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# School Refusal Behavior: A Phenomenological Study of Latino/a Children's Experiences

## Abstract

School refusal behavior (SRB) is a subset of absenteeism in which children either altogether refuse to attend school or experience great difficulty remaining in class for the duration of the school day. Child motivated SRB is a growing problem that now affects between 5% and 28% of children and adolescents at some point during their lives. The effects of SRB can extend well beyond the classroom. Long-term, SRB can lead to delinquency and psychiatric, occupational, and marital problems in adulthood. Additionally, children who consistently exhibit SRB are more likely to drop out of school, thereby limiting their career choices and their earning potential.

Though there has been considerable research conducted with school refusing youth, studies examining the impact of environmental and contextual factors on SRB with Caucasian samples have been few and with Latino/a children have been nonexistent. Additionally, the research has shown that a significant number of school refusing youth do not meet criteria for a DSM-IV-TR diagnosis. Therefore, it is imperative that researchers begin to look to external variables to garner an understanding of the factors that create and maintain SRB. The purpose of this study

was to gain a better understanding of the meaning and attributions children make of their school refusing behaviors.

This study utilized a phenomenological design in which ten Latino/a children between the ages of 11 and 13 were interviewed on two separate occasions about their school refusal experiences. The students were asked open-ended questions about their relationships with peers, teachers, and family, as well as different facets of the school environment. All relevant statements from the interviews were categorized into themes in order to discover the essence of the experience.

The interviews revealed each student faced multiple barriers to school attendance. In other words, their school refusal behaviors were impacted by many different factors. The co-researchers' experiences were synthesized, and it was found that the most commonly endorsed factors concerned relationships, and their impact on SRB. Specifically, each child endorsed the quality of peer and teacher relationships as both being factors that heavily influenced his/her unwillingness to attend school. Other major themes that impacted the SRB of most participants were the way families viewed school attendance, children's support systems, relationships with parents, their experience of their schoolwork, and parental involvement. These and other findings highlight the systemic implications that need to address these concerns in order to better serve school refusing youth.

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SCHOOL REFUSAL BEHAVIOR: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF LATINO/A  
CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES

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A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education  
University of Denver

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

---

by

Mary Ashley Angelo, M.S.

August 2011

Advisor: Maria T. Riva, Ph.D.

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Degree Date: August 2011

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## CHAPTER ONE

One of the greatest barriers to learning that children face today is poor attendance in school classrooms (Goldstein, Little, & Akin-Little, 2003). Absenteeism is at a record high with some cities reporting rates upwards of 30% (Goldstein et al., 2003). School refusal behavior (SRB) is a subset of absenteeism in which children either altogether refuse to attend school or experience great difficulty remaining in class for the duration of the school day (Kearney, 2006a). Child motivated SRB is a growing problem that now affects between 5% and 28% of children and adolescents at some point during their lives (Kearney, 2006a).

Very little is known about the intrapersonal and systemic problems unique to ethnic minority youth with SRB. Latino/a children and children of low socioeconomic status may be more likely to exhibit SRB than their white, middle class counterparts (Lyon & Cotler, 2007). However, the research has largely ignored the problems of school refusing Latino/a adolescents (Calderon, 1998).

When SRB continues, predictably, children begin to fall behind in school. It has been estimated that at least half of children exhibiting SRB underachieve academically (King & Bernstein, 2001). Research has consistently shown a positive correlation between attendance and achievement tests, grades, and standardized

tests (Goldstein et al., 2003; Lamdin, 1996; Levanto, 1975). Moos and Moos (1978) reported a -.45 correlation between grades and absentee rate. Chronic SRB also places children at greater risk for dropping out of school. The dropout rate for youth between the ages of 16 and 24 was estimated to be 8.7% in 2008 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008). The rate was even higher for Latino students, 21.4% of whom dropped out of high school in 2008 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008).

A variety of possible causes have been proposed to explain SRB. Externalizing and internalizing behavior problems as well as dysfunctional family dynamics have been hypothesized to play a part in the development of SRB (Kearney, 2001; Kearney & Albano, 2004). In fact, a study by York and Kearney (1993) found that families of school refusing youth had a higher incidence of family conflict than normative controls. Low socioeconomic status (SES) is another factor that has been found to impact school attendance. A multitude of studies have demonstrated that economically disadvantaged children have lower grades and lower attendance rates (Alexander, Entwisle, & Bedinger, 1994; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn, & Smith, 1998; Ram & Hou, 2003). Socioeconomic level also seems to impact the number of years of school a child completes (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Additionally, researchers have pointed to school related factors to explain SRB. Several studies have cited the student/teacher relationship as an important mediating factor in SRB (Bealing, 1990; Corville-Smith, Ryan, Adams & Dalicandro,

1998; Harte, 1994). Specifically, conflict between students and teachers has been found to contribute to SRB (Bealing, 1990; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Harte, 1994).

Although children and adolescents of any age may exhibit SRB, it most commonly affects children between the ages of 10 and 13. Elementary and middle school children who are entering a new school building are also at increased risk for developing SRB due to heightened anxiety about being in a new place (Egger, Costello, & Angold, 2003). Additionally, low SES and ethnic minority students, on average, have higher absentee rates than white, middle class students (Lyon & Cotler, 2007).

The effects of SRB can extend well beyond the classroom. When left unaddressed, the short-term consequences of SRB can include social alienation, legal problems, and family conflict (Kearney, 2001). Long-term, SRB can lead to delinquency and psychiatric, occupational, and marital problems in adulthood (Hibbett & Fogelman, 1990). Additionally, children who consistently exhibit SRB are more likely to drop out of school, thereby limiting their career choices and their earning potential (DeRosier, Kupersmidt, & Patterson, 1994).

Not only does SRB hurt the individual child, but when it occurs en masse it has deleterious effects on the school as well. Teachers become frustrated with high absentee rates and suffer morale problems. Schools with a high percentage of school refusers may even experience a decrease in funding, as certain districts use attendance as a guide to determine how much money each school is allotted (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

## **Statement of the Problem**

Though there has been considerable research conducted with school refusing youth, studies examining the impact of environmental and contextual factors on SRB with Caucasian samples have been few and nonexistent with Latino/a children. The research has shown that a significant number of school refusing youth do not meet criteria for a DSM-IV-TR (APA, 2000) diagnosis. Therefore, it is imperative that researchers begin to look at external variables to garner an understanding of the factors that create and maintain SRB. In order to intervene and effectively treat SRB, it is necessary to understand the meaning and attributions children make of their school refusing behaviors. An initial exploration of Latino children's perceptions of their SRB will aid in laying the foundation for future research.

## **Justification for the Study**

Chronic school absenteeism presents one of the greatest challenges faced by educators of children and adolescents. Though children of all ages and ethnic groups are at risk for chronic absenteeism, there is a growing divide between white students and minorities, with minority students displaying greater levels of nonattendance (Lyon & Cotler, 2007). Persistent school absenteeism has generally been categorized as either 'truancy' or 'school refusal behavior' (Kearney, 2008). The research suggests that absentee minority students are more likely to be labeled "truant" than their white counterparts, and consequently receive punitive rather than the empowering interventions associated with an SRB label (Lyon & Cotler, 2007).



School refusal research historically focused on the types of mental disorders that co-occur with SRB (Bernstein & Garfinkel, 1986; Bools, Foster, Brown, & Berg, 1990; Egger et al., 2003; Kearney & Albano, 2004). Inclusion criteria for such studies typically have required participants to have an anxiety disorder. However, this approach is short sighted, as a great number of school refusing youth have no mental disorder whatsoever (Kearney, 2007). It is important that researchers begin to broaden the lens through which they examine the problem of SRB, considering the role of environmental variables as well as intrapersonal variables.

The SRB literature has virtually ignored the problems of Latino/a students, despite the fact that Latino/a adolescents will soon comprise 25% of the youth in the United States (Kaplan, Turner, & Badger, 2007). There is a need for research that includes low-income Latino samples in order to have a more useful and representative literature (Lyon & Cotler, 2007). Due to the paucity of extant research on absentee Latino/a adolescents, little is known about the systemic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal variables that negatively impact school refusing ethnic minority youth. This study begins to address this gap by examining the connections between academic achievement, perception of the family environment, and perception of the school environment on SRB in Latino/a youth.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study examined the causes of SRB in Latino/a children utilizing a qualitative approach. The study addressed several gaps in the literature. Most notably, the vast majority of SRB studies have drawn convenience samples of

adolescents and children from universities or specialty-based outpatient clinics that tend to be largely middle class and Caucasian. In order to address this deficit, the proposed study drew its sample largely from an after-school program in Colorado comprised of a high population of Latino/a students.

In studies comprised largely of Caucasian participants, maladaptive family functioning has been shown to contribute to SRB in children (Bernstein & Borchardt, 1996; Bernstein, Svigen, & Garfinkel, 1990; Hersov, 1985; Kearney & Silverman, 1995; Waldron et al., 1975). Children with SRB have been found to be more likely to have families that disagree about rules and roles within the family (Bernstein & Borchardt, 1996; Bernstein et al., 1990). It has also been shown that families of children with SRB are more likely to have difficulties communicating their thoughts and feelings clearly with one another (Bernstein & Borchardt, 1996). Additionally, research suggests school refusing children are more likely to come from families that are enmeshed, have higher levels of conflict and are more isolated than other families (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). This dissertation evaluated Latino/a children's perceptions of their family environments on the factors mentioned above.

The research suggests the presence of an inverse relationship between academic achievement and SRB (Kearney, 2001). Studies also have demonstrated that low-SES children with diverse ethnic backgrounds have lower grades and lower attendance rates than their middle class white counterparts (Goldstein et al., 2003).

The dissertation gathered information about each child's assessment of his or her academic competency, the level of difficulty experienced in completing school work, and how these two things impact the child's feelings about school.

School climate is another key factor for school absenteeism. School climate refers to the degree of connectedness a student feels to their school. It also refers to the perceived level of academic and social support felt by the student. Research with mostly suggests that children who have a negative perception of the school environment are more likely to refuse to go to school (Brookmeyer, Fanti, & Henrich, 2006; McNeely, Nonnemeker, & Blum, 2002; Shochet, Dadds, Ham, & Montague, 2006). This dissertation gathered information about each participant's perception of the school environment including his or her relationships with teachers and whether or not each child feels his or her school is a safe place (i.e., free from gang activities, bullies, or discrimination).

### **Review of Methodology**

To date there are no qualitative studies exploring the meaning students make of their school refusal behavior. Due to the fact that the study's goal was to obtain a culturally grounded, deep understanding of the experiences and perspectives that maintain SRB in Latino/a youth, a qualitative approach was selected. A phenomenological approach was chosen in an attempt to understand the meaning Latino/a children make of their SRB, in accordance with the description of phenomenological inquiry offered up by Moustakas (1994). Sue (1999) suggested that phenomenology is particularly well-suited to the study of diverse or rarely studied populations. An in-depth exploration of the perceptions and

experiences of school refusing Latino/a children provided a base for future research on SRB. Additionally, the use of a qualitative method provided rich, comprehensive data and elucidated areas of inquiry that would not be possible using quantitative methods.

**Research questions.** Because this was a qualitative study, the research questions continued to develop and change as the data were collected. The primary method of data collection was semi-structured interviews with the children. The preliminary research questions were:

1. What role does academic achievement play in the development and maintenance of SRB in Latino/a youth?
2. What role does the family environment play in the development and maintenance of SRB in Latino/a youth?
3. What role does the school environment play in the development and maintenance of SRB in Latino/a youth?
  - a. Does the child's relationship with his or her peers affect SRB?
  - b. Does the child's relationship with his or her teacher affect SRB?
  - c. Does the child's feeling that he or she is safe at school impact SRB?

### **Limitations of the Study**

While the proposed study attempted to address important gaps within the literature by providing rich data and descriptions of an important phenomenon, there are also limitations to consider. One limitation was the study's small sample size, which restricted the scope of generalizability. However, the very essence of qualitative research is idiographic and emic, that is, it finds meaning by studying a

small number of participants. Morrow (2005) suggested that the emphasis should be on the qualitative, parallel notion of transferableness as opposed to generalizability. That is, to what degree can a reader apply the study results to his or her own experiences? It was expected that this study's findings would generate themes common to children who have difficulty attending school and would inform intervention and treatment strategies aimed at eliminating SRB in Latino/a youth.

Another limitation of the proposed study was the role of researcher subjectivity. Subjectivity, an unavoidable construct in qualitative research, is present in each stage of a study (Creswell, 2007), as the researcher is the primary instrument (Moustakas, 1994). The qualitative research approach places great value on the researcher's personal experience as long as he or she is able to identify it, discard it during the collection of data, and then use it constructively within the study (Moustakas, 1994). As will be discussed in Chapter 3, I minimized the effects of my biases as the researcher by maintaining a self-reflective journal and engaging in the process of achieving *Epoche*, which is defined as the process by which "investigators set aside their experiences, as much as possible, to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under investigation" (Creswell, 2007, pp. 59-60).

A third potential limitation inherent in the design of the study was the risk that I misinterpreted the meanings of co-researchers' statements. In order to minimize this risk, I reviewed the notes I'd made from the interviews and asked participants for their feedback. I then corrected or clarified any misleading statements in my notes.

## **Definitions of Terms in the Study**

*Co-researcher.* Study participants. In phenomenology research the participants are viewed as partners in research as opposed to subjects (Moustakas, 1994).

*Epoche (Bracketing).* The process of setting aside one's experiences, to the extent possible, in order to gain a fresh perspective of the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 2007).

*Functional Method.* A classification system devised to examine the causes of SRB. Children's school refusal behavior is conceptualized as being maintained by either negative or positive reinforcement. Children with negatively reinforced SRB either miss school in order to avoid things at school that make them anxious or depressed or they miss school in order to avoid feared social situations or evaluation. Children with positively reinforced SRB either miss school in order to gain attention from their parents or peers or to pursue tangible reinforcers outside of school (Kearney, 2008, p. 457).

*Negative Reinforcement.* An increase in the frequency of a behavior that occurs when an aversive stimulus is removed (Skinner, 1938). An example is a child who refuses school in order to avoid a bully. The child's SRB increases due to the removal of the aversive stimulus, the bully.

*Participant Checks.* Checking with the interviewee to ensure that the researcher's interpretations reflect the interviewee's meanings. This is often accomplished by having the interviewee read transcripts from or listen to audiotape from the interview (Moustakas, 1994).

*Phenomenological Study.* A qualitative research design whose aim is to describe the meaning of a group of individuals' common experiences with a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

*Phenomenon.* The primary concept being studied by the researcher; the commonality shared among all the co-researchers chosen for the study (Moustakas, 1994).

*Positive Reinforcement.* An increase in the frequency of a behavior that occurs when a stimulus is added (Skinner, 1938). An example is a child who refuses school in order to spend time with his parent who must now stay home with him. The child's SRB increases due to the addition of the stimulus, parental attention.

*Problematic Absenteeism.* An umbrella term that covers truancy, school withdrawal, and School Refusal Behavior (SRB) (Kearney, 2003).

*School Phobia.* Early definition of SRB as separation anxiety displaced onto the school setting in such a way that the child fears going to school instead of being separated from the mother (Johnson, Falstein, Szurek, & Svendsen, 1941).

*School Refusal Behavior.* "Child-motivated refusal to attend school or to remain in classes for an entire day" (Kearney, 2006b, p. 685). This definition also encompasses children who have difficulty in attending school (refuse to go on a regular basis but are forced to go anyway).

*School Withdrawal.* A series of unexcused absences caused by a parent's decision to keep the child at home to help a parent with psychopathology, to conceal abuse, for economic reasons, or other reasons (Kearney, 2004).

*Truancy.* An unexcused, illegal absence from school that occurs without parental knowledge and is not rooted in anxiety, but rather relates to delinquent activity (Goldstein, et al., 2003).

### **Chapter Summary**

School refusal behavior (SRB) is a growing problem that affects school aged children, impacting their ability to succeed in school and placing them at greater risk for dropping out of school (Goldstein, Little, & Akin-Little, 2003). A multitude of causes have been proposed to explain SRB including behavior problems, family dynamics, socioeconomic status, and school related factors (Bealing, 1990; Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Kearney & Albano, 2004; Ram & Hou, 2003; York & Kearney, 1993). Research suggests Latino/a children may be at greater risk for developing SRB (Lyon & Cotler, 2007). However, little is known about the systemic and interpersonal problems unique to minority youth with SRB (Calderon, 1998). This dissertation addressed several gaps in the literature by examining the relationship between SRB and perception of the school environment, academic achievement, and family functioning in a sample of Latino/a middle school students.

The next chapter will more deeply review the relevant research on school refusal behavior (SRB). SRB related definitions and labels will be described. Next, the history of SRB will be reviewed including form-based and function-based classifications. An analysis of the factors related to SRB and examination of key studies will be next. External and internal factors related to SRB will then be described. Attention will then be given to the relationship between SRB and truancy.



Finally, the chapter will conclude by briefly discussing SRB in diverse students and then highlighting gaps in the literature.

## Chapter Two

### Literature Review

One of the greatest problems facing educators of school-aged children is the increasing numbers of students who experience extreme difficulty in attending or who altogether refuse to attend school (Kearney, 1993). School absenteeism and dropout rates have reached frightening proportions. The most recent estimate by the National Center for Education Statistics (2008) cited the dropout rate as 8.7%. School nonattendance rates have been reported to reach upwards to 28% on some days (Kearney, 2001).

Hansen, Sanders, Massaro, and Last (1998) have applied the term *school refusal behavior* (SRB) to all forms of problematic absenteeism including school phobia, truancy, and separation anxiety. However, consensus has yet to be reached regarding a universal definition for SRB. Any school-aged child can exhibit SRB, but students between the ages of 10 and 13 are most likely to be affected, as are children “who are entering a school building for the first time, especially elementary and middle school” (Kearney, 2006b, pp. 685-686).

Though a paucity of literature exists regarding ethnic differences among school refusers, research has demonstrated that Latino children exhibit significantly elevated dropout rates in comparison with children of other ethnic groups (Franklin & Soto, 2002; Egger, Costello, & Angold, 2003), dropping out of school at a rate three times greater

than that of their white and African American counterparts. School practices such as low expectations, differential treatment, and poor communication with parents regarding student progress have been hypothesized to explain this disparity (Fennelly, Mulkeen, & Giusti, 1998). Additionally, research suggests a correlation between dislike of school and perception of low teacher support and high family stress (Carlson, Uppal, & Prosser, 2000). Latino children's academic success has been also tied to parental attitudes; Parents who value education tend to promote positive school and social experiences (Elder, 2002).

In terms of problematic absenteeism, a growing chasm exists between Caucasian and ethnic minority students, with minority students being vastly over-represented in truancy cases (Lyon & Cotler, 2007). Low-SES and minority students are far less likely to receive treatment for anxiety and other psychological problems and far more likely to be labeled as truant, thus placing them at risk for punitive rather than empowering interventions (Lyon & Cotler, 2007).

The importance of understanding and treating SRB cannot be overstated. Children with high rates of nonattendance are apt to experience a decline in their grades, alienation from their peers, conflict within their families, and legal difficulties (Kearney, 2001). The problems associated with absenteeism are amplified for low-SES and minority students, who, on average, accumulate more unexcused absences than their middle class, white counterparts. Low-SES and minority students who are chronically absent also are more likely to have inappropriate truancy designations. Many of these children who are labeled

“truant” are actually anxious school refusers who fail to receive proper assessment and treatment for their problems (Lyon & Cotler, 2007).

The consequences of chronic absenteeism can extend into adulthood. Such consequences include dropping out of school and subsequent difficulty maintaining employment, incarceration in juvenile detention centers, and social difficulties (Kearney, 2003; Kearney, 2006a). It has been posited that high rates of nonattendance can also create “permanent intellectual damage” (Goldstein et al., 2003, p. 128) and later marital problems (Kearney, 2006a). School nonattendance carries with it serious mental and physical health risks and is considered a “key risk factor” for unsafe sex, accidental injury, teenage pregnancy, violence, drug abuse, and suicidality (Kearney, 2008).

Some problems related to school nonattendance are also psychiatric in nature. In addition to stunting a child’s long-term economic and social development (King & Bernstein, 2001), researchers have found that over a 10-year follow-up, at least 30% of school refusers still met diagnostic criteria for a psychiatric disorder (Kearney, 2008). Kearney also found that many of the school refusing children diagnosed with separation anxiety disorder carried the disorder into adulthood (Kearney, 2008).

School nonattendance not only hurts the absentee child, but also has deleterious effects on families, schools, and communities. Parents must either miss work to stay home with their absentee children or leave them unattended and at risk for delinquency. Children who are chronically absent produce low scores on standardized tests. Schools with high rates of absenteeism may even be denied adequate funding, as monies allotted are based upon the average number of children present (Lyon & Cotler, 2007). SRB

places undue stress on parents and school personnel (King & Berstein, 2001) and creates frustration and morale problems among teachers (Goldstein et al., 2003).

### **Overview of Literature**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of research germane to the topic of SRB. The issue of school nonattendance is comprised of several components. The first part of the review addresses the many competing definitions, labels, symptoms, and diagnoses of SRB. The second part discusses the history of SRB research, including the form-based and function-based models. The next section focuses on psychological and other variables related to SRB. Fourth, the review discusses the difference between SRB and pure truancy and how this distinction affects SRB research and application, especially in relation to low-SES and minority populations. The fifth section highlights the gaps in and shortcomings of the extant SRB research and suggests areas that warrant additional study. The last section discusses the presence of SRB in diverse students and draws attention to the lack of SRB research regarding low-SES and minority populations in general, and Latino students in particular.

### **SRB Related Definitions and Labels**

The number of definitions relating to SRB, and the general ambiguity and lack of consensus regarding these definitions makes it exceptionally challenging to assess school-refusing populations. Further complicating research on SRB is the overlap between various categories of school refusal and truancy, as well as overlap and confusion relating to various forms of anxiety disorders (Lyon & Cotler, 2007).

“Problematic absenteeism” is an umbrella term that covers truancy, school withdrawal, and SRB. Problematic absenteeism is correlated with panic disorder, social anxiety disorder (SoAD), generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), conduct disorder (CD), and other psychological diagnoses such as depression and disruptive behavior disorder. In fact, the DSM-IV-TR considers problematic absenteeism to be a symptom of CD and also of separation anxiety disorder (SAD). Conversely, problematic absenteeism can exist without the presence of any such psychological disorder (Kearney, 2003). Given the wide overlap and confusion among researchers, it seems wise to select some standard definitions related to SRB.

“School refusal behavior” has several definitions. The most recent and most comprehensive definition was constructed by Doobay (2008) who characterized SRB as having seven parts: (a) school refusal or extreme difficulty remaining in the classroom all day, (b) subsequent emotional distress about being in school which leads to (c) excessive school absences that (d) the parents are aware of. The child (e) becomes visibly upset when asked to return to school that may present as tantrums, somatic symptoms, refusal to get out of bed, or excessive fearfulness. Finally, (f) there is an absence of antisocial behaviors (Doobay, 2008). Kearney’s (2006b) definition of SRB is one that “encompasses all subsets of problematic absenteeism, such as truancy, school phobia, and separation anxiety” (p. 685). This definition of SRB encompasses a spectrum of behavior, from “substantial distress while attending school” to “severe misbehaviors in the morning in an attempt to miss school,” to “chronic tardiness,” to “skipping certain classes or periods of school” to “lengthy absences from school” (Kearney, 2006b, p.

686). Kearney (2008) later defined SRB as a set of inexcusable absences where a child refuses to attend school, is tardy, or refuses to remain in school for the entire day. This definition of SRB is usually linked to an anxiety disorder, such as SAD, SoAD, or GAD. Likewise, King and Bernstein (2001) define SRB as a “difficulty attending school that is associated with emotional distress, especially anxiety and depression” (p. 197).

There are two additional types of unexcused absences, apart from those associated with SRB. School withdrawal is an unexcused absence in which the child’s parents make the decision to keep the child at home. The purpose may be related to parental finances, domestic violence, or based on fear that the child will be bullied or abducted by the non-custodial parent (Kearney, 2008). In contrast to cases of school withdrawal in which the parents are aware of the child’s absence, truancy is an unexcused absence that occurs without the parents’ knowledge. In the case of truancy, the absence is illegal and not anxiety-based (Kearney, 2008). From a purely legal perspective, truancy is “a persistent and unjustifiable pattern of absence from school” and generally relates to “anti-social or delinquent activity” (Goldstein et al., 2003, p. 132).

In order to achieve consensus across various fields – legal, psychological, sociological, and medical – a common definition of SRB is required. To date, unfortunately, such a consensus has yet to be established. This chapter will discuss SRB using Kearney’s (2006b) definition of “child-motivated refusal to attend school or to remain in classes for an entire day” (p. 685). This definition also encompasses children who have difficulty in attending school (refuse to go on a regular basis but are forced to go anyway).

## **History of SRB**

**Form based classifications.** Psychiatrists, psychologists, and educators have researched absenteeism and SRB for over a century. Although the characteristics of SRB have been closely studied for decades, researchers have been unable to agree on a single, optimal method for organizing and classifying the population of individuals who exhibit SRB (Kearney, 2007). Early research conceptualized SRB as separation anxiety displaced onto the school setting, thus resulting in “school phobia” (Johnson, Falstein, Szurek, & Svendsen, 1941). Throughout the 1930s, various studies identified children who were anxious and/or depressed in addition to being truant (Broadwin, 1932; Lippman, 1936; Partridge, 1939). These studies presumed the existence of a “variant of truancy arising from fear rather than delinquency” (Egger, Costello, & Angold, 2003, p. 797). Early attempts to study SRB classified subgroups by etiology such as anxiety (school refusal), parental ignorance (truancy), fear of school-based stimuli (school phobia), or enmeshment (separation anxiety) (Kearney, 2001). This categorical approach was problematic because the categories did not encompass the entire school refusing population and because the system was devoid of meaningful assessment and effective treatment strategies (Kearney, 2007).

Later SRB taxonomies became more empirically based, focusing primarily on the numerous forms of clinical symptoms. This research into SRB was primarily diagnostic (Bernstein & Garfinkel, 1986) or statistical (Bools, Foster, Brown, & Berg, 1990) in its approach. These studies yielded mixed results and examined only anxiety-based SRB. Within the population of anxiety-based school refusers included in these studies were



children who met criteria for multiple diagnoses including internalizing disorders, externalizing disorders, or some combination of both (Egger et al., 2003; Kearney & Albano, 2004). In contrast, some researchers found large numbers of school refusing children with no mental disorder (Kearney, 2007). The statistical approaches were of no greater assistance because of the substantial overlap in symptoms between the categories of SRB and truancy (Bools et al., 1990).

**Function based classification.** Rather than using the flawed form-based research techniques of his predecessors, Kearney developed a “functional method” to examine the causes of SRB (Kearney, 2008). The functional method assesses negatively reinforced SRB, which manifest as internalizing symptoms, and positively reinforced SRB, which manifest as externalizing symptoms (Kearney, 2008). The two negatively reinforced behaviors are “avoidance of school-related stimuli that provoke...general anxiety and depression” and “escape from aversive social and/or evaluative situations at school” (Kearney, 2008, p. 457). The first function, “avoidance of school-related stimuli,” is commonly associated with generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), somatic complaints, tardiness, “and constant pleas for non-attendance” (Kearney, 2008, p. 457). Youths attempt to avoid key stimuli such as peers, teachers, the cafeteria, the school bus, the classroom, and the transitions that occur between classes (Kearney, 2006). The second function, “escape from social/and or evaluative situations,” is commonly associated with GAD and social anxiety disorder (SoAD) (Kearney, 2008, p. 457). Examples of key situations that youths attempt to avoid include conversing or otherwise interacting with

classmates and teachers, giving class presentations, and performing on the athletic field (Kearney, 2006).

In addition to SRB that is maintained by negative reinforcement, Kearney identified positive reinforcers that may perpetuate SRB. The two positively reinforced behaviors are “pursuit of attention from significant others,” which is associated with separation anxiety disorder (SAD) and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), and the “pursuit of tangible reinforcers outside the school setting” which is analogous to pure truancy (Kearney, 2008, pp. 457-458). The first function, “pursuit of attention from significant others,” refers to the child’s desire to stay home or go to work with his/her parents (Kearney, 2006b, p. 686). The second function, “pursuing tangible reinforcers outside of school,” includes spending time with friends, watching television, sleeping in, using substances, and delinquent behavior (Kearney, 2006b, p.686).

### **External and Internal Factors Related to SRB**

In addition to examining the reinforcers that motivate children to refuse school, SRB can be conceptualized as involving a complex interplay of external or environmental (non-psychological) and internal (psychological) factors. Although approximately half of school refusing adolescents meet criteria for a psychiatric disorder in adulthood (Kearney, 2006), external variables often play a key role in SRB. Children and adolescents may refuse to attend school for a combination of reasons (Kearney, 2006). Non-psychological factors include parental education level, family homelessness or poverty, teenage pregnancy, school violence, family cohesion or conflict, “school climate and connectedness” (i.e., how students feel about their school, the degree of support they

receive for academic, social, and other needs, and/or the presence of extracurricular activities), and parental involvement in the child's life (Kearney, 2008, p. 459). Other external factors – the physical school facility, gang activity, peer pressure, and even illegal presence within the United States – must be ruled out before a researcher focuses on psychological variables (Lyon & Cotler, 2007). Somatic complaints and medical conditions commonly associated with SRB – including asthma, diarrhea, irritable bowel syndrome, fatigue, headache, nausea, recurrent pain, and sleep problems – must be examined, also, to ensure the school-refusing child does not have a physical malady (Kearney, 2006b).

Once external factors are eliminated as possible causes of SRB, the next step is to consider potential internal causes. Psychiatric disorders commonly found among school refusing youth include SAD (22.4%), GAD (10.5%), ODD (8.4%), major depression (4.9%), specific phobia (4.2%), SoAD (3.5%), conduct disorder (CD) (2.8%), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (1.4%), panic disorder (1.4%), enuresis (0.7%), and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (0.7%) (Kearney, 2006).

### **SRB vs. Truancy**

As is apparent from the description of definitions and history, “the categories of school refusal and truancy are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive and overlap considerably” (Lyon & Cotler, 2007, p. 559). The actual symptoms associated with SRB and truancy are also prone to overlap (Kearney, 2008). Perhaps the best distinction between SRB and truancy was made by Goldstein, Little, and Akin-Little (2003), who defined truancy as an absence from school that correlates with “a larger class of antisocial

or delinquent activity,” in contrast to SRB which was described as an absence from school that is “associated with affective states (*e.g.*, anxiety) without coexisting antisocial behavior” (p. 132). Goldstein et al. (2003) determined youth who suffer from SRB tend to stay at home on the days they miss school as opposed to truant students who are likely to participate in such activities as vandalism, stealing, fire setting, and substance use outside of the home. Additionally, truant students display high rates of fighting, disruptive classroom behavior, running away, cruelty towards animals and academic difficulties, and are more likely to have truant siblings (Goldstein et al., 2003). Youths who suffer from SRB rather than truancy experience disruptions in school attendance caused by “anxiety or phobic responses” (Goldstein et al., 2003, p. 132). Unlike purely truant students, those students who exhibit SRB tend to behave appropriately in class, despite experiencing anxious or phobic symptoms. School refusers also differ from truant students in that they engage in little to no antisocial behavior, are invested in making good grades, have parents who are cognizant of their absences, and are more satisfied with their teachers (Goldstein et al., 2003).

In 2003, Egger and colleagues conducted one of the largest studies of SRB to assess the relationships between DSM-IV-TR disorders and anxious school refusal behavior or truancy (Egger, Costello, & Angold, 2003). The researchers categorized school refusing children as “anxious school refusers,” “truants,” or “mixed school refusers.” Anxious school refusers were defined as children who were unable to tolerate school due to intense anxiety. Truants were defined as children whose nonattendance was not associated with anxiety and occurred without permission from parents or school officials.

Mixed school refusers were children who met criteria for both anxious school refusal and truancy over a 3-month period. Pure anxious school refusers were defined as children who did not endorse any truant behavior; pure truants did not endorse any anxious behavior. Pure truancy and mixed school refusal were correlated with CD and ODD, and pure anxious school refusal was correlated with depression and SAD. Mixed school refusers had the highest incidence of psychiatric disorders with 88.2% meeting criteria for at least one disorder, as compared to approximately 25% of pure truant and pure anxious refusers (Egger et al., 2003).

Egger et al. also examined the external variables that impacted subjects' SRB (2003). They found that children with mixed and pure anxious presentations were more likely than pure truants to feel their school was dangerous. One third of these children were teased and/or bullied by their peers. Children in the mixed and pure anxious categories also experienced difficulty in making and keeping friends. Conversely, children in the pure truant category did not experience any of these difficulties. The researchers also identified an association between problematic social and family environments and SRB in mixed school refusers. Half of these children lived in poverty, 40% had relocated over four times in the past 5 years, 40% had a parent that was unemployed, 25% witnessed frequent violent arguments between parents, and 75% had a parent with mental illness (Egger et al., 2003).

It is apparent that the distinction between SRB and truancy is sometimes blurred. It is also apparent that a truancy label "evokes punitive connotations" (Lyon & Cotler, 2007, p. 554). Low-SES, urban children with diverse ethnic backgrounds have more

unexcused absences (Lyon & Cotler, 2007), lower attendance rates, and lower grades (Goldstein et al., 2003) than their white middle class counterparts. Additionally, most low-SES students are not adequately assessed or treated for psychological services, and are thus inappropriately labeled “truant” by inexperienced or overworked school officials. Children with truant designations are more likely to receive punishment from the legal system than to be slotted for therapeutic interventions that would make them feel empowered (Lyon & Cotler, 2007). Lyon and Cotler (2007) pointed out that African-American children were vastly over-represented in truancy cases. They comprised 26% of the petitioned cases, far exceeding the overall percentage of school-aged African-American children, thus illustrating the problematic application of the truancy label to low-SES and/or minority youths. Furthermore, the very structure of the mental health system perpetuates the SRB/truancy distinction because medical insurance plans do not cover an SRB diagnosis, effectively eliminating the possibility of therapy (Lyon & Cotler, 2007). The SRB/truancy distinction creates an inescapable predicament for low-SES and minority youth who are most likely to experience chronic absenteeism and least likely to benefit from the existing mental health system (Lyon & Cotler, 2007).

### **Key SRB Studies**

Numerous research studies into SRB have been conducted since the 1930s. In the interest of brevity, this review will only discuss studies from the 1990s through present. In a 1990 study, Last and Strauss assessed 63 youth aged 7-17 with anxiety-based SRB. All of the participants previously had been referred to outpatient anxiety disorder clinics. The study found that many of them had multiple diagnoses, with the most common

comorbid diagnosis being overanxious disorder. The most common primary diagnoses were SAD (38%), social phobia (30%), and simple phobia (22%). Less common diagnoses included PTSD and panic disorder (Last & Strauss, 1990). The overall results suggested the existence of two types of school refusers – phobic, which could be categorized into two subtypes (social phobic and simple phobic) – and separation anxious (Last & Strauss, 1990). The study also determined that mothers of separation anxious school refusing children were the most likely to have experienced school refusal themselves (King et al., 2001). Similarly, Berg et. al. (1993) assessed 80 school-refusing youth, aged 13 – 15, to determine whether or not SRB was consistently linked to a psychiatric diagnosis, and if so, which one(s). Of these youth, 50% had no psychiatric disorder, one-third had disruptive behavior disorder, and one-fifth had an anxiety or mood disorder. Interestingly, 10% of the control group youths who did not exhibit SRB also had a DSM-III diagnosis (Berg et al., 1993). Berg and his colleagues classified the youths' absenteeism as truancy, SRB, or neither (Berg et al., 1993).

A later study by Martin, Cabrol, Bouvard, Lepine, and Mouren-Semeoni (1999) built on the Last and Strauss (1990) study by examining possible psychiatric diagnoses in parents of children in two subgroups of SRB (phobic and separation anxious). They determined that the parents of separation anxious school refusers were more likely to have panic disorder and/or agoraphobia, whereas the parents of phobic school refusers were more likely to have a simple phobia and/or a social phobia (Martin et al., 1999). This suggests that problematic family functioning contributes to the development of some

SRB, but few studies evaluate family functioning in the course of treating youth with SRB (Martin et al., 1999).

One study that did assess family functioning was conducted by Bernstein, Svingen, and Garfinkel (1990). Bernstein et al. (1990) used the FAM measure to assess 76 school refusal families in four different diagnostic groups: (a) anxiety disorders only, (b) depressive disorders only, (c) comorbid anxiety and depressive disorders, and (d) no disorder. The FAM Role Performance and Values and Norms subscale identified family functioning difficulties that suggested disagreement among family members regarding roles within the family (Bernstein et al., 1990). Scores on the Values and Norms subscale further indicated inconsistencies in family rules and discrepancies between family and cultural norms (Bernstein et al., 1990). Interestingly, in families where the school-refusing child met only the criteria for an anxiety disorder, family functionality was observed to meet near-normal levels (Bernstein et al., 1990).

Later, Bernstein and Borchardt (1996) also relied on the FAM to assess 134 families with school-refusing children. These authors evaluated the relationship between family constellation (i.e., intact families versus families with a single parent, typically the mother) and family functioning. The study found that single-parent families scored lower on the FAM's role performance and communication sections, which suggested unclear familial communication (Bernstein & Borchardt, 1996). Family functioning was also the subject of Kearney and Silverman's (1995) study, which used the FES to assess 64 parents of children with SRB. This study is unique in that it enumerates five family subtypes: conflictive, enmeshed, detached, isolated, and healthy. The authors then



presented data from FES subscales in relation to the five subtypes (e.g., the individual subscale with the enmeshed subtype and the conflict subscale with the conflictive subtype). Kearney and Silverman (1995) found that families with a school refusing child scored lower than the norm on the FES Independence subscale, thus identifying a link between SRB and SAD. Families with school refusing children also had higher than normal scores on the Conflict subscale and the subscales corresponding to an isolated family subtype (Kearney & Silverman, 1995).

King et al. (1998) examined anxiety-based school refusing behavior in a sample of 34 children, 5 to 15 years old. Ten of the children had been totally absent from school, 17 had attended intermittently or for partial days, and 7 attended school but were highly anxious and resistant. Eighty-five percent of the children suffered from an anxiety or phobic disorder. Subjects were randomly assigned for four weeks to either a manualized CBT or waitlist control. Treatment consisted of teacher and parent training in management of child behavior as well as individual child therapy. Results showed that almost all of the children in the CBT group increased their school attendance to at least 90%. Treated children reported feeling less fear, depression, and anxiety than the control group, as well as increased confidence that they could cope with anxiety-provoking situations. At 3 to 5 year follow up, 13 of the 17 children in the treatment group were attending school regularly and had had no further school refusing episodes (King et al., 2001).

Similar to King and Bernstein (1998), Last, Hanse, and Franco (1998) examined 56 anxiety-based school refusers aged 6 to 17 and randomly assigned the youths to twelve

weekly sessions of cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) or educational support therapy. The study found no significant differences between CBT and educational therapy. Both groups showed improvements on measures relating to anxiety and school attendance. In fact, at the study's end, 65% of the CBT group and 50% of the educational therapy group no longer met the criteria for an anxiety disorder. However, 35% percent of the CBT subjects did not achieve the desired 95% attendance rate and 60% had difficulty re-entering school the next year. The authors explained this finding by pointing out that some children require more than 12 weeks of treatment to improve.

Other studies also evaluated the link between SRB and psychological disorders. McShane, Walter, and Rey (2001) examined 93 inpatient and 58 outpatient youths, aged 10 – 17, with SRB. They found that 30% of inpatient and 15% of outpatient youths had mood disorders, 28% of inpatient and 14.5% of outpatient youths had anxiety disorders, and 18.5% of inpatient and 11.5% of outpatient youths had disruptive behavior disorder. Among all youths, both inpatient and outpatient, nearly 32% were affected by major depression and 22.5% had SAD.

In addition to finding correlations between SRB and specific psychiatric diagnoses, the researchers suggested a possible link between learning difficulties and SRB. Thirty-one percent of the study subjects reported that academic difficulties were associated with the onset of SRB, despite the fact that only 4.6% of the subjects had a confirmed learning disability (LD). This finding suggests the possibility that poor academic functioning in the absence of a diagnosed LD, impacts SRB. It might be extrapolated that being diagnosed with a LD validates children's difficulties and allows them to receive treatment

to improve academic performance, which consequently reduces SRB. The prevalence of parental illness, both mental and physical, was also examined in relation to SRB. Fifty-three percent of school refusing youth had a mother with a psychiatric disorder and 34% had a father with a psychiatric disorder. Thirty-seven percent of the youth reported that their parents suffered from a physical ailment (McShane, Walter, & Rey, 2001).

### **Diverse Students and SRB**

The most striking limitation of the SRB literature is the “lack of ethnic, racial, and economic diversity in school refusal studies” (Lyon & Cotler, 2007, p. 556). Most SRB research has been drawn from university or specialty-based outpatient clinic samples that are not representative of the school-refusing population as a whole. Given the differences in culture, low-SES and ethnic minority families may vary considerably from families studied in traditional SRB research who have been mostly middle class and Caucasian (Taylor, 1996). Even studies that include ethnic minorities have not had samples that are representative of the country’s racial make-up. Kearney (2008), the leading researcher in the school refusal field recently published a study whose sample was 67.6% European American, 5.4% Hispanic, 3.2% African American, 1.8% “other,” and 22.1% unreported. Likewise, the largest study to date on SRB also failed to produce a representative sample (Egger et al., 2003). This study by Egger et al. (2003) had a racial breakdown of 70% Caucasian, 22.4% Native American, 6% African-American, and 0.5% Hispanic (Egger et al., 2003). These two studies (Egger et al., 2003; Kearney, 2007) and countless others (Kearney, 2002; Kearney, 2006; Kearney & Albano, 2004; King et al., 1998; King et al., 2001; Last et al., 1998; Martin et al., 1998, McShane et al., 2001) had under-represented

a sample of diverse students, and Latino students in particular. As of 2006, the racial breakdown of the United States was 74% Caucasian, 14.8% Hispanic (Latino), 13.4% African-American, 4.4% Asian, and 0.68% Native American (US Census Bureau, 2006). Thus, “although low-socioeconomic-status urban children with diverse ethnic backgrounds consistently demonstrate some of the worst attendance records...school refusal research has excluded these populations” (Lyon & Cotler, 2007, p. 555).

There is a great need for SRB research that focuses on ethnic minority children and addresses problems specific to minority families. Low-SES and ethnic minority populations often distrust the school system and subsequently avoid interaction with teachers and other school staff because of negative past experiences with systems that have discriminated against them (Ogbu, 1994). Another possible explanation for the lack of interface between minority parents and the school system has been posited by Ogbu (2004), who observed the presence of an active “oppositional culture” within the African American community which rejects such activities as academic achievement that it considers to be “white.” Whatever the reason, the lack of communication between schools and parents can delay the identification and treatment of SRB. Such children are less likely to receive appropriate referrals for psychiatric treatment and consequently miss out on the chance to benefit from a multidisciplinary, collaborative approach between school personnel and mental health professionals designed to increase attendance (Ogbu, 2004).

Research has failed to thoroughly examine the contextual factors that affect SRB such as family environment and relationships with peers and teachers when evaluating

minority children (Lyon & Cotler, 2007). There has been a lack of attention paid to the cultural differences in family structure, values, and behavior when assessing low-SES and minority students (Taylor, 1996). Specifically, there is a need for research that examines the family dynamics and school environments of these minority populations.

### **Barriers to Latino/a Educational Success**

Latinos exhibit the highest rates of high school drop-out, the lowest rates of college enrollment, and the lowest overall educational attainment of all the major ethnic and racial groups (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). However, among Latinos who graduate high school, proportionate enrollment in college is commensurate with that of non-Latino Whites (Lowell & Suro, 2002). For these reasons, it is important to garner an understanding of the barriers that prevent the academic success of capable students.

**Collectivism vs. Individualism.** A primary difference between the dominant culture of the United States and the culture of many immigrants to the United States, including Latinos, is that the dominant culture prioritizes the needs of the individual over the group (individualism), whereas Latino culture prioritizes the needs of the group over the individual (collectivism) (Rothstein-Fisch, Trumbull, & Garcia, 2009). These different theoretical frameworks create differing communication norms, social roles, child-rearing goals, and concepts of schooling, learning, and development (Greenfield, Suzuki, & Rothstein-Fisch, 2006). For instance, research has shown that immigrant Latino families with a middle school aged child take a very different approach in solving home-school problems than their child's (majority culture) teacher. These collectivistic families tend to place more value on sharing and helping than on individual autonomy and personal

choice. Teachers, on the other hand, are more likely to place a higher value on individual autonomy and personal choice than on sharing and helping. The children, caught between these two worlds, tend to vacillate between the collectivistic values of their families and the individualistic values of their teachers (Raeff, Greenfield, & Quiroz, 2000).

Consequently, in order for members of the dominant culture to work effectively and compassionately with Latino/a children and their families, it is important to be knowledgeable about the differences and similarities between individualism and collectivism.

Research conducted by Greenfield, Quiroz, & Raeff (2000) with immigrant Latino families and their child's teacher supports this contention. They found that conflicts between individualist and collectivist principles can create tension when one or both parties are ignorant or insensitive to the other's value system. Greenfield and colleagues (2000) found the following areas of conflict, from the perspective of the teacher versus the parent: 1) teacher's focus on individual child's achievement while parent's focus is on family as a whole, 2) teacher praise for student's accomplishments as an individual versus the parents who will encourage contributions to group success or for behavioral improvement, 3) teacher's focus on building cognitive skills compared to parents' focus on building social skills, 4) teachers who encourage oral expression compared to parents who encourage quiet listening to show respect for authority, and 5) teacher's expectation that parents will teach at home in contrast to parents who expect teachers to take responsibility for all the teaching.

**Language.** Latino families often face tremendous difficulty in navigating the school system, lacking an understanding of teachers' and administrators' expectations (Bohon, MacPherson, & Atilas, 2005). For parents who struggle with the English language, these difficulties are exacerbated. Teachers are frequently unable to inform parents about problems such as truancy because of a flawed notification system. Such messages are generally relayed to parents through the child. Thus, parents who rely on their children as translators may not get the information they need (Bohon et al., 2005).

Latino parents also tend to be less involved in school-related activities than non-Latino parents. For this reason, school officials are apt to mistakenly conclude that they are less interested in their children's education than other parents are. However, research suggests that parents are less involved because they find communication with administrators and teachers to be difficult and embarrassing due to language difficulties, transportation and child care difficulties (Bohon et al., 2005; Valencia & Black, 2002).

Latino children who struggle with English face their own unique challenges. They are unable to succeed without the proper language acquisition assistance. In other words, many schools do not provide instruction enough to help children become proficient in English. For example, many school districts only offer such assistance to the children of migrant workers. Consequently, non-migrant children lack access to the basic courses they need to succeed in the school system (Bohon et al., 2005).

Yet another language-related problem faced by Latino students is the problem of inadequate bicultural and bilingual staffing in the schools. This stems from a lack of

qualified personnel as well as a lack of resources allocated for this need. Having more bicultural and bilingual educators within the schools would help to bridge the gap between school administration and parents and would provide positive role models for the Latino students (Schmid, 2001).

**Racism.** The lack of bicultural and bilingual Latino teachers and staff exacerbates the problem of real and perceived racism within the schools. In a study by Bohon and colleagues (2005), Latino/a parents reported their children were treated unfairly. The children in the study shared similar sentiments. The child and parent participants felt that if students did not understand English or if they had brown rather than white skin they were ignored by their teachers. “The feeling of being a non-person was pervasive” (p.52).

A meta-analysis conducted to determine if teacher expectations and speech varied according to student ethnic background produced equally disappointing results. Results indicated that teachers have lower expectations of Latino students than they do of white students. Additionally, teachers directed more positive speech toward white students than Latino students and gave more positive referrals and less negative referrals for white students than for Latino students (Tenenbaum & Ruck, 2007).

**Socioeconomic Status.** Financial difficulties create another barrier to education for many Latino families. Many are reluctant to even enroll their children in school due to real or perceived financial constraints. Some parents are unable to afford school clothes and supplies. Additionally, it is often the poorest and least educated parents that hold the misconception that they must purchase books or pay tuition for their children to attend



school. Since the most marginalized Latino immigrant families live and work in close proximity, they have little exposure to those who are better informed (Atilas & Bohon, 2002).

Some Latino families, such as Sojourners, tend to be less invested in their child's academic success because they do not plan to settle permanently in the United States. These parents often encourage their children to drop out of school and work. This strategy enables the family to more quickly meet their economic goals so that they can speed the return to their country of origin (Bohon et al., 2005)

An exhaustive literature search for the purposes of this dissertation produced no studies that examine the phenomenon of SRB in Latino school children. Latino adolescents are a minority group that has been ignored in the SRB research, despite the fact that they have the highest drop out rate and comprise the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the United States (Kaplan, Turner, & Badger, 2007). In fact, by the year 2020 the youth population is projected to be 25% Latino (Kaplan et al., 2007). However, there is a scarcity of knowledge regarding the unique challenges faced by what has been an underserved and largely ignored population. Only through careful analysis of the contextual factors impacting Latino children's perception and experience of school will researchers glean the necessary insights to help better serve this large subset of school refusers.

### **Chapter Summary**

Though researchers have offered divergent findings regarding many SRB related issues, there are several points on which most seem to agree. With the exception of Berg

et al. (1993), research has demonstrated that a large percentage of children with SRB meet criteria for one or more DSM diagnoses (Egger et al., 2003; Last & Strauss, 1990). Additionally, correlations have been found between SRB and parental psychiatric disorders (Egger et al., 2003; Martin et al., 1999; McShane et al., 2001). Specifically, children with anxiety-based SRB tend to have one or more anxiety disorders (Last & Strauss, 1990; Last, Strauss, & Francis, 1987) and they tend to have parents with anxiety disorders (Last & Strauss, 1990; Martin et al., 1999). Additionally, research has shown that problematic family functioning contributes to the development of SRB (Bernstein et al., 1990; Kearney & Silverman, 1995; Martin et al., 1999). Families of children with SRB tend to have higher than average levels of conflict and isolation and lower than average levels of independence (Kearney & Silverman, 1995). Finally, children with SRB experience a high number of environmental stressors such as social difficulties, economic hardship, and living in a home with domestic abuse (Egger et al., 2003). One subset of SRB research that has been neglected is that of minority children in general and Latino children in particular. Latino students have the highest dropout rate of any ethnic group (Kaplan, Turner, & Badger, 2007). It is therefore imperative that researchers begin to give this subset of school refusers the attention it so richly deserves.

The next chapter will outline the research methods used in the study. It will begin with a brief introduction explaining the importance of the research topic. The rationale for selecting phenomenology and the research design will then be discussed, including the selection of participants and procedure. Next will be an explanation of the data

collection methods and analysis as well as a strategy for obtaining a comprehensive description of the phenomenon. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how to maximize quality and trustworthiness.

## Chapter Three

### Methods

#### Overview

School refusal behavior (SRB) is a heterogeneous construct consisting of chronic tardiness, extended school absences, missed classes, and pleas for nonattendance (Kearney, 2003). SRB is a serious public health issue that affects more children than attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and depression (Costello, Egger, & Angold, 2005). Chronic SRB can lead to academic underachieving and school drop-out (Kearney, 2008). Despite the fact that Latino/a children have three times the drop-out rate of white children, they have been under-represented in SRB studies, leading to a problem generalizing these results to Latino youth (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). It was hoped that this study would identify reasons for high absentee rates within the Latino/a population and that the results would increase the sparse body of knowledge regarding the unique problems of school refusing Latino/a children.

The purpose of this study was to examine the systemic and interpersonal factors that impact SRB in Latino/a children with an emphasis on school, family, and peer related factors. Previous research in the area of SRB has been primarily quantitative in nature and has failed to capture the experiences of children with

SRB. Additionally, SRB has been a notoriously difficult construct to quantify, with researchers failing to come to a consensus regarding a definitive definition. Finally, an extensive search of the literature revealed that there are no existing studies that explore SRB in Latino/a children. While quantitative methods garner valuable empirical data, they fail to capture participants' subjective experiences and do not identify underlying meanings of an experience. For these reasons, a qualitative research design was most appropriate for this study.

Additionally, Sue (1999) suggested that phenomenology is particularly well-suited to the study of diverse or rarely studied populations. The Latino/a children in this study met both of these criteria as there is an absence of research on this population. The phenomenological approach is in agreement with cross-cultural research goals as it attempts to obtain an accurate, deep understanding of a specific culture (Liamputtong, 2008).

### **Research Questions**

The initial research questions were:

1. What role does academic achievement play in the development and maintenance of SRB in Latino/a youth?
2. What role does the family environment play in the development and maintenance of SRB in Latino/a youth?
3. What role does the school environment play in the development and maintenance of SRB in Latino/a youth?

3a. Does the child's relationship with his or her peers affect SRB, and if so, how?

3b. Does the child's relationship with his or her teacher affect SRB, and if so, how?

3c. Does the child's feeling that he or she is safe at school impact SRB, and if so, how?

Key topics that were explored in the interview:

1. Perception and duration of school refusal behavior: How long did the child feel he/she had been experiencing difficulty attending school? Did he or she view the SRB as problematic?
2. Perception of academic achievement as satisfactory or unsatisfactory including experiences with teachers and parents regarding the quality of the child's grades
3. Perception of family environment including the child's thoughts about how his/her family members feel about school in general and the child's school in particular
4. Perception of the school environment as being a positive or negative experience, including the factors that make it positive or negative
5. Quality and quantity of peer relationships including history of fighting with peers at school
6. Relationship with teachers including how the child feels about his/her teachers and how he/she believes they feel about him/her

7. Feelings of safety or danger at school due to the presence or absence of gangs, discrimination, bullies, etc.

### **Methods of Preparation**

**Identifying the Phenomenon.** The first step in conducting a phenomenological study is to identify the phenomenon to be studied. The phenomenon must be described in clear and concrete terms and should emerge from a deep interest in a topic or problem that has “both social meaning and personal significance” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104). As such, Latino/a children’s experience of SRB was the phenomenon chosen for this study. For the purposes of this study, SRB was defined as, “child-motivated refusal to attend school or to remain in classes for an entire day” (Kearney, 2006b, p. 685). This definition also encompasses children who have difficulty in attending school (refuse to go on a regular basis but are forced to go anyway).

In accordance with the purpose delineated by Moustakas (1994), my interest in this topic grew out of my own experience and the experiences of my family as members of a marginalized group. This study sought to understand the experiences of a minority group that has been discriminated against and marginalized - school refusing Latino/a children. The goal of this study was to give a voice to the struggles of a group that has had no voice and to understand the factors that prevent them from being successful in school.

During my work in the emergency department of The Children’s Hospital I worked with numerous Latino/a children and their families. Many have been mistrustful of the mental health system, having been treated as second- class

citizens or altogether ignored. Instead of receiving help from school counselors in connecting with outpatient mental health services, a large number of these children were ignored until their difficulties became so severe that they required emergency stabilization. Often they reported having teachers that mistreated them and peers that ostracized them. One of the things almost all of these children had in common was an aversion to school and a history of attempts to avoid attendance. However, school personnel had often showed very little concern that these children were missing school and very little interest in the reasons why. Working with these families and listening to their stories of mistreatment made me think about my family's experiences as members of a mistreated minority group.

My work with the families at The Children's Hospital reminded me of the racism I witnessed against my father, who is Middle Eastern. He told me stories about growing up poor, without a father, and as a member of a marginalized ethnic group in Vicksburg, MS. He told me about how the "white" children were not allowed to play with him and how he was never invited to the parties his schoolmates had. Though they were sad stories, they seemed somehow surreal to me as I had not yet witnessed this type of racism against my father. That all changed after 9-11. Every time my father flew out of town on business, without fail, airport personnel would pull him aside for a "random" security check. Whenever he rented a car he was pulled over by police and questioned about where he was going or why he was out so late.



Witnessing the racism my father has faced has made me much more sympathetic to and interested in the experiences of other marginalized groups. My interest in Latino/a youth, in particular, was born out of my experiences with Latino/a families at the hospital. While trying to get these children the treatment they needed, I was continually amazed by the reported lack of interest school staff demonstrated in their attendance. I felt propelled to learn more about the struggles Latino/a school children, specifically, experience in attending school. Sadly, there has been no SRB research conducted with this population. My personal experiences have given me a glimpse of the prejudice these children must encounter on a daily basis. I believe that the insight I've gleaned from my own experiences assisted me in establishing trusting relationships with the participants.

Chapter 1 provided an explanation of the phenomenon being studied, the research questions guiding the study and the justification for the study. A thorough review of the extant literature was also conducted to enable a full understanding of the phenomenon. Chapter 2 reviewed the current literature relevant to the topic.

**Obtaining Epoche.** Husserl, one of the founding fathers of the philosophically based phenomenology research design, espoused the importance of coming to understand the essence and meaning of experiences in order to gain new knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). He also emphasized the importance of searching one's own consciousness as it relates to experience. Attempting to achieve epoche is part of the preparation for research and is defined as

a preparation for deriving new knowledge but also as an experience in itself, a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time. This is not only critical for scientific determination but for living itself – the opportunity for a fresh start, a new beginning, not being hampered by voices of the past that tell us the way things are or voices of the present that direct our thinking (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85).

Through the process of obtaining Epoche, the researcher gains a new vantage point from which to perceive the phenomenon, one of a clear mind, willing and able to receive new knowledge. By being aware of my perceptions and the influences that affect my perceptions, I am able to view the phenomenon more clearly through the eyes of others (Moustakas, 1994). The Epoche is a process that requires practice and should be revisited throughout the research process as new biases are uncovered. While it is nearly impossible to achieve perfectly, I engaged in self-reflection prior to and throughout the research process. I included those reflections in the Discussion section.

## **Participants**

**Selection of Co-Researchers.** The selection of co-researchers in phenomenological research requires careful consideration of multiple factors, as there are no firm rules regarding sample size. Wertz (2005) suggested that when determining sample size one must consider “the nature of the research problem and the potential yield of findings” and that determining the number of participants prior to conducting the research and running analyses is not always possible (p. 171). He elaborates that

The nature and number of participants cannot be mechanically determined beforehand or by formula. Rather, deliberation and critical reflection considering the research problem, the life-world position of the participant(s), the quality of the data, and the value of emergent findings with regard to research goals are required in a continuing assessment of adequacy (p. 171)

Creswell (2007) pointed out that phenomenological studies have been successfully conducted with as few as one and as many as 325 co-researchers. The average sample size is five to six participants. Having a smaller sample size enables a deeper analysis of participant responses. Moustakas (1994) enumerates the essential criteria for co-researcher selection as: experience of the phenomenon, willingness to explore the phenomenon, and willingness to participate in the research.

***Child participants.*** Ten parent/child dyads comprised the co-researchers for the study. Child co-researchers consisted of 10 self-identified Latino/a children living in 4 different zip codes in North East Colorado who were sampled using a snowballing method (see Table 1). Participant ethnicity was based on self-reports. One child identified as Chicano, five as Hispanic, and two as Mexican. The children were between the ages of 11 and 13, and all reported an aversion to and attempts to avoid school attendance. Three of the children were 11, two were 12, and five were 13. The participants were at various places in the definition of SRB in terms of frequency, duration, and number of successful attempts. This age group was chosen for the study because it is the most common age for the onset of SRB (Kearney, 2006). The child participants included 6 boys and 4 girls, as the research has

demonstrated equal rates of SRB between the sexes (Kearney, 2008). Each household was comprised of between one and 7 siblings, a grandmother, mother, or both, and in 6 cases, a father. Additionally, one household included 2 cousins and another included the mother's boyfriend and the mother's boyfriend's brother. The participants were from various socio-economic levels, with 4 receiving free or reduced lunch. All child co-researchers were bilingual or English speaking. Parents were also Latino/a and English speaking. Each child participant was given a \$10 gift card via their parent figure as an incentive for participation.

The inclusion criteria for the child co-researcher sample were: 11 to 13 years old, Latino/a, English fluency, had at least one parent who was also Latino/a, and whose parent-figure answered number 13 ("How many times has your child stayed home from school over the last 3 months because he or she refused to go?") with at least once and/or number 14 ("How often does your child attempt to avoid school?") with at least once per month on the demographic questionnaire; Criteria was also met if the parent-figure answered number 14 with at least once per month and number 13 as zero. Exclusion criteria included children who were wards of the state or mentally retarded. Additional exclusion criteria included those that had a chronic medical condition or mental illness as assessed by items 18 ("Does your child have a chronic health problem or other condition that interferes with his/her ability to attend school?") and 19 (Has your child been diagnosed with a mental illness?") on the demographic questionnaire. Consequently, two children with diagnoses of Oppositional Defiant Disorder were excluded. Children who expressed

current homicidal or suicidal ideation while in contact with the researcher would have also been excluded but, no child met these criteria. Had any children reported homicidal or suicidal ideation, they would have been assessed to determine lethality and their parents would have either been directed to the nearest emergency room or given a list of outpatient providers to follow-up with, as determined by the severity of symptom presentation.

***Parent participants.*** Parent participants consisted of 7 mothers and 3 grandmothers of the participants. One identified as Chicana, 6 as Hispanic, and 3 as Mexican. To meet inclusion criteria the parents had to be of Latino descent, either English-speaking or Bilingual, and they had to have a child with a history of SRB. Only one parent figure, a mother, reported a personal history of school refusal behavior (see Table 1). Each parent participant was given a \$10 gift card as an incentive for participation.

Table 1

*Demographic Information for Child Participants*

	Angel	Arthur	Brian	Dave	Eric	Gus	Mindy	Oliver	Queely	Tonya
<b>Sex</b>	F	M	M	M	M	M	F	M	F	F
<b>Age</b>	13	12	11	13	12	13	13	11	11	13
<b>Grade</b>	6 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Ethnicity</b>	H.	H.	H/C/F Or H.	Mex.	H.	Mex.	H.	Chic.	Mex. or H.	H.
<b>Lunch</b>	dis.	dis.	no dis.	no dis.	dis.	dis.	no dis.	no dis.	no dis.	no dis.
<b>Guardian</b>	Lydia	Nicky	Lena	Erica	Conny	Marsha	Mindy	Marcy	Samantha	Penny
<b>Guardian Sex</b>	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
<b>Guardian Status</b>	g'ma	mom	mom	g'ma	mom	mom	mom	mom	mom	g'ma
<b>Guardian Ethnicity</b>	His.	H.	H.	Mex.	H.	Mex.	H.	Chic.	Mex.	H.
<b>Household</b>	3 sibs. 2 cous. Mom G'ma	7 sibs. mom dad	1 sib. mom dad	1 sib. g'ma	3 sibs. Mom M's bf Bf's bro.	1 sib. mom dad	1 sib. mom dad	1 sib. mom dad	2 sibs. mom dad	1 half- sib. g'ma
<b>Times Missed Last 3 mos.</b>	10	8	4	5	12	3	20	5	10	7
<b># Attempts</b>	1/wk.	1/wk.	1/wk.	1/wk.	2-4/wk	1/wk	2-4/wk	1/wk	2-4/wk	almost every day
<b>Dislike School</b>	3 mos.	4 yrs.	6 mos.	2 yrs.	1 yr.	1 yr.	5 yrs.	3 mos.	2 yrs.	1yr.
<b>Guardian Attempts</b>	<1/mo.	<1/mo.	<1/mo.	<1/mo.	<1/mo.	2-3/wk.	<1/mo.	<1/mo.	<1/mo.	<1/mo.
<b>Guardian Grades Completed</b>	12	12	16	14	11	6	7	5	12	12+ nurse diploma
<b>Guardian Mental Health</b>	none	dep.	dep.	none	none	none	none	none	none	none

Key:

Mex. = Mexican, F. = Filipino, dis. = discounted, no dis. = not discounted, F = female, g'ma = grandmother; sib. = sibling, sibs. = siblings, cous. = cousins, M's bf = mom's boyfriend, Bf's bro. = mom's boyfriend's brother, Half-sib. = half sibling, Times Missed Last 3 mos. = the number of days of school the child has missed over the last three months, # Attempts = the number of times the child attempts to miss school in a typical week, Dislike School = the period of time the child has disliked school, Guardian Attempts = the number of times the child's guardian used to attempt to miss school, Guardian Mental Health = the guardian's mental health diagnosis, dep. = depression

## Measures

**Demographic questionnaire.** The demographic questionnaire (Appendix A) was completed by parents in order to provide additional data about the child participants. This measure was created specifically for this study. The questionnaire consisted of questions pertaining to the child's age, gender, grade level, family constellation, and ethnicity or race. Parents were also asked if their children received free or reduced lunch. Additionally, the questionnaire contained three items to screen for school refusal behavior. Thirty participant dyads were excluded from the sample for the following reasons: Oppositional Defiant Disorder diagnosis (2), outside the age range (7), not of Latino descent (9), or they did not exhibit behavior that met the definition of SRB (12). Of the participants who met criteria, retention was 100%.

**The semi-structured interview.** The interview (Appendix E) included questions about the child's reluctance to attend school. Family factors, school related factors, and cultural factors were explored and questions were added or modified as warranted during the interview. The protocol consisted of 10 questions regarding duration of school avoidance behavior, peer, teacher, and family relationships, experience of schoolwork, grades, and future aspirations. The child participants were treated as the experts on their own experience and as such, were allowed to share their story in the way in which they saw fit. Open-ended questions were developed to encourage participants to share their experiences with minimal encouragers from the researcher.



Prior to conducting the interviews, two colleagues reviewed the questions for clarity and conciseness and to ensure consistency with phenomenological philosophy. Questions were then edited according to the feedback. The 12-year-old child of a colleague participated in a mock interview with me to determine the length of time that would be needed to complete each session.

## **Research Design**

**Rationale for the selection of a qualitative design.** Creswell (2007) suggested the use of qualitative research when quantitative measures and analyses do not “fit the problem” (p. 40). He also stated that the use of quantitative measures is insufficient to capture the interactions among people. SRB involves engaging in or avoiding multiple interactions – with parents, with teachers, and with peers. A complex understanding of this process can only be gleaned from the deep exploration afforded by qualitative methods. The use of a qualitative design provided rich, descriptive data about a group that has not been studied before. In turn, the study identified important themes to be addressed in future studies. Additionally, the qualitative philosophy that participants are active co-researchers served to empower a group that has had little power due to their age and race.

***Phenomenological approach.*** A phenomenological approach, in particular, was chosen for this study in an attempt to understand the meaning children make of their SRB, in accordance with the description of phenomenological inquiry offered up by Creswell (1998) who cites the goal of phenomenology as the garnering of an understanding of the lived experiences of others. He stated that phenomenology

“describes the meaning of the lived experience for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon” (p. 51). Giorgi and Giorgi explain that this is accomplished by examining the individual’s experience of the phenomenon within in the context in which it was experienced (2003). Ultimately, the researcher seeks to combine the individual experiences of the co-researchers into one common description of a phenomenon.

There are four main principles of phenomenological research. They are obtaining Epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and creating a synthesis of collected meanings (Moustakas, 1994). These principles will be explained in greater detail in the Data Analysis section that follows.

### **Procedure**

**Informed consent.** Approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Denver (see Appendix F). The next step was to contact school social workers, school psychologists, teachers and principals in order to gain access to potential participants. School officials were contacted via email or phone and if they had expressed interest, the researcher would have completed an application to conduct research within the school district. Unfortunately, none of the school districts chose to participate, so the researcher asked for approval from her dissertation committee to obtain participants using a snowballing method. Once the committee approved this change, the researcher also asked permission of the Institutional Review Board at the University of Denver to modify the sampling technique. Once approval was given, the researcher asked friends and colleagues to pass along the researcher’s phone number to any families they thought might be

interested. A parent or guardian would then contact the researcher, who would inform them of the purpose of the study. The researcher then obtained the family's phone number and address. Information about the study, a consent form (Appendix D), a demographic questionnaire and a stamped, self addressed envelope were then mailed to each interested family to begin screening for participants. Families then returned the materials to the researcher via the enclosed envelope. Each packet was reviewed upon receipt, and participants who met the inclusion criteria were then contacted via phone to schedule their first interview. Participants who did not meet criteria were also phoned and informed.

The consent forms provided a brief explanation of the study goals, participant requirements, confidentiality, and risks of participating. In accordance with phenomenological principles, the interviews occurred in a naturalistic setting where the child was comfortable. Students selected either their homes, after school programs, or a coffee shop or library. When each parent arrived, I engaged her in casual conversation in an effort to build rapport and put her at ease. I told parents the interview would last about one hour and I offered to show them the protocol questions that would be asked. I then encouraged them to ask any questions they had. After the conversation, some parents chose to wait in a nearby room, while others went to run errands for an hour.

Each interview began with an explanation of the purpose of the study. At this time, the researcher answered any questions the child had and obtained his/her written assent. The researcher then worked to build rapport with the interviewee

by engaging him or her in casual conversation about interests, hobbies, etc. Once the researcher established rapport with the child, the interview began with the question, "Is it hard for you to go to school?"

The second interview was scheduled after the first interview was completed. The second interview consisted of follow-up questions generated from answers gathered in the first interview. It was also used to ensure the accuracy of information gathered during the first interview. At this time the researcher provided the child with a transcript of the initial interview. The child was then given the opportunity to correct or clarify these descriptions to more accurately represent his or her shared experience. The researcher wrote down any changes made to material garnered from the initial interview and then confirmed the accuracy of these changes with the child. All but two of the transcripts were amended to include additional information gathered from the second interview. The interviews were semi-structured by virtue of the fact that each co-researcher was asked the same questions. However, questions were modified or new questions added based on the responses of each individual co-researcher during the interviews

### **Data analysis**

At the completion of each interview, the researcher transcribed each audiotape in order to obtain hard copies of the data. Then the information gathered in the second interview was used to amend the transcripts. The data were then analyzed according to phenomenological principles. A modification of Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological method was used to analyze the data. This method was created by combining the work of

three different authors and is referred to as the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. This method entailed the following steps:

1. Using a phenomenological approach, I obtained a full description of the co-researcher's experience of the phenomenon.

To complete this step, I interviewed each of the participants, recording each interview. Once the interviews were complete, I transcribed each one. Then, I conducted a second round of interviews to follow up on additional questions that arose from the first interview. Also during the second interview, co-researchers read the transcripts and corrected any errors. The transcripts were then revised to include the new and/or corrected information.

2. From the verbatim transcript of the co-researcher's experiences I considered each statement with respect to significance for description of the experience and listed each non-repetitive, non-overlapping statement (meaning units).

My personal notes and dialogue were removed from each transcript. A list was then made of all the remaining statements.

3. I related and clustered the invariant meaning units into themes.

I then went through each transcript and coded the remaining statements. The co-researcher's statements were then highlighted in different colors, with each color representing a theme. The color-coded statements were then transferred onto note cards. The note cards were then grouped according to color (theme).

4. I constructed textural-structural descriptions of the meanings and essences of the co-researchers' experiences.

Each theme was then paired with the research question to which it referred. The themes were then defined, and several example statements were chosen for each theme. The themes and example statements were then analyzed and discussed.

5. From the individual textural-structural descriptions of all co-researchers' experiences, I constructed a composite textural-structural description of the meanings and essences of the experience, integrating all individual textural-structural descriptions into a universal description of the experience representing the group as a whole (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120).

Participant reports were reduced and synthesized into one comprehensive description of the group's experience, as a whole.

**Phenomenological reduction.** Phenomenological reduction refers to the process by which experiences are reduced to the essence or phenomenon presented. Moustakas (1994) defines this process: "the task is that of describing in textural language just what one sees, not in terms of the external object but also the internal consciousness, the experience as such, the rhythm and relationship between phenomenon and self" (p. 90). The first step in the reduction is the obtaining of epoche (Giorgi, 2006). Epoche occurs when the researcher refrains from making judgments or presuppositions, a process also referred to as "bracketing" (Creswell, 1998, p. 52). Epoche also requires the researcher to "bracket" prior scientific assumptions such as hypotheses, scientific theories, and

“conceptualizations of the subject matter” (Wertz, 2005, p. 168). As the researcher, I worked to identify and bracket the biases, pre-judgments, and preconceived notions that I hold which could negatively impact my ability to be open and receptive to the co-researchers. This process does not discard the researcher’s experience, but rather embraces and utilizes it within the research process.

The researcher continued to reflect and revisit the information presented until it was reduced to essences and themes that described the phenomenon. In this study phenomenological reduction occurred through the use of the semi-structured interviews. The researcher transcribed each interview so that they could later be reduced to themes.

The second step in the reduction is horizontalization. Horizontalization is simply a listing of each statement made by the co-researchers. Phenomenology takes the perspective that horizons are limitless because they are the meanings and experiences attributed to a phenomenon by the co-researchers. Consequently, each response given by a co-researcher during the interview is given equal weight by the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). Once the interviews were transcribed, I wrote on index cards each statement made by the co-researchers.

The third step in the reduction is clustering the horizons into themes (Moustakas, 1994). This process enables the researcher to create a comprehensive description of the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). The statements (horizons) of the co-researchers were clustered by subject in order to identify themes. Similar

statements were then grouped together and given a theme title that described the main idea of the grouped statements.

**Imaginative variation.** The next step in phenomenological data analysis is that of imaginative variation. Imaginative variation allows the researcher to “seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions” (Moustakas, 1994, p.97). Thus, a compilation of the various perspectives of the researcher, co-researchers, and the extant literature are used to form a comprehensive description of the phenomenon. Through the method of imaginative variation, the researcher employs the varying perspectives to write a textural description explaining the “what” of the phenomenon. After the textural description is complete, the researcher composes a structural description explaining the “how” of the phenomenon. The situation, setting, and context in which the phenomenon occurs are included in this description. The individual statements and collective themes were used to create a structural and a textural description of the phenomenon of school refusing children’s experiences. These descriptions formed a compilation of all the co-researchers’ experiences. The descriptions were provided in Chapter 4.

**Synthesis of meaning and essences.** The final step in the phenomenological research process is the synthesis of meanings and essences. The essence is the quality or condition without which a thing would not be what it is. In order to



capture the essence of a phenomenon, the researcher combines the textural and structural descriptions into a comprehensive statement (Moustakas, 1994). The section that follows will discuss the role of quality and trustworthiness in evaluating qualitative research.

### **Quality and Trustworthiness**

Morrow (2005) suggested that the criteria used to evaluate the integrity of quantitative research do not apply to qualitative research as qualitative methods seek to acquire different types of knowledge than quantitative. The purpose of qualitative research is not to generalize its findings to the population as a whole, but rather to obtain rich, detailed data to better understand a construct (Crossley, 2007). While the quantitative constructs of validity and reliability have parallel qualitative constructs, she identifies quality and trustworthiness as the criteria by which qualitative research should be evaluated. Morrow defined trustworthiness as credibility, while quality refers to the “goodness” of the research (Morrow, 2005, p. 250).

An effective method for validating data as suggested by Moustakas (1994) is to request that co-researchers review transcripts, identified themes, and textural, structural, and comprehensive descriptions of the phenomenon. Validation is cited as a method to increase the accuracy of the co-researcher and phenomenon representations (Moustakas, 1994). This method was used by meeting with each of

the co-researchers for a second interview to review the first interview's transcripts and make any corrections or additions necessary.

Morrow (2005) suggested that researchers use techniques such as continuing to reflect upon the research process, immersing oneself in the data, and acknowledging perspectives and biases to reduce the impact of subjectivity. Toward this end, I journaled about my thoughts and perceptions of the research process and the phenomenon that was being studied. I integrated the contents of that journal into the discussion section.

### **Chapter Summary**

A qualitative study utilizing a phenomenological approach was chosen for this study to explore the phenomenon of the experiences of school refusing Latino/a children. The rationale for selecting phenomenology and the research design were discussed, including the selection of participants and procedure. Data were collected through the use of the demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. Data were then analyzed using methods of clustering, horizontalization, and written structural and textural descriptions. An integration of these descriptions provided a comprehensive description of the phenomenon. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how to maximize quality and trustworthiness.

## Chapter Four

### Results

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the systemic and interpersonal factors that impact SRB in Latino children with an emphasis on school, family, and peer related factors. The following research questions were examined via a literature review and data obtained through participant interviews.

1. What role does academic achievement play in the development and maintenance of SRB in Latino/a youth?
2. What role does the family environment play in the development and maintenance of SRB in Latino/a youth?
3. What role does the school environment play in the development and maintenance of SRB in Latino/a youth?
  - 3a. Does the child's relationship with his or her peers affect SRB, and if so, how?
  - 3b. Does the child's relationship with his or her teacher affect SRB, and if so, how?

3c. Does the child's feeling that he or she is safe at school impact SRB, and if so, how?

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section describes each of the child and parent participants. The next section details the study's findings, which are presented as structural and textural descriptions of the experiences of the child participants. The last section synthesizes the textural and structural descriptions of the co-researchers to provide a more complete understanding of the experiences of school refusing children and to assist the reader to better understand the participants' experiences.

### **Child Interview Descriptions**

Ten middle school aged Latino/a children between the ages of 11 and 13 were interviewed to learn more about their experience of participating in school refusing behaviors. The sample consisted of 6 boys and 4 girls, with a history of school refusing behavior that attended school within a large rural school district. One child identified as Chicano, 5 as Hispanic, and 2 as Mexican. Three of the children were 11, two were 12, and five were 13. Questions 13 and 14 ("How many times has your child stayed home from school over the last 3 months because he or she refused to go?" and "How often does your child attempt to avoid school?") screened potential participants for SRB. To be eligible to participate, the child's parent-figure had to answer number 13 as at least once and/or number 14 as at least once per month; Criteria was also met if the parent-figure answered number 14 as at least once per month and number 13 as zero. Each child also needed to have at least one parent who identified as Latino/a. This parent also needed to

be English-speaking, willing to complete the demographic questionnaire and sign a consent form for his/her child's participation. Exclusionary criteria for child participants included the known presence of an Axis I diagnosis or mental retardation. Child participants had to be English speaking, as well.

For each of the child co-researchers below is a brief description of his/her interview. Each description includes information about the duration of the co-researcher's SRB, as well as a discussion of factors identified by the child that have influenced his/her SRB. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of parent participants and child co-researchers. Additionally, any identifying information such as the students' school names has been changed. Demographic information regarding co-researchers including sex, grade, ethnicity, and family constellation is accurate.

**Angel.** Angel and I met for our interviews at her after-school program. She and her mother had heard about the study from the program's director, who was referred to me by a colleague. I explained the purpose of the study as she sat across from me. She then signed the assent form and I asked if she had any questions, which she did not. I began the interview by engaging her in conversation about her after-school program, which she spoke of with enthusiasm. Angel was extremely talkative, providing rich detail about her experiences.

Angel is a 13-year-old female in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade who self-identifies as Hispanic. She lives with her mother, grandmother, 3 siblings, and 2 cousins. When we met, Angel had been struggling with SRB for about 3 months. Over that 3-month span she was making attempts to avoid school approximately once a week and had been successful in her

attempts about 10 times. When I began to ask about her experience of refusing school she explained that it was hard for her to go to school on days “when there’s a big test or like when I’m nervous or when I just don’t feel like going.” Angel went on to say that they have tests at her school every day and that it was hard to maintain that kind of pace. She explained that big tests made her nervous and intimidated her to the point that she did not even try to study. Her intimidation was exacerbated by the other children in her class who she felt were more prepared than she.

Usually I don’t study for the test because it is really hard and like it is just really complicated. And then um like when the big test comes like everybody is like, ‘Yeah. I’m going to ace this test and this and that and I’m like, ‘Wow. I don’t think I’m going to ace this test.’ Everybody else has studied, been prepared and I haven’t. And like they always like they rub it in. Like those really – those nerdy kids like rub it in your face like, ‘Oh yeah. I have an ‘A’ plus – straight ‘A’ plus.’ I’m like, ‘Yeah? Cool.’ And they just keep rubbing it in and it just really – it paranoids me.

Angel was also nervous about disappointing her mother on test day. She felt pressure to make good grades because her mother was expelled for fighting in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and “never went back.” Angel said her mother did not want her to follow her mother’s example.

I asked Angel to elaborate about the days when she just doesn’t “feel like going” to school. She told me that there are mornings when she is just too tired to go and that the thought of having to sit through 8 class periods is more than she can bare. Another reason she did not want to go to school because there were people she did not like there who “pick on other kids.” Angel seemed to feel a responsibility to protect these other kids and shared that she tries to intercede when she sees a child getting bullied. In addition to the bullying, Angel said her school has problems with gangs, and at times, outside crime. She

told me that it is not uncommon for her school to have several “red alerts” or “lockdowns” in a week. Angel explained that a red alert is a situation in which an unidentified person with a weapon enters the building and a lockdown occurs when school staff seal off all the buildings because there is a criminal on the loose. Predictably, when asked what would need to change for her to want to go to school Angel answered: “fewer tests and less bullying.”

**Brian.** Brian is an 11-year-old male in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade that self-identifies as either Hispanic or Hispanic/Caucasian/Filipino. He had been exhibiting SRB for about 6 months prior to our first meeting. Though he made attempts to avoid school once a week, he had only been successful 4 days over the prior 3 months.

Brian and his mother learned of the study through one of his mother’s friends, who happens to be my co-worker. After screening for exclusion criteria via the demographic questionnaire, Brian’s mother contacted me to schedule the first interview. The interview was conducted at their home, as this was Brian’s preference. After explaining the purpose of the study and gaining his assent, I engaged Brian in a conversation about our mutual acquaintance, my co-worker. Brian presented as an intelligent, thoughtful, and polite young man who had a lot to say and shared easily. Once rapport was established, I began to ask Brian about his school refusal experiences. He confided that the primary reason he tries to avoid school concerns his teacher, who he said gets mad and yells at him. He confided that interactions with her often make him feel like nothing he does is good enough. “She has really high expectations and like if we do what we’re supposed to do, she’s like, ‘You didn’t go above and beyond’ or something like that. Brian attributed his

teacher's anger to the fact that she had more students in her class this year, and "so it's been a big change for her." Brian has also felt the stress of the added students in his class, who lessen the amount of individual attention he gets from his teacher.

Like I'm always asking questions. Sometimes she doesn't want to answer our questions. We'll go to her desk and she'll go, 'There's too many people around my desk and you guys have to raise your hands. Go to your seat and raise your hand so I can call you up to my desk.' So, I asked somebody else because I know she's not going to, there's like 20 people raising their hands so I ask a person who understands it and I get yelled at about it.

Another reason for Brian's reluctance to attend school was the amount of reading they had to do and the fact that he had been unable to find any books there that he liked to read. To further complicate his issue with reading, Brian said he needed total silence to be able to concentrate. The lack of interesting science assignments was another frustration he had with school. When asked what would need to change for school to be a place he wanted to go, Brian replied,

A place where I don't have to be yelled at and I can ask a question without being yelled at or school where I could find something that I was interested in to read and interesting stuff like science, like interesting science that I could find. Yeah, instead of being bored out of my mind. The only good science project I've done this year, which was awesome was made a rocket. We did that on Friday. Me and Fred, we made a rocket in the science lab.

**Eric.** Eric is a 12-year-old male in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade that self-identifies as Hispanic.

When we met for our initial interview he had been exhibiting SRB for about one year. He was struggling with his mother to avoid school 2 to 4 times per week and had successfully worn her down 12 times in the three months prior to our first interview.

Eric and his mother found out about the study from the director of his after-school program, to whom I had been referred by a colleague. Eric's mother contacted me and it



was arranged that the interviews would be conducted at the after-school program location. Once the purpose of the study had been explained and assent attained, I engaged Eric in conversation about his after-school program. He was obviously quite extroverted - talkative and animated – and so rapport was established easily. Eric confided that he had begun attending because all of his friends attended and the homework help they were getting there had helped them raise their grades. Eric had failing grades due to his excessive absences. In fact, Eric named poor grades as a factor in his attempts to miss school. “Sometimes I get like Cs and like Fs. And that doesn’t, it makes me feel bad and like not want to go to school because I want to have like pure Cs and As. No Fs. That’s how I want it to be.”

Eric actually had several reasons, which emerged slowly as the interview unfolded, for why he did not want to attend school. Initially, when I asked Eric about the reasons it was hard for him to attend school he told me that it was, “boring and all the teachers do is talk [to each other]...Yeah. Like, they just talk a lot, and talk, and talk, and talk, and talk, and like if you try to ask a question they get mad. Then they’d keep talking. They wouldn’t let us ask questions.”

He also criticized the teachers for not being “active” enough because they would just sit at their desks and stare at their computer screens. Eric said he would prefer that the teachers engage with the students more and to help them as they are working on their assignments. “Cool teachers, they just go and then they should help, they would help other kids and when they get an answer right they give them high fives.”

Another factor in Eric's school avoidant behavior was the pressure he felt from his mother to go to school. He explained that she wanted him to have the chance to graduate because she was forced to drop out in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade when she became pregnant with him. Eric also insinuated that he had some guilt feelings about being the reason his mother did not finish school.

Perhaps Eric's biggest reason for displaying SRB was the fact that a group of 6 boys in a grade above him had made several attempts to "jump" Eric. He recounted an incident during which the boys had followed him home: "Like, they all surrounded me and they were threatening me that they were gonna beat me up and break my arm and they, one of them hit me and my brother, he seen it and went and told my mom and that's when my mom came out and she said you better leave him alone or I'm gonna' call the cops on you guys." Since this altercation, Eric said his mother has been increasingly more concerned about his safety and has begun talking about switching him to a different school. Eric, who has several of these boys in his classes, shared this sentiment when he stated, "...they try to jump me and I just don't want to go to that school no more, so that's why I try to like tell my mom that I'm not going to go to school like the next day."

Fighting and aggression seemed to come up often during our interview. In addition to being ganged up on by this group of boys, Eric admitted that he gets into fights about three times a week. He usually instigates the fights by "scooting" people "out of the way so I can see something and they start arguing with me and then they start trying to hit me." Aside from the 3 fights per week, Eric reported he gets into trouble for tripping

someone or “pushing someone on accident” about twice per week. When asked why he starts fights at school, Eric told me that it was not personal, he was just bored.

And finally, “mean” teachers who give him a lot of homework and peers who tell him “school is a waste of time” were cited as factors that sometimes influenced his SRB. The mean teachers frustrate Eric because they don’t let him “talk or whisper quietly” to his friends when he finishes his work. He also talked about how other students in his class try to tell him that school is “stupid and all that stuff.” Eric admitted that sometimes he feels “like they’re right.”

**Gus.** Gus is a 13 year old male in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade that self-identifies as Mexican. When we first met, Gus had been exhibiting SRB for about one year. He was making attempts to avoid school, on average, once a week, and had missed 3 days over the 3 months prior to our interview.

Gus and his mother were another participant dyad that heard about the study through Gus’s after-school program director. His mother contacted me to express their interest in participation and requested that the interviews be conducted at the after-school program, as this was easiest and most comfortable for both her and Gus. Before beginning the first interview I explained the purpose of the study and asked if Gus had any questions, which he did not. I then obtained his written assent and engaged him in conversation about his after-school program. Gus was pleasant and cooperative but somewhat reserved, and did not offer a lot of elaboration in answering the interview questions. I began the interview by asking, “Is it hard for you to go to school?” Gus replied that he has difficulty sleeping,

wakes up tired, and consequently does not want to go to school in the mornings. He explained that this sometimes (several times a week) this culminates in an argument with his mother over his attendance. She was only able to finish 6 grades and does not want the same thing for Gus. Gus also shared that another reason his mother worries about his attendance is that he has a brother who has been in and out of jail. He said the “bad choices” that his brother made that have resulted in his arrests are due to the fact that he did not “get his education.”

He also named his peers’ gossiping as another factor in his SRB. “Like sometimes they get annoying and I don’t want to go because I don’t want to listen to them.” Gus characterized all but his closest friends as gossips who could not be trusted. “If I tell another kid something then they’ll tell other people and it will get out of hand.” His teachers also played a small part in Gus’s aversion to school. He was troubled by the fact that he sees students get in trouble because his teachers get “mad for no reason.” Gus reported these teachers would confiscate the students’ papers and send them to the office. The final reason he named for wanting to avoid school was due to school related meetings that occurred in the morning. Gus admitted that he would often “ditch” on such mornings and then show up to his later classes. Interestingly, despite the fact that he was able to delineate the things he did not like about school, when I asked him what would need to change for him to want to go to school, Gus was unable to come up with an answer.

**Mindy.** Mindy is a 13-year-old female in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade that self-identifies as Hispanic. At the time of our first interview, Mindy had been exhibiting SRB for about 5 years. She was attempting to avoid school between twice and four times a week and had been successful approximately 20 times over previous 3 months.

Mindy and her mother contacted me after learning of the study from Mindy's after-school director. Like all of the other participants from the after-school program, Mindy requested that the interviews take place there, where she was most comfortable. Before beginning the first interview I explained the purpose of the study and asked if she had any questions, which she did not. After obtaining assent, we spoke briefly about her after-school program. Mindy was very attentive, focused, and easily engaged in conversation. Once rapport had been established and she indicated she was ready, the interview began.

For my first question, I asked Mindy if she had difficulty going to school. She shared that "most of the week" is tired, unmotivated, and does not feel like putting forth the effort it takes to get dressed and ready for school, "Like when I don't want to get up early and like I don't want to change [clothes] or do anything pretty much that day." She described a typical morning when she wakes up tired and doesn't want to go to school: "That is like most of the week because like in the mornings I wake up and my mom wakes me up and I don't want to wake up. And then we start this big fuss about it and finally at the end she just leaves me there and I wake up like ten minutes before my bus gets here I guess. So yeah." On such mornings Mindy admitted that she often misses her bus and either her parents have to take her to school (or she just stays home).

When Mindy arrives at school, she is met with challenges from another source, her peers. She confided that she has had to endure teasing and bullying since she began school in the first grade. Often she is teased about her name. Mindy said her peers call her “Manure.” She also shared that there is a girl at school who has been telling Mindy’s friends that she wants to fight her. Mindy has tried to avoid this situation because she says she doesn’t want to get “into any trouble because then my mom will get really mad.”

Being in trouble a lot at school, which Mindy admits to, is yet another reason she does not like to go. She confided that she breaks the rules “and consequently receives “ISS” (In-School Suspension) “three times every week.” Mindy listed the behaviors that result in ISS as skipping school, “talking back to the teacher,” not wearing a uniform, cursing, and walking out of class. “Like I walk out of class when like the teacher won’t let me go to the bathroom or I don’t want to be in there so I just walk out of class and go walk around the halls or just go to the office or something.”

Feeling that the teachers do not care about or want to help her is a common emotion for Mindy. She shared that she is often so exhausted that she falls asleep in class, but that the teacher does not care enough about her learning to try to wake her.

Well, um, I fall asleep in class like when I’m really tired and I don’t get enough sleep or I just don’t get enough sleep or I just don’t want to listen to the teacher so I fall asleep...the teachers don’t really tell me anything until the bell rings. I hear the bell so I just leave when the bell rings...Like, teachers, if they – they – if they say, like, it looks like we don’t care, so what’s the whole point of waking us up if we are just not going to pay attention?

She also lamented that when she doesn't understand her schoolwork and asks one of her teachers for help that they tell her to figure it out for herself. This can be especially frustrating for Mindy, who is often already behind due to her excessive absences. Consequently, she says she just gives up, and is now failing most of her classes.

**Oliver.** Oliver is an 11-year-old 6<sup>th</sup> grader who self-identifies as Chicano. At the time that we met, he had been exhibiting SRB for approximately 3 months. He was attempting to avoid school about once a week and had been successful in his attempts 5 times over the previous 3 months.

Oliver participates in the same after-school program as many of the other participants, which is where he learned of the study. His mother contacted me to express interest in participating and requested the interviews be conducted at the after-school program location, as was Oliver's preference. I explained the purpose of the study to him and asked if he had any questions, which he did not. Once Oliver's assent was obtained, I briefly engaged him in conversation about his experience with the after-school program. He seemed at ease immediately, and shared animatedly and enthusiastically about the friends he had made there and about the "cool" staff. Rapport was easily established and the interview began. Oliver admitted early on that he did not like going to school. He shared, "I honestly feel like not going to school most of the days. Sometimes I don't, which is pretty much okay for me."

However, unlike many of the other co-researchers interviewed, the factors relating to Oliver's SRB were confined to his actual schoolwork, as opposed to peers or somatic

complaints. “I think it is pretty much the school itself. It is pretty boring there. There is a lot of work. I get pretty tired of it most of the time.” He was able to identify the source of his boredom, which contradicted his early statement that there was too much work to do. Oliver explained that he often finished his class work before everyone else and had to sit and wait for them to catch up. “Uh, math, yeah, it’s boring. I mean we have to do a lot of stuff on our own that I appreciate but the problem is there is not enough to do on our own. When we only have one worksheet it is pretty quick to finish.” He also explained that his teachers had been preparing the students to take a national achievement test, which Oliver found to be extremely boring.

In contrast to being bored in math for lack of assignments to do, Oliver later shared that he had too much assigned work to complete. He had this to share in response to a question about the difficulty of his schoolwork

Uh, some of it is [difficult] just because it is all packed on top of each other and it is just a lot of work. I mean if I had it little by little, work every day, I would probably finish it instead of having to have homework most of the days. Um, math and science are pretty easy to learn but the problem is that they pile up too much homework. And then ancient civ. I understand but our teacher goes kind of quick. And language arts is just kind of boring since a lot of people just know what it is and we just – the teacher goes fast – goes by it fast.

He expressed frustration at one teacher, in particular, that he felt was especially demanding:

After that I have Miss M. I don’t really like her because she doesn’t fully understand what we are trying – what us as – we as students are trying to do. She makes us try to work really hard and harder than we try to when we can – because she likes to make us – she wants us to take notes every day and it is kind of hard because sometimes



we might have to be typing the whole period. Sometimes we might be going outside and studying and so we can't really do our notes and things.

Interestingly, when Oliver was asked what would need to change for him to be excited about attending school, instead of wanting the teachers to slow down or assign less work, he told me that he wanted to learn more about gladiators.

And then I think a little bit more of exciting stuff like maybe – like in Rome – I mean in ancient civ. we talked about gladiators a little bit but we didn't really get into that subject and I kind of liked the gladiator part. And I – so I hoped we could learn more about that because that was pretty interesting... I thought it was pretty exciting how they lived because, uh, they were pretty much slaves and they, um – they actually fought a lot. But what was pretty interesting was that they had doctors and they had seatings and they actually fought against wild beasts like tigers and elephants.

**Queely.** Queely is an 11-year-old 6<sup>th</sup> grader who self-identifies as Mexican or

Hispanic. At the time of the first interview Queely had been displaying SRB for about 3 years. She was making efforts to avoid school 2 to 4 times per week and had missed 10 days of school over the prior three months due to school refusal related behaviors.

Queely and her mother heard about the study through the director of the summer day camp she attends, and asked her mother to contact me to arrange an interview. The interview was scheduled at a library close to Queely's house, per her request. Upon meeting her, I explained the purpose of the study and asked if she had questions, which she did not. Queely's mother then excused herself and went to wait for Queely in another part of the library. After obtaining her assent, I engaged Queely in conversation about the camp and the library. She presented as very reserved and spoke in a soft, slow voice. After about 10 or 15 minutes of conversation, when Queely was ready, we began the interview.

Queely was another student that complained about her teachers moving too quickly through the class material. I asked her what this was like for her, and she said, “It’s that it’s confusing and then you don’t understand it.” Queely had other problems with her teachers as well. She talked about several teachers who were “pretty mean” to her. Queely had an explanation for their behavior: “They, they just, my mom says that when they were small, they probably got picked on or whatever and they brought it to now and they are just doing it to other kids.” Queely named two teachers who were especially hurtful, one of which is her Physical Education teacher.

Queely has also had to endure mistreatment by her peers. She confided that they call her names and pick fights with her. In fact, there was a long period of time, when she first began exhibiting SRB, that she had no friends at all. They had all moved away. Queely told me that she would pretend to be sick so she could stay home from school, but “my mom wouldn’t buy it. She’d make me go to school. And then when I come home, I just cry.” Queely has also tried to avoid school during the times when her grades have not been as good as she would like. “It makes me feel, if I get a bad grade, it makes me feel like I don’t want to go to school anymore.”

**Tonya.** Tonya is a 13-year-old female in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade that self-identifies as Hispanic. At the time of the first interview, she had been exhibiting SRB for approximately one year. She was attempting to avoid school almost every day and had been successful seven times over the prior three months.

Tonya found out about the study through the director of the after-school program she attends. She had her grandmother contact me to schedule a time for the first interview.

Tonya asked that we meet at her program site, as this was a familiar and comfortable location for her. After meeting her and introducing myself, I informed her about the purpose of the study. Tonya had no questions for me, so I proceeded with obtaining her written assent. I then engaged her in conversation about the friends she had made at her after-school program. Tonya was very thoughtful in her answers. Her composed, relaxed demeanor allowed me to establish rapport easily.

I then began the interview by asking Tonya to tell me about her history of SRB. She explained that her excessive homework is a major factor in her school avoidance because she either has to stay up all night finishing it and then is exhausted in the morning, or chooses not to finish it and must face the consequences the next day.

...it was because all the work she had gave us was like a really big packet and she wanted us to complete like a couple of weeks of it in one night. And from me going to the [after-school] club and coming home at eight it wasn't really helping because then my mom would have to stay up with me all night and stuff. And then I would have to get up early in the morning and try to finish. So that is why I would be like, 'I don't want to go to school. I don't want to go to school. She is going to yell at me and stuff.'

Math, her least favorite part about school, was the other reason Tonya gave for wanting to avoid going.

Yeah. It is like my math. It really bothers me. I just don't like it because I used to be behind in quarter one work and that is all I had to do was my math. And we're – I was in that dividing fractions and dividing multiplication problems and that just really bugged me because my mom was like, "get it done, get it done." So that was really making me mad. So that is why – that is what part makes me not want to go to school because of my math.

When asked what would need to change for her to want to go to school, Tonya replied that they are required to do too much reading in her class. "...I like reading, but not like

two hours a day. It kind of gets boring after a while. I mean I can read the whole hour and not get tired or sleepy or bored and then the second hour is kind of like I'm done. I'm ready to do something else.”

**Arthur.** Arthur is a 12-year-old male in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade that self-identifies as Hispanic. When I first met him, he had been struggling with SRB for 4 years. He was attempting to avoid school about once a week and had been successful 8 days over the prior 3 months.

Arthur's mother learned about the study through the director of Arthur's summer day camp. When she contacted me to schedule our first interview, it was decided that we would meet at a coffee shop close to where they lived. I introduced myself to Arthur and his mother, and told her the interview would take about one hour. She then stated that she would shop for groceries (the coffee shop was located within a grocery store) while he and I talked, and to call or text her when we were finished. Once Arthur's mother had excused herself, we sat down at a table and I explained the purpose of the research to Arthur. He had no questions, so I proceeded to obtain his assent. I then began to engage him in conversation about his weekend plans. Arthur was rather reserved, providing brief answers to my inquiries. The conversation continued for about 10 minutes, at which time I asked Arthur if he was ready to begin. When he answered in the affirmative, I reminded him that he did not have to answer any questions that made him uncomfortable and that he could end the interview at any point with no penalty.

The theme of short answers continued throughout the interview, despite my attempts to draw Arthur out. Although he did not provide much elaboration, Arthur did mention numerous factors that interfere with his motivation to attend school. The first obstacle

was lack of sleep, which made him doze off in class, thereby creating another problem: “...when I don’t sleep good I feel tired all day and get in trouble for falling asleep in class.”

Arthur also told me that school was difficult for him “’Cause school’s hard and the halls are small and there’s lots of kids.” He felt that his teachers’ expectations were too high, and was especially frustrated with being made to write in MLA format. Arthur attributed the high expectations to the fact that the school he attended was a college preparatory school. Another reason Arthur did like his school was because the cafeteria did not serve lunch. Rather, the students had to bring their own. He wanted to be able to get a hot meal at lunchtime.

Lastly, and in accordance with the theme of high expectations, Arthur did not want to attend school when his grades were poor. “I don’t want to go because I know it’s going to be hard and if my grades aren’t good I really don’t want to go because I have to work that much harder.” Although Arthur chose not to discuss his grades, the inference was that they were not as high as he would like. Arthur had the following suggestions for how to improve his school experience: “It wouldn’t be so bad if they gave us more time on our work. And if they let us listen to our iPods.”

**Daniel.** Daniel is a 13-year-old male in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade that self-identifies as Mexican. At the time of our first interview, he had been exhibiting SRB for approximately 2 years. He was making attempts to avoid school, on average, about once per week, and had been successful 5 times over the prior 3 months.

Daniel and his grandmother learned of the study through the director of his after-school program. They contacted me to schedule the first interview at his after-school location, as that was Daniel's preference. Upon arriving at the facility, I introduced myself to Daniel and explained the purpose of the study. As he had no questions, we proceeded to the assent process. Once assent was obtained, I began by asking Daniel about his experience of the program. Once rapport had been established, we began the interview.

The first factor Daniel mentioned that has influenced his SRB was the presence of bullies at his school. He described witnessing them hurt his friends and being afraid: "...8<sup>th</sup> graders always picked on the little 6<sup>th</sup> graders, so I was kind of afraid to go...they always picked on my friends...but I tried to protect them, but they were too big for me, so yeah." Daniel also complained that the work was too challenging. "...sometimes science can be really hard. And sometimes my teacher sometimes doesn't help me so I try guessing, but I need help with science." In addition to the challenging schoolwork, Daniel insinuated that his teacher grades him unfairly when he said, "like sometimes we turn in the work and she puts a bad grade on it, but we still do good on it but she puts our grades down though." Daniel also confided that getting bad grades makes him not want to go to school. He told me about a time when "I was always nervous. I was getting Ds and Fs so I didn't really want to go." Out of all of the above mentioned stressors in Dave's life, he confided that the one thing he would most want to change is the way his friends are treated by the bullies.

## **Parent Information**

Demographic information was gathered from the demographic questionnaires completed by each of the parent figures. The parent sample consisted of 10 English-speaking, Latina parent figure participants, one for each child co-researcher. Parent figures (and consequently their potential child participants) were excluded if they were non-English speaking or did not identify as Latino/a. Seven of the students' parent figures were mothers and the remaining three were grandmothers. Six identified as Hispanic, three as Mexican, and one as Chicano. The majority denied any history of mental illness except for two of the mothers, who had experienced depression. Three of the guardians completed fewer than eight grades in school. One dropped out in the eleventh grade. Of the remaining six, three completed high school and three attended or completed some form of secondary education (nursing school or college). Only one parent figure, a mother, reported a history of SRB. She stated she would attempt to avoid school, on average, between 2 and 4 times per week.

The next section presents the themes that emerged across the co-researchers' experiences. To identify the themes, first I eliminated my comments and questions from the interview transcripts as well as any repetitive or irrelevant statements made by the co-researchers. I then went through each transcript and coded the remaining statements. The co-researcher's statements were then highlighted in different colors, with each color representing a broad category, such as "Experience of School Work" and "Support System/Resources." Some of the categories were then subdivided into smaller themes. For example, under the category "Experience of School Work," themes such as level of

difficulty, boredom, and pleasure emerged. The researcher eliminated statements that did not fit into themes unless they related to the larger categories. Table 2, below, presents and summarizes the themes, while Table 3 organizes them across co-researchers.



Table 2

*Themes*

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Domain and Category	Frequency
Housing	3
Safety of the School Environment	4
Relationship with Teachers	
Positive	10
Negative	8
Family's Opinion of School Attendance	7
Role of Grades in SRB	5
Experience of Schoolwork	
Level of Difficulty	9
Boredom	5
Pleasurable	5
Support System/Resources	8
Relationship with Parents	7
Impact of Sibling Relationship	4
Parent Involvement	7
Nature of Peer Relationships	10

Table 3

*Themes Arranged by Co-Researchers*

Themes	Co-Researchers									
	Arthur	Angel	Brian	Daniel	Eric	Gus	Mindy	Oliver	Queeley	Tonya
Safety of the School										
Environment		x		x	x			x		
Relationship with Teachers										
Positive	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Negative	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Family's Opinion										
Of School Attendance	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	
Role of Grades	x	x		x	x				x	
Experience of School Work										
Difficulty	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	
Boredom	x		x	x		x		x		
Pleasure			x			x		x		x
Housing	x	x					x			
Support System/ Resources										
Resources		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Relationship										
With Parents		x	x	x		x	x	x	x	
Impact of										
Sibling Relationship				x	x	x	x			
Parent Involvement	x		x	x		x		x	x	x
Peer Relationships	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x

### Composite Textural/Structural Descriptions

An analysis of the interviews indicated the presence of several common themes. Groups of themes are listed below, paired with the research question to which each group refers. Each theme then is defined and several example statements from the interviews are provided. A comprehensive list of interview statements can be found in Appendix G.

#### **Research question 1: What role does academic achievement play in the development and maintenance of SRB?**

Two related themes emerged from the data. Together these themes describe the participants' experiences of SRB, as it relates to academic success or failure. The two themes are *role of grades in SRB* and *experience of schoolwork*. *Role of grades in SRB* is defined as the degree to which the child's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with his/her grades affects his/her desire to miss or attend school. *Role of grades in SRB* was endorsed by 5 participants. Each of the 5 participants endorsed this theme between once and 3 times. *Experience of schoolwork* is defined as the child's experience of schoolwork being difficult, boring, or pleasurable. *Experience of schoolwork* as difficult was endorsed by 9 participants. This theme was endorsed between 1 and 9 times by each of these 9 participants. *Experience of schoolwork* as boring was endorsed by 5 participants between 2 and 3 times each. *Experience of schoolwork* as pleasurable was endorsed by 6 of the participants between 1 and 3 times each.

**Theme: *Role of grades in SRB*.** Half of the children interviewed stated that making a bad grade/s or the fear of making bad grades has a huge negative impact

on their motivation to attend school. One student confided, "It makes me feel, if I get a bad grade, it makes me feel like I don't want to go to school anymore." This statement illustrates the strong connection between motivation for school attendance and grades received.

Two of the participants wanted to avoid attending when their grades were poor because getting bad grades caused them to have low self-esteem. These children did not want to attend school where there would be reminders of these grades. One young man shared that he refused school, "Cause I sometimes I get like C's and like F's. And that doesn't, it makes me feel bad and like not want to go to school because I want to have like pure Cs and As – no Fs. That's how I want it to be."

One child reported feeling pressured by her mother to improve low grades. She shared,

So far my grades are going up. Like all my Ds went up to Cs and some of my Cs went up to Bs. And my mom is proud of me because she – she went to the same exact school. She got in a fight and got expelled. So she was like – she's like – she don't want me to follow her. So I'm nervous for test. I want to go home and tell my mom, 'Oh yeah. I aced this test easily.' But instead sometimes I got saying, 'Mom, I didn't pass this test easily. I didn't get a very good grade on it.' It gets me really nervous to tell her.

Another child experienced a desire to avoid attendance because he did not want to put in the extra effort required to improve his poor grades. This particularly disenchanted young man stated, "I don't want to go because I know it's going to be hard and if my grades aren't good I really don't want to go because I have to work that much harder." These participants confided that even the possibility of performing poorly was sufficient to create avoidance.

**Theme: *Experience of schoolwork.***

***Level of difficulty.*** Experiencing at least some schoolwork as challenging was a theme that occurred across 9 of the participants' transcripts. Three of the children reported at times feeling so overwhelmed by the complexity of their assignments that they did not even make an attempt to decipher them. A female participant captured the essence of this theme with the following statement:

The last one is Earth Science and because there is like these really big charts. They are like this but longer and bigger and thicker. And there is just pages and pages of reading like astronomy and all that and microscopic – microscopic images of the body and then there is like – there is this really big chart like this and it is full of numbers and words. (Deep breath) It just hurts my eyes looking at all of those blurring together.

Another female participant, Mindy, echoed this frustration when she said:

Like when they give me hard worksheets like I don't understand sometimes. Like language arts there was this worksheet we were doing and it's worth a lot of points but like the teacher – I asked if I could – if she can help me but she said that she can't because she wants to see if I can do it alone. So I didn't really do anything on it.

More than half of the participants experienced their work as difficult due to the sheer amount of the assignments they were assigned and the fast teaching pace.

Oliver shared his thoughts about this:

Uh, some of it is because it is just because it is all packed on top of each other and it is just a lot of work. I mean, if I had it little by little, work every day, I would probably finish it instead of having to have homework most of the days. Um, math and science are pretty easy to learn but the problem is they pile up too much homework. And then ancient civ I understand but our teacher goes kind of quick.

One of the children described being 'psyched out' and made to feel inferior by the more savvy test takers on exam days. She shared,

Well, usually I don't study for the test because it is like really complicated. Then, um, like when the big test comes everybody is like, 'Yeah, I'm gonna' ace this test.' Everybody else had studied, been prepared, and I haven't. And like they always like they rub it in. Like those really – those nerdy kids like rub it in your face like, 'Oh yeah. I have an A+.' I'm like, 'yeah, cool.' And they just keep rubbing it in and it just really – it paranoids me. So on big test days everybody – like all the kids that usually get As are like, 'Yeah. I'm going to ace this test.'

This young lady's admission that the "nerdy kids" made her feel paranoid on test day seemed to indicate she was comparing herself to her peers and judging herself as less capable. Not only was she nervous before the "complicated" test because she had not studied, but she became even less confident in her abilities due to the bragging by her peers.

Additionally, each of the participants identified at least one class that was especially difficult for them. It was not uncommon for children to 'tune out' completely during these classes. One young man who felt ill equipped to succeed in his math class had the following to say, "Well, only my math class is because sometimes I don't like doing anything in them because I'm not good at math so I don't even try in math." This statement seems to indicate a link between perceived proficiency and effort.

**Boredom.** Boredom was yet another common way in which schoolwork was experienced. Participants described feeling bored in class because they were unable to focus. This was especially true, for one participant, during tests and any other instance in which reading was involved. He had this to say about his science class:

Well, Science, I just, I'm not interested. It's just hard to really do it because you space out and because you don't like it. So, when I'm doing like science tests, I space out. I forget the questions and stuff like that. Then reading, I just get, can't get

into the book. Like I'll be reading and then after 5 pages, it just gets boring...5, 10 pages.

He revisits the subject of his boredom in science class, later in the interview:

I'm not interested in the things we learn in science. It is just boring. Like we do – actually we do astronomy and stuff and it's pretty good but usually we do like Newton's Laws and that is really boring to me. So I just don't want to listen to anything.

One participant, Oliver, actually reported feeling bored for the inverse reason – he did not have enough work to do in order to keep his attention occupied. Oliver frequently finished his math assignments in class before his peers, and so he sits and waits for the others to catch up: “Uh, math. Yeah, it's boring. I mean we have to do a lot of stuff on our own - that I appreciate - but the problem is there is not enough to do on our own. When we only have one worksheet it is pretty quick to finish.” He also talked about being bored when the teacher would review material he had already learned. “Well, that, and sometimes it is just the subject is boring. Like, maybe you might talk about what vocabulary, multiplication, division, things I've already learned. Things like that.

Two of the participants also identified boredom as a major cause of their acting-out behaviors. They reported behaviors ranging from being out of their desks without permission to starting physical altercations with their peers as consequences of their inability to tolerate feeling “bored.” Daniel shared that, “sometimes like the work would be real boring and I can't really stay in my seat sometimes, so I'll just keep staying up, and they tell me to sit down, so, yeah.”

***Pleasure.*** A somewhat surprising finding among the school refusers was the theme of finding pleasure in their schoolwork. More than half had a favorite subject and five

were even able to name a specific topic that they really enjoyed. A male student shared about one of his favorite subjects, math. He said, “It is just interesting to me and I just like doing math problems and it’s better than watching or doing science or anything.”

One very bright student was excited to talk about his favorite topic of the year, gladiators.

He said,

Gladiators. I thought it was pretty exciting how they lived because, uh, they were pretty much slaves and they, um – they actually fought a lot. But what was pretty interesting was that they had doctors and they had seatings and they actually fought against wild beasts like tigers and elephants.

Additionally, participants were most likely to experience “hands on” assignments as pleasurable. Angel gave an example of one assignment, in particular, that was able to hold her attention:

Um, like we are doing this thing called ‘Think Tactile’ where you have this thing because we are learning astronomy right now. And there is this box and it has nine boxes and each one of them has like, uh, the sun to Neptune meter thing. And one says like section review, fray or model notes, thirty plant word splash, and stuff like that. And we have to do three of them in like this tic tac toe thing. So that is pretty fun.”

Another student, Brian, enjoyed his science project so much that his enthusiasm was unhampered by the fact that the project “failed,” suggesting that tactile learning experiences can make classes fun, even if the child is not “proficient” in that particular subject. He offered,

The only good science project I’ve done this year, which was awesome, was made a rocket. Yeah, well it was kind of stressing because everybody wanted to do it again. We were outside. Because everyone was trying to tell us what to do and we’re like, ‘We know what to do.’ We did it and the rocket’s like a big failure because everybody’s stressing us out. It only, it was supposed to go up, but we pulled the trigger and it pulled sideways that time and it almost hit F. in the face. It was like Matrix with his head back.



In summary, two themes relating to the research question “What role does academic achievement play in the development and maintenance of SRB?” emerged from the data. These two themes were *role of grades in SRB* and *experience of schoolwork*. Five children endorsed *role of grades*, indicating that their SRB behavior was intensified by poor grades. Nine, five, and five children, respectively, endorsed *experience of schoolwork* as being difficult, boring, and fun.

### **Research Question 2: What role does the family environment play in the development and maintenance of SRB?**

Six themes that address the role of the family environment in maintaining and developing SRB emerged from the data. These themes include: *family’s opinion of school attendance*, *housing*, *support system / resources*, *relationship with parents*, *impact of sibling relationship*, and *parent involvement*. *Family’s opinion of school attendance* is defined as the family members’ opinions about school attendance in general and the child’s attendance in particular. *Housing* refers to housing related factors including number of relocations, safety of neighborhood, adequacy of housing structure, etc... *Support system / resources* are factors related to the presence or absence of a child’s support system. *Relationship with parents* refers to the quality / nature of the relationship between parent/s and child, especially as it pertains to school related matters. *Impact of sibling relationship* is defined as the affect the child’s sibling/s have on the child’s desire to attend or avoid school. *Parent involvement* concerns the degree to which the child’s parent/s is involved in school related activities.

*Family's opinion of school attendance* was endorsed by 7 of the participants, between 2 and 4 times by each participant. *Housing* was endorsed by 3 of the participants, between 2 and 3 times each. *Support system/resources* was endorsed by 8 of the participants, ranging from 2 to 15 times each. *Relationship with parents* was endorsed by 7 of the participants, between one and 6 times by each participant. *Impact of sibling relationship* was endorsed by 4 participants, between one and 4 times each. *Parent involvement* was endorsed by 7 participants, from 1 to 4 times by each participant.

**Theme: *Family's opinion of school attendance.*** Seven of the children interviewed shared that their parents regarded regular school attendance as being very important. Per the children's reports, parents tended to equate good attendance with academic success, and academic success with a higher earning potential. This is exemplified in the following statement by one young student interviewed, who said, "“Uh, well, I think my mom wants me to go to school because she wants me to get a good education and a good job so I don't have to work very hard like my dad.” Another participant reported a similar conversation with his mother. He said, "...she said if I miss school this year, you don't get an education. Without education, you can't get a job.”

A female participant reported her parents encouraged her to attend school for several reasons. They wanted her to be able to attend college, an opportunity that her brother did not have.

Well, I think she wants me to do to school because she wants me to be successful like my brother and – but my brother made it to – he had good grades in elementary and high school. They were straight ‘As.’ And like, I want to be like him, so yeah. But my brother couldn’t go to school because he was an immigrant, so yeah – like college.

Her parents would also try to coax her into going to school by equating school attendance with being successful in her future dream job.

Um, they tell me, like – sometimes we are at the table eating dinner and they say, um – they tell me, like, hoe to – ‘what do I want to be when I grow up?’ and all kinds of other things like that. And I say what I want to be and then they go, ‘well, id you really want to be that than you should be getting your grades up and paying attention in class and not walking out and doing other stuff like that.’

Four of the students reported school attendance to be important to their parents because they (parents) had wanted to graduate high school but were unable to due to extenuating circumstances. These parents wanted to see their children fulfill the dreams that they missed out on. A male student shared, “My mom she just gets mad when I don’t go to school ‘cause she never had the chance. She had the chance to go to school but them she dropped out ‘cause she had me in high school and so she always wants me to finish school.” This participant described feeling torn between his peers, who did not value attendance, and his mother, who did. He said:

Yeah, sometimes because then some of the people say, don’t go to school. That’s just a waste of time. And they just like, they tell me that school is just stupid and all that stuff. And then my mom keeps telling me, like telling me, ‘go to school...’ It’s so much pressure, I don’t know what to do.

The pressure to attend school and to be successful was intensified for children who had the chance to be the first in their families to graduate high school and go on

to college. These potential first generation graduates were torn between their desire to avoid school and their eagerness to make their families proud. A female student, Angel, shared:

She actually feels good because my mom, um, she really never completed school. Like She went to the same school as me and she only made it to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I think after that, she got expelled and she never went back. And she doesn't want me to fail, to go in the same footsteps as her, so she wants me to like, it's like if I finish school and I graduate and I go to college, I'll be the first one in my family.

School attendance was also very important to Angel's father. Even though she did not see him often, they would talk every day, and Angel said he was always very interested in how she was doing in school. When asked how her father felt about her school attendance, she replied,

He feels good. He says every day, the first thing he tells me – he speaks kind of Spanish – he says, 'how are you doing in school, Mija?' And I'm like, 'good. I'm doing good.' And he says, um, and then we just talk. That's always the first thing he asks when I'm on the phone.

**Theme: *Housing*.** Another theme that emerged from the data concerned students' housing conditions. Three of the children reported having relocated, and consequently being forced to change schools, multiple times within the last year. In one case the moves were prompted by social upward mobility. "We keep moving constantly. Not constantly, but my mom keeps getting better exceptions to houses, like we might be moving from these ones to like section 8 with like, they're not apartments, they're houses with like five to six bedrooms, so yeah."

In the other two cases, families were forced to relocate because parents had lost their jobs. One student shared, "I've been to around 4 or 5 schools... 'cause we kept moving. 'Cause my parents couldn't work at a job and then we had to move somewhere else to get a new job." One female student even reported that her family had lost everything they had when her father lost his job: "There is not that many jobs anymore my dad just barely got a job and yeah. So we're going back up. We lost our cars, we lost our house, so now we live in the trailer we just bought. So yeah."

**Theme: *Support system / resources.*** Students reported an array of different types of support systems. Most of these systems were supportive but 3 were characterized as rife with conflict or, at the least, instability. One young student reported feeling supported by peers at school.

[Friends] make school funner. Sometimes they help me with my work and – yeah... Sometimes they help me with my class work. They sit with me and we sit as a group and we do class work... Like my friends do, so those are the only people that help me but, like – that is pretty much it. The teachers help me sometimes but not all the time.

Another participant reported family and friends as a major source of support to her. When asked if she had people in her life who wanted her to succeed she replied, "Yeah. I have my friend Hilton and my mom and my dad and my aunt and my cousins and all of them say, 'stay in school. Don't be like us, don't be like us.'" She went on to say, "My brother is supportive too. He is always saying, 'you have a big day tomorrow, studying for your quizzes and stuff.'"

Two of the participants reported their families showed their support by holding them accountable for their school performance. One young man reported his grandmother motivated him by taking away his things when he made poor grades.

He stated,

She tells me, when I show her my report card and there's a 'D' or an 'F' she says, 'get that up or you'll be grounded. I get it up the next day and she goes, 'eh, you put that up fast, so, I just try to get them up because without my stuff, I'd be losing it...She just says, 'get good grades and if I have a 'D' or 'F' she says 'get it up.' And then I get it up the next day.

Another male student, Oliver, reported his "parents, um, don't really like it when I don't know what is going on at school. They always ask if I have homework. They always tell me to do it right away. They also always want me to talk to the teachers if I have any questions."

There were three children who described their support systems in negative terms. The situations described ranged from mild to severe. One example was given that was particularly impactful on a female student's motivation to avoid school. This student shared that her teacher had told her multiple times that she should just go ahead and drop out of school because she would never be successful. "And then I told my mom that and she was like, "don't drop out. You can - you're better than what your teacher thinks you are."

Another student confided that the conflict among his family members, especially between his parents, had become so severe that his mother sought out counseling for the four of them:

My mom just wanted us to go to therapy to work things out. Usually my dad wouldn't come to therapy. He would, a couple times he came. Like it would, sometimes it would be me, my mom, and [my sister]. Sometimes it'd be my dad, me and [my sister]. Therapy happened kind of May through...Like it started in May and it ended at the start of August.

Yet another student was undoubtedly greatly affected by his brother's multiple incarcerations. He looked forward to the little bit of time he was able to spend with his brother, who had to split his visitations between his family of origin and his wife and child. This student had the following to say: "Sometimes [my brother] takes us out to eat and most of the time he can't get out because he is in a place called work release because he has been in jail so many times. So he is in there and only has a bit of time to be out so he tries to spend as much time as he can with us and his family."

**Theme: *Relationship with parents.*** Yet another pattern that emerged concerned the nature of the child/parent relationship. Four of these relationships were characterized as a struggle where school matters were concerned, especially in relation to attendance. When asked if she ever had difficulty attending school, one young student responded, "That is like most of the week because like in the mornings I wake up and my mom wakes me up and I don't want to wake up. And then we start this big fuss about it and finally at the end she just leaves me there and I wake up like ten minutes before like my bus gets here I guess. So yeah." The way she explained it, every morning she and her mother would argue because she did

not want to go to school. Many days the child would wear her mother down and successfully avoid school.

Another student described taking a more passive but less effective approach: “I pretend I was sick. My mom wouldn’t buy it. She’d make me go to school. And then when I come home, I just cry.” Unlike the student mentioned above, who was able to go on with her day, as usual, when she was forced to attend, school attendance caused this student distress throughout the day and into the evening.

However, a different student, Brian, described strained relationships with his mother for reasons unrelated to attendance. He shared, “Well, I argue with my mom because every day she comes home all mad at me and I don’t know why...She kind of seems like she comes home every day kind of grumpy. So it seems like she’s always mad at someone.” A male student shared that his relationship with his parents was punctuated by a struggle to keep the lines of communication open. He went on to explain that his parents were very interested in how he was doing at school but that he did not communicate very well with about his progress. The student stated, “My parents, um, don’t really like it when, uh, I don’t know what is going on at school. They always ask if I have homework. They always tell me to do it right away. They also always want me to talk to the teachers if I have any questions.”

Yet another participant reported difficulties of a different nature. He reported his relationship with his father had suffered because his father worked long hours and consequently did not have time to spend with him.



My dad, um, he's not home very often so I don't really talk to him that much...Yeah, I mean, he comes home pretty late and I have to go to sleep at ten and so my mom and sister see him all the time...I'm okay because I know my dad is working. That way we have a good place to live...When I was a kid we used to play a lot but things have changed.

**Theme: *Impact of sibling relationship.*** The theme of the nature of the sibling relationship as impactful was found to have a great deal of influence on children's school refusal behaviors. Students reported both positive and negative sibling role models. A male student reported that he had a sister who also exhibited school refusing behaviors: "Not sure about [my sister]. She doesn't go to school sometimes too."

Conversely, a female student, Mindy, described her relationship with her sibling as having a positive influence on her. Mindy was inspired by her brother's unfulfilled desire to attend college and wanted to follow in his footsteps. She stated,

Well, I think [my mom] wants me to go to school because she wants me to be successful like my brother and – but my brother made it to – he had like good grades in elementary and high school. They were straight As. And like I want to be like him so yeah. But my brother couldn't go to school – like college – because he was an immigrant, so yeah.

Another student, Eric, described his relationship with his siblings as positively influencing him in a different manner. Instead of the siblings being his role models, Eric became a model for them of what not to do. Although he loved the idea of being a role model to his little brothers, he recognized the power of his influence over them and wanted them to succeed where he had failed.

It's cool 'cause I'm a role model to my brothers and they say they're gonna' be just like me when they grow up and I'm just like, "Be better than me." 'Cause I'm

not doing so good in school. Well, I've flunked different classes. I flunked 5<sup>th</sup> grade and they might flunk in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade just to be like me but I don't want them to be like me.

Yet another student became so annoyed with his sister that at times he wanted to go to school just to get away from her. "Because sometimes we could fight and we just need some time to get away from each other for a few hours, so..."

**Theme: *Parent involvement.*** Reports of parental involvement in the school-related activities of students exhibiting SRBs ranged from very involved to completely disconnected. Parent participation in activities ran the gamut from zero, to attending parent/teacher conferences and recitals, to coaching sports teams. One child's father was unable to be physically present for many of the school events but did his best to communicate his support from afar. This student, Tonya, described his involvement by saying, "He is always telling me, 'Don't quit, don't quit. Try your hardest. You can do it,' and stuff. So he is supportive too. He doesn't want me to quit school." She goes on to explain that her father travels a lot and consequently cannot attend parent/teacher conferences: "Yes my mom went to the conference. He can't because he is on the road but he comes home every other day. So he can't all the time but he tries to make it when he wants – when he can."

Unfortunately, Tonya's situation was not unique. Two of the other students reported their parents were unable to be as active in their children's schools as they would have liked. A commonly cited barrier to parental involvement concerned job responsibilities,

such as shift work, which necessitated that parents slept during the times of day that activities occurred. A male student shared, “[My parents] work during the night,” and:

Um, my dad works and my mom works and they don’t have enough time ‘cause when we have a meeting they like have to go to work or something ‘cause it is like their break and then I tell them and then, um, when I tell them they say they have to go to work because before that work called and told them they had to go to work.

Another student, Oliver, had parents who wanted to be more involved but weren’t because Oliver failed to relay messages to them concerning the date and time of school events. When asked if his parents showed interest in participating in school-related activities he replied:

Uh, yeah, but I’ve missed – I’ve made them miss most of the time because I just haven’t heard the announcements about the – the parent-teacher conferences because they say when they are coming up but they never like – they say they are coming up but they don’t really say the date as far as I can hear. Yeah. And since I don’t know, they don’t know either. So nobody, pretty much, has gone.

Conversely, four participants reported that at least one parent attended school-related activities such as parent/teacher conferences. One parent attended occasionally:

“Sometimes, like when something’s going to change they’ll go to the school meeting.”

Another reported his grandmother attended regularly, in order to monitor his progress:

“Yeah, we go to parent/teacher conferences to see how good I’m doing in school...she just checks on the grades and all that.” A female student, Queeley, was the participant with the most involved parents. She proudly told me, “They go to parent/teacher conferences and to watch me sing for my choir, or whatever. So they’re always there.”

Additionally, children’s feelings about their parents’ degree of engagement with the school varied, as well. Three of children admitted to being bothered by the fact that their

parents were unable to attend activities, while one student with particularly involved parents sometimes wished they were a little less involved. He made the following statement: “Like, I don’t always like – sometimes I kind of don’t want him to coach but when he actually does then I want him to. Sometimes he’s just annoying. It seems like – because he is always on my back and nobody else’s it seems like.”

In summary, there were six themes that emerged from the data that addressed the role of the family environment in developing and maintaining SRB. These themes were *family’s opinion of school attendance*, *housing*, *support system/resources*, *relationship with parents*, *impact of sibling relationship*, and *parent involvement*. Seven of the participants endorsed *family’s opinion of school attendance*, indicating their families placed great importance on their attendance. Three of the participants endorsed *housing*, reporting multiple relocations and consequently, having to change school multiple times. Eight of the participants endorsed *support system/resources*. Most of these participants described positive support systems but 3 described a lack of support. Seven of the participants endorsed *relationship with parents*, with 3 describing conflict with their parents due to their SRB. Four participants endorsed *impact of sibling relationship*, with 3 reporting sibling relationships that had a positive impact influence on their attendance and 1 reporting a sibling relationship that had a negative impact on his attendance. Finally, 7 endorsed *parent involvement*, with 2 reporting dissatisfaction with their parents’ level of involvement and 5 reporting satisfaction with their parents’ level of involvement.

**Research Question 3: Does the child's relationship with his or her peers affect SRB, and if so, how?**

Two themes emerged from the data that addressed the effect of peer relationships on SRB. These themes are: *support system/resources* and *nature of peer relationships*. *Support system/resources* is defined as the factors related to the presence or absence of a child's support system. *Nature of peer relationships* refers to the quality and quantity of a student's friendships. *Support system/resources*, as they related specifically to friends and peers, was endorsed by 6 participants, between one and 4 times by each participant. *Nature of peer relationships* was endorsed by all 10 participants, between 4 and 19 times.

**Theme: *Support system / resources*.** Students described the support given by their peers on a continuum from not supportive to supportive to mutually beneficial. One male student, Brian, who had both supportive and unsupportive peers in his support system described his friendship dynamics by saying, "Well some kids support you in school and some just, they don't help, but it doesn't like hurt you in school. It doesn't like discourage you. Just, some support you and some stand there." When asked if he had friends that encouraged him to go to school he replied, "Uh, I think, I don't know if any of my friends really want me to go to school, but, yeah, I don't know if they do, but I'm sure one of them does."

Another male student described a peer support system that was much more active than the one in the aforementioned example. He talked about being part of a mutually beneficial system in which he reciprocated the support he was receiving.

“Um, well they will just encourage you to get everything done and don’t wait until the last minute. If you need help they will help you. If you need help. And then I will help them if they need help. So it is kind of like, if you help me, I will help you.” A second male student echoed this theme of reciprocity. He described his peer support system in the following way: “A lot of times we do things together like maybe studying. We might talk about a test or like what we got wrong that way we can practice on it and see how we can help each other out.”

There was one school refuser who reported that members of his support system not only encouraged him to attend school but would also help him get caught up on the work he missed on days he was absent. “Oh, they encourage me to go and if I miss a day they always tell me what I’m missing and what’s going on.” It is possible that these school refusers perceived these two actions, encouragement to attend and providing help with the work they missed, as contradictory.

**Theme: *Nature of peer relationships.*** All of the students interviewed described peer relationships that had a negative effect on them. These peers served to distract the school refusers in various ways. One student’s peer group influenced him to act in ways that were incompatible with academic success, such as being in a gang. Eight of the participants had peer groups that bullied them. And two groups even modeled school refusing behavior for the participants.

One student was particularly impressionable and had a peer group that tried to convince him to join a gang with them. He talked about the “dumb things” they would do to try to get accepted into this gang and the “dumb things” he ended up

doing as a result of their influence. He shared, "Like [my peers] did dumb things and then they tell me to do something and instead of doing what I'm supposed to do I listen to them and do what they tell me. And then after awhile – after I did it and um I think about them I look back and I go, 'I shouldn't have done that cause it was a dumb thing.'"

Seven children described being bullied by their peer groups. One female student, Queeley, talked about how her peers would make fun of her name. She stated, "Well, sometimes I have people that don't like me and make fun of me but like I try to hold myself in and not get mad...there's some girls that call me names that I don't really like. But I just ignore them like my friends tell me to. Like they call me names like manure and stuff like that, you know?" Although Queeley tried to present a façade of being unaffected by the bullying, she was visibly upset as she recounted the story.

Two of the participants reported trying to protect their friends from bullies at the school, while a third child received protection from his friends. A male student recounts his experience last year with the bullies at his school: "Well, when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I didn't know what 6<sup>th</sup> grade was like, so I was kind of scared that, cuz, 8<sup>th</sup> graders always picked on the little 6<sup>th</sup> graders, so I was kind of afraid to go. Yeah...They always picked on my friends, but I tried to protect them, but they were just too big for me, so yeah." Another young man, Eric, had difficulty with a group of male students who had "jumped" him and continued to bully him. He described the group as follows: "Those, um, there were like 6 when they jumped me but now

there's like 3 of them that stuck up for them, there's now...9...Like the ones that tried to jump me, they're in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade." Eric reported after his friends found out about the first attack, they promised to defend him if the bullies returned. "They stick up for me. They're like, 'if they jump you we'll just jump in and help you out."

Three of the participants described ongoing conflict with their peers of a lesser degree. A female student, Angel, had this to say about the kids at her school: "And then they give me dirty looks and then I am like, 'maybe if you keep rolling your eyes they are going to stay like that and they are like, 'oh, really?' and I'm like, 'yeah.'" She dismissed such interactions by saying, "I don't get in fights. Like I get in arguments, a lot of arguments, but not fights, like physical fights." Another female student

expressed frustration with peers that she felt would "start problems for no reasons."

She describes their interactions in the following way:

Like, if you barely tap them, 'why did you push me? Why did you push me? You could have went around.' And then if you say, 'excuse me,' 'you are excused. You could have gone around.' And stuff. Some of them are actually pretty rude...I just walk away because I have that thing of if I say something they will say something back and I'm gonna' get in trouble because they are going to say I did do stuff. So yeah.

Three of the participants reported getting into physical altercations with peers.

A male student reported recently getting "in trouble for fighting" but stated "the other kid started it...This kid came over and took my mac and cheese while I had my back turned and I punched him." A female student explained she tried to avoid fighting unless she felt she had to defend herself from peers who were bullying her. She stated, "I tell the teacher. My mom says that if you tell the teacher and they



won't stop, then you, um, then like, if they're poking at you and they won't stop and you poke 'em back, or whatever. If they're hitting you and they won't stop, then you hit them back."

Another theme was members of students' peer groups modeling school refusing behavior. Three of the students, when speaking about their school absences, would point to a friend that had missed even more school than the student had missed. A male student defended his SRB using this technique by saying, "I think maybe (pause) only in – in this – right now I think they probably skipped once so far. But I think that maybe in a whole month maybe like eight times. I think they stay home all the time."

In summary, two themes emerged that related to the effect of peer relationships on SRB. They were *support system/resources* and *nature of peer relationships*. *Support system/resources*, as they related specifically to friends and peers, was endorsed by 6 participants, between one and 4 times by each participant. *Nature of peer relationships* was endorsed by all 10 participants, between 4 and 19 times. All of the participants interviewed reported problematic peer relationships.

**Research Question 4: Does the child's relationship with his or her teacher affect SRB, and if so, how?**

An analysis of the data revealed one two-part theme concerning the effect of the student/teacher relationship on SRB. This theme was *relationship with teachers*. *Relationship with teachers* refers to a student's negative or positive feelings toward his/her teacher. Surprisingly, all 10 participants endorsed positive relationships

with teachers while 8 endorsed negative relationships. Negative relationships were endorsed between one and 13 times by the participants, while positive relationships were endorsed between one and 6 times.

**Theme: *Relationship with teachers.***

**Positive.** Interestingly, all of the school refusers interviewed reported having positive feelings about their teachers. Teachers who were well thought of were typically characterized as accessible, encouraging, engaging, and funny. A female student, Angel, described feeling as if she could go to any of her teachers for help, if she needed to. Angel stated,

Well, usually I don't talk to them, except about my school work. I don't, like if there's anything else I ever need, like I could talk to them. I never really ask them for anything, but like every, but like the teachers let us know, like, 'If you need anything, you could just talk to me,' because like usually I just wake up in the morning like really tired and I look sad, but I'm not, I'm just tired. They're like, 'If you need anything, just come talk to me.' I'm like, 'ok.'

Encouragement was another approach that the children responded to. Students shared their experiences with teachers who provided them with a safe, supportive environment in which to make mistakes. Oliver, a male student, described a typical interaction with one of his teachers:

Fifth period is – oh yeah – seventh grade math. And that class is fun and the teacher, she is happy all the time. She never yelled at us before and she – she like – if we don't get it she is like, 'wrong is good. Wrong is good.' And then if you don't get the right answer she'll – she'll ask if everybody agrees on the answer. 'No? Okay let's talk over it again.' So she doesn't go on without people that don't know but she – she's fun but like she encourages kids and all that kind of stuff.

Another student, Eric, described the type of encouragement he would like to receive from his teachers: "...cool teachers, they just go and then, they should help, they would help other kids and when they get an answer right they give them high fives."

Additionally, teachers who entertained the students and made them laugh were commonly named as favorites. This held true even in cases in which the teacher was characterized as "strict." A female student gave her account of what he thought was a particularly funny incident with a favorite teacher,

The teacher is fun, but strict. Like the other day we were learning about numbers, odd and even. And if it said, um, - like we were listening to Spanish because it didn't have a French version and it said 'cuenta' and then it said 'un, ducks, twa,' and stuff like that. If it was an odd number you had to go down and if it was an even you had to do this. Then she kept like - and then our art teacher was like grading us and then like, she did this. Sat on the desk and put her butt out and then she went like this. Like she went - she like moved her area. It was funny.

**Negative.** On the other end of the spectrum, as one might intuit would be the case with school refusers, were the negative student/teacher relationships. In general, teachers who assigned too much work, were inaccessible, or were hostile were disliked by the school refusers. When asked about his least favorite part of school, a male student stated, "Uhh pretty much the work. It's just lots to handle most of the time. And also the teachers don't really take it easy on you. They kind of make it hard and make it quick for some reason."

Not only were students overwhelmed by the amount of work they were supposed to do, but they also reported being unable to get assistance when needed,

in understanding their assignments. A male student also expressed his frustration with his teacher when he tried to reach out to her for help with his work and was told to sit down:

Like, I'm always asking questions. Sometimes she doesn't want to answer our questions. We'll go to her desk and she'll go, 'There's too many people around my desk and you guys have to raise your hands. Go to your seats and raise your hand so I can call you up to my desk.' So I asked somebody else because I know she's not going to, there's like 20 people raising their hands so I ask a person who understands it and I get yelled at about it. And sometimes like some of my other classmates, they'll be walking by somebody else's desk and she thinks they're talking so she'll yell at them. Then they'll have to come in for recess or something like that.

Another male student reported being frustrated by his teachers, who he felt would rather talk to one another than help him understand his assignments. He stated, "Like, they just talk a lot, and talk, and talk, and talk, and talk, and if you try to ask a question they'd get mad. Then they'd keep talking. They wouldn't let us ask questions." A female student reported similar difficulties with teachers that would not assist her. She stated, "Like, they don't help me with my work and stuff. They say I have to do it by myself and I can't really understand it, so I don't do it. Not all of the times, but most of the times when I ask. When it's really hard is when they don't help me."

Other problematic interactions that were recounted included incidents of being yelled at by teachers. A female student, Tonya, recounted a bad experience with her math teacher, "She would like yell at you and stuff, which I did not like her and that's what – that's why math is so not good because she would yell at me when I get a

problem wrong and I would be like, 'I'm not going to respond to you because you are yelling at me.'" A male student also describes being negatively impacted by a teacher's verbal abuse:

Um, I just don't want to go to school and put up with yelling and screaming at me or anything. So I won't go to school or I'll just tell my mom I don't want to...Sometimes I just – I know I will be yelled at for something I did wrong so I just don't feel like going to school. It just hits me hard, I guess...because if I have done a piece of work or anything wrong I think I will just get yelled at so I just don't want to go.

One student, Queeley, even reported being bullied by her teacher. She shared, "Some of the teachers can be pretty mean and then others can be very nice. They, they just, my mom says that when they were small, they probably got picked on or whatever and they brought it to now and they are just doing it to other kids."

In summary, one two-part theme emerged that related to the impact of student/teacher relationships on SRB. The theme was negative and positive *relationships with teachers*. Eight of the participants endorsed negative relationships with their teachers ranging from once to 13 times during their interviews. Ten endorsed positive relationships with their teachers ranging from 1 to 6 times during their interviews.

**Research Question 5: Does the child's feeling that he or she is safe at school impact SRB, and if so, how?**

One theme emerged that addressed the effect of feeling safe on school refusal behavior. The theme was *safety of the school environment*. It is defined as the feeling that school is a safe place to be, i.e. free of bullies, gangs, etc... *Safety of the school*

*environment* was endorsed by 4 of the participants between 2 and 12 times during their interviews.

**Theme: Safety of the school environment.** Four of the students interviewed reported safety was an issue at their schools. Three were bullied by their peers. One was afraid because there were known gang members attending her school. This student witnessed frequent fights that got out of control.

A male student, Eric, confided that his little brothers looked up to him and he wanted to set a good example for them. However, he frequently tried to avoid school because he feared for his safety. He said of his brothers: “Cause they always say that they’re gonna’ be like me and at school everyone is bullying me and it makes it feel like, like not wanting to go to school.” He reported feeling unsafe because some kids at school tried to jump him. “They were trying to jump me again but then I ran away and then my mom, she went outside and told them to stop and then I went outside and then they just left...they tried to jump me and I just don’t want to go to that school no more, so that’s why I try to like, tell my mom that I’m not going to go to school like the next day.”

A female student, Angel, confessed to feeling unsafe due to the brutal fights that would erupt at her school. She recounted a recent fight between two of her friends in the excerpt that follows:

Oh there was a fight today between this girl named um – I don’t know her name. And this other girl I don’t know either. But they are both sixth graders and they are my friends but I don’t remember their names because they get called a lot of nicknames. Like at school they don’t have their own names on the papers, they have their nicknames. It’s weird. I know. So like there was fight. They are both my friends and we were in earth science in sixth period and then there is a window and

then there is a hallway by the doors. And then they um – J. – oh yeah that’s her name. J. and D. – D. was talking about J. a lot and then um J. is like I’m going to go after her. I’m going to go after her. I was like why just to get yourself in trouble for another fight? Because she got um suspended for a month and she barely got back. So – and then she wanted another fight. So I think this time she got expelled. But there was a fight today and everybody like – they said it was the girl fight of the year because the teacher was grabbing – trying to separate them and they pulled her down and kicked her in the face. And Miss A. was bleeding and then D. pulled um – no. J. pulled D.’s hair and started kicking her in the face and then um Mr. S. had to like tackle J. and Miss – Miss M. had to help Miss A. and then Miss A. and Miss um M. had to take down D. or J. And that is why they called it the girl fight of the year because teachers got hit and they had to tackle them like literally tackle them.

In addition to the fighting she witnessed, Angel also experienced problems with bullies and gang members. She describes the bad influences at her school:

My school is kind of good, kind of not good. I mean, there’s a lot, a lot of influence there, but then there’s not. There’s a lot of gang bangers. There’s a lot of fights, there’s a lot of bullying. Sixth period’s like, there’s all the, there’s all like the, all those kids, like all those bullies. Like a lot, there’s a lot of girl bullies in that classroom and they like, and they bully a lot and they sometimes bully my friends and like it gets me really irritated.

### **Chapter Summary/Synthesis**

The final step of a phenomenological study is to reduce and synthesize the participant reports to capture the “essence” of the studied phenomenon. The previous section provided the textural and structural descriptions that were used for the reduction and synthesis. The following section presents the resulting synthesis of the students’ experiences.

Grades were a theme in the school refusing behavior of half of the students interviewed. The consensus across this group was to attempt to avoid school when their grades are poor. Co-researchers gave various reasons for this stance. One student did not

want to attend when his grades were low because it meant he would have to work “even harder” than usual. Other students simply said having bad grades made them feel badly about themselves. Still others did not want to get in trouble with teachers or parents.

Likewise, schoolwork was experienced in several different ways by the co-researchers. Nine of the ten students experienced at least some of their work as difficult. However, they responded to this situation in different ways. Some of them simply gave up and stopped making any attempts at figuring out how to do their work. Others continued to try to keep up, but found the pace to be too fast and they fell behind. Slightly more than half of the students found pleasure in at least some of their work, and a minority experienced their schoolwork as boring.

The family’s opinion that school attendance was important was mentioned in the majority of interviews. Various reasons were given by the co-researchers for the value their families placed on school attendance and education in general. Many of them reported that their parents had not graduated from high school and consequently, had to work multiple jobs to support their families. They did not want the same thing to happen to their children as a result of missing too much class time. One student reported his mother wanted him to go to school and graduate so that he would not make “bad choices” like his older brother, who was in jail.

Some of the co-researchers talked about housing related factors such as multiple relocations. These relocations were attributed to promotions or sometimes, to a negative



change in circumstances. One student even shared that her family lost their home when her father lost his job.

The co-researchers' reported receiving different levels of support from family, friends and teachers. Several talked about conflict within their families while others reported feeling supported by parents and admired by siblings. Most of the participants had friends who helped them at school, either socially, or with their schoolwork. And finally, co-participants had mixed experiences with teacher support, ranging from caring and engaging to verbally abusive.

The nature of the child/parent relationship was often characterized as a struggle where school attendance was concerned. Many of the co-researchers also described feeling pressure to succeed by parents who were unable to finish school. They reported being afraid of getting bad grades for fear of punishment.

In most instances, the presence of younger siblings created internal conflict for the co-researchers who, on the one hand, wanted to set a good example, but on the other hand, wanted to avoid school. The participants were also affected by their relationships with older siblings, who often had set poor examples for the school refusers. Many commented that they had "learned what not to do" by watching the mistakes of their older brothers.

Peer relationships were extremely important and greatly impacted the co-researchers' school refusing experiences. Many of them had been the victims of teasing or bullying.

Others simply did not have any friends. Still others were influenced by peers who modeled SRB for them.

The students' relationships with their teachers ranged from very positive to very negative, with many participants reporting both types of relationships. Positive relationships were characterized as open, supportive and safe. Negative relationships, on the other hand, were described as hostile with poor communication. Students felt negatively about teachers who assigned too much work, as well.

Many of the students reported feeling unsafe at school. Some attributed these feelings to the presence of known gang members in their school. Others were afraid of bullies. Some witnessed frequent fighting that escalated out of control.

This chapter presented data provided by the co-researchers. Descriptions were given of each child co-researcher and the parent participant sample. Then, structural and textural descriptions were provided to paint a picture of the co-researchers' experiences. Lastly, a reduction and synthesis was given to capture the essence of the phenomenon of school refusal behavior in Latino children between the ages of 11 and 13. The next chapter details the implications of the study's findings and presents the limitations of the study. It will conclude with recommendations for future research.

## Chapter 5

### **Discussion**

The major findings of this study revealed each student faced multiple barriers to school attendance. In other words, their school refusal behaviors were impacted by many different factors. The most influential of these factors was *peer relationships*. It was found that the quality of *peer relationships* heavily influenced each child's unwillingness to attend school. Several other important themes were also identified including *relationship with teachers* (positive and negative), *experience of school work* as difficult, boring or pleasurable, *family's opinion of school attendance*, *safety of the school environment*, *parent involvement*, *nature of peer relationships*, *impact of sibling relationship*, *relationship with parents*, *housing*, and *role of grades*. The section that follows will address the implications of these findings.

### **Implications for Schools, Students, and Families**

The implications of these results suggest the need for a multi-level approach that targets the multiple factors that influence SRB in Latino/a youth. The significance of peer relationships was a general theme endorsed by all of the co-researchers. Research conducted by Kearney (2001; 2002; 2007) has indicated that school refusing youth tend to experience more social difficulties with their peers

than do non-school refusing youth. This study supported Kearney's findings. More specifically, 80% of the co-researchers reported having few friendships and/or being teased or bullied by their peers. Many of them even drew a direct connection between poor peer relationships and their desire to avoid school. The literature supports this study's findings that children affected by bullying often attempt to avoid school. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and the United States Department of Justice have estimated that 160,000 children avoid school each day out of fear of being victimized (Newman-Carlson & Horne, 2004).

These findings indicate the need for culturally sensitive interventions designed to prevent bullying from occurring, to identify potential bullies and victims, and to reduce bullying that is already occurring. Several empirically supported self-report measures have been formulated to identify potential or current bullies and victims (Demaray & Malecki, 2003; Furlong et al., 2006; Mynard & Joseph, 2000; Olweus, 1996; Swearer, 2001). Many of these surveys are inexpensive, web-based, and can be given to the entire student body at once. Teachers or the school psychologist would then follow up with children who passed the cut off score – either bullies or victims. Additionally, there are efficacious bullying prevention programs such as the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, which has been found to reduce victimization by 50%, that take a systemic approach by targeting teachers, parents, and students in whole-school, anti-bullying efforts (Olweus, 1994). And finally, as no prevention program can be 100% effective, there is a need for targeted programs that can address the needs of chronic victims and bullies. Chronic victims have been found to

benefit from assertiveness training (Smith et al., 2003). Though a review of the literature produced no specific intervention for bullying behavior, research and theory on aggression suggest that interventions designed to teach prosocial behavior, increase empathy, decrease peer group approval of aggression, improve problem solving in social situations, and reduce hostile attributions can reduce bullies' aggressive behavior. Additionally, helping parents to develop fair and consistent discipline plans and to increase monitoring of their child's behavior should reduce aggressive behavior, as well (Thomas & Grimes, 2008).

There were several themes endorsed by 5 to 9 students, one of which was the co-researchers' experience of schoolwork as being difficult. Many of the children reported not being able to keep up in class and wanting to give up completely, out of frustration. Students usually reported one or two classes as being the primary sources of difficulty. These findings are consistent with the extant literature about the relationship between academic success and SRB. Specifically, lack of basic academic skills has been found to negatively impact attendance (McWhirter et al., 1998).

These findings regarding schoolwork suggest the need for a multi-systemic approach involving the school, child, and parents. Parents could assist children by helping them to break assignments down into small tasks and then providing non-tangible rewards as work is completed. Additionally, parents could be taught coping skills such as deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation that they could then teach their children to use when they are feeling overwhelmed by difficult

assignments. After-school programs are also a great resource for low-SES youth as they provide free tutoring to assist children who are struggling in various subjects. Finally, researchers have found customizing instruction and curriculum to meet student needs to be efficacious in improving school attendance (Lever, Sander, Lombardo, Randall, Axelrod, & Rubenstein, 2004; Reid, 2007). This can be especially important for non-native English speakers, who may have different learning needs.

A second theme that was mentioned by more than half of the participants was the role of grades in promoting SRB. Most of the students agreed that their desire to refuse school increased when their grades were lower than they preferred. Some were troubled by receiving poor grades because it hurt their self-esteem. Others were afraid of how their teachers and/or parents would react to their low marks. The research by Kearney (2001) supports these findings that an inverse relationship exists between academic achievement and SRB. Additionally, studies have demonstrated that low-SES children with diverse ethnic backgrounds, such as the students in this study, have lower grades and lower attendance rates than their middle class white counterparts (Goldstein et al., 2003). The implications of this study's findings suggest that students seem to care about grades and in some cases, feel their grades reflect something about them, personally.

Providing low-SES school refusers who are motivated by poor grades with peer tutors would provide access to assistance they might not otherwise be able to afford. These peer tutors could provide help in the students' areas of academic weakness and to help them improve their study skills. Tutoring sessions might be

held at school for children with transportation challenges. Additionally, parents should be encouraged to maintain regular communication with their child's teacher to help him/her stay organized and keep up with school assignments. The school could assist in facilitating better communication by providing non-English speaking parents with interpreters during parent-teacher meetings. Finally, teachers can assist children who are struggling with low grades by teaching them more effective test-taking strategies (e.g., study for small periods over an extended period of time, regularly review material, read directions twice, and recheck work).

A third theme endorsed by most of the participants was a pattern of negative relationships with teachers. All but two of the co-researchers experienced regular interactions that were characterized as unpleasant. Children described feeling that their teachers did not care about helping them succeed and that their expectations were too high. Students also recounted incidents during which teachers took out their frustrations over situations in their personal lives on the children in their classrooms. They reported teachers yelled at them or ignored them when they asked for help. One participant even reported being told she would never be successful and that she should just give up. These findings are consistent with prior studies that have discovered a relationship between poor student-teacher relationships and fear of attending school (Astor, Benbenishty, Zeira, & Vinokur, 2002). Additionally, prior research has demonstrated that conflict between students and teachers contributes to SRB (Bealing, 1990; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Harte, 1994),

and that, inversely, children who have positive relationships with teachers are less likely to exhibit attendance problems and ultimately drop out of school (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002; Lee & Burkham, 2003).

School refusing that is motivated by poor student/teacher relationships is a problem that requires effort from both teachers and children to resolve. Teachers can work to improve relationships with students by communicating realistic expectations and telling them that it is OK to make mistakes. Providing many opportunities for success and taking opportunities to praise students for good work are also ways to create good rapport, as they help children to build confidence in their abilities. Children could work to improve these relationships by participating in communication skills training to learn how to be assertive and express discomfort and negative emotions appropriately. Conflict resolution management could be another useful skill that school refusers could learn that would enable them to communicate differing viewpoints and to learn to compromise, finding a middle ground where he/she is content getting some of, but not all of, what is requested. At a systemic level, addressing the issue of overcrowded classes could help to alleviate many of the problems that strain student-teacher relationships, such as children feeling ignored or frustrated because the teacher's pace is too fast for them (Thomas & Grimes, 2008).

Another theme identified by most participants was that of parental involvement. The majority of students reported either one or both of their parents were interested in and actively involved in helping with homework, and



participating in such school related activities as coaching sports teams and attending parent/teacher conferences. This is not consistent with the findings of major researchers in the field that parents who are uninvolved have children with attendance problems (Kearney, 2008). In fact, several co-researchers in this study reported having parents who placed a high value on their attendance because they were unable to finish school themselves. These parents told their children they wanted them to have the higher paying jobs that come with an education.

There are several possible explanations for this disparity in findings. Previous researchers may have defined and therefore measured parental involvement differently than it was defined (“the degree to which the child’s parent/s is involved in school related activities”) and measured (via child report) in this study. Also, prior studies concerning parental involvement have generally surveyed parents instead of children. It is possible that adults, particularly parents, and children conceptualize parental involvement differently, and consequently provide different answers. Additionally, research has suggested that Latino parents are often perceived as disinterested in their children’s education when, in fact, language difficulties, transportation and child care issues make it difficult and embarrassing to communicate with administrators and teachers. For these reasons, it is important to begin to seek answers to such questions by interviewing children directly. Surveying children about their feelings / definitions concerning parental involvement is vital in order to give them a collective voice and to enable a better understanding of this issue.

**Other important themes.** Another important theme was the safety of the school environment. Four of the co-researchers described feeling unsafe at school due to the presence of gangs, bullies, and the fact that the school was located in an unsafe part of town. The theme of safety impacting SRB behavior is consistent with previous findings that 20% of students in elementary school refuse attendance to avoid being bullied (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara, & Kernic, 2005). Others have replicated such results, correlating fear of school violence and SRB (Astor, et al., 2002).

Understanding and addressing school violence necessitates broadening one's point of view from one of intrapersonal factors to a consideration of the student within a multi-factorial system, specifically, viewing the child as a member of a community, a family, a culture, and a school system. Successful prevention / intervention programs will seek to understand and harness the potential inherent in the macro-systems outside and inside the school. A successful program would evaluate current administrative policies regarding bullying to determine whether or not they promote integrated approaches to prevention and intervention. Additionally, teacher training in classroom management techniques as well as including an anger management and problem-solving curriculum could reduce incidences of aggressive behavior. The school could also collaborate with the police gang suppression unit by educating youth and families and providing alternative after-school activities. Parents could help protect their children by learning how to

help them build self-efficacy by participating in Parent Management Training (Thomas & Grimes, 2008).

Additionally, the experience of schoolwork as boring was a theme that emerged in 4 of the interviews. This finding is consistent with current literature that has identified boredom as a key cause of SRB and eventual drop out (Guare & Cooper, 2003; National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). In fact, a survey conducted by Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) of children who dropped out of school found that boredom was a key factor in the decision making of 47% of the sample.

These findings indicate a need for interventions that decrease boredom by increasing motivation and teaching through the use of hands-on activities. Allowing children to assist in choosing which assignments the class will complete might keep them more engaged. Providing several different reading choices is another option to combat boredom. Additionally, taking classes on field trips, when possible, to observe real life examples of what they are learning in class would make the material seem more relevant. Finally, having guest speakers from the community come to talk to the class is another way to bring concepts to life. In planning for field trips and guest speakers it is important to be culturally sensitive, including activities that are culturally relevant to Latino students such as inviting successful Latino/a speakers from the community or visiting a Latino cultural center.

In summary, the implications of this study suggest the need for a systems based approach to the problem of SRB in Latino youth, as it is a complex issue impacted by multiple school, family, and peer related factors. The findings indicate a need for

culturally sensitive interventions involving parents, children, teachers, and the school as a whole. Assessment, prevention, and intervention programs were suggested to address the problem of bullying as were programs designed to decrease aggression. Collaboration between school officials and law enforcement was also suggested to insulate students from the problem of gangs. Additionally, interventions that targeted schoolwork, grades, and negative relationships with teachers were offered up for consideration.

### **Future Research**

Prior research on school refusal behavior has focused almost entirely on clinical populations. Characteristically, such children tend to refuse school for factors related to their diagnostic presentations, such as separation anxiety or oppositional defiance. Conversely, few studies have evaluated SRB in non-clinical samples, whose avoidance primarily stems from environmental and systemic factors. In attempting to address this gap, this study generated findings that suggest children in the general population who exhibit SRB often do so for more than one reason. However, little information is known about children who refuse school for two reasons, and, with the exception of a case study conducted by Kearney (2002), no information is available about children who refuse for three or more reasons. Consequently, research is needed to develop and evaluate interventions designed to treat multifaceted school refusal behavior.

This study has similarities with previous research that has found that peer relationships greatly impact children's motivation to attend school. The children in

this study identified negative interactions such as bullying and teasing as well as lack of friendships as the biggest factor impacting their SRB. Future research should be aimed at developing interventions to improve relationships between children exhibiting SRB and their peers. Though the purpose of this study was to understand the experience of school refusers through their eyes, future studies should broaden their scope to encompass parent and teacher perspectives, as well as children's views. Additionally, a lack of attention has been paid to cultural differences in values, family structure, and behavior when assessing low-SES and minority students. There is a need for further research that examines the school environment and family dynamics of these minority populations. Also, several parents in this study described situations with the school which they perceived as racist. One parents relayed an incident of blatant racism involving a white teacher who consistently bullied her daughter. Future research must assess for racism within the schools and evaluate its influence on Latino families.

Such studies need to address variables such as early intervention and prevention. The longer SRB goes untreated, the more severe the behavior can become. Therefore, future research should focus its intervention and prevention efforts on children under the age of ten – the age at which SRB is most likely to emerge.

### **Limitations of the Study**

While this study yielded rich data and descriptions of the experiences of Latino/a youth with School Refusing Behavior, there are certain limitations that

should be considered. First, the study was conducted with a small sample size. Although the aim was to identify themes that are universal, the sample size limited the scope of generalizability. However, it has been suggested that qualitative results should be evaluated in terms of whether or not the information is transferable, as opposed to whether or not it is able to be generalized across situations (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). That is, determining whether or not the findings are applicable to the experiences of others. The study results reveal themes common to children with similar experiences and will serve as a guide to inform practice and develop more effective treatments. However, the implications of the study may not generalize across other settings.

A second limitation of the study is the role of subjectivity in each stage of the research. Subjectivity is a well known, yet unavoidable component in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). However, qualitative researchers have suggested that the researcher's experience can be of value to the study if can be identified, set aside during data collection, and then used to inform the interpretation of the results (Moustakas, 1994). In order to minimize the effects of my biases, as discussed in Chapter 3, I participated in the process of obtaining epoche and I kept a journal throughout the study. Despite these efforts, it is likely that my own biases (e.g., that education is necessary to be "successful" and happy, and that parents who do not finish school must not place as much value on education as those who do) were active throughout the study.

Flowing from the second limitation, subjectivity, is the risk of misinterpreting the co-researchers' statements. In an effort to minimize this risk, I employed the use of participant checks, providing each participant with a transcript of the interview for their perusal and feedback. Any necessary corrections and/or additions were made in order to provide the most accurate representation possible of the co-researchers' experiences.

The study also does not represent the families that met criteria but chose not to participate. Many were contacted by mutual acquaintances but were not interested in being a part of the study. It is possible that the families that self-selected differed in some ways from those who opted out.

Additionally, this study did not include non-English speaking participants, who might have differed from the English-speaking ones. Families who spoke only Spanish were excluded from consideration, as the researcher does not speak Spanish. Interviewing Spanish-speaking participants would have necessitated the use of an interpreter, thereby creating a barrier between the researcher and the participants.

### **Personal Reflections**

The fact that I encountered such difficulty in obtaining participants made me initially question the relevancy of this topic. Was SRB not the significant experience that I had been led to believe during my conversations with Latino/a children and their parents at The Children's Hospital? I knew, anecdotally, that there were many

families that struggled with SRB, so I was baffled that more people did not express a desire to participate. I first sought out people who I assumed would have a vested interest in this topic, school officials, and was certain that I would have more potential participants than I needed. After failed attempts to obtain Institutional Review Board approval from multiple school districts, I was forced to change my sampling approach. Once I began to receive calls from interested families, I hypothesized about why the process had been so difficult. Had I done a poor job of explaining/selling my study to the schools? Was the time commitment required unreasonable? Did I fail to offer an appropriate incentive? Were the potential participants wary of me because I was from a different culture? Whatever the reasons, I tried to be very cognizant of the possibility that these thoughts had crossed the minds of the families who had chosen to participate, as well.

The difficulty in obtaining participants made me especially grateful to my co-researchers for being willing to devote so much time to the study and for trusting me with the personal details of their lives. They were open, honest, and excited to tell their stories. Some were more reserved than others but they were all eager to please and incredibly gracious. I was humbled to be allowed into their inner worlds.

After each interview, I reflected upon my experience with the child. Each of the co-researchers offered a unique perspective, deepening my understanding of the phenomenon. Though there were consistencies that ran across interviews, each new



conversation revealed another dimension of the construct of school refusal behavior.

I became aware of my personal biases during each interview. Specifically, I had preconceptions that the co-researchers were missing school because their parents did not place a high value on education. But as I listened to each child, I heard about the encouragement, and at times, pressure they received to not only attend, but to be successful in school. Many of these parents were especially invested in their children's educations because they had been unable to finish school, and consequently had to work multiple jobs to support their families. They wanted a better life for their children.

I also had to be cognizant of my bias that children with school refusal problems come from chaotic or broken homes. As I asked questions about their family lives, I had to be careful to maintain a neutral stance and to refrain from hyper-focusing on every negative detail; I instead tried to look at the big picture, the family relationships as a whole. In fact, I discovered that the majority of participants came from stable homes, and many from two-parent households.

The participants in this study helped me to better understand children's differing motivations for refusing school. While listening to their stories I began to generate ideas for possible interventions that I thought might enable them to succeed. Though our time together was brief, my experiences with these children helped me to understand and appreciate the complex nature of school refusing behavior.

## **Chapter Summary**

The major findings of this study suggest the need for interventions that address the problem of school refusal behavior on several levels: individual, family, school, and community. This is because SRB is not a simple construct, but rather a complex issue that often involves multiple peer, school, and family related factors. For these students, already having difficulty attending school, at 11 to 13 years old, does not bode well for the future. The children interviewed were missing school from 1 to 7 days a month and were attempting to avoid school from once a week to almost every day. SRB is a serious problem that, barring some type of intervention, worsens over time. These students suffer consequences in terms of job opportunities, long term salary implications, and mental health difficulties (Kearney, 2007). There is a great need for prevention and early intervention efforts aimed at children under the age of 10, before they are most likely to begin showing signs of SRB.

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Appendix A: Demographic Questionnaire

**Please answer the following questions regarding your child and your family. Please include your child's first name and last initial for identification purposes. Thank you for your participation!**

1. What is your name? \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. What is your child's name? \_\_\_\_\_
  
3. What is your child's sex? \_\_\_\_\_ male  
\_\_\_\_\_ female
  
4. What is your child's age? \_\_\_\_\_ years
  
5. What grade is your child in? \_\_\_\_\_ grade
  
6. What is your zip code? \_\_\_\_\_

**Please check the most appropriate answer to the following questions.**

7. With which of the following ethnic groups does your child identify? (Please check all that apply)

- \_\_\_\_\_ African American
- \_\_\_\_\_ Asian American/Pacific Islander
- \_\_\_\_\_ Biracial (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ Caucasian (Non-Hispanic)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Central American

- \_\_\_\_\_ Chicano
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cuban
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mexican
- \_\_\_\_\_ Native American
- \_\_\_\_\_ South American
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

8. With which of the following ethnic groups do you identify? (Please check all that apply)

- \_\_\_\_\_ African American
- \_\_\_\_\_ Asian American/Pacific Islander
- \_\_\_\_\_ Biracial (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ Caucasian (Non-Hispanic)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Central American
- \_\_\_\_\_ Chicano
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hispanic
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mexican
- \_\_\_\_\_ Native American
- \_\_\_\_\_ South American
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

9. How many siblings live in the same home with your child (including biological or other)?

\_\_\_\_\_ 0

\_\_\_\_\_ 1

\_\_\_\_\_ 2

\_\_\_\_\_ 3

\_\_\_\_\_ More that 3 How Many? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Who else lives in the home with your child? I am NOT asking for names, only relationships. For example, you could list, "grandmother," "family friend," "cousin," ext...

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11. Which of the following describes your child's home?

\_\_\_\_\_ Single-parent household

\_\_\_\_\_ Two-parent household

\_\_\_\_\_ Foster home

\_\_\_\_\_ Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_

12. Does your child receive free or discounted lunch?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes

\_\_\_\_\_ no

13. How many times has your child stayed home from school over the last 3 months because he or she refused to go? (Do not include sick days.)

\_\_\_\_\_

14. How often does your child **attempt** to avoid school?

\_\_\_\_\_ Less than once per month\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Once per month

\_\_\_\_\_ Two to three times per month

\_\_\_\_\_ Once per week

\_\_\_\_\_ Two to four times per week

\_\_\_\_\_ Almost every day

15. When you were in grade school, how often did you **attempt** to avoid school?

\_\_\_\_\_ Less than once per month

\_\_\_\_\_ Once per month

\_\_\_\_\_ Two to three times per month

\_\_\_\_\_ Once per week

\_\_\_\_\_ Two to three times per month

\_\_\_\_\_ Almost every day

16. How many grades did **you** complete in school?

\_\_\_\_\_

17. How long has your child disliked school?

\_\_\_\_\_ One week

\_\_\_\_\_ One month

\_\_\_\_\_ Three months

\_\_\_\_\_ Six months

\_\_\_\_\_ One year

\_\_\_\_\_ Two years

\_\_\_\_\_ If More than two years. How long? \_\_\_\_\_

18. Does your child have a chronic health problem or other condition that interferes with his/her ability to attend school?

\_\_\_\_\_ If yes, what is the condition? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ no

19. Has your child been diagnosed with a mental illness?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes

\_\_\_\_\_ no

If so, which one?

\_\_\_\_\_ Bipolar Disorder

\_\_\_\_\_ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

\_\_\_\_\_ Depression

\_\_\_\_\_ Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

\_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

20. Have you ever been diagnosed with a mental illness?

\_\_\_\_\_ yes

\_\_\_\_\_ no

If so, which one?

\_\_\_\_\_ Bipolar Disorder

\_\_\_\_\_ ADHD

\_\_\_\_\_ Depression

\_\_\_\_\_ Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

\_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B: Informational Letter to Parents

Dear Parent,

Has your child missed a lot of school this year because he or she refuses to go? Have you had to miss work in order to stay home with your child? Hello, my name is Mary-Ashley Angelo. I'm a doctoral student at the University of Denver conducting a study to learn about children who have difficulty attending school. Your child could be part of my study if he or she is between the ages of 10 and 13.

The requirements for participation are simple:

- Parent completion of a short survey to be completed in approximately 15 minutes.
- Child completion of 2 interviews to be completed in approximately 1 hour each.
- One \$10 gift card will be given to you to give to your child and one \$10 gift card will be given to you as the parent-figure at the completion of this study.

I will be mailing consent forms with additional information about this study for parents and children who would like to participate. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email at [mangelo@du.edu](mailto:mangelo@du.edu) or by phone at (303) 720-2674. Maria Riva, PhD is supervising this project and can be contacted at (303) 871-2484 or by email, [mriva@du.edu](mailto:mriva@du.edu). Thank you for considering participating in this project.

Sincerely,

Mary-Ashley Angelo, MS



Appendix C: Consent Form for Parents

Dear Parents/Caregivers:

You and your child are invited to participate in a study on school refusal behavior in children. School refusal behavior is when a child tries to avoid going to school. This research is being conducted by Mary-Ashley Angelo, M.S., a doctoral student from the University of Denver. It is supervised by Maria Riva, Ph.D., a faculty member in the College of Education, also at the University of Denver. The purpose of the study is to gather information about children who have difficulty attending school. I am interested in learning about the reasons that children try to avoid going to school.

In order to participate in this study you will need to complete a short paper and pencil demographic questionnaire about your child, which should take no more than 15 minutes. You will find the questionnaire enclosed with this consent form. It asks some basic information about your child's age, grade level, etc. Please fill out the questionnaire and return it in the stamped, addressed envelope provided. Please leave your phone number with times you can be reached in order to schedule your child's interview.

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_ Best times to be reached: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Your child will be asked to complete 2 interviews that should last less than 1 hour each. In the interest of your child's privacy and in order to preserve the integrity of the study, I ask that you allow me to interview your child in private. This means you may accompany your child to the interview but you will be asked to sit far enough away that you cannot hear your child's answers. I am asking to meet privately with your child so that I may get to know him or her and so that he/she may be as comfortable as possible to share during the interview. You are welcome and encouraged to ask any questions you may have about the interview process before the interviews begin but I will be unable to discuss the specifics of your child's interview with you. Your child's answers will not be shared with others. He or she will be asked questions about how he or she feels about his/her teacher, peers, family, grades, and overall feelings about school. It is possible that some of the questions being asked may raise issues that are not intended for use in the study. Therefore, your child may refuse to answer any of the individual questions that are asked during the interview without penalty. The interviews with your child will be audio taped to make sure that the answers are recorded accurately. The only person who will listen to the tapes is myself. At the end of the study, all of the tapes will be destroyed to keep your child's information private. After his/her interviews, your child will be given a \$10 gift card. A \$10 gift card will be mailed to you, too, once you return the questionnaire and consent form.

Very little risk is involved in this study. You or your child can decide not to participate in this study, at any time, for any reason, without any penalty. If you decide to participate, all information gathered through interviews, questionnaires, and audiotapes will be kept confidential and will be coded with identification numbers and stored in a locked area. Audiotapes will be destroyed at the end of the study.

I am required to tell you that there are two exceptions to confidentiality. If your child tells me that he/she is having thoughts about hurting himself/herself, or other people, it is required by law that I report this information to the proper authorities. Also, if your child tells me that he/she is being abused or neglected I am legally bound to report this, as well. The last exception is if a court should order that information from this study be released to it. This is extremely unlikely, but I am required to inform you about its possibility.

Thank you very much for thinking about participating in this study. Your help is so important. It will help researchers and school personnel to better understand the reasons children have difficulty attending school. If you want to know about the results of this study, a summary will be distributed to all participants. To protect your child's confidentiality, the findings will be general, so no individual can be identified.

Two copies of this letter were provided. You may keep one copy for your records. Please mail the completed questionnaire in the provided envelope. Please sign the page below if you understand the information given to you on this form. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please contact me to ask any questions you have. By signing this form you are giving permission for your child to participate.

I would really appreciate your participation in this study! Thank you! ☺

I have read and understand the descriptions of the research project on school refusal behavior. I have asked for and been given an explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study and I understand that I may choose to withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you or your child were treated during the interview please contact Dr. Susan Sadler, IRB Chair, 303-871-3545 Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3545 or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4052 or write to the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-4820.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Parent or Caregiver

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent or Caregiver's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Yes, I agree to allow my child's interview to be audio taped \_\_\_\_\_

No, I do not agree to allow my child's interview to be audio taped \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D: Assent Form for Participants

My name is Mary-Ashley Angelo. I am writing to ask if you would like to help me with a project. The project is about why kids don't want to go to school. I want to learn more about the reasons that make you want to skip school.

In order to participate I will ask you to meet with me for two interviews. The interviews will last about 1 hour each. I will be audio taping our interviews to make sure I don't miss anything you tell me. This is because what you have to say is very important to me. You may refuse to answer any questions during the interview. When the study is over I will give you a \$10 gift certificate. This is to say "thank you" for helping me with this project.

If you decide to participate in this project, everything we say we will be kept private. No one else will be allowed to listen to our tapes except my helper. The tapes and notes from our interview will be locked up where no one can get to it. Your name will not be on the tapes or the notes or anything else related to our interview. I will not tell anyone what you've told me. You can also decide not to participate in this study for any reason.

There are three reasons why I might have to share the information you've given me with someone else. The first reason is if you tell me someone is hurting. The second reason is if you tell me you are going to hurt yourself or someone else. The third reason is if a lawyer needs to know about our interview.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you or your parent were treated during the interview please contact Dr. Susan Sadler, IRB Chair, 303-871-3545 Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3545 or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4052 or write to the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-4820.

If you would like to participate, first check the "yes" box. Then write your name below. You may ask the person who gave you this form any questions you have about the study. I hope you decide to be in my study! I would love to hear what you have to say! ☺

I will participate in this study: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

I give my permission to be audiotaped: \_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

## Appendix E: Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to be part of this study. Our interview should last about one hour. If at any time you feel uncomfortable or want to stop just let me know and we will end the interview. Do you have any questions you want to ask before we start? If not, we will begin.

1. Is it hard for you to go to school? If so, how long have you had a hard time attending school? Tell me about your attendance. How much school have you missed over the last month? Does your mom/grandmother get upset about you missing so much school? Do you feel pressured to attend? Does she stay home with you when you miss? How many schools have you been to? Why did you switch schools?
2. What makes it difficult for you to go to school? What is it about school that's SO bad? What would need to change for you to want to go to school?
3. Is your schoolwork hard for you? Do you want someone to help you? Who helps you with your schoolwork? What (subject) do you usually get help with?
4. How do you feel about your grades? Do your grades make a difference in how you feel about school? What are they? What would you like them to be? What happens at home if your grades are low (consequences)?
5. How do you think your mother feels about you going to school? Your father? Your siblings? How old are your siblings? How do your siblings feel about school? What do you think their opinion is of your school? Do your parents go to parent/teacher meetings or other activities through the school?

6. What do you think of your school? Are you comfortable there? Do you feel safe at school? If not, why? What is your most favorite part of school? What are your least favorite parts?
7. How do you get along with the other kids at school? Do you have friends there? Tell me about your friends at school. Do you guys hang out together outside of school? Do the other kids make it harder or easier for you to go to school? Do you ever get into fights at school? If so, how often? Who usually starts the fights – you or the other kid? Are they fist fights? What are the fights usually about? Are you bullied at school? Do you ever see other kids getting bullied?
8. How do you feel about your teacher? What does he/she do that makes you like/not like him/her? Tell me about each one of your teachers. Do you feel that he/she is interested in you and cares about how you are doing? Do you get in trouble at school? If so, how often? What types of things do you get in trouble for?
9. Do you have people at school or at home that really want you to go to school? How do you know they want you to go? Do you have people at school you feel you can talk to if you need to? What types of things do you need to talk to them about? Do you feel supported?
10. Do you plan on going to high school? To college? Where do you want to go to college and why? What do you want to be when you grow up? How did you decide that?

11. How much school did your mother/grandmother complete?
12. Do you ever ditch classes? Do your friends ever skip school/ditch classes?
13. What do you do when you miss school? Where do you go?
14. Is there anything else I didn't ask that you think is important for me to know?



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Appendix F: IRB Approval Letter

University of Denver

Sylk Sotto-Santiago, MBA  
Manager, Regulatory Research Compliance Tel: 303-871-4052

Certification of Human Subjects Approval

May 25, 2011

To,

Mary Angelo

Subject Human Subject Review

TITLE: School Refusal Behavior in Children: A Phenomenological Study  
of Children's

Experiences

IRB# : 2010-1372

Dear Angelo,

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
has reviewed the above named project. The project has been approved  
for the procedures and subjects described in the protocol at the  
06/07/2011

meeting. This approval is effective for twelve months. We will be  
sending you a continuation application reminder for this project.  
This form must be submitted to the Office of Sponsored Programs if  
the project is to  
be continued. This information must be updated on a yearly basis,  
upon continuation of your IRB approval for  
as long as the research continues.

NOTE: Please add the following information to any consent forms,  
surveys, questionnaires, invitation letters, etc you will use in your  
research as follows: This survey (consent, study, etc.) was approved  
by the University of Denver's Institutional Review Board for the  
Protection of Human Subjects in Research on 06/07/2011. This

information must be updated on a yearly basis, upon continuation of your IRB approval for as long as the research continues. This information will be added by the Research Compliance Office if it does not already appear in the form(s) upon continuation approval.

The Institutional Review Board appreciates your cooperation in

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protecting subjects and ensuring that each subject gives a meaningful consent to participate in research projects. If you have any questions regarding your obligations under the Assurance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely yours,

Susan Sadler, PhD  
Chair, Institutional Review Board  
for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval Period: 06/07/2011 through 06/06/2012

Review Type: EXPEDITED - RENEWAL

Funding: SPO:

Investigational New Drug :

Investigational Device:

Assurance Number: 00004520, 00004520a

## Appendix G: Themes and Example Statements by Co-Researchers

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Example Statements</b>
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<p><b>1. Safety of School Environment</b></p>	<p><b>Angel</b></p> <p>And bullying happens a lot at our school. I don't know why. It's just like one of those schools like, where like bullying is just like, it's like a bullying school, but they try to stop it and it's been going down a lot, but like...</p> <p>I really just keep to myself unless someone else is getting bullied. Then I just say, would you like someone else to bully you, and then they say no, and then they just leave that person alone. But they still continue to do it. I don't know why. I think it makes them, they think that they look cool bullying.</p> <p>My school is kind of good, kind of not good. I mean, there's a lot, a lot of influence there, but then there's not. There's a lot of gang bangers. There's a lot of fights, there's a lot of bullying.</p> <p>6<sup>th</sup> period's like, there's all the, there's all like the, all those kids, like all those bullies. Like a lot, there's a lot of girl bullies in that classroom and they like, and they bully a lot and they sometimes bully my friends and like it gets me really irritated.</p> <p>Yeah, I feel safe, but it's really... we had two lock downs in a week. Wait, three lockdowns in a week. We had a red alert, a red alert, and a yellow alert like where they're on the school property and trying to get in. We had that twice. And then we had one where they were like down the road, but yeah...</p> <p>And they um, the thrift store, I guess they robbed one of those areas in there and they were heading up towards where we were and that was the yellow lock down. And they were heading up towards the neighborhood and so we had to have the yellow lock down.</p> <p>The red lockdowns, they really didn't tell us. They just said, um, we have a code, so then they don't know, like we have a red lockdown, lockdown, so that they don't know that we're saying that. We have like, our red folder is missing, our red 166 : meant like there's somebody on't know with possibly a weapon.</p>
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Oh there was a fight today between this girl named um – I don't know her name. And this other girl I don't know either. But they are both sixth graders and they are my friends but I don't remember their names because they get called a lot of nicknames. Like at school they don't have their own names on the papers, they have their nicknames. It's weird. I know. So like there was fight. They are both my friends and we were in earth science in sixth period and then there is a window and then there is a hallway by the doors. And then they um – Jasmine – oh yeah that's her name. Jasmine and Destiny – Destiny was talking about Jasmine a lot and then um Jasmine is like I'm going to go after her. I'm going to go after her. I was like why just to get yourself in trouble for another fight? Because she got um suspended for a month and she barely got back. So – and then she wanted another fight. So I think this time she got expelled. But there was a fight today and everybody like – they said it was the girl fight of the year because the teacher was grabbing – trying to separate them and they pulled her down and kicked her in the face.

And Miss Austin was bleeding and then Destiny pulled um – no. Jasmine pulled Destiny's hair and started kicking her in the face and then um Mr. Swenson had to like tackle Jasmine and Miss – Miss Macintosh had to help Miss Austin and then Miss Austin and Miss um Macintosh had to take down Destiny or Jasmine. And that is why they called it the girl fight of the year because teachers got hit and they had to tackle them like literally tackle them.

Not really. I am just like nice fight and then go back and watch. Because we were like watching this movie about like meters and – it was boring.

A red alert is where somebody unidentified with a weapon comes into the building.

A lockdown is where you are in the classroom and they lock the doors, tur 167 e you in the corner farthest aw

A yellow alert is somebody like around the school area is armed and is dangerous and is unidentified.

**Daniel**

Well, when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I didn't know what 6<sup>th</sup> grade was like so I was kind of scared that cuz, 8<sup>th</sup> graders always picked on the little 6<sup>th</sup> graders, so I was kind of afraid to go. Yeah.

No, they always picked on my friends though, but I tried to protect him, but they were too big for me, so yeah.

**Oliver**

Safe? Yeah. A lot of people might rattle me but they don't come like push me around and things.

I did a couple days ago but he kind of – he kind of came to me and asked for help so I kind of told him to go away. And they left them alone. So that felt pretty good.

No. People won't really pick a fight with me.

**Eric**

No. Well it's because some kids tried to jump me. I think that's why.

Like, I don't know it's like, I think it is a big problem 'cause they're starting to mess with me again.

They were trying to jump me again but then I ran away and then my mom she went outside and told them to stop and then I went outside and then they just left.

Cause they always say that they're gonna be like me and at school everyone is bullying me and it makes it feel like, like not wanting to go to school.

Yeah, I like it pretty much. Sometimes, it's still boring and they try to jump me and I just don't want to go to that school no more, so I'm going to tell my mom that I'm not going next day.

	<p>My least favorite parts are when I'm with the kids that try to jump me b/c I mostly have all the classes with them except for 3<sup>rd</sup> period, the last period, and, and um PE.</p> <p>Some of my friends are pretty cool but then there are other friends that like stick up for the kids that tried to jump me. And then they tried to fight me before and I didn't want to.</p> <p>They stick up for me they're like, if they jump you we'll just jump in and help you out.</p> <p>Those, um, there were like 6 when they jumped me but now there's like 3 of them that stuck up for them, there's now....9.</p> <p>They [the kids that jumped me] make it harder for me to go to school.</p> <p>No. They [my friends] never fight with me [against the kids that tried to jump me].</p>
<p><b>2. Nature of Peer Relationships</b></p>	<p><b>Angel</b></p> <p>I get along with them pretty good, except for the people that pick on my friends. Like I don't really even talk to them.</p> <p>The other kids actually make it pretty, well kind of both.</p>

Kind of easier b/c like I have somebody to talk to and like discuss about things and stuff like that. And it's kind of harder too b/c like some of them, like some of them at the lunch will be like, I hate school and stuff like that. And I'll be like, why do you hate school? And they'll say, I don't know b/c it's just boring and I just want to get out of it. It's b/c all the teachers and all the drama. That's what my friends were saying.

And most of the kids are like what? And like these two people are like and these people don't. And then they give me dirty looks and then I am like maybe if you keep rolling your eyes they are going to stay like that and they are like oh really and I'm like yeah.

I don't get in fights. Like I get in arguments, a lot of arguments, but not fights like physical fights.

**Arthur**

'Cause I got in trouble for fighting.

The other kid started it.

Well, it's easier because I know I can go to school and have someone to talk to. And it's harder because some kids are really annoying.

This kid came over and took my mac and cheese while I had my back turned and I punched him.

**Brian**

Uh, I think, I don't if any of my friends really want me to go to school, but yeah, I don't know if they do, but I'm sure one of them does.

Fernando, probably. He's my best friend.

Yeah, he's funny. He's hilarious.

Like I don't think there is one person that would intentionally hurt – try to hurt somebody.

Because he is kind of obsessed with this girl he is dating.



Her name is Layne and she an eighth grader and he's in sixth grade. So he is like obsessed with her and he is always around her and then this kid Jacob he's a – he hangs out with her and then me and Paul and – we all hang out together. Well when he is around her he will like go I don't want you here. I just – and then he tells Jacob to go get Harper because –well supposedly he is supposed to be dating her but he is not pretty much. And he doesn't – he is not – doesn't like what Darin is doing and gets really fed up with him a lot of times.

Sometimes he can be cool but sometimes he can be really stupid when he does that stuff.

Oh we play football. Me, Paul and Jacob play football with our grade and all the girls in our class and Seth and Fernando and all these other kids. And then sometimes we'll go play with the eighth graders. We used to play kickball a lot at the beginning of the year with our whole class but then we kind of split up after - like after Christmas break we kind of split up. So yeah.

Um well they will just encourage you to get everything done and don't wait until the last minute. If you need help they will help you. If you need help. And then I will help them if they need help. So it is kind of like if you help me I will help you.

We just play football. Sometimes we hang out afterschool like around the school or anything.

### **Daniel**

Well, when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I didn't know what 6<sup>th</sup> grade was like so I was kind of scared that cuz, 8<sup>th</sup> graders always picked on the little 6<sup>th</sup> graders, so I was kind of afraid to go. Yeah.

No, they always picked on my friends though, but I tried to protect him, but they were too big for me, so yeah.

Uh, just a help my friends and just make sure that we don't get in trouble and that yeah, that's it.

My friends are my most favorite part.

Uh, if somebody hates you, just go tell, I don't want to fight or anything, so...

Well I got in one in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. That was my only fight though.

**Gus**

Sometimes they make it hard and sometimes they make it easy.

Like sometimes they get annoying and I don't want to go because I don't want to listen to them. And sometimes they are just quiet and they don't say anything.

The other kids because if – because I can trust my friends more than other people. If I tell another kid something then they'll tell other people and it will get out of hand.

Well it's a good school when people don't pick on me and stuff.

In elementary they used to pick on me a lot.

I don't know. They just liked to pick on me because they were bigger and better.

Like everybody knew them and I was like really like – I only knew a few people.

Well I did but I didn't want to get picked on.

Well because some of them are in a gang – they want to be in a gang and I don't think they should be in a gang because that could mess up their life.

Yeah. Yeah. They want to be in the gang but still go to school and get their education.

Umm they (peers) are dumb sometimes.

Like they (peers) did dumb things and then they tell me to do something and instead of doing what I'm supposed to

do I listen to them and do what they tell me. And then after awhile – after I did it and um I think about them I look back and I go I shouldn't have done that cause it was a dumb thing.

Well they (friends) keep me from doing things that I'm not supposed to and um show me stuff that I'm supposed to be doing and tell me not to – and just stuff that will get me in trouble and stuff.

Well I told a kid about a thing that was going to happen and that happened and then once I told him later on everybody started to find out. And they were – wanted a – and then like that's how fights started and stuff.

Well um it is cause I wanted to be in a gang too and then um they all found out that I wanted to be in a gang and everybody was telling me that I am – I am going to try to get in this gang and I was like you know I don't want to be in the gang.

Because they are always telling me to do my homework and to wake up on time so I'm not late to school or anything.

### **Mindy**

Well sometimes I have people that don't like me and make fun of me but like I try to hold myself in and not get mad.

Um well there's some girls that call me names that I don't really like. But I just ignore them like my friends tell me to.

Like they call me manure and stuff like that, you know.

Some of them (peers) make it harder [to go to school], some easier.

They make school funner. Sometimes they help me with my work and – yeah.

Uh, no, but people always tell me that there's this girl that really don't like me out there and she wants to fight me.

I say no because I don't really want to get into any trouble because then my mom will get really mad.

There's like certain people there and they call me names, they make fun of my name and I don't really like that.

Like sometimes they call me menudo or manure or stuff like that because it kind of sounds like my name.

Um like everybody – there is a certain group that calls me names and then the other people are pretty much like are my friends and stuff. They talk to me and tell me to ignore them and not pay attention to them and stuff like that.

They are like my really close friends that I have known for two years now. Three. So-

It is actually cool. There are people you can trust and they won't tell any of your secrets or anything.

Um sometimes they help me with my class work. They sit with me and we sit as a group and we do class work.

Yeah. And they make it fun by talking and we have – we laugh and other stuff like that.

Oh well actually me and her became friends now so she don't really want to fight me no more.

Um she didn't like me. She called me the names and she like – I don't know. She just said that she wanted to fight me. But now she talks to me.

I don't really know. We just started talking to each other and we became friends.

When I'm grounded I'm not allowed to go anywhere. Like I'm – there is a park near our house where I go.

Sometimes I don't come here but go hang out with my friends at the park.

Like my friends do so those are the only people that help me but like – that is pretty much it. The teachers help me sometimes but not all the time.

**Oliver**

I like my friends better than I like school.

Um well I have my friend Dominic. He goes to a different school, Chappelow. And we don't talk very much right now especially because we have been doing a lot of work but when we do it is really fun. Also I have a friend called Hilda. She is pretty cool. I know that she likes me and I like her but I don't really want to ask her out specifically because if I am going to be with her I just want to be able to pay attention and I am kind of busy right now. And then I have some friends at Bella Romero – I mean Brentwood. And I guess that they are not really my friends. They are more – they are more connected to me than I am to them.

Um I think a lot of what we do is play sports.

Uh well here we play a lot of basketball and football which I like a lot. Sometimes we play soccer which hurts sometimes.

Uh most of my – the friends that I really do like they have good grades. I think that I like them more because they understand more of what I'm talking about. Some of the friends that I'm just around uh sometimes have Fs. I am trying to encourage them to get it up because it is not going to look pretty good if they flunk.

Like my friend Vicki and Steven and Lucas.

I think maybe (pause) only in – in this – right now I think they probably skipped once so far. But I think that maybe in a whole month maybe like eight times.

I think they stay home all the time.

I think they probably make it easier um because they me to get a good education. They like uh they like seeing me a success.

A lot of times we do things together like maybe studying. We might talk about a test or like what we got wrong that

way we can practice on it and see how we can help each other out.

Uhhh no. Sometimes I get warnings just because I'm whispering to my neighbor to be quiet because they might talk sometimes when I want to leave the class when it is about time to leave.

**Queeley**

I like my friends...

They call me names and then I tell the teachers and they wouldn't stop, so then there'd be fights.

Um, just loser, whatever names they can think of.

There's one girl and she usually gets sent home.

I don't know. I tell the teacher. My mom says that if you tell the teacher and they won't stop, then you um, then like if they're poking at you and they won't stop and you poke 'em back, or whatever, if they're hitting you and they won't stop, then you hit them back.

I would, there were times when I was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade and I didn't have any friends and people would just call me names.

Well my friends in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, they moved away.

Or they just changed schools.

But then in the middle of 4<sup>th</sup> grade I met my best friend.

... And there was a student there the next day and she became my friend.

I have many friends...

**Eric**

Some of my friends are pretty cool but then there are other friends that like stick up for the kids that tried to jump me. And then they tried to fight me before and I didn't want to.

They stick up for me they're like, if they jump you we'll just jump in and help you out.

Those, um, there were like 6 when they jumped me but now there's like 3 of them that stuck up for them, there's now....9.

They're cool, they're like, the cool thing about it is they're like older, well, they're not older they're just a higher grade. My friend Matthew he's in 8<sup>th</sup>, Manuel is in 6<sup>th</sup>, and Nicholas in 7<sup>th</sup>.

Cause like the ones that tried to jump me they're in like 7<sup>th</sup> grade and they're scared of my friend Manuel.

They [the kids who tried to jump me] make it harder for me to go to school.

No. They [my friends] never fight with me [against the kids who tried to jump me].

### **Tonya**

We're fine. And then sometimes they just start problems for no reasons.

Like if you barely tap them, why did you push me? Why did you push me? You could have went around. And then if you say excuse me, you are excused. You could have gone around. And stuff. Some of them are actually very rude.

I just walk away because I have that thing of if I say something they will say something back and I'm gonna get in trouble because they are going to say I did do stuff. So yeah.

They (peers) make it easier and sometimes harder.

Like easier because my friends are like you can do it, you can do it. And then some are like – my others friends are like you can't do it. Why don't you just quit already? So like that.

	<p>No. Maybe like an argument but no fights. I am not that violent. Punching and stuff. That's not me.</p> <p>No. Nobody is racist at this school but they do talk about how dark you are and stuff. But they are mostly Mexicans. There are a couple of white people but they don't bother each other. They have their own group. The people who talk with everybody and the people who are just really snotty talk with each other and that's about all.</p> <p>Like they (peers) broke his (teacher's) cup. They threw it against the wall. They broke a window and blamed it on me and I was like I wasn't there. I wasn't there. I was over with the girls. He called the girls over and they are like yeah she was with us and he was like just stop lying to protect her. I was like okay yeah. I guess it was me.</p>
<p><b>3. Family's Opinion of School Attendance</b></p>	<p><b>Angel</b></p> <p>She actually feels good because my mom, um she really never completed school. Like she went to the same school as me and she only made it to 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I think after that, she got expelled and she never went back. And she doesn't want me to fail, to go in the same footsteps as her, so she wants me to like, it's like if I finish school and I graduate and I go to college, I'll be the first one in my family.</p> <p>He [father] feels good. He says every day, the first thing he tells me, he speaks kind of Spanish. He says, "how are you doing in school, Mija?" And I'm like, "Good. I'm doing good." And he says um, and then we just talk. That's always the first thing he asks when I'm on the phone.</p> <p><b>Arthur</b></p> <p>She wants me to go because she didn't get to graduate</p> <p>Same thing - he wants me to go so I can get a good job.</p> <p>147. My mom and dad want me to go because they both want me to go to college.</p>



**Daniel**

She feels good b/c she said if I miss school this year, you don't get education. Without education, you can't get a job.

My grandma wants me to go.

**Mindy**

That is like most of the week because like in the mornings I wake up and my mom wakes me up and I don't want to wake up. And then we start this big fuss about it and finally at the end she just leaves me there and I wake up like ten minutes before like my bus gets here I guess. So yeah.

Well I think she wants me to go to school because she wants me to be successful like my brother and – but my brother made it to – he had like good grades in elementary and high school. They were straight As. And like I want to be like him so yeah. But my brother couldn't go to school since he was an immigrant so yeah. Like college.

Well I hear him sometimes. He wants me to go to school just like my mom.

Um they tell me like – sometimes we are at the table eating dinner and they say um – they tell me like how to – what do I want to be when I grow up and all kinds of other things like that. And I say what I want to be and then they go well if you really want to be that than you should be getting your grades up and paying attention in class and not walking out and doing other stuff like that.

**Oliver**

I think my mom likes if I go to school and that I want to go to college...

Uhh well I think my mom wants me to go to school

	<p>because she wants me to get a good education and a good job so I don't have to work very hard like my dad.</p> <p><b>Queeley</b></p> <p>My mom wouldn't buy it. She'd make me go to school. And then when I come home, I just cry.</p> <p>She told my dad and my dad, he let me stay home for a day and then I went back. And there was a student there the next day and she became my friend.</p> <p><b>Eric</b></p> <p>Sometimes I just stay home. But then my mom, she makes me go to school. She's like. Sometimes I stay home, sometimes she's like, she doesn't, well she knows, she gets so angry that she's like ok, do whatever, well don't do whatever you want, just like just stay home for just today but then tomorrow you're going to go to school. And then the next day I go to school. And then like three other days I go to school and then the other, the next day after those three days I don't go to school.</p> <p>I don't know. My mom she just gets mad when I don't go to school cause she never had the chance. She had a chance to go to school but then she dropped out cause she had me in high school and so she always wants me to finish school.</p> <p>Sometimes I do [feel pressured to go to school].</p> <p>Yeah, sometimes b/c then some of the people say, don't go to school. That's just a waste of time. And they just like, they tell me that school is just stupid and all that stuff. And then my mom keeps telling me, like telling me, go to school...it's so much pressure, I don't know what to do.</p>
<p><b>4. Role of Grades in SRB</b></p>	<p><b>Angel</b></p> <p>[It's hard for me to go to school] like when there's a big test...</p> <p>Um, depending on the grade. Like, if it's like advisement, I</p>

should have an A b/c that's like the easiest class ever. Like really all we do is silent read and just like, every month we have an objective. Like this month we're doing on careers, last month we did it on our goal setting. So like every month we have a different objective.

So far my grades are going up. Like all my Ds went up to Cs and some of my Cs went up to Bs. And my mom is proud of me because she's – she went to the same exact school. She got in a fight and got expelled. So she was – she's like – she don't want me to follow her. So I'm nervous for tests I want to go home and tell my mom oh yeah I aced this test really easily. But instead sometimes I got saying mom I didn't pass this test easily. I didn't get a very good grade on it. It gets me really nervous to tell her that.

**Arthur**

I don't want to go because I know it's going to be hard and if my grades aren't good I really don't want to go because I have to work that much harder.

**Daniel**

Yeah, cuz when I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I was always nervous. I was getting D's and F's. And then in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade I always got A's and B's, so it really helped me.

**Queeley**

It makes me feel, if I get a bad grade, it makes me feel like I don't want to go to school anymore.

**Eric**

Yeah, but I'm starting to fail classes [because I'm not there enough].

It's not so cool [that I'm starting to fail classes] because then like, I'll stay behind in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and all my other friends are going to go to 7<sup>th</sup>.

'Cause I sometimes I get like C's and like F's. And that doesn't, it makes me feel bad and like not want to go to

	<p>school b/c I want to have like pure C's and A's. No F's. That's how I want it to be.</p>
<p><b>5. Experience of School Work</b></p> <p><b>a. Difficult</b></p>	<p><b>Angel</b></p> <p>'Cause in my school we have tests like every day except for Friday and it's like kind of hard to study for this, kind of hard to study for that every night because we have like eight classes, including advisement and it's kind of hard to just keep going on, going on every night.</p> <p>Well, usually I don't study for the test because it is like really hard and like, it is just really complicated. Then, um, like when the big test comes like everybody is like, "Yeah. I'm gonna' ace this test." Everybody else has studied, been prepared, and I haven't. And like they always like they rub it in. Like those really – those nerdy kids like rub it into your face like, "Oh yeah. I have an A+." I'm like, "yeah, cool." And they just keep rubbing it in and it just really – it paranoids me. So on big test days everybody – like all the kids that usually get As are like, "Yeah. I'm going to ace this test."</p> <p>Ummm Reading and Writing and Earth Science – What I don't like about them is just I don't understand them. Because like they put me in advancement which I don't know why and um – like it is really hard. Like we are doing right now – we are doing this thing like with I am the Moon poem and then we had to like – like it says something about I once was a blue bright circle until my bright cloak of stars covers my second unknown eyes. Something like that. It is just really confusing. Like you don't get some words.</p> <p>I just see it differently (letters). Well it depends – it depends on the day. Sometimes I might write it right, sometimes I might not without knowing.</p> <p>The last one is Earth Science and because there is like these really big charts. They are like this but longer and</p>

bigger and thicker. And there is just pages and pages of reading like astronomy and all that and microscopic – microscopic images of the body and then there is like – there is this really big chart like this and it is full of numbers and words. (Deep breath) It just hurts my eyes looking at all of those blurring together.

Advisement? Advisement I have a 'B' because I was gone a couple of days and I am still working on the extra credit she gave me. I feel pretty good about that class.

Advanced Language Arts is kind of confusing. Not impressed with myself but I'm trying to get like – because I got extra credit from each class so I am trying to make myself feel better about getting a good grade.

Well, Ancient Civ. Ancient Civ. I do really good but he grades my things all wrong and I don't know why. I should have an 'A' in that class but I don't. He doesn't check our ISNs. He never makes us turn in our warm ups. So like most of that is most of our grades and he never makes us turn it in so that is why I have a bad grade in that class.

My least favorite part would be International Languages...French Class.

International Languages I do not like because we have to learn French words and if we don't get it right we will get a warning on our claw card for not paying attention in class.

We had like homework to do. She would give us a packet and we would complete so much and take it back the next day.

Mostly in public school it was because all the work she had gave us was like a really big packet and she wanted us to complete like a couple of weeks of it in one night. And from me going to the Boys' and Girls' Club and coming home at eight it wasn't really helping because then my mom would have to stay up with me all night and stuff. And then I would have to get up early in the morning and try to finish. So that is why I would be like I don't want to

go to school, I don't want to go to school. She is going to yell at me and stuff.

Yeah. All my math is kind of hard but they – my mom made it at my grade level so it is better for me now.

Our teacher only gives us one piece of homework and it is 94. My teacher only gives us one piece of homework and it is our spelling words. All that we need to do is write those down ten times and then give it back to him. And that is all we have to do. And occasionally he will give us a piece of math or something but that's all.

Yeah. It is like my math. It really bothers me. I just don't like it because I used to be behind in quarter one work and that is all I had to do was my math. And we're – I was in that dividing fractions and dividing multiplication problems and that just really bugged me because my mom was like get it done, get it done. So that was really making me mad. So that is why – that is what part makes me not want to go to school because of my math.

**Arthur**

What I have to do is high expectations. The teachers make us write in MLA style for papers and don't explain how to do it.

Like math is hard and English is hard because of the MLA part.

**Brian**

There's just sometimes, I just can't find a book that I like.

**Daniel**

Yeah. Yes – my homework's hard.

Science, but I just need help with science sometimes b/c sometimes science can be really hard. And sometimes my teacher sometimes doesn't help me so I try guessing, but it still works and I need help with science. Yeah.

**Gus**

Well only my math class is because sometimes I don't like doing anything in them because I'm not good at math so I don't even try in math.

Um the things I'm hard at is uh um multiplication and division.

Because most of the time I set there and I don't want to do anything in class. I just sit there and don't do anything.

Well it is kind of hard and sometimes I don't get what they are telling us to I sit there and don't do anything.

### **Mindy**

I can understand them but like sometimes I can't so my teacher helps me pretty much.

Well like I said, they have too much work in them and I pretty much don't like to pay attention in class at all. 208. Well, like I don't want to do class work...210. Because sometimes it's hard and I don't understand it.

Like in – I pretty much get everything in math. The only thing I don't get is language arts and history which is really hard for me. I don't know why but it just is.

Well I kind of um, I think math is easy now.

Science? I don't know. I just don't like doing a lot of writing. He makes us write a lot of things and yeah. Like he does do these questions that are called analysis questions which I don't understand.

Um history I don't really like doing my work in that class sometimes so I don't pay attention. So I guess that is why I don't really get it.

I don't really get like – my teacher is showing me more but I don't get the adjectives and pronouns and prepositions and all that stuff.

Like when they give me hard worksheets like I don't understand sometimes. Like language arts there was this

worksheet we were doing and it's worth a lot of point but like the teacher – I asked if I could – if she can help me but she said that she can't because she wants to see if I can do it alone. So I didn't really do anything on it.

It makes me feel like, well, I don't understand it so I don't know how I'm supposed to do it.

**Oscar**

Uh no. I think I'm okay with doing what I can on my own but the work is pretty easy. I'm not saying I want more work. I'm just saying I could use work a little bit harder.

Uh some of it is just because it is all packed on top of each other and it is just a lot of work. I mean if I had it little by little work every day I would probably finish it instead of having to have homework most of the days. Um math and science are pretty easy to learn but the problem is they pile up too much homework. And then ancient civ I understand but our teacher goes kind of quick.

Well I – I think it is kind of challenging considering that they give us a lot of work. Uh actually the work helps out a lot but it's good and it is just the work is too much.

Uh yeah and the teachers try to help me some – or most of the time but it is hard progress.

Like maybe if I don't understand something they explain but I don't get it that well.

I mean like I understand it but it's just when I think about it sometimes doesn't make sense. It is just weird.

Uhh pretty much the work. It's just lots to handle most of the time. And also the teachers don't really take it easy on you. They kind of make it hard and make it quick for some reason.

**Queeley**

It's easy and hard. It's ok.



<p><b>b. Boring</b></p>	<p>The hard part is that sometimes she can go a little fast and you don't understand it.</p> <p>It's that it's confusing and then you don't get it.</p> <p>Sometimes. Sometimes she gives us easy stuff and sometimes it could be a little tough.</p> <p><b>Eric</b></p> <p>Math, it's hard because they give us some problems that we don't understand sometimes.</p> <p>Sometimes certain subjects are hard on certain days because they're different subjects and it gets harder and harder and harder.</p> <p>It's hard 'cause we like try to make these, these, um these projects but sometimes we don't have the tools to make them or like we made a volcano last time but like it didn't turn out so good cause we didn't know how to make the volcano the lava, the magma come out of the volcano.</p> <p>It's hard cause we have to do these we have to write and write and write and write and we have to read like four paragraphs and we have to write like three other paragraphs and sometimes we don't get enough time to finish it.</p> <p><b>Brian</b></p> <p>There are two subjects that I don't really like. Reading and science. Reading is just not so fun. It gets me really bored.</p> <p>Well, science, I just, I'm not interested. It's just hard to really do it b/c you space out b/c you don't like it. So, when I'm doing like science tests, I space out. I forget the questions and stuff like that. Then reading, I just get, can't get into the book. Like I'll be reading and then after 5 pages, it just gets boring...5, 10 pages.</p> <p>I'm not interested in the things we learn in science. It is just boring. Like we do – actually we do astronomy and stuff and it's pretty good but usually we would do like</p>
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Newton's Laws and that is really boring to me. So I just don't want to listen to anything.

And now we are doing surface area and stuff so it's boring.

Well I just can't find a book that is interesting to me and I can't get interested in a book unless I'm like in a really quiet room where I can't hear anybody.

**David**

Um, sometimes doing the work b/c sometimes we do work all day sometimes so I kind of get bored of it. So, yeah, the work.

Uh, sometimes b/c sometimes like the work would be real boring and I can't really stay in my seat sometimes, so I'll just keep staying up and they tell me to sit down so, yeah.

**Gonzalo**

Cause um now that they are going to start doing is they are going to start making classes that you fail and what they are only going to have you do those three classes all day cause it's only math, writing and um reading. I don't even know what it is. Some other class. And then if you fail those three classes then next year you only have three classes all year.

Well I kind of would change them so I can um – next year I have more choices on how many classes I get instead of having regular classes and being bored. So I could get like PE or art or woodshop or something different.

**Oliver**

Uh math yeah it's boring. I mean we have to do a lot of stuff on our own that I appreciate but the problem is there is not enough to do on our own. When we only have one worksheet it is pretty quick to finish.

Well that and sometimes it is just the subject is boring. Like maybe you might talk about what vocabulary, multiplication, division, things I've already learned. Things

<p><b>c. Pleasurable</b></p>	<p>like that.</p> <p>...And language arts is just kind of boring since a lot of people just know what it is and we just – the teacher goes fast – goes by it fast.</p> <p><b>Angel</b></p> <p>Fifth period is – oh yeah seventh grade math. And that class is fun.</p> <p>Um like we are doing this thing called Think Tactile where you have this thing because we are learning astronomy right now. And there is this box and it has nine boxes and each of them has like uh the sun to Neptune meter thing. And one says like seluride, section review, fray or model notes, thirty plant word splash, and stuff like that. And we have to do three of them in like tick tack toe thing. So that is pretty fun.</p> <p>I like the online work. And then some days I just don't want to do it.</p> <p><b>Brian</b></p> <p>The only good science project I've done this year, which was awesome was made a rocket.</p> <p>Yeah, well it was kind of stressing b/c everybody wanted to do it again. We were outside. B/c everyone was trying to tell us what to do and we're like, we know what to do. We did it and the rocket's like a big failure b/c everybody's stressing us out. It only, it was supposed to go up, but we pulled the trigger and it pulled sideways that time and it almost hit Fernando in the face. It was like Matrix with his head back.</p> <p>...Like we do – actually we do astronomy and stuff and it's pretty good...</p> <p>It is just interesting to me and I just like doing math problems and it's better than watching or doing science or anything. It is just interesting to me and I – it is kind of</p>
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	<p>boring now because we do a lot of geometry and stuff.</p> <p>So – but I still like it.</p> <p><b>Gus</b></p> <p>And my second one teaches life science and it is good in there. It’s going good... And then um my fourth class is going well. And she teaches intervention – reading intervention and my fifth class is world geography and it is going good in there... And my seventh teacher it is going good in there.</p> <p><b>Oliver</b></p> <p>...In science we read about astronomy which is pretty cool...</p> <p>And then I think a little bit more of exciting stuff like maybe – like in Rome – I means in ancient civ. we talked about gladiators a little bit but we didn’t really get into that subject and I kind of liked the gladiator part. And I – so I hoped we could learn more about that because that was pretty interesting.</p> <p>Gladiators. I thought it was pretty exciting how they lived because uh they were pretty much slaves and they um – they actually fought a lot. But what was pretty interesting was that they had doctors and they had seatings and they actually fought against wild beasts like tigers and elephants.</p> <p><b>Queeley</b></p> <p>I love science.</p> <p><b>Tonya</b></p> <p>I like reading but not like two hours a day. It kind of gets boring after awhile. I mean I can read the whole hour and not get tired or sleepy or bored and then the second hour is kind of like I’m done. I’m ready to go do something else.</p>

<p><b>6. Impact of Sibling Relationship on SRB/Academic Performance</b></p>	<p><b>Daniel</b></p> <p>Good b/c sometimes we could fight and we just need some time to get away from each other for a few hours, so...</p> <p><b>Gus</b></p> <p>Not sure about her (sister). She doesn't go to school sometimes too.</p> <p>Umm well I feel better because now I know what not to do and go in his direction that he (brother) went in.</p> <p><b>Mindy</b></p> <p>Well I think she wants me to go to school because she wants me to be successful like my brother and – but my brother made it to – he had like good grades in elementary and high school. They were straight As. And like I want to be like him so yeah. But my brother couldn't go to school since he was an immigrant so yeah. Like college.</p> <p><b>Eric</b></p> <p>It's cool cause I'm a role model to my brothers and they say they're gonna be just like me when they grow up and I'm just like be better than me.</p> <p>'Cause I'm not doing so good in school.</p> <p>Well, I've flunked different classes. I flunked 5<sup>th</sup> grade once. I'm supposed to be in 7<sup>th</sup> and so they're like looking up to me and they know I flunked 5<sup>th</sup> grade and they might flunk in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade just to be like me but I don't want them to be like me.</p> <p>They think that they want to be like me. Just going to school, being proficient, and they want to grow up to be like me. And but, um, I'm not doing so good in school and like, just do better than me and I keep telling them that. And they're like, ok. And then, I keep telling them that every day.</p>
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**7. Relationship With Teachers**

**a. Positive Feelings**

**Angel**

120. Well, usually I don't talk to them, except about my school work. I don't, like if there's anything I ever need, like I could talk to them. I never really ask them for anything, but like every, but like the teachers let us know, like, if you need anything, you could just talk to me b/c usually like I wake up in the morning like really tired and I look sad, but I'm not, I'm just tired. They're like, if you need anything, just come talk to me. I'm like, ok.

And because like – not just that but that teacher is not strict. She is strict but not like you need to sit down right there and then you get up to go sharpen your pencil. Get your claw card out. She says okay. And she brings treats and she – like today we went over – because we were kind of in the child section because we also learn about the family. We just got down with the family but we had a review and it was of a baby. She put on this really goofy picture and it had this tip that says secure your – because we are going over the months like twelve to eighteen and stuff like that. And we were on two years or four or three years old and it said secure thing. Secure chemicals up safely and secure and lock things the baby shouldn't have. And then it had a face of a really funny baby and it laughed.

The teacher is fun but strict. Like the other day we were learning about numbers, odd and even. And if it said um – like we were listening to Spanish because it didn't have a French version and it said cuenta and then it said un ducks twa and stuff like that. If it was an odd number you had to go down and if it was even you had to do this. Then she kept like – and then our art teacher was like grading us and then like she did this. Sat on the desk and put her butt out and then she went like this. Like she went – she like moved her area. It was funny.

Fifth period is – oh yeah Seventh Grade Math. And that class is fun and the teacher she is happy all the time. She never yelled at us before and she – she like – if we don't get it she is like wrong is good, wrong is good.

And then if you don't get the right answer she'll – she'll ask if everybody agrees on the answer. No? Okay let's talk over it again. So she doesn't go on without people that don't know but she – she – she's fun but like she encourages kids and all that kind of stuff.

**Arthur**

They're really helpful. I like all of them.

**Brian**

Um, I, we had knitting class and everything and she was fun a lot last year...

**Daniel**

Uh, she's ok, but sometimes she could be like really mean sometimes. So like, yeah. But she's cool though.

**Gus**

My first teacher she – he is good.

**Mindy**

Some teachers I like....

The one that I like the most is Miss G. She teaches math. And she teaches my math and my math essentials class. And she is a pretty cool teacher so I kind of like her most than any of the other ones.

Better. So like I like it more when she helps me. I understand it better.

**Oliver**

Uh Mr. Sullivan is our advisement teacher. He is pretty funny sometimes. Lots of time he is kind of straight forward and wants to get the work done. Uh Miss Austin, she is my first period class, she is the language arts teacher. Um I understand the work that she gives me but she goes by pretty fast. She gives me a lot of work. So I kind of like

her. She likes to joke around sometimes but she is pretty serious. And then Mr. Simpson, he is my second period teacher. He's – he's in science. Um he's – he's pretty cool. He teaches us a lot about what we need to learn. He also likes to tell us stories so we can fully understand things. Also he gives us a lot of work to do things so I think that is pretty cool. And then for my fifth period I have Miss Azari and she is my band teacher. She is pretty awesome. She plays a lot of cool songs. She likes to let us play things. She likes to joke around most of the time and she is pretty fun.

Yeah. Then I have – after that I have uh Miss Meyers. She is my (pause) uh speech and drama uh teacher. Um we don't do much paperwork in there which is what I like about that class because it is a lot better um in there because we have to act out instead of having to write down an assignment or do things like that. Um I think yesterday is when we had to do a poster and that was pretty cool. And then after that I got downstairs to Miss Brennan. She is my advanced math teacher. Uh she is kind of weird sometimes. She sings a lot of songs. Pretty oldie ones. And that makes me laugh about her. But most of the time she likes to get to work. And then after that I have Miss Austin. She likes to kid around. She teases me sometimes.

Like when I give other girls hugs she makes fun of me. And um she is pretty funny most of the time. She goes through work pretty quick which is ok I guess...

### **Queeley**

...I like my teachers...

She's fine, but sometimes she can go can go a little too fast.

She's (art teacher) fun.

She's (music teacher) nice too.

She's ok. Sometime she can be mean, sometimes she can



<p><b>b. Negative Feelings</b></p>	<p>be nice.</p> <p>I liked one [of my teachers in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade]. Her name was Ms. S.</p> <p><b>Eric</b></p> <p>...cool teachers they just go and then they should help they would help other kids and when they get an answer right they give them high fives.</p> <p><b>Tonya</b></p> <p>He's very cool. His name is Mr. C. but we call him Mr. C. He's um like twenty-six so he understands us and stuff a whole lot better than our old teacher. She would like yell at you and stuff which I did not like her and that's what – that's why my math is so not good because she would yell at me when I get a problem wrong and I would be like I'm not going to respond to you because you are yelling at me. So that's why I like him a whole lot better because he doesn't yell. He helps you and talks it out with you.</p> <p><b>Arthur</b></p> <p>Sometimes they don't really care what I say or do. It happens like 1000 times.</p> <p><b>Brian</b></p> <p>... Just looking at my teacher and how she'll be mad at me about stuff. Like if I forget to do something that night, I'll do it in the morning. But I don't know if she'll be like, she wants to see that paper and she thinks it's acceptable b/c she's really strict and stuff like that.</p> <p>Yeah, b/c I think she'll be like extremely mad at me. And if she's mad at me, she'll just talk about it throughout the day. She'll like, like on Thursday we had science project and me and my friend F., the kid I was talking about upstairs, she said we couldn't do it and we said ok and we're like can we do it after school? She said yeah, but you</p>
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have to have supervision, so he called his mom b/c we were going to do it at school after school cuz we had a basketball game, but I couldn't play so I we were going to do it, but his mom was like you're not supervised. I'm like well my dad's right there, he can watch us after every quarter b/c he's the coach. He can just go outside for a second and then she starts yelling, I already said ok, but she just keeps adding on. We're just saying ok, we get it, we won't do it after school.

I had her for two years. I had her for 5<sup>th</sup> grade and for 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Since, last year she was ok, but this year she's just kind of mad and stressed out more b/c she has 25 kids in her class and last year she had 14. So it's been a big change for her.

Yeah, she kind of has bad days and she blames it like on her kids.

Yeah. I don't think I spend enough time with them [teachers], but...

This year, I don't like her that much anymore b/c it's hard to have a teacher two times in a row. And it's just, she knows what you do, and she like says, I know what you did last year and you're not going to do that this year. She says that to all the kids and it's hard to...it's really different. It's not really different, but she just makes it harder.

Yeah, it just kind of, she cares about your grades and she cares about you, but sometimes it's just hard to think b/c she's always on you about something you didn't do. Like if you don't do something right, like a page, you get like an 8. She'll be like you should have read the directions or something.

Yeah, she has like really high expectations and like if we do what we're supposed to do, she's like you didn't go above and beyond or something like that.

... Like I'm always asking questions. Sometimes she doesn't want to answer our questions. We'll go to her desk and she'll go there's too many people around my desk and you guys have to raise your hands. Go to your seats and

raise your hand so I can call you up to my desk. So, I asked somebody else b/c I know she's not going to, there's like 20 people raising their hands so I ask a person who understands it and I get yelled at about it. And sometimes like some of my other classmates, they'll be walking by somebody else's desk and she thinks they're talking so she'll yell at them. Then they'll have to come in for recess or something like that.

Um I just don't want to go to school and put up with yelling and screaming at me or anything. So I won't go to school or I'll just tell my mom that I don't want to.

Well she'll (teacher) just have like something will happen wrong at – at her house before school or she'll just have a bad day. Because today she had um – she didn't really take it out on us today but she had this flower place um charged her \$100 for flowers and she never ordered any flowers there so at recess um my friend S. was in there and he heard. She was yelling on the phone to the a guy telling him she didn't order the \$100 flowers. So she is like never mind, never mind. She got really annoying it seemed like.

Sometimes I just – I know I will be yelled at for something I did wrong so I just don't feel like going to school. It just hits me hard I guess.

Yeah because like if I have done a piece of work or anything wrong I think I will just get yelled at so I just don't want to go.

**Daniel**

Like sometimes we turn in the work and she puts a bad grade on it, but we still do good on it but she puts our grades up though.

**Gus**

And my sixth block class I don't like the teacher and she teaches math.

**Mindy**

Yeah. And also like I don't really like a lot of homework

and I don't like listening to the teachers talking. So yeah.

...Some teachers I don't like

Like they don't help me with my work and stuff. They say I have to do it by myself and I can't really understand it so I don't do it.

Not all the times but most of the times like when I ask. When it's really hard that is when they don't help me.

That is when I get ISS for not wearing a uniform and talking back to the teachers and stuff like that.

Well cause like I fall asleep in some classes and the teachers get mad. So that's what happens. And also because sometimes like I cuss in class and they get me in trouble for that. And sometimes cause I walk out of class and stuff like that.

...I don't want to listen to the teachers.

...I just don't want to listen to the teacher so I fall asleep.

**Oliver**

I think the teachers [make it boring]. They don't make it anything exciting. They make most of it reading assignments, writing.

Uhh pretty much the work. It's just lots to handle most of the time. And also the teachers don't really take it easy on you. They kind of make it hard and make it quick for some reason.

...After that I have Miss C. I don't really like her because she doesn't fully understand what we are trying – what us as – we as students are trying to do. She makes us try to work really hard and harder than we try to when we can –

Because likes to make us – she wants to make us take notes every day and it is kind of hard because sometimes we might have to be typing the whole period. Sometimes we might be going outside and studying and so we can't

really do our notes and things. And those are all of my classes.

**Queeley**

Some of the teachers can be pretty mean and then others can be very nice.

They, they just, my mom says that when they were small, they probably got picked on or whatever and they brought it to now and they are just doing it to other kids.

That when one of us gets hurt and we have to stop the game or whatever, to make sure we're ok, he just tells us to keep on playing, not to stop.

He's just rude.

She can use pretty rude words to us.

She just tells us to sit down and be quiet and she just um, she just, I don't know...

Sometimes. Sometimes she does and sometimes she just doesn't bother.

It bugs me. Makes me mad.

She's ok. Sometime she can be mean, sometime she can be nice.

I didn't care for them.

No, I just didn't like them.

**Eric**

Because the teachers they just they didn't want to like, they didn't, they weren't that active and they weren't that much fun. They were like boring.

Like they weren't, like when they'd tell us, like, when we'd be working they'd just like go sit down on their desk, look at the computer, and they'd come back and make us do another question and then they'd go back and other teachers they just,

	<p>Yeah. Like, they just talk a lot and talk, and talk, and talk, and talk, and like if you try to ask a question they get mad. Then they'd keep talking. They wouldn't let us ask questions.</p>
<p><b>8. Housing</b></p>	<p><b>Angel</b></p> <p>We keep moving constantly. Not constantly, but my mom keeps getting better exceptions to houses, like we might be moving from these ones to like section 8 with like, they're not apartments, they're houses with like five to six bedrooms, so yeah.</p> <p><b>Arthur</b></p> <p>Cause we moved.</p> <p>Well, 'cause we moved again.</p> <p><b>Mindy</b></p> <p>I've been to around 4 or 5 schools.</p> <p>Well, 'cause we kept moving.</p> <p>'Cause my parents couldn't work at a job and then we had to move somewhere else to get a new job.</p> <p>Well my parents right now since there is like jobs – there is not that many jobs anymore my dad just barely got a job and yeah. So we're going back up. We lost our cars, we lost our house so now we live in the trailer we just bought. So yeah.</p>
<p><b>9. Relationship With Parents</b></p>	<p><b>Angel</b></p> <p>I'm nervous because my Mom. And my mom is proud of me because she's – she went to the same exact school. She got in a fight and got expelled. So she was – she's like – she don't want me to follow her. So I'm nervous for tests I</p>

want to go home and tell my mom oh yeah I aced this test really easily.

**Brian**

Well, I argue with my mom b/c everyday she comes home all mad at me and I don't know why. Me and my dad get along.

Well, she (mom) kind of seems like she comes home every day kind of grumpy. So it seems like she's always mad at someone.

Stay home for an hour. Yeah. Sometimes when she has a late shift she will let me stay home for an hour or two and then she will take me to school at 9:30 or 10:00.

Not really. She just makes me – she makes me work harder the next quarter. So if I get a bad grade in Reading – I have had a C two times in my whole thing at St. Mary's and so she will make me read more at night and – yeah. So if I am doing good this quarter she'll lay off on what I'm doing. And then if I'm doing bad she'll help me more and more.

... Like I don't always like – sometimes I kind of don't want him to coach but when he actually does then I want him to. Sometimes he's just annoying. It seems like - because he is always on back and nobody else's it seems like.

Yeah they are. My mom well she is involved with some of the like community service stuff with us because we have to go to the Guadalupe Center once a month because of – for community hours. Kayla has to do 100 for seventh and eighth grade and I have to do 30 hours.

**Daniel**

Yeah, she wants me to go to college so that I can get like a real good job cuz my...I want to go play football for the NFL, so...

**Gus**

Umm she (mom) – I think she wants me to get my grades

up so I can pass and – yeah.

Because she (mom) wants me to succeed in life. And she doesn't want me to be like a bad person and um do bad things later on because I didn't get my education and I need my education.

Umm ([pause]) like if I want to join a sport I want them to be there so they know I have to be in a sport or at a meeting or something. And they won't think that I'm – try to not be at the house.

**Mindy**

I say no because I don't really want to get in trouble because then my mom will get really mad.

I'm not sure about college but I want to because my parents want me to. So yeah.

That is like most of the week because like in the mornings I wake up and my mom wakes me up and I don't want to wake up. And then we start this big fuss about it and finally at the end she just leaves me there and I wake up like ten minutes before like my bus gets here I guess. So yeah.

When I'm grounded I'm not allowed to go anywhere. Like I'm – there is a park near our house where I go. Sometimes I don't come here but go hang out with my friends at the park.

Well not really. My mom don't ground me that much anymore. She don't ground me that much.

**Oliver**

My dad, um, he's not home very often so I don't really talk to him that much.

Yeah. I mean he comes home pretty late and I have to go to sleep at ten and so my mom and sister see him all the time.



	<p>Uh no I'm okay because I know my dad is working. That way we have a good place to live.</p> <p>When I was a kid we (he and dad) used to play a lot but things have changed.</p> <p>My parents um don't really like it when uh I don't know what is going on at school. They always ask if I have homework. They always tell me to do it right away. They also always want me to talk to the teachers if I have any questions.</p> <p><b>Queeley</b></p> <p>She really wants me to go to college and she wants me... cuz she didn't go to college, so she wants me to go.</p> <p>He didn't go either. But, he wants me to go too.</p> <p>I don't know. I tell the teacher. My mom says that if you tell the teacher and they won't stop, then you um, then like if they're poking at you and they won't stop and you poke 'em back, or whatever, if they're hitting you and they won't stop, then you hit them back.</p> <p>My mom she um, she met this lady. They had like an interview or something like that. She took me and we ate lunch there and then I saw nice teachers and they talked to me.</p> <p>I pretend I was sick. My mom wouldn't buy it. She'd make me go to school. And then when I come home, I just cry.</p>
<p><b>10. Support System</b></p>	<p><b>Angel</b></p> <p>Usually my grandma, my mom, my auntie, my dad, my uncle, my other uncle, and my teachers at school [help me with my school work].</p> <p>They think, like I was going to go to Frontier Academy or Wintegrads, but my mom couldn't afford it, so they sent me to the closest school. You know how you can't, you have to go to the closest school. So they sent me to that</p>

one, but my mom and my grandma and all my supporters, they're really liking it.

Yes, I have my grandma, my mom, my siblings, and at school I have all my friends [that really want me to go to school].

Like we barely moved in and my mom had a new job and like – cause we moved in from like all the way over there by the mall apartments. And my – we like barely got done placing all the stuff in and then next day my mom had to go to work and didn't have nowhere to go – like leave us at and so she came over here and applied and like – yeah. We signed up. So like the next – the day after we moved in.

**Brian**

My sister and I don't get along.

Like we'll just, we'll be fine with each other just talking with each other, happy, and then we'll kind of argue if we're watching a movie, then we'll just start arguing about what's going to happen. Something. It's kind of weird.

My sister doesn't really have a good relationship with him (dad).

No, like, kind of last year was bad b/c she didn't want to spend time with him.

It was just pretty much, well last year, she just didn't want to like, we went into therapy last year and she didn't want to talk to my dad and she didn't want to interact or do anything with him. Now she has a little better relationship with him, but not too much.

It was the whole family. My mom didn't go for a long time, but we all went for a couple months and then we kind of stopped after that.

Yeah, yeah, every, like one week it's not as bad and the next week it's kind of worse. It (fighting between mom and dad) just gets worse every week.

My mom just wanted us to go to therapy to work things out. Usually my dad wouldn't come to therapy. He would,

a couple times he came. Like it would, sometimes it would be me, my mom, and Kayla. Sometimes it'd be my dad, me, and Kayla. Therapy happened kind of May through...Like it started in May and it ended at the start of August.

I think my mom's more of the educator. She kind of gets mad when I get a bad grade, but my dad, he just says try harder next quarter. If I don't, I usually do better. It's never happened that I haven't done better.

Well some kids support you in school and some just, they don't help, but it doesn't like hurt you in school. It doesn't like discourage you. Just some support you and some stand there.

Uh, I think, I don't if any of my friends really want me to go to school, but yeah, I don't know if they do, but I'm sure one of them does.

F., probably. He's my best friend.

...And then if I'm doing bad she'll (mom) help me more and more.

...Sometimes he's (dad) just annoying. It seems like - because he is always on back and nobody else's it seems like.

Yeah they are. My mom well she is involved with some of the like community service stuff with us because we have to go to the Guadalupe Center once a month because of - for community hours. Kayla has to do 100 for seventh and eighth grade and I have to do 30 hours.

Um well they (peers) will just encourage you to get everything done and don't wait until the last minute. If you need help they will help you. If you need help. And then I will help them if they need help. So it is kind of like if you help me I will help you.

**Daniel**

68. She tells me, when I show her my report card and there's a D or an F, she says, get that up, or you'll be grounded. I get it up the next day and she goes, eh, you put

that up fast, so, I just try to get them up b/c without my stuff, I'd be losing it. So, I have to get my grades up. 70. No, she just says, get good grades and if I have a D or F, she says get it up. And then I get it up the next day.

**Gus**

Sometimes they (other kids) make it hard and sometimes they make it easy.

Sometimes I go to a classroom and then they help me there.

Yeah. Because in my – my brother didn't get his education well and um he makes about – he used to make bad choices and he always got in trouble and – yeah.

Yeah. He – because he (brother) has been in jail a lot.

Sometimes he takes us out to eat and most of the time he can't get out because he is in a place called work release because he has been in jail so many times. So he is in there and only has a bit of time to be out so he tries to spend as much as time as he can with us and his family.

**Mindy**

They (friends) make school funner. Sometimes they help me with my work and – yeah.

Yeah they – I think they want me to get a good career so I won't have to work at like McDonald's and stuff like that.

Because he wants me to be successful like my mom does and my brother.

Sometimes they help me with my class work. They sit with me and we sit as a group and we do class work.

Like my friends do so those are the only people that help me but like – that is pretty much it. The teachers help me sometimes but not all the time.

**Oliver**

Uhh well I think my mom wants me to go to school because she wants me to get a good education and a good job so I don't have to work very hard like my dad.

I think they probably make it easier um because they me to get a good education. They like uh they like seeing me a success.

A lot of times we do things together like maybe studying. We might talk about a test or like what we got wrong that way we can practice on it and see how we can help each other out.

Uhh yeah. I have my cousin, my friend Dominic, and my friend Hilda. My friend Tolsilite wants me to go to school a lot too.

Oh they encourage me to go and if I miss a day they always tell me what I'm missing and what's going on.

My parents um don't really like it when uh I don't know what is going on at school. They always ask if I have homework. They always tell me to do it right away. They also always want me to talk to the teachers if I have any questions.

### **Queeley**

She (Mom) really wants me to go to college and she wants me... cuz she didn't go to college, so she wants me to go.

He (Dad) didn't go either. But, he wants me to go too.

He's (brother) at a college level.

### **Tonya**

My brother is supportive too. He is always staying you have a big day tomorrow, studying for your quizzes and stuff.

They like it because when I get home I can go right to sleep, eat and stuff. And they like it a lot more than my old school because they would have to help me with my

	<p>homework and they would have to – they would have to put off what they had to do and stuff. So they like it a whole lot more.</p> <p>Yeah I have my friend Hilton and my mom and my dad and my aunt and my cousins and all of them say stay in school, stay in school, don't be like us, don't be like us.</p> <p>And then I told my mom that and she was like don't drop out. You can – you are better than what your teacher thinks you are.</p>
<p><b>11. Parent Involvement</b></p>	<p><b>Arthur</b></p> <p>85. Sometimes, like, when something's going to change they'll go to the school meeting.</p> <p><b>Brian</b></p> <p>Yeah. My dad's the coach of the middle school basketball team, so...</p> <p>Um, she like volunteers to do stuff like pick up for the spaghetti dinner like after the thing. We have to help like take everything away and stuff like that. All the dinners...</p> <p>No, like if I have a big project, I'll ask my mom to help me with it. That's all.</p> <p><b>Daniel</b></p> <p>Yeah, we go to Parent/Teacher Conferences to see how good I'm doing in school.</p> <p>Uh, no, she just checks on the grades and all that.</p> <p>She tells me, when I show her my report card and there's a D or an F, she says, get that up, or you'll be grounded. I get it up the next day and she goes, eh, you put that up fast, so, I just try to get them up b/c without my stuff, I'd be losing it. So, I have to get my grades up.</p> <p>Alright. So she doesn't like punish you real bad or anything?</p>

**Gus**

No because most of the time they are busy.

Other obligations and they work during the night.

Um my dad works and my mom works and they don't have enough time cause when we have a meeting they like have to go to work or something cause it is like their break and then I tell them and then um when I tell them they say they have to go to work because before that work called and told them they had to go to work.

Because they are always telling me to do my homework and to wake up on time so I'm not late to school or anything.

**Oliver**

Uh yeah but I've missed – I've made them miss most of the time because I just haven't heard the announcements about the – the parent-teacher conferences because they say when they are coming up but they never like – they say they are coming up but they don't really say the date as far as I can hear.

Yeah. And since I don't know, they don't know either. So nobody pretty much has gone.

**Queeley**

They go to parent/teacher conferences and to watch me sing for my choir or whatever. So they're always there.

She does that b/c she, when I get home, she right away tells me to do my homework. And then she practices math facts with me.

Uh huh. When she's not home, my dad has to do it.

**Tuesday**

Yeah. All my math is kind of hard but they – my mom made it at my grade level so it is better for me now.

	<p>But he (dad) is always telling me don't quit, don't quit. Try your hardest. You can do it and stuff. So he is supportive too. He doesn't want me to quit school.</p> <p>Yes my mom went to my conference. He can't because he is on the road but he comes home every other day. So he can't all the time but he tries to make it when he wants – when he can.</p> <p>And we're – I was in that dividing fractions and dividing multiplication problems and that just really bugged me because my mom was like get it done, get it done. So that was really making me mad. So that is why – that is what part makes me not want to go to school because of my math.</p>
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