    □ She seemed to get along OK with people and to have some friends.
    □ She seemed not to get along too well with people and to have few friends.
    □ She seemed to get along poorly with people and to have no friends.
11. Based on the information you have, why do you think this student left the Multilingual Program? CHECK ALL THAT APPLY
   □ Problems with transportation
   □ Missed her friends back at her neighborhood school
   □ Inadequate study skills
   □ Poor grades
   □ Problems with other students or fighting
   □ Poor attendance
   □ Family problems
   □ Lack of interest in learning a second language
   □ Not sure
   Other

12. If there is any other information regarding this student that would be relevant to the University of North Texas study, please write it below.

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR FILLING OUT THIS QUESTIONNAIRE. IF YOUR RETURN ENVELOPE HAS BEEN MISPLACED, PLEASE MAIL THIS QUESTIONNAIRE TO:

Kay Thomas, Senior Research Associate
Box 6394, University of North Texas
Denton, TX 76203
February 16, 1996

Dear Multilingual Teacher:

My name is Kay Thomas and I am part of the UNT research team studying the SAISD Multilingual Program. We may have met during the early phase of the project when our team conducted interviews and observations at Davis. Now the project is nearly finished and we are beginning to publish some of our findings from this fascinating long-term study.

One facet of our research that is still in the data collection phase is an attrition study. In order to study attrition from the Multilingual Program, I have collected information on groups of students -- both those who left the program last year and those who were still in the program at the end of the 1994-95 school year. The information comes from several sources: (1) a questionnaire mailed to students at their homes, (2) permanent student records, (3) interviews with administrators and counselors, and (4) a questionnaire administered to the teachers of Multilingual classes in which these students were enrolled during the 1994-95 school year -- you!

There may be two different versions of the questionnaire attached to this note. One is for students who stayed in the program until the end of last year and who may still be in the program and in your class. The other is for students who left the program before June 1995.

A few students for whom you received questionnaires may have left early last year. They may have been in your class for such a brief time that you may not be able to give meaningful responses on the questionnaire bearing their name. If this is the case, please write me a note on the questionnaire to that effect.

When I surveyed the students, I attached a $2.00 bill to their questionnaire to show my appreciation for their help in this study. Many commented that they were pleased to receive it. I am attaching one for you as well. Because I was a classroom teacher for 14 years, I KNOW how valuable your time is. I only wish I could afford to attach $100.00 bills! In any case, please accept my sincere thanks for your cooperation.

If you have any concerns or comments about this questionnaire, you may be able to find me this Friday working in Mrs. Muñoz's office. If not, please call me collect at (817) 891-4371.

Sincerely,

Kay Thomas, Senior Research Associate
APPENDIX C

STUDENT COVER LETTER

PARENT COVER LETTER

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

TURN-DOWN NOTE
January 3, 1996

Dear [student's name],

My name is Kay Thomas and I am a researcher at the University of North Texas. I am studying the Multilingual Program at Tafolla by surveying students. I have selected your name from the Tafolla school files because you are or used to be in the Multilingual Program.

The parent letter in this packet explains more about this research project. Please show it to your mother or father and feel free to read it yourself.

Attached is a questionnaire and a stamped return envelope. If your parents have no objection, please answer all items and mail it back to me as soon as possible. The $2.00 bill is a token of my appreciation for your help. If your parents will not allow you to fill in the questionnaire, keep the $2.00 bill, but please sign the blue slip and send it to me in the return envelope.

Mr. Almaguer, Superintendent Lam, and members of the SAISD Board of Education know about the University of North Texas study and support it. I have received permission to contact you and to collect information from you. You will not be identified by name when I report the results of this study. What I learn from you and other students will be used to improve the Multilingual Program.

Thank you very much for your help. If you have any problems with the questionnaire, please call me at (817) 891-4371. Make it a collect call if you wish.

Sincerely,

Kay Thomas
Senior Research Associate
January 23, 1996

Dear Parents,

My name is Kay Thomas and I am a graduate student at the University of North Texas. I am conducting a research project for my dissertation. This project is designed to study the reasons students give for staying in or leaving the San Antonio Independent School District Multilingual Program. I request permission to ask your daughter about her experiences in the Multilingual Program.

My findings will inform school officials of the problems families face when their students participate in the Multilingual Program and will assist them in keeping students in the program.

If you do not wish to allow your daughter to participate in this study, she may throw away the questionnaire I sent and keep the $2.00 bill.

There is no personal risk or discomfort involved with this research. You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue your daughter’s participation in this study at any time. I assure you that student names will not be used in any reports from this study.

Any question or problem that arises in connection with your daughter’s participation may be referred to Kay Thomas (817) 891-4371. Hablo español.

Sincerely,

Kay Thomas, Senior Research Associate

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (817) 565-3940.
Dear Parents,

My name is Kay Thomas and I am a graduate student at the University of North Texas. I am conducting a research project for my dissertation. This project is designed to study the reasons students give for staying in or leaving the San Antonio Independent School District Multilingual Program. I request permission to ask your child by mail or by phone about his or her experiences in the multilingual program.

My findings will inform school officials of the problems families face when their students participate in the multilingual program and will assist them in keeping students in the program.

If you wish to allow your son or daughter to participate in this study, please sign below:

I, ____________________________, grant permission for my child, ____________________________, to participate in the research entitled, “Who Leaves and Why: An Examination of Student Attrition from a Selective Public School Thematic Choice Program in San Antonio, Texas.”

I understand that as a participant, my child will answer questions on a mail questionnaire or on the phone. I understand that when the data are reported, real names will not be used.

I understand that there is no personal risk or discomfort directly involved with this research and that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my child’s participation in this study at any time.

Any question or problems that arise in connection with my child’s participation may be referred to Dr. Frank Kemerer (817)565-4800 or Kay Thomas (817)891-4371.

______________________________  ______________________________
Signature                         Witness (Investigator)

______________________________  ______________________________
Date                             Date

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN REVIEWED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (817)565-3940.
Student's name: ___________________________ is not returning a questionnaire for the following reason(s): CHECK ONE OR MORE

☐ Student chooses not to participate in the study.

☐ Parent does not give permission for student to participate in the study.

☐ Student no longer lives in San Antonio Independent School District.

☐ Student is still in the program but was sent a questionnaire that asks why he or she left.

☐ Student has left the program but was sent a questionnaire that asks why he or she stays in.

☐ Other ___________________________
APPENDIX D

STUDENT REMINDER LETTER
January 2, 1996

Dear [student’s name],

The Christmas season is a busy time for the post office, and it’s easy for things to get lost. I’m afraid that may have happened to a survey packet I sent you in mid-December. The packet contained a questionnaire I’m using to study the San Antonio ISD Multilingual Program, a return envelope, letters explaining the research project, and a $2.00 incentive. I hope you received it. If not, please call me collect at (817)891-4371 and I will send you another packet.

The study of the Multilingual Program is important. Research findings will be used to make it easier for students to participate in special school programs in the future. Your input is crucial — you can help my research team learn how and why students choose to participate and how participation in the program impacts their lives.

I will wait a week or two for a response. Then, because the information you can provide for this study is so important, I will follow up by telephone. If you have already filled out and returned the questionnaire, please accept my sincere thanks and my apology for bothering you about it.

If you have any questions or concerns about items on the questionnaire, please do not hesitate to call me, using the number given above.

Sincerely,

Kay Thomas,
Senior Research Associate
REFERENCES


Schnaiberg, L. (1996, August 8). Hispanic immigrants trail other groups, study says. Education Week, 12.


