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School-Within-a-School and its Effectiveness as Measured by Improved Grades, Increased Attendance, and Student Satisfaction

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by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University
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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

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Abstract

Although the number of high school students not graduating is alarming, a successful transition from middle school to high school can place students on the path toward graduation. In 2009, a large, suburban high school implemented a school-within-a-school program to help ease this difficult transition for incoming, at-risk freshmen students. The school-within-a-school program assists students before they begin to struggle while providing them with a team teaching approach within the traditional high school setting.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the school-within-a-school program on student success, using the school district's outcome measures of grades and attendance, while also using data gathered from surveys to examine students' perceptions of the program. This study indicated that a one-year, voluntary school-within-a-school program consisting of approximately 15 students per class was able to meet the needs of at-risk freshmen by decreasing the number of semester F's and changing their perceptions of school as compared to their middle school experiences. Overall, the participants were satisfied and perceived the school-within-a-school program to be beneficial. While results revealed that the program increased students' academic achievement and their perceptions of school while enrolled in the program, it did not have a statistically significant difference on student attendance. This study will be beneficial to other school districts seeking the implementation of a transitional alternative program in the traditional school setting for at-risk freshmen.

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Key to Abbreviations

IEP	Individualized Educational Program
IRB	Institutional Review Board
MO DESE	Missouri Department of Secondary and Elementary Education
MSSN	Missouri Student Success Network
SIS	School Information System
SWS	School-Within-a-School

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Chapter One: Overview of the Study

The transition from middle school to high school can cause great anxiety for many students. Not only are the high school buildings typically larger with more students and teachers, but also the fast-paced environment places more responsibilities and higher expectations on the students (Letrello & Miles, 2003). Although high school students have more choices and freedom, they face a very different educational philosophy than middle school.

Table 1

Differences between Middle School and High School

Middle School Concept	High School Concept
Teachers instruct core subjects per grade level	Teachers instruct core subjects in multiple grade levels
Student progress discussed regularly	Individual meetings as needed
Set of expectations based on students' needs	Expectations based on teacher and subject matter needs

Note. Adapted from "Planning for the Transition to High School," by J. Hertzog, 2006, *Principal*, *86*, p. 60. Copyright 1982-2006 by the H.W. Wilson Company.

Many school districts across the nation are implementing transition programs to help prepare students to feel more comfortable with their new learning environment. Hertzog (2006) concurred "the manner in which students make the transition from middle school to high school is crucial, because it is this transition that sets the tone for high school graduation" (p. 60).

Progress Heights High (a pseudonym given to the school by the researcher), the school of study, implemented a school-within-a-school program to assist their at-risk freshmen. During the 2010-2011 school year, the district of study had 6,237 students enrolled in high school. Approximately 1,700 of these students were

freshmen (MO DESE, 2011). With a district of this size, it was important to ensure that incoming at-risk freshmen transition smoothly in order to continue their education and become productive citizens.

Students eligible for this program had academic, attendance, and/or motivational concerns. The administration considered students at-risk if they had several low or failing grades in core courses, poor attendance, and/or would benefit from a smaller learning environment. Although the district had an alternative program available to students, it did not accommodate first-year freshmen. The purpose of the program was to help prepare and ease the transition of at-risk students into high school. The program assisted students before they began to struggle and give up. According to the building principal at Progress Heights High, typically "about 15 percent of freshmen fail at least one class, putting them behind for the rest of high school" (Bock, 2010, C1). Currently, the district only has one school-within-a-school program located in the largest of its four high schools. It is the only alternative schooling option available to at-risk, first-year freshmen. Depending on the success and outcomes of the program, the other high schools in the district may implement similar programs.

This research project involved collecting academic grades and attendance, from the district's School Information System (SIS), for participants enrolled in the school-within-a-school program during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. All freshmen, from both years, were asked to complete at least one survey on the perspectives of their educational experiences (Appendix C) using a rating scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Based on the participants' responses to the questions given before, during, and after completion of the program, the researcher compared these answers to their previous/present grades and attendance

in order to reflect upon the success and concerns of the school-within-a-school program.

Background Information

Prior to the 2009-2010 school year, all high schools in the district of study only offered an alternative program for struggling sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Students applying for the alternative program had to undergo an interview; receive recommendations from teachers and administrators; and meet the academic, attendance, and behavioral criteria. Although this program had assisted many at-risk students who may have otherwise dropped out or been unsuccessful in high school, it did not accommodate first-year freshmen. With the added pressures of adjusting to a new building, attaining credits for graduation, making friends, new responsibilities, and balancing more homework, some students who struggle in school need help in transitioning and finding success again. In 2005 and 2006, the Missouri Department of Secondary and Elementary Education (MO DESE) adopted an increase in minimum graduation requirements; this forced school districts to increase their graduation requirements from 22 to 24 credits by 2010, putting even more pressure on already at-risk students (MO DESE, 2007).

Many of the teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents in the district realized the importance of a smooth transition for at-risk students from middle school to high school. The significance of this transitional period along with the increased accountability placed on schools to lower the dropout rate led to the implementation of a school-within-a-school program during the 2009-2010 school year at Progress Heights High. The middle school staff selected approximately 50 at-risk students to participate in the program. The selection of these students depended on low academic performance, poor attendance, and/or those who might benefit from a small group,

team-teaching approach. The high school administration carefully recruited four high school teachers to instruct the main core courses of math, science, social studies, and communication arts. These teachers had a desire to work with at-risk students and agreed to participate in the program. Each teacher was flexible, able to engage students in lessons, differentiated instruction to meet individual needs, and provided a positive, supportive learning environment. A wing of the building accommodated these four classes to ensure close proximity to one another, better supervision, a sense of community, and fewer distractions from the rest of the school building. Progress Heights High also implemented a flexible schedule giving teachers a team plan hour to discuss academic/student concerns, work toward common goals, and allow students to earn an additional high school credit. The assignment of teachers and students to this program was on a voluntary basis. The unique characteristics of the school-within-a-school program include its location within the traditional school setting, weekly recognition assemblies, small class sizes, team-teaching approach, quarterly parent-teacher conferences, and the opportunity for students to take elective courses with their peers in the afternoon.

This study used surveys and data collection of grades and attendance to determine whether the school-within-a-school program was effective at changing students' perceptions of school, increasing their attendance, and positively affecting their academics. The researcher collected four years of data from the 2009-2010 freshman class and three years of data from the 2010-2011 freshman class.

Importance of the Study

School districts across the nation face the conflict of helping students transition smoothly into high school while providing them with a challenging program of study (Cooney & Bottoms, 2002). In order to prepare the future generation for

postsecondary studies, educators must challenge each student to their highest potential instead of allowing them to enroll in lower-level academic courses that will not prepare them for their future (Cooney & Bottoms, 2002). At-risk students have the potential to be very successful when given the opportunity, support, and proper learning environment. Attendance, background, and behavior cannot be the only factors that account for students' potential. Unfortunately, many students placed in lower-level courses could achieve at a higher level but suffer from other problems (Cooney & Bottoms, 2002). If school districts continue with the present system, Cooney & Bottoms (2002) argued:

> too many students will not complete high school or will graduate from high school inadequately prepared for further study or the workplace. The result will be too many people competing for a shrinking number of low-skill jobs and too few people prepared for jobs that require some postsecondary education. (p. 41)

The results of this study will be important to the other high schools within the district as well as other school districts seeking an alternative program within the traditional school setting. If the school-within-a-school approach is successful, fewer students may need to attend a traditional, separate site alternative program possibly saving school districts money. "The school-within-a-school appears to be a cost-effective approach to school reform in terms of start-up costs, and in some cases is less expensive to maintain" (Dewees, n.d., para. 8). This freshman transitional program attempts to assist at-risk students with the adjustment to high school by providing them with a supportive and caring learning environment similar to the team approach in middle school.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the school-within-a-school program on student success, using the school district's outcome measures of core subject grades and attendance while also using data gathered from surveys to examine student perceptions of the program. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does a one-year, voluntary school-within-a-school program consisting of approximately 15 students per class meet the needs of at-risk freshmen to prepare them for high school?
2. When comparing the average of semester grades for school-within-a-school participants in each core subject before, during, and after attendance in the school-within-a-school program, will they increase?
3. While attending the school-within-a-school program, will the number of semester F's for this select group of at-risk students decrease as compared to middle school?
4. Is there an increase in the attendance of students participating in the school-within-a-school program as compared to their middle school attendance?
5. Do the perceptions of school for these at-risk students change when comparing their middle school academic experiences to their school-within-a-school academic experiences?

After analyzing the data to answer each of these five questions, the program's effectiveness can be determined.

Independent Variables

The independent variable in this study was the opportunity to enroll in the school-within-a-school program. After selection, participants had to volunteer to take part in the program. In order to analyze the data, the researcher used a statistical

analysis for reporting student survey data and a SIS data analysis for reporting grades and attendance.

Dependent Variables

The dependent variable in this study was the effect of the school-within-a-school program when comparing (a) overall student grades, (b) overall attendance, and (c) the overall student perceptions of school before, during, and after the program.

Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis #1. At-risk freshmen who participate in the school-within-a-school program for at least one year will not show a measureable change in core subject grades when compared with their average achievement in the previous two years of classes.

Null Hypothesis #2. At-risk freshmen who participate in the school-within-a-school program for at least one year will not show a measureable change in attendance when compared with their average performance in the previous two years of classes.

Hypothesis #1. At-risk freshmen who participate in the school-within-a-school program for at least one year will show a measureable change in core subject grades when compared with their average achievement in the previous two years of classes.

Hypothesis #2. At-risk freshmen who participate in the school-within-a-school program for at least one year will show a measureable change in attendance when compared with their average performance in the previous two years of classes.

Assumptions

The following assumptions apply to this research study. First, the researcher assumed that although the school-within-a-school teachers obtained more flexibility

in restructuring their students' schedules, all four teachers followed the school district's board approved curriculum. The program's flexibility allowed students to attend weekly recognition assemblies and seminar activities including goal setting and reflection, college and career planning, character education, study skills, and organization and journal writing. During the 2009-2010 school year, students had the opportunity to earn an additional credit by attending their four core classes in three hours. Next, the researcher assumed that the students were receiving the same amount of material as the traditional students enrolled in the same course.

The researcher also assumed that through small group and one-on-one instruction, the teachers were able to make the workload as challenging as the workload for traditional students attending Progress Heights High. Finally, the researcher assumed that the school-within-a-school teachers abided by their accountability contract (Appendix E) which held students responsible for their education. After a student missed two days of school in a quarter, they were required to attend make-up sessions before and after school of 60 minutes for every day they missed to make up their work and missed time.

Limitations of the Study

Researcher. While the researcher is not a teacher in the school-within-a-school program, she is a teacher at Progress Heights High.

Expectations. Although each student and their guardian(s) agreed to support and follow the program's expectations regarding attendance, homework, participation in activities/seminars, and teacher conferences, unforeseen circumstances occurred within some of the families causing differences in the expectations of one student versus another.

Timing of Data Collection. Students, who participated in the program during the 2009-2010 school year, responded to a 16 question survey during the first week of their sophomore year in their academic lab. Within the same class period, they returned the survey to their teacher. The lapse of time from their freshmen year in the program to the first week of their sophomore year, when they responded to the survey, may have influenced the results of the data.

Interpretation. The school-within-a-school participants voluntarily completed self-report surveys. The students read each question of the surveys (Appendix C) independently and may have interpreted the questions, rating scale, and written directions differently, therefore skewing the results.

Change of Residency. Teachers made every effort to ensure that all students participated in the survey. However, the survey was voluntary and not every subject responded.

Instrument. The researcher did not have prior experience in developing surveys for the study. However, prior to administration, a professor from Lindenwood University, the superintendent, building principal, and assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction at the district of study evaluated the survey. They found the questions to be valid for the research.

Definitions of Terms and Acronyms

Alternative Program. "An established class or environment within or apart from the regular school. An alternative program is designed to accommodate specific student educational needs" (Aron & Zweig, 2003, p. 23).

At-Risk. According to the Iowa Department of Education (n.d.):

> Any identified student who needs additional support and who is not meeting or not expected to meet the established goals of the

> educational program (academic, personal/social, career/vocational). At-risk students include but are not limited to students in the following groups: homeless children and youth, dropouts, returning dropouts, and potential dropouts. (para. 2)

Attendance Rate. For the purpose of this study, attendance rate represents the average number of days students were present during a school year in the traditional high school and the school-within-a-school program.

Schools-Within-Schools (SWS). "Large public schools that have been divided into smaller autonomous subunits" (McAndrews & Anderson, 2002, para. 3).

School Information System (SIS). According to Tyler Technologies (2011):

> Tyler SIS Student Data Management delivers data with the power to instantly provide information from all district school sites – and quickly generate customized and standard comprehensive reports. This powerful Web-based solution delivers a secure, reliable and flexible solution for district-wide deployment. (para. 1-2)

Traditional High School. For the purpose of this study, a traditional high school is a state-approved, grades 9-12 facility with a modified block schedule and a seven period day.

Transition Program. "The series of strategies or activities that a cluster of schools agree to implement [in order] to assist students making the transition from primary school to secondary school [or middle school to high school]" (NSW Public Schools, 2007, para. 1).

Summary

Making the transition to high school is a critical step for many students. Not only are they expected to adjust to an unfamiliar learning environment with new

teachers and classes, but there is also increased pressure to earn enough credits to graduate on time (Martin, Tobin, & Sugai, 2002). Middle schools and high schools must work together to ensure that students are able to make the change from one model to another with smooth evolution, rather than revolution ending in the student fighting the system and floundering in their own misperceptions of the way things should be at high school.

The implementation of the school-within-a-school program was to assist students with the transitioning process. While students enjoy electives, lunch, the library, and extracurricular activities with the rest of the students, they work in smaller learning environments, similar to their middle school experiences, to help them adjust to the new, larger school building. This allows students to "acquire the skills to succeed in a competitive educational environment" while enjoying a sense of security (Hertzog, 2006, p. 61). Alternative programs should be available to students who struggle with the larger, more impersonal high school setting (Leone & Drakeford, 1999, p. 87). In fact, there has been an increase in the number of alternative programs, since educators have realized that all students learn differently and one unified curriculum is inadequate in meeting their needs (Kim & Taylor, 2008). "However, it is usually the end result of unsuccessful transitions—high dropout rates, low on-time graduation rates, and low achievement—that receive the most attention" (Herlihy, 2007, p. 4).

The school-within-a-school model provides the benefits of a smaller school in a larger school environment (Dewees, n.d.). "While research results are limited, the school-within-a-school model has the potential to contribute to a greater sense of student well-being, a sense of student community, and higher student achievement and educational attainment" (Dewees, n.d., para. 9). Using the school-within-a-school

model at Progress Heights High, the researcher will explore its overall effect on students' grades, attendance, and perceptions of school. Chapter 2 will review what the literature and research states regarding (a) the characteristics of at-risk students, (b) the causes leading to school failure, (c) alternative programs, (d) the effects of transition programs on freshmen students, and (e) student perceptions of school.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Over the next decade, more than 13 million students will drop out costing the nation more than $3 trillion (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). "Dropouts are more likely than high school graduates to experience health problems, engage in criminal activities, and become dependent on welfare and other government programs" (Martin et al., 2002, p. 10). Currently, the state of the United States economy makes the graduation rates even more frightening. "It is practically impossible for individuals lacking a high school diploma to earn a living or participate meaningfully in civic life" (Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog, 2007, p. 28). As a nation, all citizens must understand the impact that these statistics have on the economy. Although a child ultimately has the choice of dropping out or staying in school, many students need support in order to find success in the classroom. Most at-risk students exhibit early warning signs as they progress through school before actually deciding to dropout. Kennelly and Monrad (2007) claimed "most future dropouts may be identified as early as sixth grade and many can be identified even earlier" (p. 1). These children are sending signals and begging for help. School districts must understand what these signs are and how to provide these children with the assistance needed to receive a quality education. Taking measures to prevent high school dropouts can save society trillions of dollars (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). School programs implemented to curb the dropout rate are more cost effective and beneficial to society than programs created to assist with crime prevention, prosecution, welfare, and unemployment (Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2009). After all, these children are suffering as well as society when they do not have the opportunity to become productive citizens.

Alternative programs provide for a diverse group of students who "are twice as likely to have parents who have less than a high school education; are more likely to live in single parent families; are more economically disadvantaged; and have repeated a grade, been suspended, or dropped out" (Reimer & Cash, 2003, p. 5). Unfortunately, even though these students are coming from a variety of backgrounds, educators are placing them in environments that are not conducive to all learning styles. May and Copeland (1998) maintained "it is not the students that are high risk but rather the circumstances of their environment" (p. 199). Although background factors are often associated with dropouts, "there is also growing consensus that school level factors such as grades, retention, attendance, classroom behavior, and engagement are better predictors of dropout than fixed status indicators such as gender, race, and poverty" (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007, p. 3). When students lose interest or find a subject matter to be too challenging many students respond by causing disruptions to the learning environment. In fact, "students who experience academic failure often resort to misbehavior and may eventually drop out of school" (Tissington, 2006, p. 20). Educators need to step in and provide these students with the necessary resources to get them back on track. From one year to the next, students are passing classes without acquiring the fundamental skills to be successful. Upon entering high school, students are suddenly required to pass their classes in order to earn the necessary credits to graduate. For many of these students, the reality of failure actually occurs when they do not pass and receive sophomore status the following school year; this is why ninth grade is such a critical year in the lives of future generations. During this time, "students either gain the maturity and academic skills to succeed in high school, or fail and eventually drop out" (Hardy, 2006, p. 21).

The American school system allows students to enter high school unprepared for what the future holds. Neild et al. (2007) insisted:

> The U.S. graduation rate crisis is not fueled by students who lack the potential or desire to graduate, but rather by secondary schools that are not organized to prevent students from falling off the path to graduation or to intervene when they do. (p. 32)

Since many at-risk students are identifiable in middle school, programs need to be in place to assist these students with their academic needs as they continue through high school. In the eighth grade, two factors are strong predictors of future dropouts. These include students who attend school less than 80% of the time and/or receive a failing grade in math and/or English (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). "Of those 8th graders who attended school less than 80% of the time, 78% became high school dropouts. Of those 8th graders who failed mathematics and/or English, 77% dropped out of high school" (Neild & Balfanz, 2006, p. 4). Across the nation, schools are beginning to implement programs to assist students who were academically unsuccessful in middle school as they enter into high school.

Although a plethora of reasons exist for student failure, proposed solutions range from early intervention to alternative programs to credit recovery. Levin (2007) claimed "it is these changes in school organization and, even more, in instructional practice, that offer us some hope of escaping the cycle of failure and of helping many thousands of young people to develop their skills and talents" (p. 235). By intervening at this crucial time, school districts are hoping to keep children in school and reduce the dropout rate. After all, "approximately 1 in 8 children in the United States never graduate from high school. Based on calculations per school day (180 days of seven hours each), one high school student drops out every nine seconds"

(Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio, & Thompson, 2004, p. 7). With well-educated citizens, society can combat this problem.

Characteristics of At-Risk Students

At-risk students are possible dropouts who are not experiencing success in the traditional school environment. Typically, these students exhibit several of the following traits:

special educational needs that interfere with learning

families with low socioeconomic status

families with limited educational backgrounds

one-parent families

males

minorities (African Americans, Hispanics, and Native Americans)

live in large cities and rural areas

limited knowledge of the English language

"history of academic failure" (para. 3)

"older age in comparison with classmates" (para. 4)

learning disabilities, emotional, and/or behavioral problems

"frequent interaction with low-achieving peers" (para. 6)

uninvolved in the school setting (Ormrod, 2008).

While these traits do not characterize all dropouts, educators can use this list as a guide for determining students who may be at-risk of educational failure. With early identification and proper training, teachers can address the needs of these students before they choose to dropout.

Challenges Educators Face when Working with At-Risk Students

The Missouri Student Success Network (MSSN) conducted a survey in 2003 on the challenges educators encounter when working with students at-risk of school failure. Participants of the electronic survey included 260 school and social service professionals. "The survey is the most comprehensive assessment of the perceptions of those who work with at-risk children currently available for Missouri" (MSSN, 2003, p. 4). Participants listed up to three of the greatest challenges they face when working with at-risk students. Their responses fell into six categories including parental issues, student issues, program resource issues, professional development issues, attendance issues, and other issues. Figure 1 displays the overall percentage each category received from the respondents.

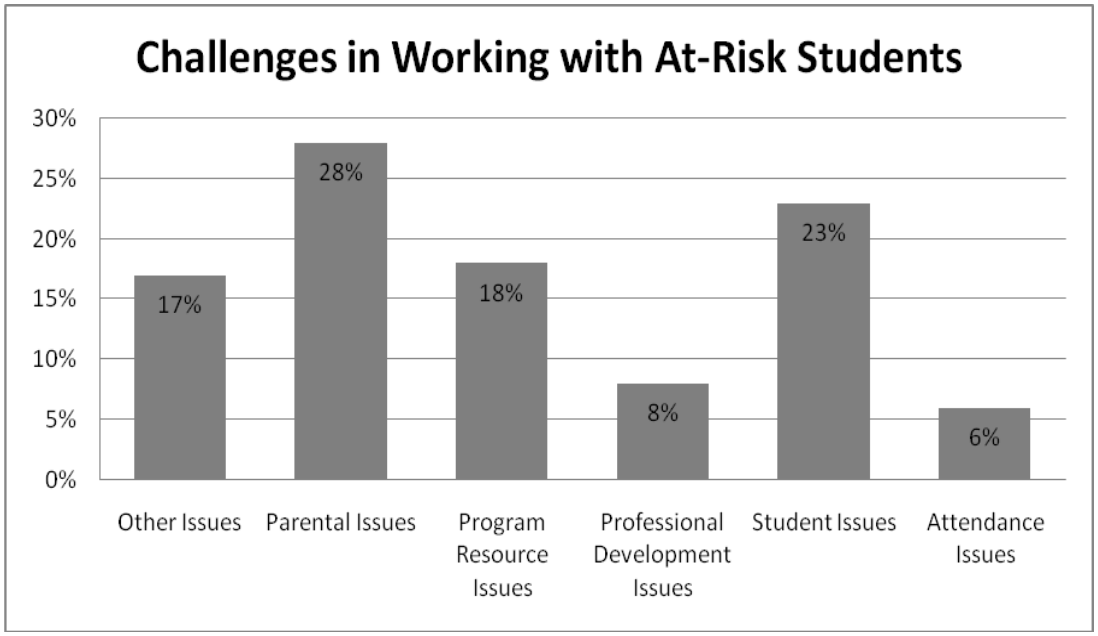

Figure 1. Note. Adapted from "Missouri Student Success Network 2003 Survey of At-Risk Services," by University of Missouri Office of Social and Economic Data Analysis, 2003, p. 8.

Respondents perceived parental issues to be their greatest challenge. Approximately, 28% of the respondents believed these challenges included "low parental involvement with school, poor parenting skills in dysfunctional families, and lack of parental support for children" (MSSN, 2003, p. 3). The second area of greatest challenge

included student issues. Almost 23% of the respondents reported concerns with "motivation, attitudes, and maintaining academic focus. An additional 6 percent of the challenges involved student issues relating to poor school attendance" (MSSN, 2003, p. 3). The third greatest challenge for these educators fell into the area of inadequate program resources. Approximately, 18% of the respondents felt inadequate resources included time, staff, space, funding, and/or community services (MSSN, 2003). This survey would be beneficial to school districts planning for effective alternative programs by making teachers aware of these issues in advance, providing them with adequate resources, and ongoing, high-quality professional development in order to meet the needs of at-risk students.

Background/History of Alternative Education

During the last 20 years, the federal government placed higher levels of accountability on school districts. The implementation of public school choice, teacher preparation tests, and higher graduation standards all assist students in reaching their academic potential (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Even with new practices in place, the nation's educators, community businesses, and parents agree that not all students are reaching their individual academic success.

Beginning in the 1960s, public schools have seen a movement of reform from the traditional setting. Schools in Massachusetts, Oregon, and Minnesota were the first open public schools. These schools were without walls and designed as non-competitive, child-centered systems. They emphasized community-based learning and allowed individuals from the community into the schools to teach students (Lange & Sletten, 2002). As schools continued to change, the development of less competitive continuation schools were able to meet the individual needs of students who failed, dropped out of school, or became pregnant. The creation of learning

centers offered special resources to particular students' needs in the school setting. Schools-within-schools, multicultural schools, continuation schools, learning centers, fundamental schools, and magnet schools were all a result of the open school influence (Tissington, 2006).

Educators have seen dramatic changes in regards to the public education system from standardized testing to special service programs to greater accountability at the state and federal levels.

Table 2

Changes in Education

20th Century Classrooms	21st Century Classrooms
Textbook-driven	Research-driven
Passive learning	Active learning
Learners work in isolation	Learners work collaboratively
Teacher-centered	Student-centered
Factory model based on the needs of employers	Global model based on the needs of the high-tech society

Note. Adapted from "What is 21st Century Education?," 2008, pp. 3-4. Retrieved from http://www.21stcenturyschools.com/What_is_21st_Century_Education.htm

Due to the Freedom Movement, teachers realized that not all students learn in the same way; however, all children can be educated. Since one size does not fit all, if a student does not function well in one school, it makes sense to offer the child a different kind of school. In the interest of society, providing educational opportunities enables each individual to find a learning environment in which they can participate (Gilson, 2006). Offering more options for students required the establishment of alternative schools or alternative education programs (Tissington, 2006). The establishment of these programs helped to fulfill the commitment to educate all

students within the public school system, no matter their circumstances or educational issues. "Alternative education programs provide options for students with particular needs, special interests, and learning styles, in order to increase the likelihood of engaged learning" (Tissington, 2006, p. 23). Since 1993, enrollment has tripled in alternative education programs (Tissington, 2006). The growth in the number of students placed in alternative programs may be due to the increased accountability placed upon school districts to raise graduation rates.

Characteristics of Alternative Education Programs

Traditionally, alternative schools were places to send students who exhibited disruptive behaviors or school truancy. These schools gave students the opportunity to succeed in an innovative learning environment instead of choosing to drop out. Today, alternative schools range from schools-within-schools to magnet schools (De La Ossa, 2005). These programs provide an environment for students with a varying range of ability levels who have not found success in the traditional school setting. Some researchers believe they may also be the solution to reducing school violence in the United States (De La Ossa, 2005). Although educators may disagree on the best techniques to meet students' needs, they agree that the main goal of schools is to meet these needs (De La Ossa, 2005).

The school-within-a-school model is gaining popularity through its ability to downsize larger schools (McAndrews & Anderson, 2002). Schools-within-schools share the benefits of "both large and small schools by placing students into small learning communities while using the resources of the larger existing facilities" (McAndrews & Anderson, 2002, para. 4). Typically, students who attend a traditional alternative program are isolated from their peers; however, the school-within-a-school model is located within the traditional school setting. This model provides students

with the academic and social benefits of a smaller school setting while easing their transition into high school (McAndrews & Anderson, 2002).

When developing an alternative education program, school districts should carefully consider the type of program and needs of the students. Although various types of alternative programs are available, many of them share common characteristics. First, these programs must build upon the premise that all students can succeed and graduate (Gilson, 2006). Therefore, teachers must opt to work in alternative programs. The strength of the teaching staff lies in the fact that the teachers all chose to work in this type of setting (Gilson, 2006). Teachers staffed at this program should have high expectations, provide a creative, engaging learning environment, and build a sense of community. In order to ensure these teachers remain, high quality, successful programs must allow teachers the flexibility to create innovative teaching strategies and receive ongoing professional development. When "students are given successful, highly motivated, and experienced teachers, achievement gaps can be narrowed and even closed" (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007, p. 12). Unfortunately, too often educators place these students in environments with inexperienced and ineffective teachers.

A student's length of time in an alternative program varies depending on the type of program and reason for placement. Typically, these programs try to return students to the general education program (Tobin & Sprague, 1999). In an attempt to reform school districts, educators must have training in handling conflicts, cultural diversity, and respect for others (McCall, 2003). When these students return to the traditional school setting, educators' proper training will assist students in order to keep them in school until graduation. Unfortunately, 90% of traditional school staff members are untrained and feel incompetent in intervening and handling the array of

crises within the school's environment (McCall, 2003). As training in these areas becomes a reality, students and teachers will recognize each person's strengths and differences in order to bring an understanding and sense of belonging back into the traditional school setting.

Since school officials are gaining more knowledge of the problem, they have been able to assist students, who do not all learn the same way, by creating programs to help with the prevention of dropouts (Somers et al., 2009). Educators have explored integrating experiential learning, hands-on programs, and more student-teacher interaction to build relationships between the workforce and school. Eclectic instructional styles, high-quality teachers, smaller class sizes, and mentoring from teachers, students, and parents all contribute to building a community and school relationship of trust, confidence, and support (Somers et al., 2009).

Parental Involvement

Although all parents want to see their children succeed in school, it is often difficult for parents to get involved. In fact, the amount of time parents are available for their children has steadily declined (Leone & Drakeford, 1999). For various reasons, parents have become less involved in their children's education during middle school and high school. For some families, this lack of involvement is due to work obligations; however, for others, they do not know how to make a connection with their child's school. As children grow up, they tend to resist parental involvement and thrive on becoming more independent. Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) argued that a lack of parental involvement, during an adolescent's first two years in high school, is more likely to lead to school dropout. "Studies have indicated that children whose parents and/or other significant adults share in their formal education tend to do better in school" (Rich, 2011, para. 1). Schools with

involved parents have higher teacher morale, more family support, a better reputation in the community, and outperform schools without parental involvement (Tableman, 2004). "At the most basic level, parents can begin encouraging the education of their children by showing that they truly value education themselves" (Rich, 2011, para. 3). Although parental involvement is essential, it cannot replace the importance of high-quality educational programs (Tableman, 2004).

Small Versus Large Schools

Research has shown "the states with the largest schools and school districts have the worst achievement, affective, and social outcomes" (Cotton, 1996, p. 4). In small school settings, students become well acquainted, care more about each other, and develop close relationships with one another (Cotton, 1996). More students are able to be involved in activities that promote positive social and affective behaviors. "Many practices common in small schools are in operation largely because they are much easier to implement and manage in small environments than in larger ones" (Cotton, 1996, p. 4). In small schools, teachers, staff members, and parents show more involvement in the learning environment and school activities while accepting more responsibilities (Cotton, 1996). Typically, teachers in smaller school settings are more likely to implement programs such as team teaching and cooperative learning while placing a greater emphasis on learning that is relevant to the outside world (Cotton, 1996). Similar opportunities exist in larger school buildings that house school-within-a-school settings, allowing students to connect with staff members and other students who have also struggled in a large traditional school environment. Proponents of larger schools argued "housing 500-2,000 students presumably could offer greater variety in subject matter, would provide teachers with the opportunity to

track their students according to ability, and might put less strain on community resources" (Wasley, 2002, p. 8).

Cotton (1996) claimed that small schools need and depend upon everyone within the school to participate in extracurricular activities. More students have the opportunity to hold offices and be members of teams. Each individual is encouraged to help create a sense of belonging. In larger schools, students have the option of taking a wider variety of classes and participating in more sports; however, many students do not have the opportunity to fill the limited number of positions in activities. Student involvement and encouragement from peers and teachers in small schools have shown improvement in attendance, academics, dropout rates, and social disruptions (Cotton, 1996). Many students become lost in the environment, overlooked, and do not feel a sense of belonging. Often, a shy student in a large school just becomes a number or quietly fails without awareness from his or her teachers (Herlihy, 2007). Students attending smaller schools of 1,000 or less as compared to high schools with more than 2,000 students have shown more growth academically (Neild, 2009). However, "more than 70 percent of U.S. high school students attend schools of more than 1,000 students" (Allen, 2002, p. 39).

Although many researchers maintain smaller schools are the answer, without the proper supports, conditions, and controls, these schools will not prove to be any more successful (Raywid, 2002). School districts have created small schools and schools-within-schools, but "continue to bind these new organization entities within old organization structures, shackle them with outmoded practices, and impose regulations designed for another time and place – while denying them the particular supports they need for success" (Raywid, 2002, pp. 47-48). The debate on school size will continue with a focus on how to create the optimal learning environment where

students are able to receive the benefits of both small and large schools. The combination of a personalized education with more class options and choices will likely motivate students to attend and continue their education.

Characteristics that Influence Attendance

Absenteeism is a serious problem that many schools face when dealing with at-risk students (Wilkins, 2008). It is one of the strongest predictors of course failure, which unfortunately is also associated with the dropout rate (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). Educators must closely monitor absenteeism in order to intervene quickly before it is too late. There is a link between the lack of school attendance and increased unemployment, dependency on welfare, and incarceration since many of these students drop out (Wilkins, 2008). Traditionally, society examined non-attendance from the viewpoint of social, family, and personal values. The public viewed students and their families as not valuing education based upon where they lived, the social groups they belonged to, and their families' financial status. However, for many students, "the cause of their detachment from school lay [lies] within the school setting itself" (Wilkins, 2008, p. 12). Academic difficulties have been associated with intermittent attendance. These students skip school without their parents' knowledge and/or skip due to school phobia (Wilkins, 2008). "Many researchers pinpoint feelings of isolation and alienation that students experience in the school setting" (Wilkins, 2008, p. 13).

Most students given the opportunity to participate in alternative programs relate the positive attributes of the program to the reasons for attending school. Although alternative schools serve different purposes, the programs have a tendency to meet the needs of students who have failed in the traditional school setting by offering them a second chance (Lange, 1998). "One of the most cited reasons for

students' success in alternative schools is the small size of the school" (Wilkins, 2008, p. 14). The success of many small schools are attributed to the fact that they build a community within them and give teachers more flexibility and opportunities to engage students in learning (Gilson, 2006). Many students believe that smaller school settings make it easier for them to learn; the school is more relaxed, and teachers are able to spend time teaching and less time trying to maintain discipline. Teachers also have a better opportunity to get to know the students on an individual basis (Wilkins, 2008). However, the low student-to-teacher ratios needed for an effective alternative program can be expensive.

Funding an Alternative Program

In education, one problem that districts face is "spending money when it is not clear what works" (Hill, 2008, p. 238). Originally, funding for public education began with communities providing all of the funding for local schools followed by states contributing part or all of the funding for basic instruction (Hill, 2008). The creation of separate accounts for instruction, materials, building construction and maintenance, and transportation for various parts of education contributed to the entirety of a student's education in a public school. The federal government eventually became involved by providing funding for targeted groups from special education programs to limited English speakers. The result is funding from several sources with no one "responsible for deciding how much [money] is needed to produce a given set of outcomes" (Hill, 2008, p. 239).

Within a given school district, monies are allocated based on many variables, the least of which is enhancing overall school performance (Hill, 2008). According to Hill (2008), the rules for spending forbid using logic to allocate or reallocate funds for uses that individual schools may have identified. Schools that serve a population of

disadvantaged students generally do not produce the outcomes that these students need, but there is no indication that spending more money on these schools will produce anything other than paying more for the staff and materials they already have in place (Hill, 2008). The main reason money is not spent wisely is due to the lack of "developing, testing, and improving methods of instruction" (Hill, 2008, p. 241).

Although students drop out of school for various reasons, many researchers believe that students ultimately drop out because the school did not meet their educational needs (Alspaugh, 1998; Cargill, 2010). Examining successful public, private, or narrow-focused magnet schools, educators can identify some of the obvious traits that led to the school's success but too often, cannot duplicate these successes. In fact, school districts are not even "close to knowing what it will take to educate all children, including the most disadvantaged," in order to prepare them for their role in society (Hill, 2008, p. 243). However, there are many early warning signs that school districts can use to determine whether a student is on track to complete high school.

Early Warning Signs

Many middle school students who attend high poverty schools with high percentages of minority students "continue to be the underperformers of the U.S. educational system" (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007, p. 223). Early intervention and identification of at-risk students in the middle grades make it easier to keep them on-track for graduation (Balfanz et al., 2007). Before entering high school, educators must identify students who may be in danger of dropping out and employ a transitional plan along with pro-active measures at the beginning of the identified students' high school careers (Heppen & Therriault, 2008). Academic performance,

behavior, attendance, and status variables are all predictors for determining students who are at-risk (Balfanz et al., 2007). These predictors include the following:

> attend school 80 percent or less of the time;
>
> receive a failing grade in math;
>
> receive a failing grade in English;
>
> receive an out-of-school suspension; and/or
>
> receive an unsatisfactory final behavior mark in any subject (Balfanz et al., 2007).

When all else is determined to be equal, Balfanz et al. (2007) found:

> chronic absentees were 68% less likely than other students to graduate, those with an unsatisfactory behavior grade were 56% less likely to graduate than others, those who failed math were 54% less likely to graduate than others, and those who failed English were 42% less likely to graduate than others. (p. 229)

Although school districts have traditionally focused on academics, they have overlooked the importance attendance and behavior also play in keeping students on the path to graduation. Many dropouts feel alienated in traditional schools and believe no one truly cares if they are there or not (Ransel, 2010). Educators can prevent many at-risk students from becoming dropouts by recognizing and providing immediate and frequent interventions to students with academic, attendance, and behavioral concerns. However, to become a nation in which everyone graduates, school districts need to tailor interventions to students' needs and focus on high-risk groups (Balfanz et al., 2007).

The Importance of Freshman Year

As students transition into high school, they experience many changes including more choices in class selection, more freedom, and new friends. During this stage of their life, the excitement of many great opportunities becomes entwined with frustrations of not being accepted, a more strenuous workload, a larger-sized school, and peer pressure. Transitioning between schools brings unyielding concerns of lower self-esteem, involvement, and grades (Somers et al., 2009). The balance between the new academic, organizational, and social pressures are not equitable to the amount of support given to the students to build these skills and gain high school success (Somers et al., 2009). Even students who appear to be on-track during middle school can become overwhelmed by the new social pressures and academic demands of high school. Parents of these students are also at a loss. After all, their son or daughter always made average grades and never had much trouble in school.

Researchers have tried to understand the reason why students tend to struggle during their freshman year of high school. In most research, a recurring theme appears to point to the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). In fact, "40% of students generally suffer serious problems after the transition to high school" (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010, p. 449). This transition period is frequently marked by "declining academic performance, increased absences, increased behavioral disturbances, and decreased participation in extracurricular programs" putting freshmen more at-risk than any other group (Fritzer & Herbst, 1996, p. 7). For some students, more independence and responsibilities will not affect them negatively; however for others, a decline in grades, poor attendance, friendship problems, and the possibility of dropping out of school quickly approaches. Ninth grade is a genesis year for students that may make or break their

high school endeavours. "More students fail ninth grade than any other high school grade, and a disproportionate number of students who are held back in ninth grade subsequently drop out" (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007, p. 5). Students who have gained the ability to manage their time between the academic and social pressures of ninth grade are likely to graduate within four years as compared to those who are unable and do not earn enough credits during their first year (Neild, 2009).

Neild studied four theories regarding why ninth grade creates difficulties for some students. These theories examine how ninth grade coincides with life-course changes, breaks the bonds students have already formed with teachers and peers, expects students to come adequately prepared, and lacks organization in itself (Neild, 2009). First, increased peer pressure and parental freedom can cause students to focus less on their academics, more on social issues, and exhibit risk-taking behaviors. Second, the transition to a new school breaks the close ties that many of the students have formed with one another. Students must adjust to a new learning environment filled with pressures of social changes. Third, the lack of academic preparation becomes a significant concern in high school. Middle school students not challenged to their potential, lacking basic skills, socially promoted, or completing the minimum amount of work in order to pass their classes become overwhelmed with the challenges of high school. Finally, with students continually changing classes, teachers are unable to develop close working relationships with students to monitor their academic growth across the curriculums (Neild, 2009). These theories cause students to become distraught and frustrated with the school setting resulting in truancy and possible school incompletion.

Perceptions of High School

Before students are able to make the transition from middle school to high school, their perceptions of the transition may taint their success and affect their entire stay in high school. In an ongoing effort to improve transition programs, educators must question students about their concerns before and after the transition in order to determine the effectiveness of the program. After questioning students about their concerns regarding high school, transition activities need to be in place to focus on alleviating these concerns and reducing student anxiety. According to Morgan and Hertzog (2001), to counter typical student concerns regarding the size of the school building and their lockers, educators can arrange and conduct a building tour prior to the beginning of the school year. Each student can also receive a map of the building in order to reduce some of their nervousness about getting lost and asking for help. Distributing and reviewing the high school discipline and dress code with eighth grade students alleviates concerns and student perceptions about personal safety and high school discipline. Students' anxieties often extend from drugs and weapons to the attendance policy to the rumors they have heard about certain teachers. Although many concerns and apprehensions are universal among transitioning students, some are only unique to smaller groups or divided along the lines of male and female students. While many activities are appropriate to present to eighth graders, transitional activities should not end when these students begin high school each fall (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001). High schools can be prepared to counter students' apprehensions by identifying high school students who incoming ninth graders can turn to for assistance, labeling hallways and classrooms with room numbers and teachers' names, and enlisting faculty members to help develop ninth grade advisories to assist students with the adjustment to high school (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001). In

order to make the transition from middle school to high school as smooth as possible, educators must ask the students, who have transitioned, if the program was effective and where they could strive to improve. After all, students' perceptions may become reality if allowed to proceed unchanged.

Students perceive many factors as having a significant influence during their transition from middle school to high school. According to a survey given to first-time ninth grade students at a large, Midwest, comprehensive 9-12 high school of approximately 2,300 students, the results revealed that "a full transition program is needed to address the areas necessary for new ninth-grade students to be successful in the transition to high school" (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005, p. 73). This high school did not have a plan in place to ensure incoming freshmen would transition smoothly and feel a sense of belonging, support, and academic success (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). In fact, it appears that many large high schools provide little support available to freshmen. They conducted a survey to find out the factors that students perceived as having the greatest influence on successful transitions. There were 495 first-time ninth grade students given the survey with a 93.4% response rate (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). When asked if they felt successful at high school, 66.1% of the students believed they were successful; however, 17.58% responded they were not successful and 16.36% did not respond to the question (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). This means that at least 87 of the students surveyed were already having feelings of failure. Society's negligence to provide the appropriate assistance and support in order to get these individuals back on track will result in an increased financial burden on taxpayers.

A supportive system includes effective teachers who have a variety of teaching techniques to engage students, interesting class options, programs to support

students, extracurricular activities that build a social group of friends, and mentoring programs (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). It is also important to provide students with opportunities to familiarize themselves with the new building, rules, and procedures prior to transitioning into high school (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). Although full transition programs are beneficial to students, educators must recognize that student success revolves around a total school commitment to transitioning students successfully into high school (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005).

Transition Programs

Before students enter high school, educators must identify and provide at-risk students with the necessary assistance they need before they begin to struggle and decide to leave. After all, "students who fail to make a smooth transition to high school dropout as early as the end of ninth grade" (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010, p. 449). The School District of Philadelphia recognized the importance of providing a transition program for ninth graders to high school. They maintained that this transition is an important factor in determining whether students dropped out or graduated from high school. McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) agreed "schools with fully operational transition programs have an average dropout rate of only 8%, while schools without these programs have a dropout rate of 24%" (p. 450). The School District of Philadelphia identified barriers and found that they needed to build college awareness early to create and sustain high expectations (Gold et al., 2010). They decided to create ninth grade academies in their large, under-performing high schools. The academy consisted of a physically separate space for ninth graders, a team of teachers who only teach ninth graders, and a ninth grade academy leader. The intention of this design was to improve personalization and a collective responsibility for student success. According to research, this correlates with better

student outcomes, including increased attendance and 10th grade promotion rates, as well as reduced dropout rates (Gold et al., 2010).

Philadelphia educators found that a "ninth grader enters high school with math and English skills below grade level" (Gold et al., 2010, para. 10). They decided to implement double-dose classes in these areas. Teachers and administrators had mixed feelings about the double-dose classes, because of the lack of professional development for the 80 to 90 minute class periods. Teachers who were young, inexperienced, and unprepared taught transition students in need of high-quality instruction (Gold et al., 2010). The district decided that they needed to set and communicate high expectations for all ninth graders. In order to ensure that all students received the academic support they needed to achieve high expectations, the district acquired more research-based intervention strategies and implemented more programs to assist ninth grade teachers (Gold et al., 2010). "Research indicates that a balance between relevance and rigor will result in even more students staying in school. Engaging and challenging catch-up courses for struggling ninth graders also reduce dropout rates" (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007, p. 11).

On-Track Indicators

Chicago Public Schools have shown "inadequate credit accumulation in the freshman year, which usually results from course failures, is highly predictive of failing to graduate four years later" (Allensworth & Easton, 2007, p. 1). They decided to analyze data from freshman-year performance indicators and compare it to data from a decade ago. Chicago Public School leaders used this information to assist in diagnosing the causes for the nearly 50% dropout rate in the district. They concluded that "success in coursework is affected more by what students do while they are in high school than by their preparation for high school and backgrounds" (Allensworth

& Easton, 2007, p. 2). They also found that efforts to reduce the dropout rate are consistent with initiatives to address low achievement (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

From earlier research on freshmen on-track indicators, there is a definite relationship between on-track freshmen at the end of their first year of high school and eventual graduation (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). By the end of their first year in high school, "on-track students had at least ten semester credits (five full-year course credits) and no more than one semester F in a core course" (Allensworth & Easton, 2007, p. 2). These on-track students were "nearly four times more likely to graduate from high school than their classmates who were not on-track" (Allensworth & Easton, 2007, p. 2). While this on-track indicator is predictive of high school graduation, other factors including grades, semester F's, and attendance are equally predictive for freshmen (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Their findings indicated that almost all students who had good attendance finished their freshman year on-track. Attendance is an area that schools can easily track and develop strategies for improvement by determining the causes for the absences. Almost immediately, schools know which students are missing school or class. Research shows "students attend class more often when they have strong relationships with their teachers, and when they see school and their coursework as relevant and important for their future" (Allensworth & Easton, 2007, p. 39).

Findings also show that good grades in high school are unlikely unless students have strong grades in elementary and middle school (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). Collectively, all schools need to work together to help ease the transition from one level to another. Chicago Public Schools have found that instead of only using testing as the criteria for assigning students to programs, they could also use attendance and grades as predictors for success. While 78% of Chicago Public School

seniors want to graduate from college, they need to realize that this goal requires strong performance in coursework, regular attendance, and high grades (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

Schools can examine different policy responses when determining the best way to ensure ninth graders do not incur difficulties and remain on-track for graduation. If educators witness off-track behaviors due to adolescent development, then students need supportive and mentoring adults for redirection. If the transition to high school becomes a problem, then students need programs to ease their fears. If poor preparation for high school leads to off-track concerns, then elementary and middle schools may need to adjust instruction to better prepare students for high school. If the size of the high school becomes too large and creates problems, then the organization may need restructuring (Neild, 2009). In order to prevent at-risk students from dropping out of school, restructuring the traditional high school may be inevitable. Neild (2009) argued "the strongest evidence points to students' inadequate preparation for high school and high school organization as primary sources of getting off track in ninth grade" (p. 63). Consequently, school reform efforts have focused on addressing the organization but leave out any academic remediation to get students back on the path to success (Neild, 2009). Alternative programs and additional academic assistance may be essential for students lacking necessary academic skills. Both the Twilight Academy and the Talent Development High School model are examples of successful alternative programs located in the traditional school setting.

Twilight Academy: An Alternative Education Program

In an effort to gain an edge on the never-ending changes to education, alternative programs are becoming more popular. Twilight Academy is an example of an alternative program implemented in a large, urban high school in Pennsylvania.

The academy's purpose was to reach students who were unsuccessful in the traditional school setting. "Although the idea was new and the task was daunting, this new school would provide an alternative to dropping out of school for many students" (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009, p. 211). The state approved this program to have 60 students; the students were in grades 9-12 and selected by the recommendations of teachers, counselors, and administrators. Several sources referred students to the program who had issues with truancy, suspension, repeated failures, and outside placements. The staff included four classroom teachers, a physical education teacher, counselor, secretary, and security guards (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). The core components of the program consisted of a small student-teacher ratio, creative and experienced teachers, counseling services, and work experiences that all tied to the success of the program. Furthermore, D'Angelo and Zemanick (2009) suggested "all classes should be held in close proximity to each other to limit movement and reduce opportunities for inappropriate behavior" (p. 212). The district hired teachers who desired to work with this group of students and had diverse backgrounds; the counselor was familiar with the school culture and available resources. Once the staff was hired and the students identified, the next step was to promote the new program to the students and their parents. During the summer, the counselor spoke with families and set up graduation plans for each student. By the end of the year, students had progressed far beyond what they thought imaginable and the teachers had received more from the students than they thought possible (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009).

According to D'Angelo and Zemanick (2009), the following central components of an effective curriculum made Twilight Academy successful. The program opened with a well-developed and broad-based curriculum, computer

programs and software were available to assist with remediation and provide teachers with supplemental material, and lessons were reflective of real-life experiences (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). Supportive teachers were also essential components to the program. The staff and students faced many challenges, learned lessons that proved to make the program even more successful, and graduated students that no one thought would ever graduate. During the first year, "of the 12 students who were eligible to graduate, 11 achieved this goal, and the 12th earned her diploma after enrolling in summer school" (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009, p. 217). The following school year, students voluntarily wanted to participate in the program resulting in a wait-list for students to enroll (D'Angelo & Zemanick, 2009). The Twilight Academy proved to be a successful in-house alternative program that allowed students the ability to learn in a smaller classroom setting with more individualized instruction while maintaining a connection to the traditional school setting.

The Twilight Academy and Progress Heights High's school-within-a-school program share many similar features. Each alternative educational program is located in the traditional school setting with four classroom teachers and approximately the same number of participants. Although both of these programs are located in large schools, the major difference is their student population. While the Twilight Academy is available to students in grades 9-12, Progress Heights High's program is only available to incoming freshmen with an academic lab during their sophomore year. The small student-teacher ratio gives students the opportunity to build closer working relationships with their teachers while giving teachers the ability to meet individual students' educational needs (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Students and teachers voluntarily become a part of both programs creating a more welcoming school climate.

The Talent Development High School Model

The Talent Development High School model also focuses on the importance of closely monitoring student success by keeping students on-track and building basic academic skills, according to Neild (2009). This model offers personalization by providing interdisciplinary teams of teachers who are able to work closely with ninth grade students and build personal relationships. By placing students in a separate location of the building, there are less distractions and congestion in the hallways giving students the opportunity to maintain a sense of security in a school-within-a-school environment. The program's innovative schedule allows students to earn additional credits, while mastering academic skills in a well-designed curriculum. Students are on a block schedule and take four courses each semester with the ability to earn eight credits during the school year. Freshmen courses try to remediate academic skills, build study and organizational skills, and raise reading comprehension. To keep up with current educational trends, teachers have a common planning period and ongoing professional development (Neild, 2009). When comparing Talent Development ninth graders to neighborhood high schools with similar demographics and low achievement, "attendance, total credits earned, credits earned in algebra, and on-time promotion to tenth grade exceeded those of ninth graders at the comparison schools" (Neild, 2009, p. 67). Unfortunately, many of these students "still had poor attendance and were not promoted on time to tenth grade" (Neild, 2009, p. 67). This study found that by focusing solely on ninth graders, educators are unlikely to improve educational outcomes (Neild, 2009). Progress Heights High also realized that students needed more than a one-year alternative program to continue on the right path toward graduation. Students were provided an academic lab their sophomore year to assist with this transition. Both Progress

Heights High's school-within-a-school program and the Talent Development High School model are alternative schools seeking solutions to problems with student attendance, performance, and dropout rates. Each school recognizes the necessity of restructuring into smaller group settings and receiving parental support and involvement.

Summary

Although some educators believe that students struggle in the traditional school setting due to personal problems, others argue that the problems lie within the school system itself (Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006). These individuals believe "the traditional system of education is ineffective in meeting the diverse and rapidly changing needs of young people in today's society" (Quinn et al., 2006, p. 11). They blame a child's failure to learn on the educational system and the adults in it (Quinn et al., 2006). The plague of high school dropouts is ravaging schools in every state with large urban districts affected at an even higher rate (Neild et al., 2007). "For almost all young people, dropping out of high school is not a sudden act, but a gradual process of disengagement; attendance patterns are a clear early sign" (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006, p. iv). An effort by educators to stem this tide of underachievers has taken many twists and turns with varying rates of success. Although alternative schools protect students who have been unsuccessful in the traditional system, these schools must have stable funding and the flexibility to provide schooling in nontraditional ways (Ransel, 2010). The success of alternative programs relies heavily on having appropriate facilities with high quality, caring, flexible teachers who develop strong connections with the students involved (Ransel, 2010).

The transition from middle school to an even larger, more impersonal high school often acerbates these students' perceptions of the educational process resulting in a downward spiral. Transition programs such as the school-within-a-school program have shown success at saving students from what many see as the predictable outcome of dropping out of school. While a large amount of research is available on alternative education based on dropout prevention, at-risk students, and special education, there is not enough specific research on the assessment of student outcomes in alternative programs (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006). "Although the field lacks a common definition and suffers a major divide in philosophies of alternative programs, the tremendous growth in the availability of these programs in the United States over the past several decades illustrates a continuing demand" (Quinn et al., 2006, p. 12).

The focus of this research concerned students' successes and perceptions of a school-within-a-school environment. While these programs may contain flaws, as any human endeavor dealing with an infinite number of variables, the positive outcomes could outweigh any negatives.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Some students at Progress Heights High struggle to acclimate to their new school environment due to the large enrollment of over 2,000 students. Alienation, suspension, poor attendance, and chronic failure all contribute to the nation's high dropout rate (Gilson, 2006). "With our nation's schools losing approximately $77 billion dollars annually because of school dropouts, public schools have had to 'step to the plate' to find alternative methods to keep otherwise at-risk students in school" (Gilson, 2006, p. 49). To assist the needs of at-risk students, many states have created alternative schools that vary from part-time programs to separate schools to school-within-a-school programs. Typically, alternative programs are for students who have been unsuccessful in the regular educational setting. These programs vary greatly from working with students who have behavioral issues to assisting students who are truant due to home life situations or fail to comprehend the course content. Every student deserves the opportunity to be educated in an environment that allows him or her to be successful in order to be a productive member of society. After all, "every student that they [schools] prevent from dropping out is a savings of roughly $5,000" (Gilson, 2006, p. 61).

Research Design

This study will show the effects of a school-within-a-school program on academically challenged incoming freshmen students. When students believe their teachers care about them, they tend to put forth more effort into their schoolwork (Muller, 2001). "The students' perceptions that teachers care may be especially important for these students [at risk of dropping out of high school] because of the greater vulnerability of the students to negative teacher attitudes and poor academic performance" (Muller, 2001, pp. 243-244). This research study investigated the

academics and perceptions of a select group of at-risk ninth grade students who had the opportunity to participate in the school-within-a-school program. The district's School Information System (SIS) generated information on the participant's grades and attendance. The researcher developed a survey instrument to collect data in order to determine the participants' perceptions of school preparedness, teacher interaction, student support, preparation for life after high school, and readiness to learn.

Demographics of the School of Study

Progress Heights High is a 9-12 high school in the state of Missouri with a total enrollment of 2,168 students and 156 certified staff members at the time of this study. Of the teaching staff, 74.6% had a master's degree or higher and an average of 10.8 years of experience. The average ratio of students to regular classroom teachers was 21:1. The school had an average daily attendance rate of 92.9% during the 2009-2010 school year. The school of study is located in a suburban area about 30 miles west of a major Midwestern metropolis. During the 2009-2010 school year, Progress Heights High had a graduation rate of 91.1% with 38.2% entering a four-year college/university, 35.9% entering a two-year college/university, 3.2% entering a non-college institution, 10.2% entering the work force, and 3.1% entering the military. Progress Heights High's dropout rate was 2.1% as compared to the state of Missouri's 3.5% dropout rate.

Table 3 displays demographic data of the school-within-a-school students at Progress Heights High. According to district records, during the 2009-2010 school year, the school-within-a-school program at Progress Heights High consisted of 42 freshmen students. The following year, the school-within-a-school program enrolled a slightly larger group of 52 students.

Table 3

School-Within-a-School Demographics

	2009-2010 SWS	2010-2011 SWS
Total Population	42	52
Female	15	16
Male	27	36
Caucasian	37	43
African American	5	7
Asian	0	1
Hispanic	0	1
IEP Students	3	11
Free Lunch	11	15
Reduced Lunch	1	3

Note. The data in Table 3 came from the district of study's School Information System (2011).

Participants of the Program

A select group of 40-50 students voluntarily participated in the enrollment of the school-within-a-school program at Progress Heights High. During the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years, there was approximately a 1:2 female to male ratio of participants involved in the program. Although the group consisted of African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics, most of the participants were Caucasians. The middle school building principal, eighth grade assistant principal, teachers, eighth grade counselor, school nurse, and crisis counselor recommended students who were at-risk during their eighth grade year. They made recommendations based on the areas of academics, attendance, social relations, and family problems. These school professionals met weekly throughout the school year to discuss individual student

concerns. They specifically looked for students who would benefit in the school-within-a-school program, due to academic, attendance, and motivational concerns, which would provide a smaller learning environment and more individualized instruction. They tried to refrain from recommending students with extreme behavior issues and/or students who required several special education classes. According to Progress Heights High's building principal, the administration wanted this program to assist students who struggled and could not receive additional assistance such as special education services for academic or behavioral concerns. These educators based their selection on students who had several low or failing grades in core courses, poor attendance, and/or would benefit from the smaller group instruction. Table 4 displays academic data on the 2009-2010 school-within-a-school participants, while Table 5 displays academic data on the 2010-2011 school-within-a-school participants. Both tables show the number of participants involved in the school-within-a-school program and academic data regarding their four core courses of math, science, communication arts, and social studies that they failed before, during, and after the program. In order to determine the total possible F's that all participates could earn during each school year, the researcher multiplied the number of participants by eight. Each participant took four core courses a semester totaling to eight credits per school year. After finding the actual number of F's that all participants earned, the researcher wanted to determine the number of participants earning these F's.

Table 4

Student Information System Data – Failure Rates (Group A)

	2007-2008 Seventh Grade	2008-2009 Eighth Grade	2009-2010 Freshman (SWS)	2010-2011 Sophomore
Participants	38	39	42	36
Number of Participants with at Least One F During the School Year	22	28	7	19
Percentage of Participants with at Least One F During the School Year	57.9	71.8	16.7	52.8
Possible Number of F's all Participants could Earn During the School Year	304	312	336	288
Actual Number of F's all Participants Earned During the School Year	68	111	8	63
Percentage of F's Participants Earned During the School Year	22.4	35.6	2.4	21.9

Note. The data in Table 4 came from the district of study's School Information System (2011).

Table 5

Student Information System Data – Failure Rates (Group B)

	2008-2009 Seventh Grade	2009-2010 Eighth Grade	2010-2011 Freshman (SWS)
Participants	42	52	52
Number of Participants with at Least One F During the School Year	29	40	16
Percentage of Participants with at Least One F During the School Year	69.0	76.9	30.8
Possible Number of F's all Participants could Earn During the School Year	336	416	416
Actual Number of F's all Participants Earned During the School Year	85	142	45
Percentage of F's Participants Earned During the School Year	25.3	34.1	10.8

Note. The data in Table 5 came from the district of study's School Information System (2011).

The data in Table 4 represents the failure rates for the SWS group A two years prior to the program (2007-2008, 2008-2009), during the program (2009-2010), and the year after the program was implemented (2010-2011). The data in Table 5 represents the failure rates for the SWS group B two years prior to the program (2008-2009, 2009-2010) and during the program (2010-2011). The researcher did not have access to data for the SWS group B the year after they completed the program.

Description of the Program

At the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year, Progress Heights High implemented an alternative school-within-a-school program for at-risk freshmen.

Although the district of study has an off-campus, district-wide alternative educational program available to high school students, it is not available to first-year freshmen. Students must meet specific attendance and behavioral guidelines before consideration into the off-campus alternative program. The administration examined an extensive evaluation, interview, written application, and recommendations prior to each student's acceptance into the program.

The transition into high school during students' freshmen year is extremely important in determining their academic success (Hertzog, 2006). The school-within-a-school program serves incoming at-risk freshmen. The selected students and their guardian(s) received a letter from the high school building principal informing them of their acceptance into the program. In order to enroll, the students and at least one legal guardian were required to attend an informative meeting outlining the expectations of the program. Both the student and their legal guardian(s) were required to sign a contract stating that they understood the requirements and expectations of the program, agreed to meet the attendance requirements, and would attend quarterly parent-teacher conferences.

The program was located in a wing of the traditional high school building. It gave its participants instruction in a smaller setting with the additional support and remediation that many of them need. By participating in the school-within-a-school program, students had the opportunity to work and socialize with other ninth graders who share similar interests and concerns. The students attended classes of approximately 15 students with selected teachers who work well with struggling learners. The four teachers involved in the program volunteered to work with these struggling learners, because they wanted to see them succeed. According to Progress Heights High's building principal, the administration not only chose these teachers

based on their teaching skills, but also their willingness and ability to work together as a member of a team, engage students in lessons, differentiate instruction to meet individual needs, and exhibit a positive demeanor.

During the first year of implementation, the school-within-a-school teachers split the students enrolled in the program into three different groups based on the results from a mathematics placement test. Although there were fewer female than male students involved in the program, the teachers tried evenly distributing the male and female students to each group. With approximately 15 students in each class, the smaller class sizes allowed students to receive more one-on-one interaction with the teachers. The students rotated among the four teachers involved in the program without passing periods. They attended four core classes in three hours giving them the opportunity to take an extra class during their freshman year. To allow for this additional high school credit, the students did not attend math on Mondays, government on Tuesdays, science on Wednesdays, and communication arts on Thursdays. The day that a teacher was not teaching his or her subject, allowed him or her the opportunity to assist colleagues, look up student grades, and attend parent/teacher conferences. On Fridays, students attended all four classes for a shortened amount of time. Every other Friday, all classes were even shorter to allow students to attend an awards assembly. Each teacher and the building principal rewarded a student of his or her choice. Based on effort, attendance, and participation, five students received an award during each ceremony. Throughout the program, students frequently received incentives for a job well done. In May, if the students had perfect attendance and turned in all of their work on time, they received a ticket and transportation to attend a major league baseball game.

The school-within-a-school program was only a one-year transition program to help at-risk students begin high school on the right track. Students attended the school-within-a-school learning environment in the morning for their first four classes. To assist with the transition into the traditional school setting for the following year, students ate lunch and attended afternoon elective classes with the rest of the students attending Progress Heights High. During their sophomore year, all of their courses except for their academic lab were in the traditional school setting with the rest of the student population. In order to continue to assist and monitor these students, two of the school-within-a-school teachers taught a seventh hour academic lab at the end of the school day. The two teachers divided the former school-within-a-school students among themselves. The purpose of the lab was to assist students with academic and organizational skills. These teachers checked each student's assignment notebook, grades, and assisted with any extra help the student needed in order to be successful in his/her classes. The school-within-a-school teachers also tried to keep ongoing communication with each student's teachers in order to monitor his/her progress and effort in his/her classes.

For the 2010-2011 school year, the incoming freshmen involved in the school-within-a-school program had four classes in four hours instead of four classes in three hours as the previous group had. Although the students were not able to receive an extra credit during their freshmen year, the teachers were able to ensure the students learned the necessary curriculum, so they could be successful when transitioning the following school year. These students would also have an academic lab their sophomore year so the school-within-a-school teachers could assist and monitor their transition into the traditional school setting. All four of the teachers involved in the program also had a common fifth hour planning period. This allowed the teachers to

collaborate with one another more frequently. The continuous implementation of new changes will determine if these students received the best possible educational experience.

Collection of Data

Before beginning this study, the researcher sent a letter of consent to the district superintendent asking for permission to conduct educational research on the current school-within-a-school transition program. The researcher received a letter from the superintendent approving the study. Before conducting research, an Institutional Review Board application (Appendix A) was completed and approved in October 2010 with Lindenwood University (Appendix B). The research involved anonymously surveying students and collecting academic grades and attendance data from the district's SIS program.

Toward the end of eighth grade, semester grades and attendance were both factors used in identifying students who were eligible to participate in the school-within-a-school program during their freshman year. For students involved in the school-within-a-school program during the 2009-2010 school year, attendance and semester grades were obtained from seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth grade using the district's SIS program. For students involved in the school-within-a-school program during the 2010-2011 school year, attendance and semester grades were obtained from seventh, eighth, and ninth grade using the district's SIS program. The 2009-2010 school-within-a-school students participated in one survey asking about their experiences in the program. The 2010-2011 school-within-a-school students received three paper-and-pencil surveys asking about their middle school educational experiences in August, perceptions of the school-within-a-school program after first semester in December, and overall perceptions of the school-within-a-school program

at the conclusion of the school year in June. Since the program was new to Progress Heights High, the administration used the voluntary surveys to receive feedback on the students' perceptions of the program and consider possible modifications to the program.

Description of the SIS Data

The researcher collected academic and attendance data for the following years: 2007-2008, 2008-2009, 2009-2010, and 2010-2011. For the purpose of this study, the researcher conducted statistical tests to compare the average of the two years prior to participation in the school-within-a-school program to the program, participation in the program to after the program, and the average of the two years prior to participation in the program to after the program. The researcher tabulated and analyzed academic data collected from the SIS program in the following manner:

1. Seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth grade academic data in each of the four core subjects for the 2009-2010 school-within-a-school participants (Group A)
2. Seventh, eighth, and ninth grade academic data in each of the four core subjects for the 2010-2011 school-within-a-school participants (Group B)
3. Seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth grade attendance data for Group A
4. Seventh, eighth, and ninth grade attendance data for Group B
5. Statistical analysis (ANOVA: Single Factor test) comparing the average grades in seventh grade, eighth grade, and ninth grade (school-within-a-school)
6. Statistical analysis (*Z*-Test: Two Sample for Means) comparing students' grades two years prior to the program to the program, comparing students' grades in the program to the year after the program, and comparing students' grades two years prior to the program to the year after the program

7. Statistical analysis (*Z*-Test for Difference in Proportions) comparing students' attendance two years prior to the program to the program, comparing students' attendance in the program to the year after the program, and comparing students' attendance two years prior to the program to the year after the program

Description of the Survey Data

The participants of this study voluntarily completed surveys that contained 16 statements about their attitudes toward their middle school and school-within-a-school experiences. The purpose of the survey was to answer the research questions:

1. How does a one-year, voluntary school-within-a-school program consisting of approximately 15 students per class meet the needs of at-risk freshmen to prepare them for high school?

2. Do the perceptions of school for these at-risk students change when comparing their middle school academic experiences to their school-within-a-school academic experiences?

Survey responses came from 31 students regarding their middle school experiences, 30 students regarding their school-within-a-school experiences at the end of the 2009-2010 school year, 30 students regarding their school-within-a-school experiences after first semester of the 2010-2011 school year, and 40 students regarding their school-within-a-school experiences at the end of the 2010-2011 school year. The researcher combined the responses from the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school-within-a-school participants regarding their experiences at the end of the program. Combining these responses gave the researcher three categories to compare including students' overall perceptions before, during, and after the school-within-a-school program. The researcher also simplified the survey data by combining the five response categories of strongly disagree, moderately disagree, neutral, moderately agree, and strongly

agree into three categories of disagree, neutral, and agree. The researcher focused on displaying data from the respondents who agreed and disagreed with the survey statements.

Description of Assessment Tools

The researcher compiled each student's grades from first and second semester for three to four school years focusing on the four core classes of math, science, communication arts, and social studies. After collecting all of this data, there were 32 grades for each of the 2009-2010 participants and 24 grades for each of the 2010-2011 participants. The researcher assigned a point value to each grade of A = 4, B = 3, C = 2, D = 1, and F = 0 and averaged each student's grades to calculate one overall grade per student per school year. Although there was a possibility that the assignment of course grades from one teacher to another varied, in 2010 the school district of study implemented professional learning communities allowing teachers time to collaborate and develop common assessments in order to provide consistency within each course. The researcher also examined each student's attendance record for his or her last three to four years of school. After calculating the number of days each student was present per school year, the researcher compared the attendance rates for students before, during, and after the school-within-a-school program. The researcher obtained both grades and attendance data from the SIS program on individual subjects within the school-within-a-school program.

Further quantitative data, obtained from Likert-scale surveys of past and present students, reflected the perceptions of their educational experiences. Evaluation began with a survey of the students involved in the program during the 2009-2010 school year asking about their perceptions of the program and its impact on their success. The researcher then acquired information about the students

enrolled in the program during the 2010-2011 school year. These students were surveyed at the beginning of their ninth grade year on their perception of their middle school academic experiences and then again at the end of first and second semester of the program. Ultimately, this pre and post survey design allowed the researcher to compare the students' perceptions of the instructional methods they received in middle school to the school-within-a-school program's instructional methods. The researcher evaluated and compared the effectiveness of the program by determining if (a) grades improved, (b) attendance increased, and (c) surveys revealed student satisfaction during and after the program.

Participants of Survey

On August 18, 2010, approximately 50 current and 40 former school-within-a-school students completed a typed survey in class. The current school-within-a-school students completed the voluntary survey during their school-within-a-school class, while the former participants completed the survey in their school-within-a-school academic lab. The participants for the anonymous student survey included ninth grade students enrolled in the school-within-a-school program during the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years. The students were unidentified in all aspects of the research. The survey asked the current school-within-a-school participants about their perceptions of experiences in middle school, while asking the previous year's school-within-a-school participants about their perceptions of the program and comfort with transitioning into the traditional school setting. The students enrolled in the program during the 2010-2011 school year responded to the same survey at the end of first semester and again at the end of the school year. The questions remained the same in all three surveys; however, the students responded to their perceptions of middle

school, the school-within-a-school program, and overall school-within-a-school program experiences.

This research project relied on two types of instrumentation to collect and analyze data. An anonymous student survey (Appendix C) gathered perceptions on the students' middle school and high school experiences, while the SIS database program provided data on the students' grades and attendance. Both of these instrumentations were common measures in other studies, as well.

The survey was developed and distributed to current students in the school-within-a-school program and second year students who transitioned into the traditional school setting with a common academic lab. The participants self-reported their responses to the surveys. The surveys were voluntary, anonymous, and completed with no time constraints. Teachers were responsible for handing out, explaining, and collecting the completed surveys. Then the researcher collected the completed surveys from the four teachers involved in the program. The survey questions in Appendix C are in first-person and asked participants to rate their perceptions using a scale of strongly disagree, moderately disagree, neutral, moderately agree, and strongly agree. The researcher simplified the survey data by combining the five response categories into three categories of disagree, neutral, and agree. The researcher examined the summarized descriptive data for trends by completing a frequency count and determining percentages for each category of each statement. Categories included school preparedness, readiness to learn, teacher interaction, student support, student learning, and preparation for life after high school.

A second instrument used in this research study was the district's SIS program that provided students' attendance and academic grades. The collection of data for

each participant expanded over a three to four year period without association to specific student names. The researcher compared participant's grades from a traditional middle school program to the school-within-a-school program. An additional comparison was made for the 2009-2010 participants who completed their freshman year in the school-within-a-school program and then transitioned their sophomore year back into the traditional school setting.

The researcher tested to determine if there was a significant difference in the average percentage of attendance for students before the SWS program to during the SWS program, during the SWS program to after the SWS program, and before the SWS program to after the SWS program. The researcher calculated the average percentage of days the participants were present and used a *z*-test for the difference in proportions to determine the significance. For grades, the researcher used an ANOVA: Single Factor test to determine if at least one mean was different from the others when comparing before, during, and after students participated in the program. If a difference in the groups existed, the researcher ran a *z*-test for the difference of means to determine which group was significant.

Validity and Reliability

Validity depends on the quality of the instruments, procedures, and conclusions based on the data obtained by these instruments (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). The superintendent, assistant superintendent, building principal, and professor from Lindenwood University evaluated the student surveys on validity. Validity refers to the "appropriateness, correctness, meaningfulness, and usefulness" of the student surveys based on the data, the researcher collects (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 148). Since the school-within-a-school program at Progress Heights High has only existed since 2009, the researcher developed a 16-question survey to provide the

teachers involved in the program with a better understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, and concerns the participants experienced during the program. After the review of many articles dealing with the importance of a smooth transition to high school and lowering the dropout rate, the 16 questions for the survey evolved from the areas that researchers believed made a significant impact on keeping students in school. The school-within-a-school teachers also expressed additional areas that they felt played a major influence on student success; these areas included small group discussions, relevant material dealing with career planning, and recognition for student accomplishments in the areas of effort, attendance, and participation. The combination of the readings from similar studies and input from the school-within-a-school teachers helped to create the final survey questions. While the approximate reading level of the surveys was at an eighth grade level, both the teachers and administrators felt the questions were age appropriate. In order to understand the students' experiences and monitor changes in their perceptions, the students completed surveys at the beginning, middle, and end of the program. The questions focused on the areas of teacher-student interaction, student support, academic preparation, self-esteem and confidence levels, peer relationships, and career goals/planning.

The SIS program was used to electronically research, organize, and tabulate both academic and attendance student data. In regards to gathering data, the SIS program is an accurate and reliable source, since the data the district reports to the state comes from this database. Overall, both instruments used in this study appeared to provide information relevant to the questions presented.

Summary

Chapter 3 described the methodology for this quantitative research study on a select group of at-risk freshmen students in the school-within-a-school program. The researcher collected data through an anonymous student survey and reports generated by the SIS program. The data allowed the researcher to compare the effects of the school-within-a-school program on students' academic success, attendance, and overall perceptions of school as compared to their experiences in middle school. Educators selected the participants for the program; however, the students voluntarily enrolled and signed a contract agreeing to comply with the program's expectations. If the students met these expectations by the end of their freshman year, they qualified for sophomore status by earning at least six credits toward graduation.

Chapter 4 presents the results of the school-within-a-school student surveys as well as the academic and attendance data gathered through the district's SIS program. This information is necessary in determining the overall effectiveness of the school-within-a-school transition program.

Chapter Four: Results

The researcher designed this study to answer five research questions. These five questions were proposed in Chapter 1.

1. How does a one-year, voluntary school-within-a-school program consisting of approximately 15 students per class meet the needs of at-risk freshmen to prepare them for high school?

2. When comparing the average of semester grades in each core subject before, during, and after attendance in the school-within-a-school program, will they increase?

3. While attending the school-within-a-school program, will the number of semester F's for this select group of at-risk students decrease as compared to middle school?

4. Is there an increase in the attendance of students participating in the school-within-a-school program as compared to their middle school attendance?

5. Do the perceptions of school for these at-risk students change when comparing their middle school academic experiences to their school-within-a-school academic experiences?

The researcher generated results to these questions through a collection of data from Progress Heights High's SIS program and voluntary, anonymous student surveys. Using tables and narratives for the descriptive study, the statistical analysis of the academic and attendance data specifically addressed and provided answers to research questions two, three, and four. The results from a separate survey analysis conducted by the school-within-a-school teachers addressed research questions one and five. The end of Chapter 4 provides a summary of the results to these questions.

Academic Data Analysis

The researcher averaged each student's grades from first and second semester in the four core subjects to obtain one average grade for each student per school year. Then the researcher used this data to conduct two ANOVA: Single Factor tests to determine if at least one mean was different from the others when comparing seventh, eighth, and ninth grade SWS groups A and B. The researcher proposed the following null and alternate hypotheses:

H_0: The means are not different from one another when comparing seventh, eighth, and ninth grade average grades ($\mu_1 = \mu_2 = \mu_3$).

H_1: At least one mean is different from the others.

Table 6 and Table 7 display the ANOVA test results for the 2009-2010 group A school-within-a-school participants.

Table 6

Quantitative Data Analysis, Group A: ANOVA Test Results I

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
2009-2010 (9th Grade – SWS)	42	98.375	2.342262	0.582362
2008-2009 (8th Grade)	39	45.875	1.176282	0.69138
2007-2008 (7th Grade)	38	59.875	1.575658	0.791841

After conducting the ANOVA test, the results generated an *F* test value of 20.8657, which was greater than the *F* critical value of 3.0744. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis. There was enough evidence to conclude that at least one mean was different from the others. After determining there was a difference in the means when comparing participants' grades before to during participation in the program, the researcher decided to conduct a second ANOVA test to determine if there was a

difference in their grades when comparing before to after participation in the program. Table 7 displays the results of the second ANOVA test ran on Group A participants.

Table 7

Quantitative Data Analysis, Group A: ANOVA Test Results II

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
2010-2011 (10th Grade)	36	56.125	1.559028	0.850434
2008-2009 (8th Grade)	39	45.875	1.176282	0.69138
2007-2008 (7th Grade)	38	59.875	1.575658	0.791841

After conducting the ANOVA test for Group A's tenth, eighth, and seventh grade years to determine if there was a difference in average grades, the results demonstrated that there was not a change in grades when comparing the years prior to after the school-within-a-school program. The results generated an *F* test value of 2.5235, which was less than the *F* critical value of 3.0788. The researcher did not reject the null hypothesis. There was not enough evidence to conclude that at least one mean was different from the others. This is in contrast to the previous test, which revealed there was a difference in the means during the program.

The researcher then conducted an ANOVA test on Group B participants to determine if there was a difference in the means when comparing participants' grades before to during participation in the program. Table 8 displays the ANOVA test results for the 2010-2011 school-within-a-school participants, Group B.

Table 8

Quantitative Data Analysis, Group B: ANOVA Test Results

Groups	Count	Sum	Average	Variance
2010-2011 (9th Grade – SWS)	52	102.625	1.973558	0.675451
2009-2010 (8th Grade)	52	58.375	1.122596	0.469663
2008-2009 (7th Grade)	42	59.25	1.410714	0.670949

After conducting the ANOVA test, the results generated an *F* test value of 16.1394, which was greater than the *F* critical value of 3.0594. The researcher rejected the null hypothesis. There was enough evidence to conclude that at least one mean was different from the others. To identify which group was different from the others, the researcher used a *z*-test for the difference of means. Because the researcher did not have data for Group B for the year after the school-within-a-school program, the researcher only ran one ANOVA for this group.

The *z*-test for the difference of means allowed the researcher to determine whether the differences between students' grades in the core subjects were statistically significant before, during, or after the school-within-a-school program. The researcher proposed the following null and alternate hypotheses:

H_0: The means are not different from one another ($\mu_1 = \mu_2$).

H_1: The means are different from one another ($\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$).

The researcher began by finding the variance of the sample data. After finding the variance of each sample, the researcher used this information to conduct a *z*-test for the difference of means between the variables using a hypothesized mean difference of zero. Table 9 reflects the first comparison of students' grades before the school-within-a-school program to during the program.

Table 9

Quantitative Data Analysis, Group A - Part I: Z-Test Results

Comparison of Students' Grades Before the SWS Program to During the Program	
Statistical Test	Result
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0
z	-6.27
Alpha	0.05
Z Critical two-tail	±1.96

Since the *z* value of -6.27 is less than the critical value of -1.96, the *z* value falls into the critical regions on the normal bell curve. Therefore, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis that there was not a difference in students' grades before the SWS program to during the program. Furthermore, the researcher supported the alternate hypothesis that there was a statistically significant difference in students' grades before the SWS program to during the program. While enrolled in the school-within-a-school program, students' grades improved in comparison to their middle school grades.

Table 10 reflects the second comparison of students' grades during the school-within-a-school program to after the program.

Table 10

Quantitative Data Analysis, Group A - Part II: Z-Test Results

Comparison of Students' Grades During the SWS Program to After the Program	
Statistical Test	Result
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0
z	4.05
Alpha	0.05
Z Critical two-tail	±1.96

Since the z value of 4.05 is greater than the critical value of 1.96, the z value falls into the critical regions on the normal bell curve. Therefore, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis that there was not a difference in students' grades during the SWS program to after the program. Furthermore, the researcher supported the alternate hypothesis that there was a statistically significant difference in students' grades during the SWS program to after the program. Although students' grades improved during enrollment in the program, the following year the students did not sustain the increase in their grades.

Table 11 reflects the third comparison of students' grades before the school-within-a-school program to after the program.

Table 11

Quantitative Data Analysis, Group A - Part III: Z-Test Results

Comparison of Students' Grades Before the SWS Program to After the Program	
Statistical Test	Result
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0
z	-1.01
Alpha	0.05
Z Critical two-tail	±1.96

Since the *z* value of -1.01 is greater than the critical value of -1.96, the *z* value does not fall into the critical regions on the normal bell curve. Therefore, the researcher did not reject the null hypothesis. There was not a statistically significant difference in students' grades before the SWS program to after the program. Although there was an observable increase in the means of the participants' grades from middle school to their sophomore year after the program, it was not a statistically significant difference.

Table 12 reflects the comparison of Group B SWS students' grades before the school-within-a-school program to during the program.

Table 12

Quantitative Data Analysis, Group B - Part I: Z-Test Results

Comparison of Students' Grades Before the SWS Program to During the Program	
Statistical Test	Result
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0
z	-5.23
Alpha	0.05
Z Critical two-tail	±1.96

Since the *z* value of -5.23 is less than the critical value of -1.96, the *z* value falls into the critical regions on the normal bell curve. Therefore, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis that there was not a difference in students' grades before the SWS program to during the program. Furthermore, the researcher supported the alternate hypothesis that there was a statistically significant difference in students' grades before the school-within-a-school program to during the program. While enrolled in the school-within-a-school program, students' grades improved in comparison to their middle school grades. The researcher did not have data on the SWS Group B students' sophomore year grades after they finished the program.

Attendance Data Analysis

Table 13 contains the aggregate data for the average attendance rates of the Group A SWS participants. The attendance rate percentages show how students performed before, during, and after participation in the school-within-a-school program.

Table 13

Group A – Average Attendance Rates (%)

Before Participation	
2007-2008	92.3
2008-2009	92.1
During Participation	
2009-2010	93.1
After Participation	
2010-2011	87.2

Table 14 contains the aggregate data for the average attendance rates of the Group B SWS participants. The attendance rate percentages show how students performed before and during participation in the school-within-a-school program.

Table 14

Group B – Average Attendance Rates (%)

Before Participation	
2008-2009	92.6
2009-2010	91.5
During Participation	
2010-2011	90.9

The *z*-test for the difference in proportions allowed the researcher to determine whether the differences between students' attendance were statistically significant before, during, or after the school-within-a-school program. The researcher proposed the following null and alternate hypotheses:

H_0: The means are not different from one another ($\mu_1 = \mu_2$).

H_1: The means are different from one another ($\mu_1 \neq \mu_2$).

After calculating the average attendance rates for the SWS participants, the researcher conducted a *z*-test for the difference in proportions for SWS participants in Group A from middle school (seventh and eighth grade) to sophomore year following the program. The overall proportion for days students were present was 92% in middle school as compared to 87% their sophomore year. The *z* test value was -0.81, which was greater than the critical value of -1.96. The researcher did not reject the null hypothesis; there was not a difference in the proportions. Although there was an observable decrease in attendance, there was not enough evidence to support a statistically significant difference in attendance from before the program to after the program.

Second, the researcher conducted a *z*-test for the difference in proportions for SWS participants in Group A from middle school (seventh and eighth grade) to freshman year in the SWS program. The overall proportion for days students were present was 92% in middle school as compared to 93% their freshman year. The *z* test value was 0.18, which was less than the critical value of 1.96. The researcher did not reject the null hypothesis. There was not enough evidence to support a statistically significant difference in attendance from before the program to the program.

Third, the researcher conducted a *z*-test for the difference in average proportions for SWS participants in Group A from freshman year in the SWS program to sophomore year after the program. The overall proportion for days students were present was 93% their freshman year as compared to 87% their sophomore year. The *z* test value was -0.87, which was greater than the critical value

of -1.96. The researcher did not reject the null hypothesis; there was not a difference in the proportions. Although there was an observable decrease in attendance, there was not enough evidence to support a statistically significant difference in attendance from the program to after the program.

The researcher then conducted a *z*-test for the difference in proportions for SWS participants in Group B from middle school (seventh and eighth grade) to freshman year in the SWS program. The overall proportion for days students were present was 92% in middle school as compared to 91% their freshman year. The *z* test value was -0.24, which was greater than the critical value of -1.96. The researcher did not reject the null hypothesis. There was not enough evidence to support a statistically significant difference in attendance from before the program to the program.

When comparing the 2009-2010 SWS participants 93.1% overall proportion for days present to the district of study's (9-12) attendance rate of 93.1% and Missouri's (9-12) attendance rate of 92.8%, the researcher noticed that there was not an observable difference between them. The researcher also compared the 2010-2011 SWS participants 90.9% overall proportion for days present to the district of study's (9-12) attendance rate of 93.1% and Missouri's (9-12) attendance rate of 92.8%. The researcher conducted a *z*-test for the difference in proportions for SWS participants in Group B to the 2010-2011 district of study's (9-12) attendance rate. The *z* test value was -0.58, which was greater than the critical value of -1.96. The researcher did not reject the null hypothesis. There was not enough evidence to support a statistically significant difference in attendance from the 2010-2011 school-within-a-school participants to the district of study's (9-12) attendance rate. The researcher then conducted a *z*-test for the difference in proportions for SWS participants in Group B

to Missouri's (9-12) attendance rate. The *z* test value was -0.50, which was greater than the critical value of -1.96. The researcher did not reject the null hypothesis. There was not enough evidence to support a statistically significant difference in attendance from the 2010-2011 school-within-a-school participants to Missouri's (9-12) attendance rate. However, there was an observable decrease in the attendance rate for the 2010-2011 school-within-a-school participants as compared to the district and state.

Survey Data Analysis

Table 15 displays the results from the 2010-2011 school-within-a-school participants' perceptions of their middle school experiences. The researcher listed each of the 16 survey statements by topic with the number and percentage of participants who disagreed and agreed with each statement. For a full listing of each item of the survey, please see Appendix.

Table 15

2010-2011 SWS Participants Perceptions of their Middle School Experiences

	Students who disagreed with statement	Students who agreed with statement
Prompt Feedback from Teachers	8 (26%)	8 (26%)
Discussion of Grades and/or Assignments with Teachers	11 (35%)	11 (35%)
Support from Teachers	10 (32%)	11 (35%)
Recognition	11 (35%)	9 (29%)
Necessary Skills	4 (13%)	14 (45%)
Importance of Good Grades	7 (23%)	20 (65%)
Pride in Work	15 (48%)	9 (29%)
Excited about Classes	12 (39%)	5 (16%)
Usefulness of Material	8 (26%)	10 (32%)
Positive Relationship with Peers	7 (23%)	14 (45%)
Positive Relationship with Staff	9 (29%)	16 (52%)
Develop Clear Career Goals	8 (26%)	15 (48%)
Responsibility for Behavior	6 (19%)	18 (58%)
Safety at School	8 (26%)	19 (61%)
Acceptance	8 (26%)	11 (35%)
Caring Adults	7 (23%)	16 (52%)

Note. N = 31.

As the data in Table 15 indicated, overall the students did not have very high satisfaction with their middle school experiences. Both columns received relatively low agreement and disagreement rates. The statement, *I took pride in my work during my middle school experience*, received a 48% disagreement rate. Only 29% of the students claimed to take pride in their work during middle school. The statement, *I received the necessary skills to complete my work during my middle school experience*, received a 45% agreement rate. Less than half of the participants believed they received the necessary skills from their middle school teachers to complete their schoolwork. The next statement read *I felt safe at school during my middle school experience*. Responses showed that 26% disagreed with this statement while 61% agreed. Approximately 40% of the students did not feel safe or were unsure if they felt safe in middle school. The last statement that stood out read *I have at least one adult who cares and knows me well at school during my middle school experience.* Responses showed that 23% disagreed with this statement while 52% agreed. However, that is only half of the participants holding the belief that someone cared and knew them well in middle school.

Table 16 displays the results from the 2010-2011 school-within-a-school participants' perceptions of the program after first semester and both the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school-within-a-school participants' perceptions of the program after their experience. The researcher listed each of the 16 survey statements by topic with the number and percentage of participants who agreed with each statement.

Table 16

SWS Participants Perceptions of the Program

	Survey of 30 Students After First Semester in SWS (agree with statement)	Survey of 70 Students at the End of SWS Program (agree with statement)
Prompt Feedback from Teachers	25 (83%)	59 (84%)
Discussion of Grades and/or Assignments with Teachers	20 (67%)	53 (76%)
Support from Teachers	25 (83%)	61 (87%)
Recognition	22 (73%)	51 (73%)
Necessary Skills	24 (80%)	53 (76%)
Importance of Good Grades	27(90%)	56 (80%)
Pride in Work	23 (77%)	49 (70%)
Excited about Classes	21 (70%)	46 (66%)
Usefulness of Material	22 (73%)	52 (74%)
Positive Relationship with Peers	18 (60%)	39 (56%)
Positive Relationship with Staff	23 (77%)	51 (73%)
Develop Clear Career Goals	19 (63%)	46 (66%)
Responsibility for Behavior	24 (80%)	52 (74%)
Safety at School	24 (80%)	52 (74%)
Acceptance	24 (80%)	49 (70%)
Caring Adults	24 (80%)	55 (79%)

As the data in Table 16 indicated, the students perceived the school-within-a-school program to be beneficial. When comparing their overall satisfaction with their middle school experiences to their school-within-a-school experiences, there was a large shift in their overall satisfaction. The survey only revealed four areas where participants' opinions shifted from first semester to the end of the program. The first statement read *I discuss grades and/or assignments with my teacher(s) during my SWS experience.* Responses after first semester showed that 67% of the participants agreed with this statement, while the percent increased to 76% by the end of the program. Only 7% of the participants disagreed with this statement. The agreement rate of this statement more than doubled from middle school with a 35% agreement rate. The next statement read *I believe it is important to make good grades during my SWS experience.* Responses after first semester showed that 90% of the participants agreed with this statement, while the percent decreased to 80% by the end of the program. At the end of first semester, 3% of the participants disagreed with the statement; however, by the end of the year, 10% were in disagreement with this statement. Once again this was an increase from middle school where only 65% of the students agreed with the statement. The next statement read *I take pride in my work during my SWS experience.* Responses after first semester showed that 77% of the participants agreed with this statement, while the percent decreased to 70% by the end of the program. Only 7% of the participants disagreed with this statement, while 48% of the students disagreed in middle school. Lastly, the statement, *I feel accepted for who I am during my SWS experience,* received responses after first semester showing that 80% of the participants agreed, while the percent decreased to 70% by the end of the program. At the end of first semester, 10% of the participants disagreed with this statement, but

by the end of the program, the percent decreased to 7%. Overall, according to their responses, participants were highly satisfied with the school-within-a-school program.

The researcher compared the changes in students' perceptions before, during, and after participation in the school-within-a-school program. Although the researcher only included figures for the statements that received strong disagreement in middle school and notable changes from first semester to second semester in the school-within-a-school program, the rest of the figures are available for observation in Appendix D.

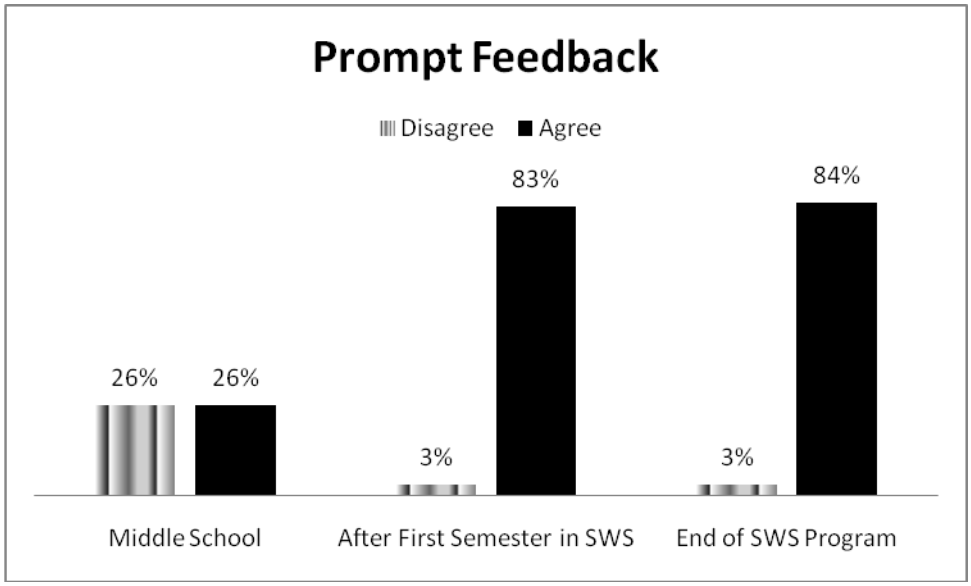

Figure 2. Responses to survey question 1.

Survey Question 1: I received prompt feedback from my teachers.

By the end of the school-within-a-school program, most of the participants believed they received prompt feedback from their teachers. Figure 2 illustrates that 84% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 26% in middle school. Furthermore, only 3% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 26% in middle school.

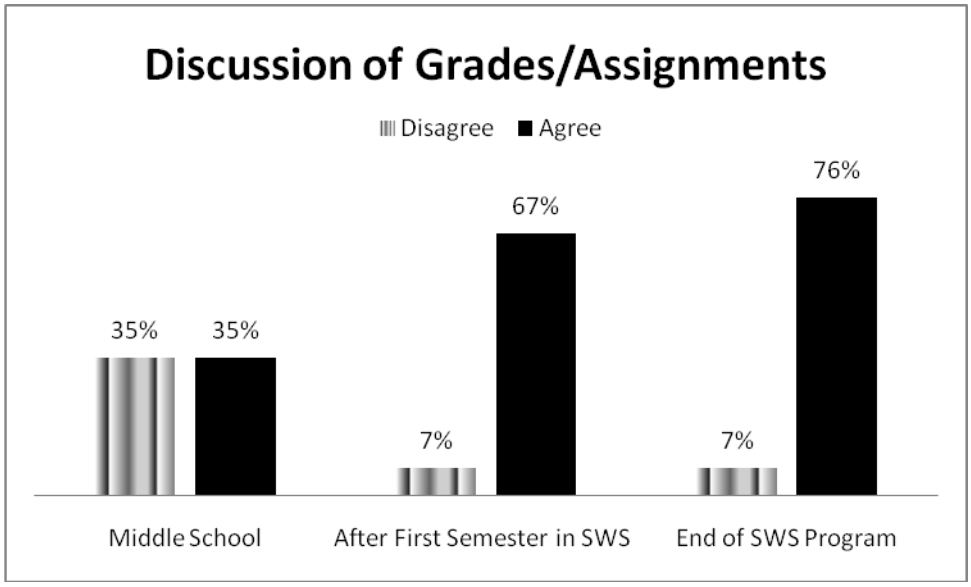

Figure 3. Responses to survey question 2.

Survey Question 2: I discussed grades and/or assignments with my teacher(s).

The percentage of respondents who discussed their grades and/or assignments with their teachers continued to increase from middle school to high school. Figure 3 illustrates that 76% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 35% in middle school. Furthermore, only 7% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 35% in middle school.

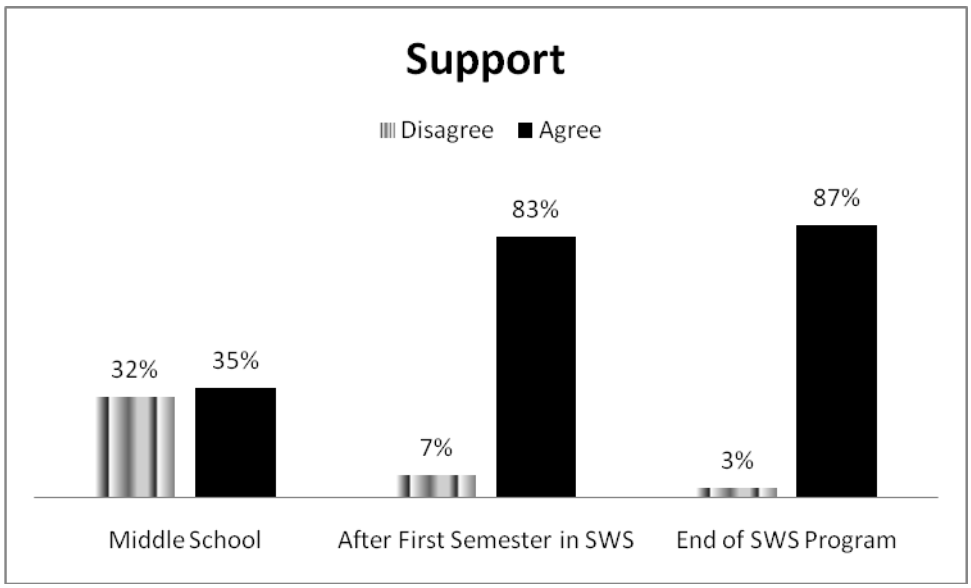

Figure 4. Responses to survey question 3.

Survey Question 3: I received support from my teachers to succeed in school.

The percentage of respondents who received support from their teachers to succeed in school continued to increase from middle school to high school. Figure 4 illustrates that 87% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 35% in middle school. Furthermore, only 3% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 32% in middle school.

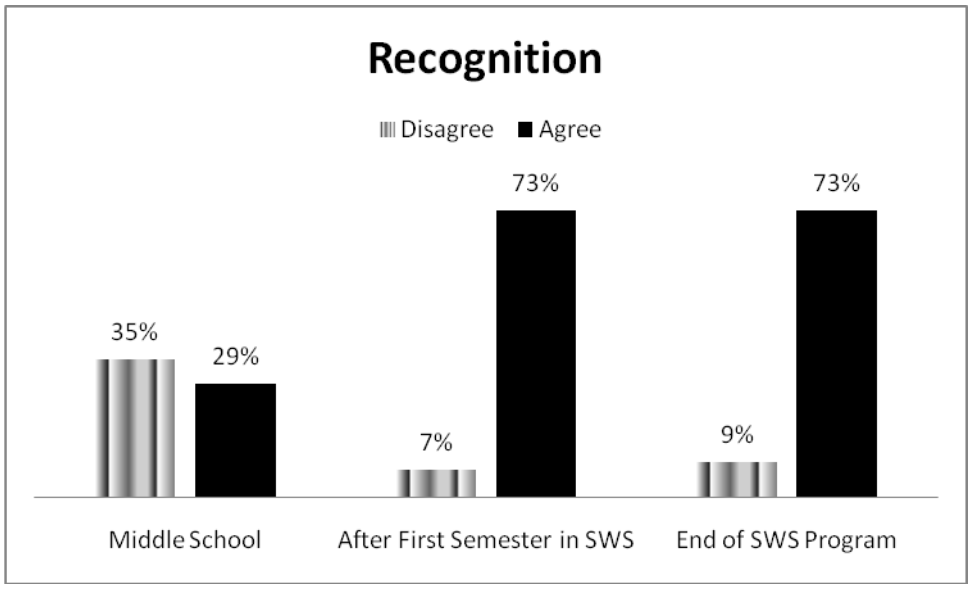

Figure 5. Responses to survey question 4.

Survey Question 4: I received recognition for my academic improvement.

By the end of the school-within-a-school program, almost three-fourths of the participants believed they received recognition for their academic improvement. Figure 5 illustrates that 73% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 29% in middle school. In fact, a higher percentage of students believed they did not receive recognition for their academic improvement in middle school than received recognition. Only 9% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 35% in middle school.

Survey Question 5: I received the necessary skills to complete my work.

Although the percentage of respondents in agreement increased from middle school, it decreased slightly from first semester in the school-within-a-school program to the end of the program. Figure A1 (Appendix D) illustrates that 76% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 45% in middle school. The greatest percentage of respondents in agreement was 80% and occurred after first semester in the program. Furthermore, only 3% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 13% in middle school.

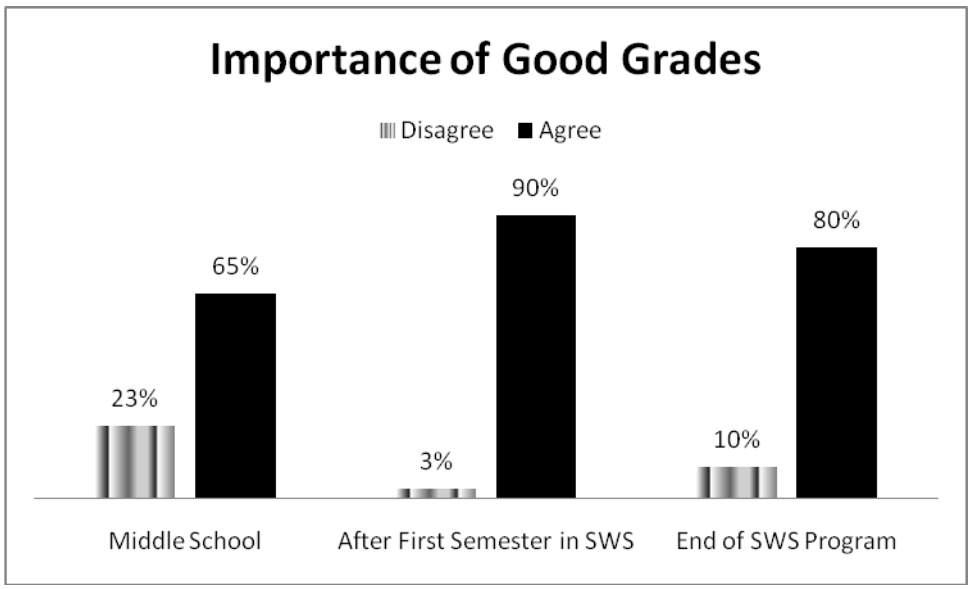

Figure 6. Responses to survey question 6.

Survey Question 6: I believed it was important to make good grades.

Although the percentage of respondents in agreement increased from middle school, it decreased from first semester in the school-within-a-school program to the end of the program. Figure 6 illustrates that 80% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 65% in middle school. The greatest percentage of respondents in agreement was 90% and occurred after first semester in the program. Furthermore, 10% of the respondents disagreed with this

statement after participation in the program versus 23% in middle school; however, only 3% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after first semester in the program.

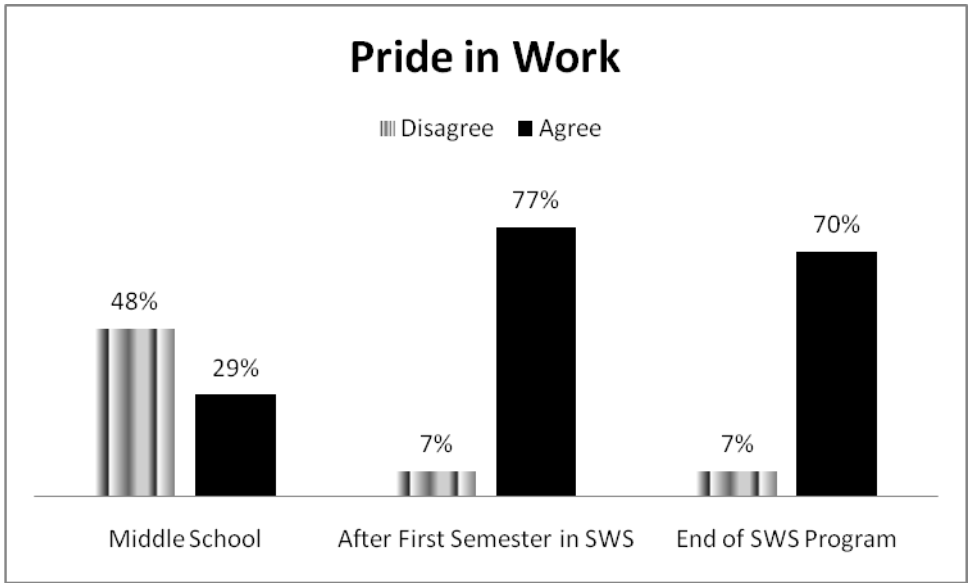

Figure 7. Responses to survey question 7.

Survey Question 7: I took pride in my work.

Although the percentage of respondents in agreement increased from middle school, it decreased from first semester in the school-within-a-school program to the end of the program. Figure 7 illustrates that 70% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 29% in middle school. The greatest percentage of respondents in agreement was 77% and occurred after first semester in the program. Furthermore, only 7% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 48% in middle school.

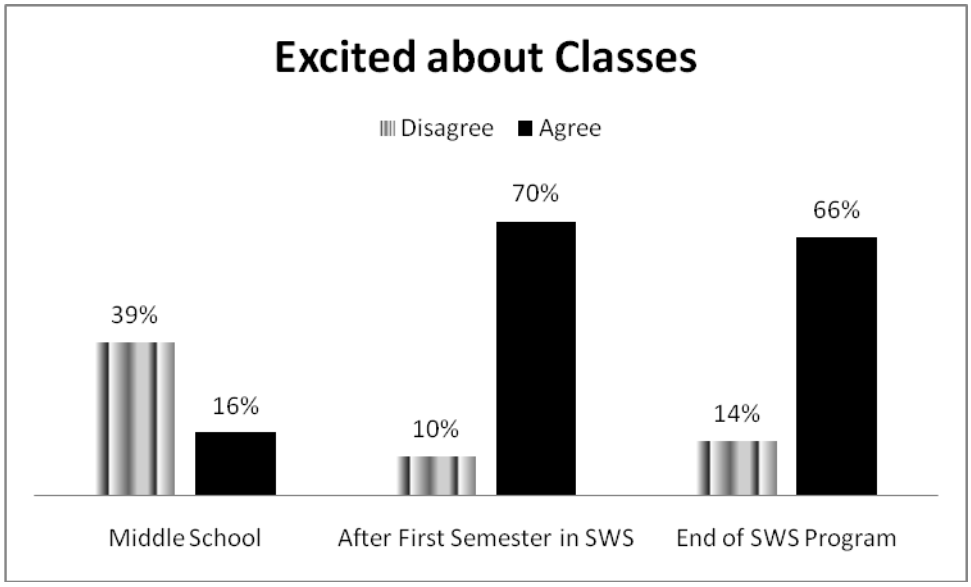

Figure 8. Responses to survey question 8.

Survey Question 8: I was excited about my classes.

Although the percentage of respondents in agreement increased from middle school, it decreased from first semester in the school-within-a-school program to the end of the program. Figure 8 illustrates that 66% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 16% in middle school. The greatest percentage of respondents in agreement was 70% and occurred after first semester in the program. Furthermore, 14% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 39% in middle school; however, only 10% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after first semester in the program.

Survey Question 9: I learned material that I thought was useful.

By the end of the school-within-a-school program, almost three-fourths of the participants believed they learned material that they thought was useful. Figure A2 (Appendix D) illustrates that 74% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 32% in middle school. Furthermore, only 7% of

the respondents disagreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 26% in middle school.

Survey Question 10: I got along with other students.

Although the percentage of respondents in agreement increased from middle school, it decreased from first semester in the school-within-a-school program to the end of the program. Figure A3 (Appendix D) illustrates that 56% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 45% in middle school. The greatest percentage of respondents in agreement was 60% and occurred after first semester in the program. Furthermore, 11% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 23% in middle school.

Survey Question 11: I got along with my teachers.

Although the percentage of respondents in agreement increased from middle school, it decreased from first semester in the school-within-a-school program to the end of the program. Figure A4 (Appendix D) illustrates that 73% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 52% in middle school. The greatest percentage of respondents in agreement was 77% and occurred after first semester in the program. Furthermore, 6% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 29% in middle school.

Survey Question 12: I was able to develop clear career goals.

The percentage of respondents who were able to develop clear career goals continued to increase from middle school to high school. Figure A5 (Appendix D) illustrates that 66% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 48% in middle school. Furthermore, only 9% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 26% in middle

school; however, only 7% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after first semester in the program.

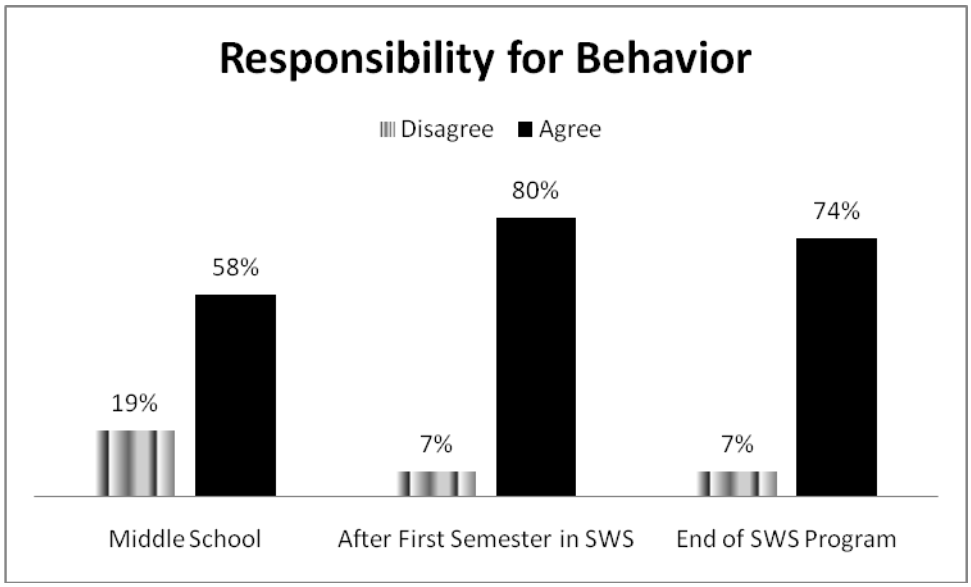

Figure 9. Responses to survey question 13.

Survey Question 13: I took responsibility for my behavior.

Although the percentage of respondents in agreement increased from middle school, it decreased from first semester in the school-within-a-school program to the end of the program. Figure 9 illustrates that 74% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 58% in middle school. The greatest percentage of respondents in agreement was 80% and occurred after first semester in the program. Furthermore, 7% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 19% in middle school.

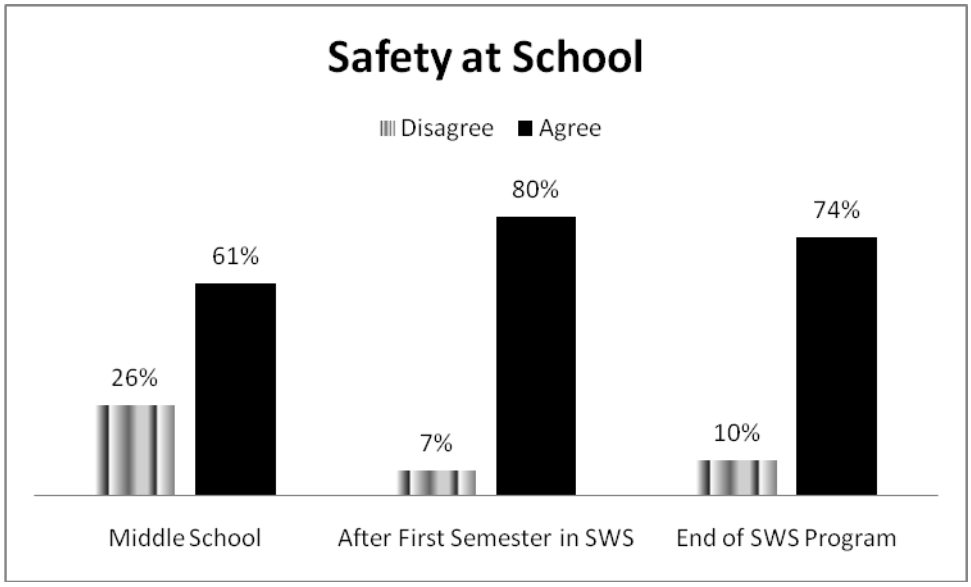

Figure 10. Responses to survey question 14.

Survey Question 14: I felt safe at school.

Although the percentage of respondents in agreement increased from middle school, it decreased from first semester in the school-within-a-school program to the end of the program. Figure 10 illustrates that 74% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 61% in middle school. The greatest percentage of respondents in agreement was 80% and occurred after first semester in the program. Furthermore, 10% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 26% in middle school; however, only 7% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after first semester in the program.

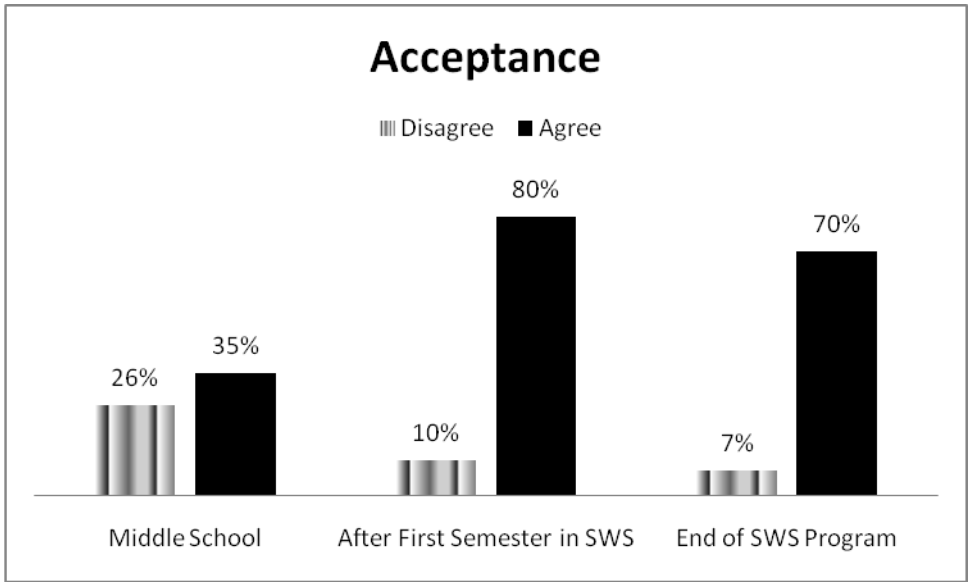

Figure 11. Responses to survey question 15.

Survey Question 15: I felt accepted for who I am.

Although the percentage of respondents in agreement doubled from middle school, it decreased from first semester in the school-within-a-school program to the end of the program. Figure 11 illustrates that 70% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 35% in middle school. The greatest percentage of respondents in agreement was 80% and occurred after first semester in the program. Furthermore, the percentage of respondents who disagreed with this statement continued to decrease after participation in the program from 26% in middle school to 7% after the program.

Survey Question 16: I had at least one adult who cared and knew me well at school.

By the end of the school-within-a-school program, most of the participants believed they had at least one adult who cared and knew them well at school. Figure A6 (Appendix D) illustrates that 79% of the respondents agreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 52% in middle school. Furthermore, only 7% of the respondents disagreed with this statement after participation in the program versus 23% in middle school.

Summary

Chapter 4 was a disaggregation of student data gathered during this study. The researcher focused on academic and attendance data gathered from Progress Heights High's SIS program to address research questions two, three, and four. Results presented statistical evidence to support that the school-within-a-school program had an effect on students' grades. While students were in the school-within-a-school program, their grades improved from their middle school experiences; however, there was no statistical evidence to show there was an improvement in grades after the program. There was also no statistical evidence to show that there was an increase in attendance during or after the program.

The researcher also focused on the results from the student surveys to address research questions one and five. The overall results of the student surveys support that there was a difference in students' perceptions of the school-within-a-school program as compared to their middle school experiences. Students perceived the school-within-a-school program to be beneficial and gave higher ratings to every category as compared to their middle school experiences.

Chapter 5 will review the results of this study and answer the five research questions. Additionally, the researcher will present the conclusions to this study along with recommendations for further research.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

In 2009, the administration at Progress Heights High implemented the school-within-a-school program at one of the four comprehensive high schools in the district. This program addresses the needs of incoming at-risk freshmen before they begin to struggle in high school. Educators and policymakers agreed "rather than allowing students to fail and then offering remediation, it is far better to prevent failure in the first place" (Brandt, 1992, p. 3). The school-within-a-school program assists students with the difficult transition to high school while providing them with a team teaching approach. Although many districts offer alternative high schools, freshman centers, credit recovery, after-school programs, mentoring, and tutoring, the school-within-a-school program allows students to take all of their classes in the traditional high school building. In the morning, students take their four core courses in the school-within-a-school program located in a wing of the regular school building. In the afternoon, they eat lunch and participate in elective courses with the rest of the students at Progress Heights High. The design of the program allows students to receive the extra assistance they need in a smaller learning environment without feeling isolated from their peers. During a student's freshman year, there are factors that schools can use to predict their eventual graduation from high school including "freshman-year GPA, the number of semester course failures, and freshman-year absences" (Allensworth & Easton, 2007, p. 3). With this in mind, the purpose of this study was to measure the effectiveness of the school-within-a-school program, a one-year alternative program within the traditional high school setting, by using the quantitatively measurable school-related outcomes of grades, attendance, and survey data. The researcher determined the effectiveness of the school-within-a-school

program for first-year freshmen as measured by (a) improved grades, (b) increased attendance, and (c) student satisfaction.

The researcher set forth to answer the following questions:

1. How does a one-year, voluntary school-within-a-school program consisting of approximately 15 students per class meet the needs of at-risk freshmen to prepare them for high school?
2. When comparing the average of semester grades for school-within-a-school participants in each core subject before, during, and after attendance in the school-within-a-school program, will they increase?
3. While attending the school-within-a-school program, will the number of semester F's for this select group of at-risk students decrease as compared to middle school?
4. Is there an increase in the attendance of students participating in the school-within-a-school program as compared to their middle school attendance?
5. Do the perceptions of school for these at-risk students change when comparing their middle school academic experiences to their school-within-a-school academic experiences?

For research questions two, three, and four, the researcher gathered academic and attendance data with the use of Progress Heights High's SIS program. To address research questions one and five, the researcher used a collection of voluntary and anonymous student surveys. Conclusions, recommendations, and answers to all five research questions are included in this chapter.

There were several limitations identified in this study. The school-within-a-school teachers made every effort to ensure that all students participated in the survey; however, it was voluntary, and not every student responded. In addition, the participants self-reported their responses to the surveys. The students had to read

each question independently and may have interpreted the questions, rating scale, and written directions differently, skewing the results. Furthermore, while each student agreed to follow the program's expectations regarding attendance, homework, participation in activities/seminars, and teacher conferences, unforeseen circumstances occurred within some of the families causing differences in the expectations of one student versus another. While the results of this study will be beneficial to the school district of study, it is difficult to generalize these results to other large high schools seeking similar alternative programs. After all, each school has certain characteristics that sets it apart and defines it.

Research Question #1. How does a one-year, voluntary school-within-a-school program consisting of approximately 15 students per class meet the needs of at-risk freshmen to prepare them for high school?

Conclusions. From an analysis of the data, the school-within-a-school program was effective in addressing the needs of these students through its contribution toward lowering the number of semester F's, improving participants' grades while they were in the program, and changing their perceptions of school. According to the surveys, 26% of the students felt they received prompt feedback from their teachers in middle school, which significantly increased to 84% during their school-within-a-school experience. Furthermore, 35% of the students felt they received the support from their teachers to succeed in middle school, which increased to 87% during their school-within-a-school experience. "An atmosphere of high teacher expectation and support has a positive effect on the behavior and academic investment and success of at-risk students" (Lange & Sletten, 2002, p. 12). The additional support and more individualized instruction, based on each student's needs, allowed for the change in students' perceptions and increased success academically.

Unfortunately, the success these students experienced academically did not follow them into their sophomore year. Results showed that there was not a statistically significant difference in grades from before students participated in the program to after participation in the program. The school district of study recognized that a one-year program might not be long enough to make a significant impact on the participants' educational experiences. They implemented an academic lab for these students during their sophomore year to ensure they remain on the path toward graduation.

While school districts continue to assess students' needs, they must also provide ongoing professional development for teachers on how to best work with at-risk students. After all, there are a large percentage of teachers who feel uncomfortable and reluctant dealing with behavioral problems and major crisis (McCall, 2003). "All educators and support personnel need specific skills to disengage from conflict and connect with reluctant students" (McCall, 2003, p. 116). Effective professional development activities help to strengthen teaching strategies and provide methods of varying instruction (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006). After transitioning back into the traditional high school setting, the larger school environment, less frequent student-teacher interaction, and more independence can cause students to revert to feelings of isolation and detachment from the school setting (Chmelynski, 2004). While only 29% of the school-within-a-school participants felt they received recognition for their academic improvement during middle school, this number increased to 73% during the program. The frequent recognition and awards assemblies for school-within-a-school participants may have contributed to this increase. Unfortunately, the limited amount of ongoing recognition after the program,

in the larger traditional school setting, may create a difficult transition for these students.

Furthermore, while only 32% of the school-within-a-school participants agreed that the material they learned in middle school was useful, the percentage increased to 74% during their school-within-a-school experience. In order for material to become useful, "learning must be relevant and applicable to life outside of school and to future learning and work opportunities" (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006, p. 4). While these areas showed some of the most significant increases in student satisfaction, every area in the survey increased from middle school to the school-within-a-school program. Research results indicated "as students grew more comfortable and confident in their educational settings, their academic performance and commitment to their role as students improved" (Lange & Sletten, 2002, p. 16). The school-within-a-school program provides a smaller learning environment that gives the students and teachers a chance to build working relationships with one another. In fact, by the end of the program, 73% of the students agreed they got along with their teachers compared to 52% in middle school. Smaller class sizes, more personalized attention, and additional support create a caring and comfortable learning environment where students are more willing to further their education (Aron & Zweig, 2003).

Research Question #2. When comparing the average of semester grades for school-within-a-school participants in each core subject before, during, and after attendance in the school-within-a-school program, will they increase?

Conclusions. The overall results of the academic data analysis showed a statistically significant difference in students' grades while enrolled in the school-within-a-school program. When comparing students' grades during the program to

the following school year, there was an observable decrease in students' grades but not a statistically significant difference. Additionally, when comparing students' grades before to after participation in the program, there was not a statistically significant difference in grades. It appears from the study that a one-year school-within-a-school program may not be long enough to ensure these at-risk students academically remain on the right track toward graduation. In order to continue making academic gains, students must be responsible for their learning needs and able to seek assistance when having difficulties. Strong study and organizational skills are also essential when transitioning into a larger learning environment with less individual attention. These students may need more time to understand how they learn best and what to do to cope with their educational weaknesses. Unfortunately, there is limited research available on the academic outcomes of alternative programs (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006).

Research Question #3. While attending the school-within-a-school program, will the number of semester F's for this select group of at-risk students decrease as compared to middle school?

Conclusions. For the 2009-2010 school-within-a-school participants, seven out of the 42 students had one or more F's in their core subjects. During middle school, 22 of 38 students in seventh grade and 28 of 39 students in eighth grade had at least one F in their core subjects. The actual number of semester F's that school-within-a-school participants earned was eight during their freshman year as compared to 68 in seventh grade and 111 in eighth grade. For the 2010-2011 school-within-a-school participants, 16 out of 52 students had one or more F's in their core subjects. During middle school, 29 of 42 students in seventh grade and 40 of 52 students in eighth grade had at least one F in their core subjects. The actual number of semester

F's that school-within-a-school participants earned was 45 during their freshman year as compared to 85 in seventh grade and 142 in eighth grade. For both school-within-a-school groups, the number of students with F's and the actual number of semester F's decreased during their attendance in the program as compared to their middle school experiences. "Not surprisingly, poor school performance is a strong predictor of dropping out of school. For example, low test scores, course failure, and grade retention have all been found to be strongly associated with leaving school" (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009, p. 84). While enrolled in the school-within-a-school program, there was a significant decrease in the number of students failing courses. After attendance in the program, fewer students were failing courses than in middle school; however, more students were failing courses in comparison to their participation in the school-within-a-school program. According to Allensworth and Easton (2007), "grades are the most important determinant of graduating from high school, going to college, and graduating from college" (p. 41). In order to ensure these students are academically prepared to transition back into the traditional school setting, it is important for the school-within-a-school teachers to collaborate with other teachers in the same grade level. By using the same common assessments and providing high-quality instruction, these students will possess the opportunity to gain the same skills as the traditional students to transition smoothly into their courses.

Research Question #4. Is there an increase in the attendance of students participating in the school-within-a-school program as compared to their middle school attendance?

Conclusions. There was no statistical evidence to demonstrate that this one-year school-within-a-school program was effective in increasing the attendance of at-risk students; however, there was an observable shift their sophomore year where the

attendance rate was lower than their previous years. Since school districts receive funding based on attendance, most try to provide incentives and monitor it closely. Currently, the only attendance incentive at Progress Heights High is for students who would like to be eligible for two years of free tuition at a public community college through the A+ program. These students must maintain at least 95% attendance for all four years of high school along with various other requirements. For both school-within-a-school groups, their middle school attendance rate was 92%. During their freshman year, the attendance of the 2009-2010 SWS Group A increased to 93% while the 2010-2011 SWS Group B fell to 91%. "Attendance is the most important determinant of passing classes and graduating. Even a week of absence per semester substantially increases the likelihood of failing a class" (Allensworth & Easton, 2007, p. 41). Therefore, schools need to emphasize to both parents and students the importance of regular school attendance. Providing students with attendance incentives could also spread the message that attendance matters. However, the best way to ensure that students willingly attend school is to provide a positive learning environment with student engagement, a sense of belonging, and the ability to develop supportive interpersonal relationships with their teachers (Wilkins, 2008). "As noted, weak student engagement, often measured by absenteeism and discipline problems in survey data, is also strongly linked with a higher dropout probability" (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009, p. 84).

Research Question #5. Do the perceptions of school for these at-risk students change when comparing their middle school academic experiences to their school-within-a-school academic experiences?

Conclusions. The overall results of the student survey analysis supported that there was a difference in students' perceptions of the school-within-a-school program

as compared to their perceptions of middle school. The three areas that received the highest percentage of students in agreement with the statement included students receiving prompt feedback from their teachers, students receiving support to succeed in school from their teachers, and the importance of making good grades. Their responses indicated that the students perceived the school-within-a-school program to be beneficial. There was a large shift in students' overall satisfaction with this program as compared to their middle school experiences.

Academic counseling and support "often makes the difference in terms of keeping students on track, retaining them in the program, and customizing academic offerings to their needs and interests" (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006, p. 31). Only 35% of the school-within-a-school participants reported that they received the support from their teachers to succeed in middle school. The lack of support that most of these students reported receiving had negative consequences on their middle school educational experiences. Only 29% of these students took pride in their work and only 16% were excited about their classes. These alarming percentages put these students at-risk of not graduating. After participating in the school-within-a-school program, the percentage dramatically increased to 87% of the participants believing they received support from their teachers to succeed, 70% taking pride in their work, and 66% excited about their classes. The smaller learning environment allowed students to receive individualized attention based on their learning needs, strengths, and life situations (Ruzzi & Kraemer, 2006).

Teachers who create lessons that are interesting and relevant are able to keep students engaged; often students cite "some measure of school disengagement as the primary reason for leaving school" (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009, p. 84). The fact that only 16% of the school-within-a-school participants reported that they were excited

about their classes in middle school suggests that these students may have been well on their way to disengaging from school. This percentage increased to 66% after one year in the school-within-a-school program. When these students transition back into the traditional school setting, this percent could even continue to rise. By enacting these suggestions on a school-wide level, there may even be a reduction in the dropout rate (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

By conducting annual student surveys, educators can examine the participants' perspectives on the effectiveness of the program. Then the administrators, teachers, and counselors can determine the areas of the program that need modified and new procedures that need implemented. The feedback will strengthen the program and the support each student is receiving. "In a world in which education is becoming ever more important, finding solutions to the dropout problem is one of the most pressing issues facing America's high schools" (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009, p. 95). By gathering and analyzing data, educators will see a clearer picture of the reality of the dropout situation (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009).

Recommendations for Progress Heights High

The school-within-a-school program has been effective at increasing students' academic achievement while they participated in the program; however, it has shown to be ineffective at having a significant difference in their grades the following school year. There was an observable drop in students' grades after the program and an observable increase in students' grades when comparing their middle school experiences to their sophomore year after the program. Based on the results of this study, the transition from the school-within-a-school program to the traditional school setting does not provide students enough support to sustain the positive results the program is producing. Although these students are able to enroll in a school-within-a-

school academic lab during their sophomore year and can earn an elective credit for the course, it is only for one hour at the end of the school day. Students have an hour to receive academic assistance from either the math or the communication arts school-within-a-school teacher who has to divide his or her time between all of her students.

By providing programs that not only place at-risk students on the right track toward graduation but also continue to monitor their progress until they are well underway to graduation, schools can effectively meet the needs of their at-risk students. At Progress Heights High, the administration and school-within-a-school teachers outline the expectations and ensure both the students and parents agree to follow them before enrollment into the program. However, there must be consequences in place when students or parents deviate from the expectations during the program. Educators often encounter a difficult task receiving parental support, participation, and buy in for school initiatives, but it is important to involve parents as much as possible in their children's education (Somers et al., 2009). "The power of parents to shape their children, though well documented in the literature, may often be underemphasized or even overlooked by schools" (Somers et al., 2009, p. 355). The following are the researcher's recommendations for the school-within-a-school program as the effectiveness of the program is determined:

1. Continue with the use of the school-within-a-school program to assist at-risk students with the transition to high school, and possibly expand the program to include two teams allowing more students the opportunity to participate.
2. Consider extending the program into the participants' sophomore year and perhaps provide the students with a different team of teachers their second year.

3. The year after participation in the program, provide students with an academic lab in the middle of the school day when the material is fresh and they have energy to complete their work.

4. To motivate school-within-a-school students after transitioning into the larger traditional school setting, consider recognizing more of their academic improvements.

5. To prepare school-within-a-school students for the transition back into the traditional school setting, collaborate with other teachers in the same grade level and administer the same common assessments that students receive in the regular school setting for core subject areas.

6. Middle school and high school teachers need ongoing professional development to work effectively with at-risk students academically, socially, and behaviorally.

7. Reexamine the contract that is set up for the school-within-a-school program between the students and parents. The students, parents, teachers, and administration must agree upon the expectations in the contract. They must also agree on consequences to these expectations if not fulfilled.

8. Consider adding a work-study program to the school-within-a-school experience where students are involved in job shadowing and activities that inform them of the amount of education required for various positions. Assist these students in making better connections between possible career choices and the requirements to achieve each choice so they can begin to set goals for themselves early on.

9. Consider making it mandatory for parent(s) to be involved in their child's education by attending student-teacher conferences and one school activity per quarter.

10. Provide regular attendance incentives and consequences for not meeting the attendance requirements. A possible solution to increasing attendance would be a

district-wide attendance incentive where students could be exempt from certain finals based on a combination of their grades and attendance in the course. Other options include offering students a free prom pass, a free activity pass, or a free yearbook.

Recommendations for Future Studies

This study implies the need for a formal transition program for school-within-a-school participants returning to the traditional school setting their sophomore year. In order for this experience to be effective, the school-within-a-school program must coordinate with the traditional high school teachers to provide academic and social support systems for these students. A transitional team consisting of the student, the student's parent(s), regular education and school-within-a-school teachers, a counselor, a peer mentor, and an administrator would be beneficial in providing a support system with caring individuals the student could meet with on a regular basis to discuss progress and seek assistance. Expectations must be set up and regularly monitored for all stakeholders involved in the transitional team. These students need teachers who support and challenge their learning. The success of their transition back into the traditional school setting depends upon the amount of resources provided to them, the level of communication that exists between the school-within-a-school program and the traditional high school, and the willingness of all stakeholders to take an active role in each student's education. "As they return to the schools where they previously have failed, their outcomes will hinge on whether they have the inner strengths and external supports to maintain their fledgling success" (McCall, 2003, p. 114). The following are recommendations for future studies:

1. Replicate this study using data from similar districts who also implement similar, yearlong transitional program for at-risk students.

2. Replicate this study tracking individual students' perceptions, academic achievement, and attendance performance before, during, and after the school-within-a-school program.

3. Compare data on specific core courses before, during, and after the program to determine if there are trends in certain subjects.

4. Determine how incoming at-risk students would have performed in the absence of the school-within-a-school program by comparing these students to the other three high schools in the district that did not provide their at-risk students with this program.

5. Continue to track the school-within-a-school participants' progress throughout high school and determine how many of these students end up at the district's alternative program, drop out, or graduate from high school.

6. Utilize standardized testing data or pre-tests and post-tests to determine the participants' actual skill level before and after completion of the school-within-a-school program.

7. Collect survey data from teachers, administrators, counselors, and parents on their perceptions of the school-within-a-school program.

8. Extend data collection to generate more in-depth results of the program's effectiveness. According to Lange and Sletten (2002), "the limitation of short-term evaluations with an at-risk population may need time to adjust and make academic gains" (p. 18).

Summary

Alternative programs are an increasingly popular option for keeping kids in school and lowering the dropout rate. They vary from required programs to environments that students attend by choice. For many years, educators have debated

whether alternative programs are effective solutions at providing at-risk students a second chance at succeeding and being productive members of society. Unfortunately, there is not enough information on how effective alternative programs are at meeting the educational needs of students and improving their outcomes (Aron & Zweig, 2003). "Filling these research gaps would help identify appropriate policies and strategies to meet this great societal need" (Aron & Zweig, 2003, p. 19).

Over a million students each year are not graduating from high school; this staggering number of dropouts results in costs to the students and society (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). "Individual costs include lower earnings, higher likelihood of unemployment, and greater likelihood of health problems….societal costs include loss of tax revenue, higher spending on public assistance, and higher crime rates" (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009, p. 77). Students do not make an immediate decision to drop out of school; in fact, most have encountered many years of disengagement from the school environment before choosing to drop out (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). Due to the increasingly large number of students choosing to drop out each year, state and federal guidelines through the No Child Left Behind Act have mandated that school districts be held more accountable for their graduation rates (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). "Alternative schools have evolved from a promise made within the American educational system—the promise to educate all students, no matter their circumstances or educational issues" (Lange & Sletten, 2002, p. 24).

This study focused on a transitional alternative program for first-year, at-risk freshman. Although many alternative programs are separate from the traditional school setting, this school-within-a-school program was located in the traditional school building. The researcher studied the program's effects on academics, attendance, and student perceptions of school. Overall, the results of this study have

shown that the school-within-a-school program at Progress Heights High is effective at increasing students' academic achievement and their perceptions of school while enrolled in the program; however, this program did not have a significant effect on increasing students' attendance. There is a strong connection between students' attendance and academic achievement in ninth grade and eventual graduation from high school (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). The results of this study will be beneficial to other school districts seeking the implementation of a transitional alternative program in the traditional school setting for at-risk freshman.

Although it is expensive to keep students in school, it becomes even more costly to provide for them when they drop out early (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009). "If the 1.3 million high school dropouts from the Class of 2010 had earned their diplomas instead of dropping out, the U.S. economy would have seen an additional $337 billion in wages over these students' lifetimes" (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010, para. 1). Educators and researchers continue to explore dropout-prevention programs. "What lies ahead is learning not only how to keep students in school, but also how to muster the public will to fund and support programs that are proven effective in doing so" (Tyler & Lofstrom, 2009, p. 96). Meanwhile, teachers must continue to identify students who are failing, determine why, and provide them with the support they need to ensure they do not become a statistic.

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IRB Application

(Appendix A)

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY

Application for IRB Review of Research Proposal Involving Human Subjects

Proposal #_____

1. Title of Project:

School-Within-a-School and Its Effectiveness as Measured by Improved Grades, Increased Attendance, and Student Satisfaction

2. Dissertation Chair:	Department:	Extension:	e-mail:
Dr. Sherrie Wisdom	**Education**	**(636) 949-4478**	**swisdom@lindenwood.edu**

3. Primary Investigator:	Department:	Local phone:	e-mail:
Amanda Shelmire	**Education**	**(636) 970-0312**	**ashelmire@fz.k12.mo.us**

4. Anticipated starting date for this project: **Upon Approval** ending date: **May 2011**

(collection of *primary* data – data you collect yourself - cannot begin without IRB approval)

5. State the purpose of this proposed project (*what do you want to accomplish?*)**:**

According to Neild and Balfanz (2006), two factors that are strong predictors of future dropouts include students that attend school less than 80 percent of the time and/or receive a failing grade in math and/or English.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the school-within-a-school program on student success, using the school district's outcome measures of GPA and attendance while also using data gathered from surveys and focus groups to examine student perceptions of the program.

- **I will study the effects the program has on grade point average and attendance for our at-risk freshmen students who voluntarily enrolled in the program after being recommended by teachers, counselors, and the administration in eighth grade.**
- **I will also survey students and conduct focus groups to find out more about these students' perceptions of school and whether or not they have changed due to participation in the program.**

The school-within-a-school program operates in an autonomous area of the traditional high school building. With an enrollment of over 2,200 students, it is the largest high school in the district. Approximately 50 students are enrolled in the program and placed in small class sizes with four chosen teachers who work well with struggling learners.

Students were considered to be at-risk if they had two or more failing grades in core courses and/or poor attendance.

6. State the rationale for this proposed project (*why is this worth accomplishing?*):

The intent of the 2009-2010 implementation of the school-within-a-school program at Progress Heights High was to help prepare and ease the transition of at-risk freshmen students into high school. The school-within-a-school program assists students before they begin to struggle and subsequently drop out of high school.

This study will evaluate the effectiveness of the school-within-a-school program on student success, using the school district's outcome measures of GPA and attendance while also using data gathered from surveys and focus groups to examine student perceptions of the program.

Over the next decade, more than 12 million students will drop out, costing the nation more than $3 trillion (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007). Furthermore, it is practically impossible for individuals lacking a high school diploma to earn a living or participate meaningfully in civic life (Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog, 2007). The success of many small schools can be attributed to the fact that they build a community within them and give teachers more flexibility and opportunities to engage students in learning (Gilson, 2006). The school-within-a-school program was designed to meet the needs of students who have not benefitted from the traditional school setting.

7. State the hypothesis(es) or research question(s) of the proposed project:

Null Hypothesis #1: At-risk freshmen who participate in the school-within-a-school program for at least one year will not show a measureable change in GPA when compared with their previous three years of classes.

Null Hypothesis #2: At-risk freshmen who participate in the school-within-a-school program for at least one year will not show a measureable change in attendance when compared with their previous three years of classes.

Hypothesis #1: At-risk freshmen who participate in the school-within-a-school program for at least one year will show a measureable change in GPA when compared with their previous three years of classes.

Hypothesis #2: At-risk freshmen who participate in the school-within-a-school program for at least one year will show a measureable change in attendance when compared with their previous three years of classes.

Research Question: What effects does a school-within-a-school program for at-risk freshmen students have on overall student perception of high school as compared to perception of experiences in middle school?

8. Has this research project been reviewed or is it currently being reviewed by an IRB at another institution? If so, please state when, where, and disposition (approval/non-approval/pending). **No**

9. Participants involved in the study:

a. Indicate how many persons, of what type, will be recruited as participants in this study.

LU participants _____ Undergraduate students (Lindenwood Participant Pool)

_____ Graduate students

_____ Faculty and/or staff

Non-LU participants _____ Children / Adolescents [need guardian's consent]

_____ Adults

_____ Persons with diminished autonomy (e.g. seniors, medical patients, persons in correctional facilities, etc.)

__X__ Other (specify): **I will not recruit participants for this study. Students have already been selected for the school-within-a-school program. A survey will be given to the 2009-2010 past program participants, and three surveys will be given to the 2010-2011 current program participants. The first survey will be given at the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year and ask about their perceptions of middle school. The second survey will be given at the end of first semester and, again, at the end of second semester asking about perceptions of the school-within-a-school program. I would like to see if their perceptions change throughout the school year.**

b. From what source(s) will the potential participants be recruited? (specify):

The middle school administrators, counselors, and teachers identified and selected the students who were eligible to participate in the school-within-a-school program.

c. Describe the process of participant recruitment.

Provide a copy of any materials to be used for recruitment (e.g. posters, flyers, advertisements, letters, telephone and other verbal scripts).

Teachers, counselors, and administrators from eighth grade looked for students with attendance and motivation concerns who may benefit from a small environment. These educators tried to stay away from recommending students with extreme behavior issues and/or students who required several special education classes. They based their selection on students who had two or more failing grades in core courses, poor attendance, and/or might benefit from the extra small group attention.

d. If any persons within the selected group(s) are being excluded, please explain who is being excluded and why. (Note: LU Participant Pool students must be allowed to participate, though they may be excluded when analyzing data.)

The only participants in the at-risk freshmen alternative program that will be excluded will be the students whose parents indicate in the permission form that they do not want their child to participate in the study.

e. Where will the study take place?

__X__ On campus – Explain: _____ Off campus – Explain:

Progress Heights High School

10. Methodology/procedures:

a. Provide a sequential description of the procedures to be used in this study.

Data will be obtained from School Information System (SIS) reports for grade and attendance information on each participant. Each participant will be assigned an ID number in order to refer to their progress anonymously. Likert-scale surveys will be given to the participants involved in the program. The surveys will be given by the school-within-a-school teachers and not connected to each student's ID number.

- **For the students who participated in the program during the 2009-2010 school year, semester grades and attendance will be recorded from sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth grade. These students will only be given one survey at the beginning of their sophomore year asking about their perceptions of the program and preparedness for tenth grade.**
- **For the students who participate in the program during the 2010-2011 school year, semester grades and attendance will be recorded from sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth grade. These students will be surveyed at the beginning (August), middle (December), and end (May) of the program. They will be asked about their perceptions of their middle school experiences and current experiences in the school-within-a-school program.**

Two focus groups, consisting of 5-8 students per group, will be conducted by a teacher not affiliated with the school-within-a-school program. The first focus group interview will be conducted within the first weeks of school for the previous

year's school-within-a-school participants. The second focus group interview will be conducted toward the end of the 2010-2011 school year for the current program's participants.

IDs for those students providing data for grade point average and attendance will be listed. Random samples (size 30) will be chosen from the list, with the help of randomization software. And, then secondary data will be analyzed for change in measurement. Survey and focus group responses will be summarized and analyzed for trends.

b. Which of the following data-gathering procedures will be used?

Provide a copy of all materials to be used in this study with application.

_____ Observing participants (i.e. in a classroom, playground, school board meeting etc)

__X__ Survey / questionnaire: _X_ (paper) ___ (email) ___ (web based)

Source of survey: **compiled by the researcher**

__X__ Interview(s) ___ (in person) ___ (by telephone) _X_ Focus group(s)

__X__ Audio recording **Focus Groups** Videotaping

__X__ Analysis of secondary data - specify source: **Progress Heights High's School Information System (SIS)**

_____ Other (specify)

11. Will the results of this research be made accessible to participants, institutions, or schools/district? If yes, explain how.

Yes, the aggregate results will be made available to the superintendent and assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. This aggregate data will also be made available to administrators at the middle and high school levels in the district and future incoming at-risk freshmen and their parents when being informed of the program.

12. Potential Benefits and Compensation from the Study:

a. Identify and describe any known or anticipated benefits to the participants (perhaps academic, psychological, or social) from their involvement in the project.

b. Identify and describe any known or anticipated benefits to society from this study.

The benefits to society from this study are to provide an analysis of the benefits of a program for students, who are at-risk of dropping out of school, that allows them to transition into high school in a smaller school environment and receive

the assistance they need to achieve academic success. Keeping these students in school helps them to become more productive members of society.

c. Describe any anticipated compensation to participants (money, grades, extra credit).

There will not be any compensation given to the participants.

13. Potential Risks from the Study:

a. Identify and describe any known or anticipated risks (i.e. physical, psychological, social, economic, legal, etc) to participants involved in this study:

b. Describe, in detail, how your research design addresses these potential risks:
Students will be surveyed and participate in focus groups voluntarily and anonymously. Parental permission will be required of all participants. Participants will remain anonymous.

c. Will deception be used in this study? If so, explain the rationale. **No**

d. Does this project involve gathering information about *sensitive topics*? **No**

[*Sensitive topics* defined as: political affiliations; psychological disorders of participants or their families; sexual behavior or attitudes; illegal, antisocial, self-incriminating or demeaning behavior; critical appraisals of participants' families or employers; legally recognized privileged relationships (lawyers, doctors, ministers); income; religious beliefs and practices.

If so, explain: S**ensitive topics will not be discussed.**

e. Explain the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity of participants and confidentiality of data during the data gathering phase of the research, in the storage of data, and in the release of the findings.
When gathering data, all forms will be stored in a locked drawer in my classroom. The survey forms and information obtained from focus groups will not include the participants' names. No names will be associated with any of the data. When the study is over, all information will be shredded and disposed.

f. How will confidentiality be explained to participants?
The parents will receive a permission form stating that their child's name or any identifying information will not be tied to any of the data obtained. The researcher will instruct the teachers distributing the surveys to inform the students that their name and identifying information should not be written on the surveys.

g. Indicate the duration and location of secure data storage and the method to be used for final disposition of the data.
Paper Records

__X__ Data will be retained until completion of project and then destroyed.

_____ Data will be retained indefinitely in a secure location.

Where? _____

Audio/Video Recordings

__X__ Audio/video tapes will be erased after completion of project.

_____ Data will be retained indefinitely in a secure location.

Where? _____

Electronic Data (computer files)

__X__ Electronic data will be erased after completion of project.

_____ Data will be retained indefinitely in a secure location.

Where? _____

14. Informed Consent Process:

a. What process will be used to inform the potential participants about the study details and (if necessary) to obtain their written consent for participation?

__X__ An information letter / written consent form for participants or their legally authorized agents will be used; include a copy with application.

__X__ An information letter from director of institution involved will be provided; include a copy with application.

_____ Other (specify):

b. What special provisions have been made for providing information to those not fluent in English, mentally disabled persons, or other populations for whom it may be difficult to ensure that they can give informed consent?

Does Not Apply

15. All supporting materials/documentation for this application are to be submitted electronically with the application to IRB@lindenwood.edu. Please indicate which appendices are included with your application. Submission of an incomplete application package will result in the application being returned to you unevaluated.

_____ Recruitment materials: A copy of any posters, fliers, advertisements, letters, telephone or other verbal scripts used to recruit/gain access to participants.

__X__ Data gathering materials: A copy of all surveys, questionnaires, interview questions, focus group questions, or any standardized tests used to collect data.

_____ Information letter for participants.

_____ Informed Consent Form: Adult

__X__ Informed Consent Form: guardian to sign consent for minor to participate

__X__ Informed Assent Form for minors

_____ Information/Cover letters used in studies involving surveys or questionnaires.

__X__ Permission letter from research site

_____ Other:

In submitting this application the Principle Investigator certifies the information in this proposal is complete and accurate.

Adapted, in part, from LU Ethics Form 8/03

Revised 9/08 Revised 3/09 Revised 1-21-2010

IRB Approval

(Appendix B)

11-06
IRB Project Number

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board Disposition Report

To: Amanda Shelmire
CC: Dr. Sherrie Wisdom

The IRB has reviewed the resubmission of your application for research and has approved the application.

Ricardo Delgado — 10/11/10
Institutional Review Board Chair — Date

Surveys

(Appendix C)

Survey for Former School-Within-a-School (SWS) Participants

Directions: This survey reflects your perceptions about past experiences with your academic classes in the school-within-a-school program during the 2009-2010 school year. There are not any right or wrong responses.

Circle the level to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1.) I received prompt feedback from teachers during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

2.) I discussed grades and/or assignments with my teacher(s) during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

3.) I received support from my teachers to succeed in school during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

4.) I received recognition for my academic improvement during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

5.) I received the necessary skills to complete my work during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

6.) I believed it was important to make good grades during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

7.) I took pride in my work during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

8.) I was excited about my classes during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

9.) I learned material that I thought was useful during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

10.) I got along with other students during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

11.) I got along with my teachers during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

12.) I was able to develop clear career goals during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

13.) I took responsibility for my behavior during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

14.) I felt safe at school during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

15.) I felt accepted for who I am during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

16.) I had at least one adult who cared and knew me well at school during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

Middle School Survey
for
Freshman School-Within-a-School (SWS) Participants

Directions: This survey reflects your perceptions about past experiences with your academic classes in middle school. There are not any right or wrong responses.

Circle the level to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1.) I received prompt feedback from my teachers during my middle school experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

2.) I discussed my grades and/or assignments with my teacher(s) during my middle school experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

3.) I received support from my teachers to succeed in school during my middle school experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

4.) I received recognition for my academic improvement during middle school.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

5.) I received the necessary skills to complete my work during my middle school experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

6.) I believed it was important to make good grades during middle school.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

7.) I took pride in my work during my middle school experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

8.) I was excited about my classes during my middle school experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

9.) I learned material that I thought was useful during my middle school experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

10.) I got along with other students during my middle school experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

11.) I got along with my teachers during my middle school experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

12.) I was able to develop clear career goals during my middle school experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

13.) I took responsibility for my behavior during my middle school experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

14.) I felt safe at school during my middle school experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

15.) I felt accepted for who I am during my middle school experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

16.) I had at least one adult who cared and knew me well at school during my middle school experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

Survey for School-Within-a-School (SWS) Participants (End of First Semester)

Directions: This survey reflects your perceptions about current experiences with your academic classes in the school-within-a-school program during the 2010-2011 school year. There are not any right or wrong responses.

Circle the level to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1.) I receive prompt feedback from teachers during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

2.) I discuss grades and/or assignments with my teacher(s) during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

3.) I receive support from my teachers to succeed in school during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

4.) I receive recognition for my academic improvement during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

5.) I receive the necessary skills to complete my work during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

6.) I believe it is important to make good grades during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

7.) I take pride in my work during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

8.) I am excited about my classes during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

9.) I learn material that I think is useful during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

10.) I get along with other students during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

11.) I get along with my teachers during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

12.) I am able to develop clear career goals during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

13.) I take responsibility for my behavior during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

14.) I feel safe at school during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

15.) I feel accepted for who I am during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

16.) I have at least one adult who cares and knows me well at school during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

Survey for School-Within-a-School (SWS) Participants (End of 2010-2011 School Year)

Directions: This survey reflects your perceptions about experiences with your academic classes in the school-within-a-school program during the 2010-2011 school year. There are not any right or wrong responses.

Circle the level to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

1.) I received prompt feedback from teachers during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

2.) I discussed grades and/or assignments with my teacher(s) during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

3.) I received support from my teachers to succeed in school during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

4.) I received recognition for my academic improvement during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

5.) I received the necessary skills to complete my work during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

6.) I believed it was important to make good grades during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

7.) I took pride in my work during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

8.) I was excited about my classes during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

9.) I learned material that I thought was useful during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

10.) I got along with other students during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

11.) I got along with my teachers during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

12.) I was able to develop clear career goals during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

13.) I took responsibility for my behavior during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

14.) I felt safe at school during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

15.) I felt accepted for who I am during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

16.) I had at least one adult who cared and knew me well at school during my SWS experience.

Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree

Survey Results

(Appendix D)

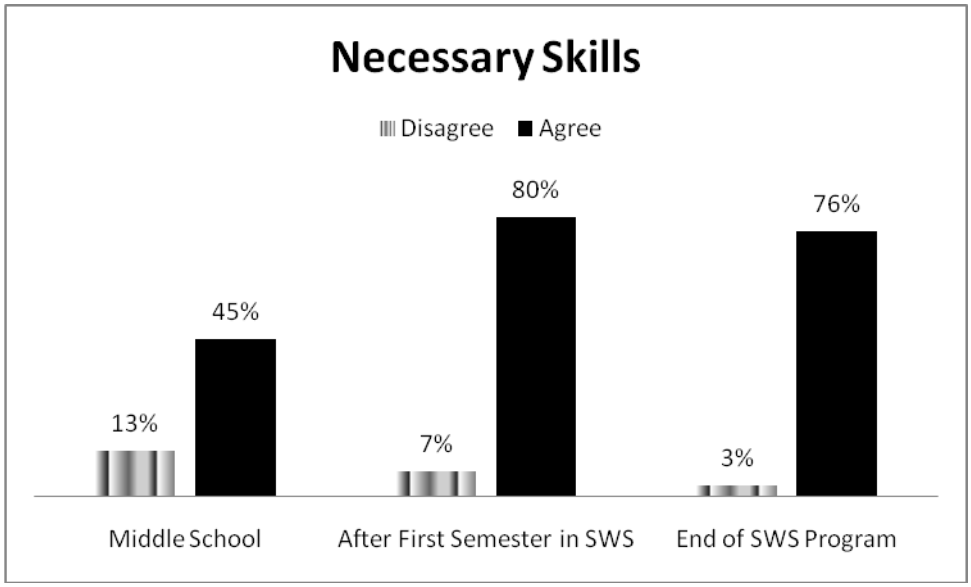

Figure A1. Responses to survey question 5.

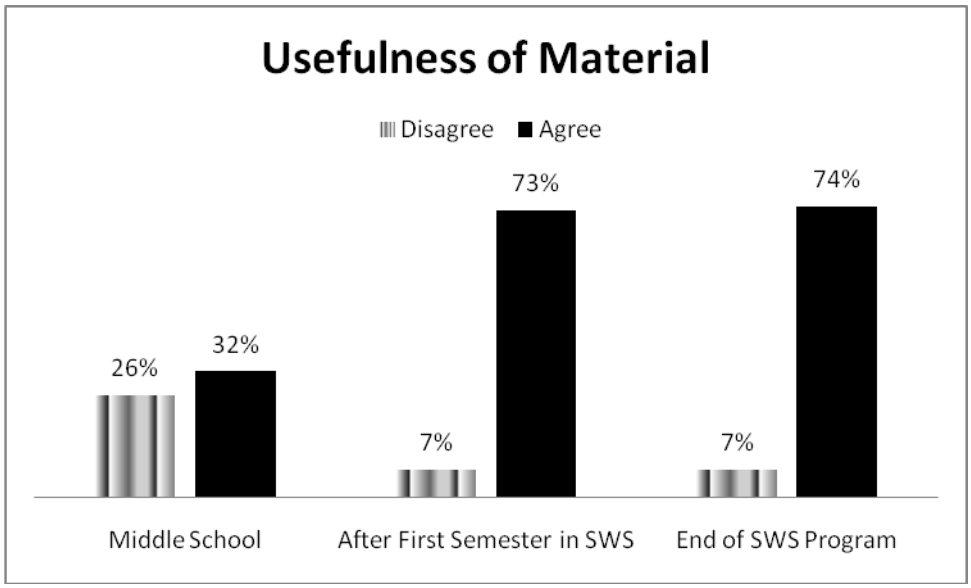

Figure A2. Responses to survey question 9.

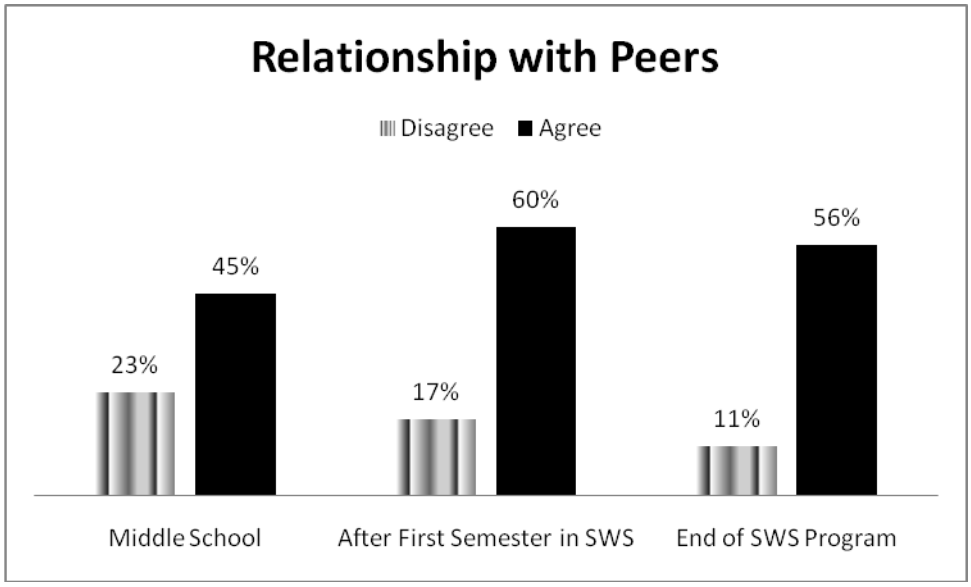

Figure A3. Responses to survey question 10.

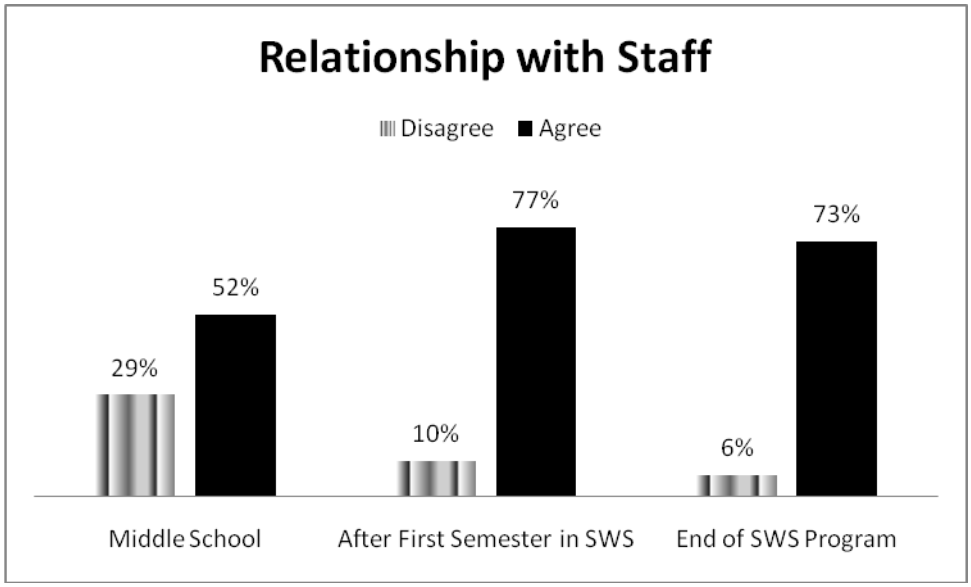

Figure A4. Responses to survey question 11.

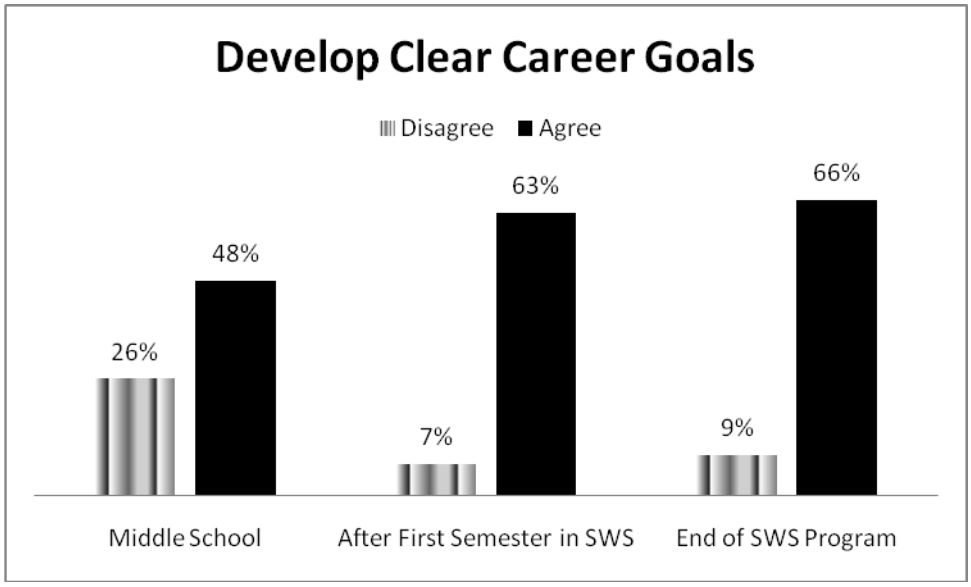

Figure A5. Responses to survey question 12.

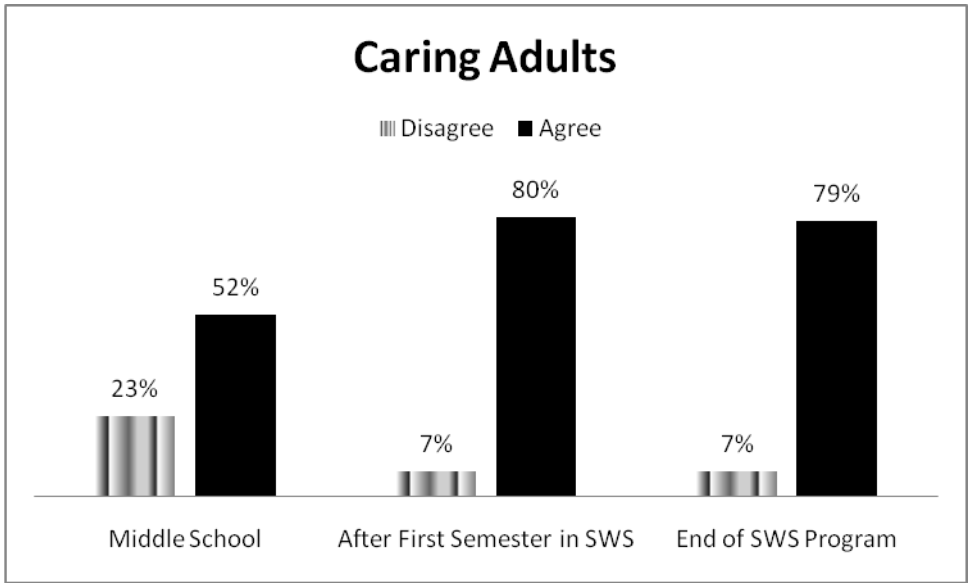

Figure A6. Responses to survey question 16.

SWS Contract

(Appendix E)

Positive Contract

School Within a School

It is an expectation that our students will attend school at a rate of 95%.

After a student has missed two days of school in a quarter, they will be required to attend make up sessions of 60 minutes for every day missed. These sessions are not intended for punishment on the contrary, they are set up before and after school to provide an opportunity to make up work and time.

It is an expectation that our students will complete all homework and coursework.

Students will be provided time during our regular school day to work on assignments. If additional help is needed, teachers will be available before and after school.

It is an expectation that students participate in school activities outside the regular school day.

Students need to either join a club or participate in an activity. They are also strongly encouraged to attend at least one extracurricular activity per quarter.

It is an expectation that students participate in weekly seminar activities.

Every Friday students will participate in activities that include goal setting and reflection, college and career planning, character education, study skills, organization and journal writing.

It is an expectation that parents will attend teacher conferences whenever they are scheduled.

Our first parent and teacher conference will be scheduled for every student in the program at the end of our first grading period (September). After the initial meetings, teachers will schedule conferences quarterly or as needed.

It is an expectation that every student who successfully completes this program will meet the following goals.

1) *Have at least six credits and thus qualify for sophomore status.*
2) *Perform at or above grade level in reading and mathematics.*

_____ _____

Parent Signature Student Signature

Progress Heights High

Professional Vitaé
Amanda E. Shelmire

Academic Degrees

EdD (pursuing)	Lindenwood University Educational Administration	2011
MA	Lindenwood University Educational Administration	2008
BA	Lindenwood University Secondary Math Education	2004

Professional Experience

Fort Zumwalt School District 2004–Present
Educator of Mathematics – Fort Zumwalt West High School
Algebra IB, Algebra I, Informal Geometry, Geometry, Algebra II

Certifications

Missouri Administrator Certification (7-12)
Missouri Mathematics Certification (5-9)
Missouri Mathematics Certification (9-12)

Activities

National Honor Society Sponsor
Assessment Committee
F.I.S.H. Committee
Mathematics Curriculum Writing
Geometry P.L.C. Committee

Awards and Honors

Fort Zumwalt West Teacher of the Year 2011
Wal-Mart Teacher of the Year 2009
Perfect Attendance 2005 – 2008
Nominee for Teacher of the Year 2005 – 2006, 2009 – 2010
Cum Laude, Lindenwood University 2004
Alpha Lambda Delta, Freshman Honor Society
Dean's Honor Roll 2000 – 2004
Kappa Delta Pi, Education Honor Society
LindenLeader Award for outstanding work performance
Pi Mu Epsilon, Mathematics Honor Society
Alpha Sigma Tau, Academic Honorary Society