

THE PERCEPTIONS OF AT-RISK HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS REGARDING THEIR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Research shows students who are at-risk of academic failure become a long-term liability on society. There is a large body of quantitative research which points at increased educational success for students who attend preschool. This study brings to light the personal testimonies of at-risk high school students in regards to their early childhood educational experiences. Students were classified into three groups based upon the setting in which they were currently being educated: a traditional high school setting, a mixture of high school with minimal support from the district alternative school, or a total or almost exclusive placement in the alternative school.

This qualitative instrumental case study took place in a southwest Missouri school district. Five open themes emerged from the study including: Home is Where You Lay Your Head; Box of Chocolates; Seems Normal to Me; I Like You; You Like Me, or Do You? and finally, Listen to Your Heart. The open themes were then compiled into three focused themes: Positive Early Childhood Experiences; Damaging Early Childhood Experiences; and a Means to an End.

Implications for leaders were discussed. The findings indicated the students who attended preschool were scattered throughout the three groups, and one group did not stand out as having more preschool experience. Students who had participated in preschool education were able to remember more details about their learning. Relationships with adults, both personal and academic, were mentioned by the participants in both positive and negative examples.

