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EDU 7900 Qualitative Research  
COHORT 11

**Problem: *This study will examine why students exit the Saint Demetrios school system after Junior High School instead of continuing their education at the Saint Demetrios High School.***

### FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. In your opinion what makes our school different than other Schools?
2. What factors would you consider when choosing a school?
3. When deciding whether or not to continue your education in Saint Demetrios, what factors are you looking at?
4. What Are the any underlying factors that you believe may be the reasons why students decide to leave after J.H.S and do not continue Highs School at Saint Demetrios?
5. How does the issue of exiting after J.H.S reflect on our school?

### Focus Group

The group consisted of six eighth graders, two boys and four girls, which were chosen on a volunteer basis. There were two boys and four girls. Out of the six students three were decidedly going to another high school one was undecided and two were staying. This information was not acquired through questioning but directly from the guidance department.

All six students were eager to assist the principal on this assignment although they questioned whether or not their parents would be notified about what was discussed in the group. Saint Demetrios being the largest Greek School and the only High School is evidently the major attribute of the school. All of the students clearly stated that what makes Saint Demetrios special is the “Greek language.” While the majority of them quickly declared that indeed the “Greek” was something “cool”, there were certain students who remarked that it “sucked”. The idea of wearing a uniform everyday, having

to take Greek classes, and go to church seemed very unfair and at times overwhelming.

The “Greek” factor quickly began to lose importance, and the other factors won over. While the few who have made it to “Specialized High Schools” understand the significance of the Saint Demetrios curriculum and appreciate what the school offered them through out the years. The idea of having to study something that they believe they will never use again, seemed to bother most of the students. “We live in America, nobody speaks Greek here. Our parents need to wake up already.”

Unfortunately, Saint Demetrios can not compete with Specialized High Schools like Frank Sinatra High School, LaGuardia and the other schools that offer students something more than just an academic education. Art, music, clubs, and social gatherings, are what Saint Demetrios lacks, and the main reason why many of the students have decided to attend a different High school. The desire to learn another language instead of Greek came up several times, as did “I hate the Greek teacher Mrs X. and Greek too.” Even though they did not mention which language they would prefer this definitely was something they considered when choosing a High School as was the wide range of courses and teachers they would have available at a larger school. “Thank God I won’t have Mr. D again in Math next year”. The comment did get the group going and a bit of course. For a moment it became an execution group for teachers. “You won’t fire anyone Mr. Koularmanis will you”? “They’re not that bad, just mean”. Very few comments came from the two students that were staying. They did however attempt to stand up for several of the staff members they admired.

One of the female students leaving the school expressed her love for the school and all the teachers, and she went on to explain that Saint Demetrios does not offer her

anything she likes besides the main academic subjects. They all express their sorrow for leaving but felt as if they had no other choice. “We’ll come back and visit when we don’t have school”. Immediately on of the male students, who was continuing his studies at the school replied “Why? You just said that you hate everyone here?”

The effect of their exiting the school, and how this would reflect on Saint Demetrios, did not seem to matter to most of the students leaving, but did trouble the two that were staying. The majority of them did not think it should be a negative reflection because it is the only Greek High School, and if someone wants to learn Greek they will come to Saint Demetrios. They also emphasized that they are only leaving the school and not the community. They will all still be coming to the church and participating in GOYA (Greek Orthodox Youth Association).

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Did you have an opinion when deciding on what school you would be attending?
2. Did you pick Saint Demetrios as a possible school to attend?
  - a. If yes, why?
  - b. If no, why not?
4. If you could give the school a grade (A being the best, F being the worst) what would it be?
5. Why would you give that grade?
6. What could be done to improve that grade?
7. Did your parents discuss schools among themselves? What are some of the things they discussed?
8. Did they speak favorably of our school?
9. What were some of the positive things they thought our school could offer you
10. What were some of the negative things they wished Saint Demetrios offered or lacked?

The Saint Demetrios school system was created in 1956 to preserve the Greek culture, its tradition, the Greek language and religion. While the school has

remained firm to its beliefs and vision, the community at large has changed drastically. Parents continue to send their children to Saint Demetrios to learn and maintain their Greek identity. However, the children that attend the school do not have the same values and beliefs as previous first generation Greek children did. While learning the Greek language is important to them, mastering it is not a priority. After sitting through the focus group several patterns emerged regarding the departure of students from the school after the eighth grade. Despite the fact that all the students expressed their love for the school, it was clearly evident that they were frustrated with having to learn about their Greek identity on an ongoing basis. Evidence from their responses suggests that many of them decided to leave because they felt overwhelmed. “I will really miss this place, but I can’t stand doing Greek all the time. You need to bring in another language or something, Mr. K.”

Another pattern that surfaced was that all of the students desired a richer curriculum with additional languages. This clearly suggested that they were aware of the need to break out of the shell that their parents raised them in. This was also evident in the individual interviews when they expressed their desire to specialize with students of various nationalities. All of the respondents reported that even though they will eventually marry someone Greek they would like to date non-Greeks in the interim.

Still another pattern was the fear that information of this study would find its way to their parents. This concern came up every time a child spoke negatively about the school or any aspect of their Greek identity. They were also worried about information getting out to their classmates. The theme of privacy and embarrassment was very evident in the focus group, but became less apparent during the personal interviews. This

comes as no surprise when dealing with the Greek community. The fear of embarrassing their families and being ridiculed is something that every Greek child is careful of from an early age. The only discrepancy to this was the one student that came from a mix-marriage household, who did not really deal with Greeks on a daily basis except for school.

It is very disturbing to witness the complete transformations of the students when they left the focus group and came in for the personal interviews. Many of the students still feared their parents and the ramifications they would face if their dreams and desires for their futures would be discovered. The majority of them would be leaving the school still fearing that their lives would not change. In fact, it would only get much more difficult to break free from traditions.

The majority of the students had an opinion when deciding what school they would like to attend, while only two, truly, did not care. Saint Demetrios was an option for all, except for one who could not afford to attend. This student was a discrepancy throughout the study. Unlike the other students, he was from a mixed race marriage as well as a single parent household. His remarks were always contradictory. For the most part the students loved the school which was an immediately evident and a pattern thought the questioning.

Overall one could see that their love for the school was affected by their frustration over having to learn about the Greek language, history and religion on a daily basis. They felt as if they were “in prison,” this was a theme that was emitted after every response with a sigh. Their home life had a direct influence on the questioning as well as the answers that the students gave in the focus group as well as during the personal

interview process. It was a true awakening for me since I too have been raised in a similar environment and was saddened that the students felt this way. I will continue to have these interviews with various students and hopefully will be able to come up with a program that will allow them to feel some sort of release from their everyday lives.