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Effects of the A+ Schools Program on Attendance, Dropout Rate, and Student Achievement

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EFFECTS OF THE A+ SCHOOLS PROGRAM ON ATTENDANCE, DROPOUT RATE, AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

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Doctor of Education

School of Education

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 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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This dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment
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Dr. Terry Reid, Dissertation Chair — Aug 6, 2009 — Date

Dr. Sherry DeVore, Committee Member — Aug. 6, 2009 — Date

Dr. Howard Neeley, Committee Member — August 6, 2009 — Date

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the memory of Bryan K. Silvey and Darin W. Price. I am ever grateful for the guidance, direction, and friendship that these two offered. They both lost their lives in a car accident July 28, 2001, and will never be forgotten. Bryan motivated me to become a better educator, and Darin was always there to support both of us during our early years of administrative growth. I would not have had the success in my life without their friendship.

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Abstract

In this study, the results of Missouri Assessment Program student achievement and average daily attendance of schools designated A+ Schools by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE) were examined to determine if student achievement and average daily attendance results are higher in eligible A+ Schools. Student Missouri Assessment Program achievement results, dropout rates, and average daily attendance percentages were obtained from randomly selected school district populations. This information was compared to a second subject group of the same population for schools not designated A+ Schools by MDESE. The reporting period data was compiled from the 2007-08 school year. Schools with an A+ Program did not show a significant difference in attendance, drop out rate, and student achievement when compared to the selected schools without the A+ Program.

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CHAPTER I-INTRODUCTION

Background

Educating children to their fullest potential has been a hotly debated issue that dates back over many years in the history of educational improvement (Mirel, 2006; Puriefoy, 2005). The elements needed to provide that education have been identified and argued for the same number of years (Fullan, Hill & Crevola, 2006). The task of improving public schools is crucial at the high school level. It is there that students face critical decisions that shape their future and life decisions (Mirel). Nowhere is the potential to positively impact the education of generations greater than the high school. Quality education is not a new concept, nor is it one that has a ready, successful solution (Williamson, 2007).

The development of the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 was to provide school improvement programs to unite school communities toward the same purpose (Missouri Department of Secondary and Elementary [MDESE], 2007a). The Outstanding Schools Act raised academic standards, driving the need for incentives to motivate schools to reduce the dropout rate, improve attendance, increase student achievement, eliminate general track education

curriculum, provide better career pathways for all students, and work more closely with businesses in the community and post secondary higher education (Ko, 2006). Striving to achieve these goals involves motivation, not only from the students but teachers and community members as well. Actively incorporating several groups creates more shared involvement resulting in school district success (Robison, 1995).

The original focus was for the A+ Program to eliminate the traditional general track education and focus on post secondary education opportunities for more Missouri students (MDESE, 2007b). The development of the program was initiated to improve high school graduate opportunities through enhanced high school preparation and offer more access to post secondary opportunities (Robison, 1995). The A+ Program offers students the ability to extend their post-secondary background including vocational training opportunities. Several Missouri institutions across the state offer college bound opportunities in the technical and trade areas. This program includes all Missouri post secondary vocational training and post secondary two year degree offering community colleges (MDESE, 2008).

Led by the efforts of the late Governor Mel Carnahan, Missouri established the A+ Program through the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 (MDESE, 2007b). The Missouri General Assembly in 1994 appropriated funding to establish the program. The primary goal of the A+ Program was to assure that A+ eligible students were prepared to advance into the post secondary training of their choice. The first A+ eligible students entered post secondary institutions in 1997 (“Community,” 2006).

From 1995 to 2008 there have been over 200 million dollars allocated for the implementation of over 250 A+ Schools Programs and tuition allotted for A+ eligible students. Over 77,000 students have qualified to receive the financial incentive since 1997, and more than 28,000 have utilized at least one semester of post secondary education (MDESE, 2008). Starting the 2008 school year, there were 254 designated A+ high schools across the state. Nearly one of every two high schools in the state of Missouri offer the A+ school program tuition based incentive scholarship (MDESE, 2008).

The Missouri A+ program was not the first of its kind. Several programs of similar implementation are currently in place and offering tuition for students. In the State of Georgia, “Helping Outstanding Pupils

Educationally" (HOPE) has been one of the most duplicated and scrutinized programs in the country (Wright, 2008). According to Jacobson (2003), students in the Georgia HOPE program, much like students in the Missouri A+ Program, must meet certain educational criteria to become eligible for in-state tuition. From research on this topic it was determined that the HOPE scholarship was the springboard for many statewide tuition incentive programs (Wright). A major contrast between the two programs is that the HOPE scholarship allows four years of paid tuition scholarships and the A+ program awards students with two years paid of tuition scholarships.

Preparing students to be productive and successful in post secondary opportunities is the cornerstone of the Missouri based A+ Schools Program (MDESE, 2008). To examine the efficiency of statewide tuition programs, this study will focus specifically on the Missouri A+ School Program. The extension of the A+ Schools' concept into the governance structures promotes the inclusion of parents, community members, administrators, teachers, and students in all aspects of problem solving to create an environment that is not only conducive to learning but to working, living, and achieving for anyone involved (MDESE, 2008). The A+ Schools' philosophy provides for ownership of all

decisions made concerning finance, curriculum, students, employees, tutoring, learning, achievement, behavior, and success or failure of each. The specific provision for the A+ Schools Program is stated in the Revised Statues, Chapter 160, Section 160.545. Minimum requirements for the administration of the A+ Schools Program are cited by MDESE in Title % CSR 60-120.060.

Statement of the Problem

Large populations of current public school students view education as something they are required to do instead of an opportunity or right. In a sizeable portion of student populations, education has become something they dread instead of the means of becoming a knowledgeable and contributing member of society (Dunne & Delisio, 1998). The A+ Schools Program can be a strong motivating opportunity that can have a positive impact on student populations and assist both the college bound and the workforce populations (MDESE, 2007c).

The basic elements needed to provide a quality education, identified by MDESE (2007c), include curriculum, attendance, increased grade point averages, and ownership of the decisions that have been made in the school system effecting motivation. Good attendance has been shown to have a positive effect on academic

achievement, promotion, graduation, self esteem, and employment potential of students (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Attendance and the Missouri Assessment Program have become focal points for educators in Missouri to help improve the quality of education. For students to excel on the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) test in and school in general, attendance is a vital aspect (MDESE, 2007c).

Schools across the United States are implementing policies designed to improve attendance which restrict the number of absences to specific limits and impose penalties effecting course grades or course credits on students who exceed excused limits (Turque, 2008). Although courts have ruled in favor of a policy of this nature, A+ Schools have implemented a more positive policy based on financial support to further the education of those students willing to go to school and put forth the effort to meet expected standards (Johnston, 2000). Students in an A+ eligible school who maintain a 95% attendance average over their four year high school career is the main component of A+ criterion that is required (MDESE, 2007a).

The focus on attendance is becoming a mandatory priority for schools across the country. According to the Associated Press (2004), more high schools are looking for ways to boost attendance by offering incentive based

motivators. Nationwide, schools are turning away from stickers and certificates to pre-paid credit cards and big prizes as incentives due to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) education law which requires every school to report truancy figures and attendance rates. Attendance is now an assessment factor that helps determine whether a school goes on the needs improvement list, which then forces schools to allow students to transfer and thereby lose government funding (Associated Press, 2004).

Critics believe that incentives are not the best answer for attendance improvement. Alfie Kohn, a Massachusetts-based former teacher and author, stated that schools are sending the wrong message and are dangling goodies in front of students (Associated Press, 2004). Monty Neill, executive director of the Center for Fair & Open Testing in Cambridge, also reported that schools are so focused on improving test scores, and punishing those who don't make the cut, that students are frustrated (Associated Press).

In Missouri, the 2007 overall attendance rates for students in a kindergarten through 12th grade setting were at 94.0% statewide (MDESE, 2007c). Schools are required to meet the 94.4% attendance rate for a district population or sanctions from the federal level can be imposed.

Improving the attendance rate is becoming a daily challenge, and each school district is searching for best practices to improve the overall attendance and dropout rate (MDESE, 2008).

Another popular program that continues to grow nationwide is the implementation of the alternative school settings. School districts have been developing this program since the 1960's (Mckee & Conner, 2007). The establishment of the alternative school route is meant to bolster the academic opportunities for students who can not maintain the traditional K-12 track (Mckee & Conner). These programs include students who have fallen behind academically and students who have been removed from the regular school setting. Due to such high regulations set forth by the federal government, educational opportunities are offered at the highest level in today's society. Education has become much improved, and that will eventually benefit the next generation (Harris & Hopkins, 2000).

The results of student achievement from the MAP and building level average daily attendance of high schools that have been designated as A+ Schools by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE, 2007a) were examined to determine if student achievement,

dropout rate, and average daily attendance were improved compared to schools not A+ designated. Student achievement MAP index results, dropout rates, and average daily attendance data were obtained from randomly selected school districts kindergarten through twelfth grade populations. This information was compared to a second subject group of the same size of schools population not designated A+ Schools by MDESE. The reporting period data was compiled during the 2007-08 school year. The study was compiled from the most recent statistical analysis offered from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Purpose of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a significant difference in student average daily attendance, dropout rate, and Missouri Assessment Program achievement scores in high schools that have been designated A+ Schools by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE) and in schools not A+ designated. In the State of Missouri, the A+ School Program offers eligible graduating high school students post secondary tuition incentives for meeting established program criteria. Students enrolled in a high school not

designated A+ by MDESE are not eligible for this post-secondary tuition benefit (MDESE, 2007a).

Importance of the Study

The atmosphere of an A+ School lends itself to the feeling of achievement and belonging. The teachers, students, and school community are responsible for the implementation of the program (MDESE, 2008). Eligible students can take ownership of their future by agreeing to meet the requirements set forth by MDESE and the A+ eligible school program (MDESE, 2007a). Students who maintain a 95% or above attendance rate, 2.5 grade point average, tutor 50 hours, and follow citizenship requirements achieve the opportunity to receive financial assistance to attend a post secondary community college or vocational trade center. Each student can experience the success and exuberance of ownership in his or her choices and decisions (MDESE, 2007a).

According to the A+ Schools Program information (MDESE, 2008) and research cited in this study, there are minimal increases statewide in student achievement, improved attendance, lower dropout rates, and fewer discipline referrals for school districts with the A+ School Program. There is little research to be found that

indicates there is a negative impact on a high school designated as an A + School.

This study will compare average daily attendance, dropout rate, and student MAP achievement index data of students attending an A+ School who are eligible for post secondary financial assistance to those who are not A+ eligible during the 2007-08 school year. This may provide insight as to whether there is a significant difference in attendance and or student achievement due to the A+ Schools Program and school setting. This study will seek to determine if the motivating factor for post secondary financial assistance will promote better high school attendance, reduce dropout rate, and increase student achievement.

Incentive programs are becoming a nation-wide trend, but the A+ program scholarship actually is making a difference in the performance of students eligible for tuition benefits (“Community,” 2006).

Design of the Study

An extensive study of eligible A+ school districts was completed to determine if post secondary financial assistance would affect average daily attendance, dropout rate, and Missouri Assessment Program Communication Arts index scores compared to school districts not eligible for

A+ tuition scholarships. Average daily attendance, dropout percentages, and student achievement data for the 2007-08 school year was compiled from the MDESE data base and was used in a dependent T test to compare means.

Two randomly selected groups were chosen for data analysis comparison. Two variable groups of fifty schools were formed in separate groups of A+ eligible schools versus non eligible A+ schools. The comparison of the data for high school Communication Arts, dropout rate, and student attendance was evaluated by using a two sample paired comparison T test.

Hypothesis

The study sought to answer the following hypotheses:

Ho_1. The mean attendance of students in the A+ Schools Program is not significantly different from the mean attendance of students not eligible for A+ financial assistance.

Ho_2. The mean dropout rate of students in the A+ Schools Program is not significantly different from the mean dropout rate of students not eligible for A+ financial assistance.

Ho_3. The mean MAP Communication Arts index scores in A+ Schools is not significantly different from the mean

MAP Communication Arts index scores of students not eligible for A+ financial assistance.

Limitations

1. Fifty Missouri school districts that are eligible and designated to be a part of the A+ Schools Program were randomly selected for the study.
2. Fifty Missouri school districts that are not eligible and not designated to be a part of the A+ Schools Program were randomly selected for the study.
3. The two randomly selected groups were established by convenience sample.
4. Due to availability of the most current data, the subjects were members of the 2007-08 school year in grades 9-12 meeting A+ eligibility criterion.
5. Due to availability of the most current data, the subjects were members of the 2007-08 school year in grades 9-12 not meeting A+ eligibility criterion.
6. The research data was limited to the 2007-08 high school student average daily attendance data, dropout rates, and MAP achievement index results for Communication Arts of A+ eligible school districts.
7. The research data was limited to the 2007-08 high school student average daily attendance data, dropout rates, and MAP achievement index results for

Communication Arts of school districts not designated A+ Schools.

Operational Definitions

The following operational definitions were provided to ensure understanding of these terms as used in this study:

1. *A+ Eligible School*: A high school that has been identified and designated “A+” by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education located in Jefferson City, MO (MDESE, 2008).
2. *Absenteeism*: Continually not being present at school during the regular scheduled day.
3. Attendance: Being present at school during the regular scheduled school day.
4. Average Daily Attendance: A statistic compiled by the following formula: the sum of the hours attended by each student enrolled divided by the number of hours school is in session.
5. Community College: A post secondary two year institution eligible to accept students with A+ financial assistance.

6. Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE): The administrative governing body of the Missouri State Board of Education.
7. Excused Absence: An absence from school for any reason recognized as legitimate by the school district.
8. Missouri Assessment Program (MAP): Is the assessment program that is directed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education that assesses student achievement in the state of Missouri (MDESE, 2007b).
9. Outstanding Schools Act of 1993: The Missouri State Statute that established and outlined the framework for the A+ School Program (Section 160.545, RSMO).
10. Tardiness: Is the act of being late to a prescribed place at a prescribed time.
11. Truancy: The deliberate absence from school on the part of the student without the knowledge and consent of the parent.
12. Unexcused Absence: An absence from school for a reason that is not recognized by the school as legitimate.

13. Vocational Technical School: A post secondary institution eligible to accept students with A+ financial assistance for vocational training.

Summary

The A+ program was developed to offer more opportunity for graduating high school students to attend community college or receive post-secondary vocational training. Several initiatives have been developed in the past twenty-five years in which successes and failures have evolved.

This study was designed to determine if schools offering incentive based scholarship programs show a difference in student attendance, dropout rate, and achievement compared to schools that do not offer incentive based scholarship programs. The analysis will determine if students are motivated by incentives that result in a tuition based scholarship.

CHAPTER II-REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Background

The purpose of this study was to determine if participation in the Missouri A+ Schools Programs increases attendance rate, reduces dropout rate, and increases student achievement; therefore, the review of literature focuses on several aspects of school reform initiatives. Specific initiatives include the No Child Left Behind Law (NCLB), effective school practices, accelerated school reform, educational culture change, school attendance policy and practice, statewide tuition incentive programs, and the implementation process of the Missouri A+ School Program. The inclusion of the Missouri A+ program is based on a college scholarship tuition incentive for high school students and is one step that Missouri established to help students (MDESE, 2007a). The related literature will also focus on several trends that have been developed to improve public school education.

No Child Left Behind

School improvement is a hotly debated topic throughout the education community (Toppo, 2008). The United States is expected to remain competitive with other industrialized nations around the world when it comes to

education (Toppo). Many experts have determined that the United States is falling way behind, and the reason is the public school systems. With the adoption of NCLB, the level of accountability for public schools and student achievement is now at an all time high benchmark (Wallis & Steptoe, 2007). School improvement in public schools is not a new perspective on the education of students. Schools have been in school improvement mode for years, and the report *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 forced the country into a reform mode with no end in sight. The report initiated decades of extensive discussions about school reform which culminated into the 2002 NCLB law (Toppo, 2008).

The expectations for today's schools and the success of students are at the highest level ever required due to the implementation of the No Child Left Behind law (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Over $5 million, with another $120 million in Title I grants were set aside as an initiative for schools to seek improvement plans (Darling-Hammond). Public schools are taking the efforts even farther with the development of building level plans for improved student achievement. Comprehensive school improvement guidelines were established by the government and included professional development with the inclusion

of parents, measurable goals for student performance, classroom management, technology, and the use of outside expert assistance (Darling-Hammond).

School Reform

According to Hentschke (1997), school reform has consisted of three components. Hentschke indicated that schools have been organized on the foundation of specified processes, the level of student achievement is not adequate, and that today's school should be equipped to produce maximum student performance. Hentschke further stated the reform has two general characteristics which include many changes, and the changes have been accepted by the majority of educational leaders and government officials (Hentschke, 1997). Radical school reform is not supported by most educators due to the emphasis on parent control, choice based, vouchers, having private sources, and taking change to the extreme (Hentschke). Fifteen years of school reform has not shown much progress in increasing student achievement. Hentschke deduced that if schools did not make changes, the public would force school districts to change from the outside.

To implement necessary changes to ensure increased student achievement, the Platoon School District from Gary, Indiana, was one of the first to undergo such

changes (Cuban, 1998). The core concepts of using a building to its fullest potential, educating the whole child socially, emotionally, and educationally, and involving the community were practiced by the Platoon School District (Cuban).

School reform base philosophy follows a general process. Goals are set and methods to achieve goals are established and implemented with the involvement of students, teachers, administrators, and community members (Cuban, 1998). Reform standards are set with different priorities from each group: administrators respond to student needs; policy makers respond to goals and results that are spurred by values and events; and, researchers focus on scientific proof of success backed by the quality of theory, methodology, and how the results are used (Cuban).

Darling-Hammond (2007) observed that the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Public Law 107-110) is a controversial United States federal law that reauthorized a number of federal programs aiming to improve the performances of U. S. primary and secondary schools by increasing standards of accountability for states, schools districts, and schools as well as providing parents more flexibility in choosing which schools their children will

attend (GreatSchools Staff, 2008). It promoted an increased focus on reading and re-authorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. NCLB is the latest federal legislation which enacts the theories of standards-based education reform, formerly known as outcome-based education, and is based on setting high expectations and establishing measurable goals that lead to improved individual outcomes in education (Toppo, 2008). The act requires states to administer assessments in basic skills to be given to all students in certain grades, if those states are to receive federal funding for schools (Toppo).

Achievement Standard

The NCLB act does not assert a national achievement standard. Instead, standards are set by each state, in line with principles of local control of schools and in order to comply with the tenth amendment of the United States Constitution, which specifies that powers not granted to the federal government nor forbidden to state governments are reserved powers to the individual states (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

The effect and desirability of the NCLB's measures are hotly debated. A primary criticism asserts that NCLB could reduce effective instruction and student learning

because it may cause states to lower achievement goals and motivate teachers to teach to the test (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Darling-Hammond evaluated the NCLB standard further and determined this law was widely hailed as a bipartisan breakthrough—a victory for American children, particularly those traditionally underserved by public schools. Now five years later, the debate over the law's reauthorization has a decidedly different tone. The United States House of Representatives and Senate are currently considering whether the law should be preserved and, if so, how it should be changed. High profile Republicans are expressing their disenchantment with NCLB, while many newly elected Democrats are seeking major overhaul as well (Toppo, 2008).

In 2002, civil rights advocates praised NCLB for its emphasis on improving education for students of color, those living in poverty, new English learners, and students with disabilities (Darling-Hammond, 2007). NCLB aims to raise achievement and close the achievement gap by setting annual test-score targets for subgroups of students on a goal of 100 percent proficiency by 2014 (GreatSchools Staff, 2008). These goals are tied to school sanctions that can lead to school reconstitutions or closures as well as requirements for student transfers.

The NCLB law requires schools to hire highly qualified teachers and states to develop plans to provide such teachers (GreatSchools Staff).

Over the time of the NCLB law GreatSchools Staff (2008) reported that congress increased federal funding of education from $44.2 billion in 2001 to $54.4 billion in 2007. The majority of this focus was developed into three testing areas. Math and reading will be measured annually for grades 3-8 and at least once in high school. By the end of the 2000 school year, schools were also required to implement testing in science for grades 3-11. Many states have moved to a standardized testing process with a multiple choice test (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Unlike many states, Missouri has implemented more than the multiple choice testing basing the majority of its results from writing assessments formed in constructed response and performance events questions. For public schools the testing is mandatory. Private schools and homeschooled students are not subject to this requirement (Darling-Hammond).

Proficiency

Wallis and Steptoe (2007), suggested two options for schools to consider in their quest to reach the 2014 target of 100% proficiency. One is for schools to cheat on

the test, a frighteningly commonplace solution. The other solution is to make the state test easier, a phenomenon known among educators as the race to the bottom (Wallis & Steptoe). With so much emphasis on such a small part of the overall curriculum, many school districts are refocusing instructional minutes to spend more time on testing areas. Because the law holds schools accountable for only reading and math, there is growing evidence that schools are giving short shrift to other subject matter (Darling-Hammond 2007).

Wallis and Steptoe (2007) also added that in a survey of 300 school districts conducted by the Center for Education Policy, 71% of administrators polled admitted that elementary schools are refocusing instruction minutes to combat the increase in assessment standards. Martin West of Brown University found that on average from 1999 to 2004, reading instruction gained 40 minutes a week while social studies and science lost about 17 minutes and 23 minutes, respectively. The decline in science and social studies is often much deeper in schools struggling to end a record of failure.

At Arizona Desert Elementary in San Luis, Arizona, students spend three hours of their six and a half hour day on literacy and 90 minutes on arithmetic (Wallis &

Steptoe, 2007). Science is no longer taught as a stand-alone subject. Science is embedded within the content of reading and math. The payoff for this school district is that they went from a failing Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) school in 2004 to a performing plus school in 2005 (Wallis & Steptoe).

The emphasis on achievement and assessment within public schools throughout the United States is evident. With so many different school reform programs utilized throughout the years, the NCLB law has gained the most attention. There are more than 2000 United States schools that have failed to make the AYP standard for 5 years in a row. Under NCLB, such schools face escalating interventions (Wallis & Steptoe, 2007). If a school misses AYP standards two years in a row, the school must offer students a chance to transfer to another school. After three years, they must provide tutoring services. After five years of failure, the law states the school must be restructured, which means replacing staff and having the state take control of the district (GreatSchools Staff, 2008).

Major investments to achieve NCLB must be made in the area of highly qualified teachers and leaders. While NCLB sets an expectation for hiring qualified teachers, it does

not include supports to make this possible. Federal leadership in developing an adequate supply of well qualified teachers is needed. Just as the government has helped provide an adequate supply of physicians for more than forty years, it can provide for those who prepare in specialties of which there is a shortage and agree to locate in underserved areas (Darling-Hammond, 2007). High level of emphasis that have been required of math, communication art, and science teachers have had a slowing effect of producing highly qualified in other areas teachers (Darling-Hammond).

Teacher Shortage

In the state of Missouri, there are several shortage areas, and math, science, and communications are included on the list of critical shortage areas offered by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2007c). With fewer qualified teachers available to replace retiring teachers, and teachers leaving education for better paying jobs, educational leaders need to establish protocols to develop highly qualified replacements. Students will not learn at higher levels without the benefit of good teaching, strong curriculum, and adequate resources (Primont & Domazlicky, 2006). The

adoption of tests and the development of punishments will not create genuine accountability (Primont & Domazlicky).

Effective Schools Research

One type of reform that has lasted over a decade is the research on effective schools. Effective school reform is based on the philosophy that all children can learn, have high academic achievement, and display accountability (Levine, 1993). The Effective Schools model became a program of improvement for schools that had no other name (Levine). Levine expressed concern for the lack of a consistent definition of effective schools; he also stated that there appeared to be more of a need for effectiveness in school dealing with poverty and that much criticism is provided with no solutions to the problems. Levine discussed what he identifies as levels of changes which provide a means of systematic restructuring and reform. Levine indicated that the educators would determine the success of any other methods used to provide change needed to meet national reform objectives.

Quality Education

The effective schools question was asked in many languages in countries around the world. People wanted to know what factors influences the quality of education. Harris and Hopkins (2000) stated that the effective

schools movement had influenced the United Kingdom positively. They suggested that school improvement be based on a combination of the following principles: school improvement; a shared vision; combining internal and external expectations to determine priorities; decisions based on obtained data and action research; and full collaboration and empowerment of community, students, and teachers (Hopkins, 2000).

Ron Edmunds was identified, by Lawrence Angus (1993), as the so called godfather of the school effectiveness movement. Edmunds (1979) argued that all children could be educated, and the school determined the quality of that education. Angus (1993) also indicated that the background of families was the beginning focus of school effectiveness research. Angus implied that the original purpose of school effectiveness was to identify techniques and procedures that could be applied directly in any educational or management situation. Angus believed that school effectiveness is all about raising educational standards. Additionally, Angus expressed that the following issues need to be addressed through school effectiveness: communication, grade influence on student's school experience, and techniques used by at risk students to cope.

Trends in school effectiveness became obvious and were identified by Jansen (1995). According to Jansen, the 1960s measured resources available to schools and not how the resources were organized or used and focused on average achievement levels. In the early 1970s, comparing school resources and the quality of education using individual achievement was a measure. The late 1970s and early 1980s research produced a list of effective schools characteristics. The 1990s brought doubts as to the actual school effectiveness of education on student performance (Jansen).

Key management arrangements were proposed by Harris and Hopkins (2000). They studied additional resources (Ainscow & Harris, 1994) which were present at the school and classroom level that influenced the development of school systems. They suggested that the key management arrangement can be stated as (p 10): a commitment to staff development; practical efforts to involve staff, students, and the community in school policies and decisions; transformational leadership approaches; effective coordination strategies; proper attention to the potential benefits of enquiry and reflection; and a commitment to collaborative planning activities.

Many articles were published as researchers began to complete studies. Elliot (1996) compared school effectiveness research. Elliot stated that there were eleven key characteristics of effective schools consistently cited from research literature. According to a report from the University of London Institute of Education by Sammonds, Hillman, and Mortimore (1995), the common characteristics include "professional leadership, shared vision, and goals-unity of purpose, a learning environment and orderly atmosphere, concentration on teaching and learning, purposeful teaching, high expectations, positive reinforcement, monitoring progress, pupil rights and responsibilities, home-school partnership, and school based staff development" (pp. 15-16). Elliott (1996) felt that the effective schools researchers shared a common vision of education and confirmed that effective schools research was becoming out dated as a method of addressing the challenges, which the process of social change in advanced societies was presenting to schools. As effective schools research came to an end, researchers began to look for the weakness in the research.

Coe, Fitz, and Taylor (1998) emphasized that many important issues related to school effectiveness have not

been addressed. They expressed that school effectiveness research needed to be more specific as to what factors are actually controlled. The authors felt that claims are overstated. They indicated that effective schools research does not identify the actual mechanics which made the schools effective. They specified that, when the studies done on effective schools are reviewed, quantitative data is missing. The authors implied that the term "effectiveness" is overused. They determined that there should be more evidence of how schools and teachers can influence outcomes that are being measured. The authors suggested that schools should not be held responsible for outcomes beyond the power to change, and those strategies should be offered for improvement (Coe, Fits, & Taylor, 1998).

School-Within-School-Model

Another method of reform that educators hoped would improve their schools was the school-within-school-model. Dewees (1999) researched this approach which intended to reproduce the qualities, thus the advantages, of a small school by creating a "school-within-a-school". To do this a smaller educational unit with its own staff, students, and budget is established within a school. Much of the research done on this method appears to suggest that these

smaller units contribute not only to achievement but also to the students' well being. Attendance and behavior also appear to show improvement (Dewees, 1999).

The school-within-a-school may be a cost effective method to provide an education to those students needing the small school atmosphere and has set some foundations for effective schools. This can also be driven from an incentive approach for students and parents. Smaller settings have shown to improve the academic achievement of students (Guo, 2007).

Accelerated Schools: The Foundation of A+ Schools

Effective schools research was the foundation used by Levin and Associates of Stanford University in the development of the Accelerated Schools (Van Tassel-Baska, 1997). They believed that by providing an enriched program at an increased pace, student achievement would improve. They developed a system to involve all levels of the school in accelerated learning. Only the gifted and talented program had been associated with this concept in the past. In early research, Levin (1990) believed that this process would benefit all students and help the students to become successful contributing parts of the educational system. The Accelerated Schools Project was developed to deliver this model into school systems.

Stanford Group

The Stanford Group started with two subject groups in 1986 (Stanford University School of Education, 1991). The group piloted the program and reported increased test scores, improved morale in both students and staff, and greater parental involvement. In 1988, Levin's program came to Missouri where several schools were selected to begin to develop the accelerated vision. In 1989, the National Center of Accelerated School Project was established, and it developed a way to extend this idea through satellite centers, a training model to train coaches, and workshops (Van Tassel-Baska, 1997). Everything was developed to support Levin's idea and incorporate all of the philosophical beliefs and principles of accelerated schools including the governance process, inquiry process, and powerful learning. The project now includes nearly 200 elementary, middle/junior high, and high schools in all areas in the state of Missouri – urban, suburban, small town, and rural (MDESE, 2007b).

High Expectations

Accelerated Schools believe that with high expectations and combined effort from the community and school personnel, students will excel beyond expectations.

Accelerated schools serve students who are identified as “at risk” (Levin & Hopfenberg, 1991). High levels of poverty and minorities combined with the “at risk” have made the expectations of high achievement almost an idealistic view. Despite all odds, accelerated schools boast of increased parent involvement, higher achievement scores, and greater collaboration among staff and students (Van Tassel-Baska, 1997).

At Risk Students

One focus of the A+ Schools Program is the opportunity for at risk students to continue their education and formulate a career pathway before graduation (“Community,” 2006). The Missouri A+ Schools Program is a legislated, statewide framework for providing universal quality education with a career focus and an academic foundation for lifelong learning. The program recognizes that an internationally competitive workforce will require more than a high school diploma but less than a baccalaureate degree (Robison, 1995).

Specific standards must be maintained to assure a school is accelerated. The “accelerated” concept increases the rate of instruction so at-risk students experience a faster pace of learning to catch up with the stronger learner instead of getting farther behind (MDESE, 2007b).

Accelerated schools expect all students to be treated as gifted and talented. The concept promotes highly stimulating instructional activities and programs to present challenges to all students. The accelerated school concept also promotes teacher, community, and student involvement to build on strengths and identifies areas that present a challenge (Levin, 1990). All members work together in different units identified as cadres to focus on the challenges. Accelerated schools have traditionally been built to portray the three following central principles: unity of purpose, school site empowerment coupled with responsibility, and building on strengths (MDESE, 2007b).

School Community

According to Levin and Hopfenberg (1991), unity of purpose is achieved when teachers, parents, students, administrators, and other community members are striving to achieve the same goal or vision. The vision statement is the foundation upon which all other things, including curriculum instruction, are based. Anyone involved in the school must be working, planning, and designing activities and educational programs that are targeted at achieving that goal. The vision must address the dreams of parents and students as well as those of the entire school

district and community. It must be visible, available, and well known to everyone involved. The entire school community should be involved in celebrating their vision. This part of the process cannot end, and the vision must be kept current. All actions need to be evaluated to see that they support and address the school community's dreams (Levin & Hopfenberg).

Levin (1990) stated that the ability of the school community making good, solid decisions that are best for the students' educational needs and implementing the decision is known as school site empowerment coupled with responsibility. It involves the total ownership of responsibility for the success or failure of decisions and implementing successful curriculum and instruction. Building interpersonal relationships is necessary in the success of an accelerated school.

School Environment

Another essential principle is an instructional approach that is based on building on the strength of students, teachers, administrators, staff, and parents. Levin and Hopfenberg (1991) emphasize the importance of this process to provide a supportive environment from the community. Often mistrust has been developed over time. Trust, respect, caring, and equality must be reestablished

to enhance the accelerated schools process. The authors discussed the difficulty and time that is required to rebuild and establish an enthusiastic, trusting, and caring community again. Sharing skills, experiences, and knowledge establishes that trust and provides resources that are readily available and personal. The community is combined to provide a huge pool of resources, establishing the basis for building on strengths. Active practice of the three principles serves as the vehicle to becoming an accelerated school (Van Tassel-Baska, 1997).

School as a Whole

Levin (1990) stated the vision the school develops must reflect the goals and expected outcomes. It must be a central vision. The information from taking stock is evaluated to provide a completed picture that reflects areas of strength as well as areas that need to be improved. These priorities are rated, and three to five of the most important are chosen to receive attention first. The others are set aside to work on after the first priorities have been addressed. Governance groups referred to as cadres, the Steering Committee, and School as a Whole (SAW) are established. The cadres include students, teachers, parents, administrators, and patrons of the district (Van Tassel-Baska, 1997).

Each cadre focuses on a priority, or challenge area set in the previous phase. The cadre uses the Inquiry Process to find and try solutions to the problem. Cadres report to the Steering Committee. They are responsible for developing and following through with the implementation of Action Plans (SUSE, 1991).

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee is made up of a representative of each cadre, administrator, parent, students, and staff. The primary purpose of the Steering Committee is to assure the cadres keep the school vision right in sight, communicate with each other, make sure the cadres are focused and using the Inquiry Process, develop recommendations of the SAW, direct information, and network between cadres (Levin, 1990). It is the steering committee's responsibility to see that the cadres are setting new priorities.

Levin (1991) indicate that the SAW must approve any decisions that affect the entire school. The level of governance is composed of the principal, teachers, paraprofessionals, students, and parents. The SAW must approve all decisions before the cadre can carry anything through or before the cadre can finish anything.

Manning cited seven essentials of effective at risk programs (1993). The programs that have proven to be most successful include “comprehensive approaches; emphasis on self concept; higher expectations; improving social skills; teachers and learners agreeing on objectives, methods and materials; involvement of parents and families; and recognition of the relationship between motivation and success” (Manning, 1993, p. 135). The Accelerated School combines these requirements and developed a foundation for other reform programs to build upon (Manning).

Attendance

Attendance rates are being used as an indicator in the effectiveness of education. It stands to reason students do not learn when they are not in school. Policies designed to improve attendance range from lenient to strict and from formal enforcement by law officials to informal enforcement by school officials. Attendance supervisors are trained and employed by some schools to provide prevention programs and identify patterns of absenteeism. Many schools have resorted to youth services and the juvenile court system to force students to attend school (Land, 2003). All policies are designed to increase attendance of students, which will in turn increase

student achievement and grade point average. Absenteeism is a common occurrence of any public school and as students progress through school, the absenteeism rates do become worse. When students are not present, that is also detrimental to a school district's bottom line. Policy is one avenue for schools, but targeting the student and parents and putting the responsibility on them is an effective approach to consider (Johnson, 2007).

Attendance Policy

One such policy was adopted by Mt Diablo High School in Concord, California. The attendance policy fails a student with 15 or more absences (including excused absences) and was implemented during the 1985-86 school year (Harris, 1990). Harris concluded that several other schools in the district adopted similar polices but decreased the number of allowed absences. The district overall experienced minimal improvement in the student average daily attendance rate. Recommendations were made by the school board to change the attendance policy to eliminate the 15-day policy and exclude excused absences. A similar policy was developed which limited the number of absences allowed to ten. The students lost academic credit unless an attendance committee determined the absences to be legitimate. All of the participants reported increased

attendance rates from 6% to 9%. Fernandez and Cardenas (1976) indicated that such a policy had greatly improved attendance in a Michigan school.

Schools with lower teacher-to-pupil rates have indicated less absenteeism. Wright (1996) indicated that there are four basic factors which affect absenteeism. The density of the population, school size, higher state mandated requirements, and lower teacher to pupil ratios. These factors have been said to have a major impact on how often students miss school. School districts are now being held to higher attendance standards with the No Child Left Behind and Annual Yearly Progress requirement that includes a benchmark of 93% for a school district’s attendance rate (MDESE, 2008).

Galenson (1998) indicated that most of the studies done neglected to determine influences on attendance. Galenson suggested that residential location and neighborhood characteristics have a direct impact on attendance. He analyzed school attendance in Boston during the late 1800s. He found evidence that sons of poor, unskilled immigrant fathers had poor attendance when compared to the sons of wealthy, white-collar, native parents. Galenson also found evidence that boys in poor immigrant neighborhoods did not attend school as often as

wealthy Americans. The problem of absenteeism has been a concern for over a century and it will continue through present time.

An early research study done by Stennett (1967) compared the attendance of gender of students and different grade levels of attendance. It was determined at that time the attendance of males was better than females at all grade levels. Attendance rate appeared to remain relatively constant as students progressed from grades seven through ten, but absences increased in grades eleven and twelve.

Another study designed to compare demographics and attendance indicated that only four states will have a 20% increase in high school graduates while 13 states will report declines. Carr (2000) insisted that the general educating track must be eliminated.

With 95% of the high school students graduating choosing to continue in education or go into the work force, a general track prepares the other five percent for nothing. The A+ School Program in Missouri has the potential to eliminate that general track and focus on 100% of a high school ispopulation (Robison, 1995).

Attendance Rate

A study on attendance and its relationship to test data and schools being identified as at-risk due to attendance was evaluated by Crone (1993). Louisiana is among the majority of states that have identified attendance as an important indicator of student success. Attendance was indicated as the primary predictor of the percent of students passing the Graduation Exit Exam. Low attendance was associated with an increase in suspension, expulsion, and dropout rate. Schools that were characterized to have low attendance rates were in metropolitan areas. They were middle and secondary schools. Crone's (1993) report results indicated that Caucasian students had lower attendance rates than African American.

In the late 1980s, the Cleveland City School District reported an average daily attendance rate of 85% during the 1985-86 school year. Zafirau (1987) analyzed the Cleveland attendance policy and suggested that attendance improvement strategies would be more successful if they included positive motivators not only to attend school but also to do well academically. He provided information on reading achievement compared to attendance rate, indicating higher scores when attendance was greater.

Another study which investigated the correlation between attendance and grade point average was done by Strickland (1998). His findings were in concurrence with other studies of that nature. The results indicated that there is a significant positive correlation between days present and grade point average. He explained that attendance appeared to have a sizeable impact on grade point average. Student achievement is effected negatively on standardized assessment when absenteeism rates are high.

The many studies done to determine if different programs improve attendance rate and student achievement usually find that there are too many factors present to isolate the change in the program affected by that policy. They did all indicate a direct correlation between days attended and grades, a relationship between attendance and performance on competence tests, and a higher grade point average (Strickland, 1998). Strickland determined that better attendance also affected the attainment of high school graduation and a lower law incidence record.

Compulsory Attendance

In almost every state, school attendance is compulsory. Compulsory school attendance means school attendance is required for all students of school age by

the laws of the state. Ronnie Land (2003), Deputy Sheriff in Desoto Parish, indicated in an article for the International Association for Truancy and Dropout Prevention that tracking and enforcing compulsory attendance is not always as easy as hoped. School attendance tracking needs to be a partnership with local law enforcement and can be accomplished in the following ways: reporting from a teacher's classroom roll book, school based computer records, school based attendance cards, data management programs, and state level attendance data systems. For any of these tools to be effective, the partnership and the resiliency of both law enforcement and school administration to battle truancy must be established. Another approach offered to combat truancy concerns is to create a position at the school district level that has law enforcement authority (Land, 2003).

Attendance Incentives

Attendance incentives have become a popular approach to help improve public school student attendance. School districts across the country for several years now have been offering incentives to students for good attendance. Incentives ranging from the chance of winning a new car or being able to opt out of a final have been approaches

created by schools. Greg Hamilton (2000) is concerned that these attendance incentives are no more than bribery and questions if the students are really learning from this approach. With schools now being graded on attendance rates, districts are pulling out all the stops when trying to find ways to improve attendance. The latest in St Petersburg is the give-away of a new car to high school students and bicycles for middle school students.

Belluck (2006), with the New York Times disclosed that in Chelsea High School, in Massachusetts, the high school attendance rate hovered around the 90% for several years, and the school officials were determined to turn things around.

Belluck (2006) also reported in Chicago public schools, students with perfect attendance for the first three months of the school year were eligible for $500 in groceries or up to $1,000 in rent or mortgage payments. For every one percent increase in the Chicago public schools, the district would receive $18 million more in new state funding. From her investigation, she also found experts to say that incentives for daily attendance were a bad approach. Belluck questioned how far the incentives would have to go and if the prizes would have to get more lucrative to continue the improvement in attendance.

Incentives are considered acceptable if they are educationally-related, such as a computer compared to a car. Incentive approaches will continue to grow as long as school districts can increase funding and attendance is a focal point of a school's annual yearly progress.

Student Achievement

The ultimate goal of education has always been to provide students with valuable learning experiences that will enrich their lives and prepare them for life after high school, but much of the focus of education is to produce students with high grade point averages and high standardized test scores (Levine, 1993).

Programs are designed to achieve this goal. Three such programs have been successful in Parkway West High School in Chesterfield, Sherman Elementary in St. Louis, and Wild Horse Elementary in the Rockwood School District. Bower (2000) analyzed the effects of family income on test scores. These three schools were among the top performing schools in Missouri. The teachers in these schools attribute their success to encouraging the kind of teaching that helps students learn analytical thinking. Teachers and parents have set high expectations for these students. Teachers meet monthly to share ideas on how to motivate students. Over 90% of the students participate in

a tutoring program. Parents and community members volunteer to listen to students read. A shocking point to ponder is that 95% of these students qualify for free and reduced lunches (Bower, 2000).

The trends in education have turned towards encouraging students who are not going to college to enroll in a vocational course or work-experience programs. In an early attendance study, Daly (1975) compiled data to determine whether the grade point averages of students at Santa Ana College had increased over time and whether the work experience grade distribution had any effect on grade distribution of that college. He indicated that the overall grade point average had an 8.9% increase over a four year period.

There was an 18% increase in the number of “A’s” given with the same decrease in the number of “C’s.” The mean grade point increased from 2.57 in the fall of 1970 to 2.80 in the spring of 1974. There was little indication that work experience grades had an affect on the overall college grade point average (Daly, 1975).

Student achievement standards have become a focal point since the development of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Law. Every public school district in the United States is required to meet established benchmarks from the

Annual Yearly Progress reports. Each state's department of education is required to implement strict standards of testing in communication arts and mathematics. The federal government has established the required amount of students who are to achieve proficient on state initiated standardized testing (Primont & Domazlicky, 2006).

The 2001 No Child Left Behind law requires that schools make "annual yearly progress" in raising student achievement or face possible sanctions. The No Child Left Behind law places added emphasis on test scores from the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) to evaluate the performance of schools (Primont & Domazlicky, 2006). Primont and Domazlicky investigated the school performance in Missouri by measuring the efficiency with which schools provide their education services using a two-stage data development analysis approach. The authors' study simulates the effects of two sanctions (school transfer and supplemental tutoring services) under the No Child Left Behind Act on the performance of failing school districts' building management efficiency. Primont and Domazlicky found that the transfer of students is more likely to improve building achievement than the tutoring sanction. School districts continue to research best practices to help in the improvement of student

achievement. Attendance has been widely investigated through the years as the number one aspect that directly effects the overall achievement of students.

Professional Learning Community

One of the fastest growing effective school program concepts in the public school setting has been the implementation of collaboration activities that are becoming a common practice throughout the United States (DuFour, 2007). The Professional Learning Communities program is main component is to establish collaborative environments within school buildings between teachers and administrators. Educational change is one of the most difficult processes to implement in a learning environment (Eaker, Dufour, & Dufour, 2002). Teachers have taught in isolation for generations, and if change is not implemented, it will take generations to overcome that embedded stigma. It is not uncommon for a school (or any complex organization) to keep certain practices in place and unchallenged for years and even decades simply because of historical status (Marzano, Waters, and McNulty, 2005). Improvement initiatives require time for planning, training, and constructive dialogue including various stakeholders in district-wide decisions which will in turn

help with the implementation of successful effective school practices (Schmoker, 1999).

School reform initiatives can come in a variety of opportunities, and collaborating on what is best for a specific district needs to come from all involved. Educational leaders must be willing to act as change agents and be willing to temporarily upset a school's equilibrium. By taking this approach, leaders must be willing to accept uncertainty and conflict to reestablish a new learning style commitment. The Professional Learning Community empowers teachers with changing initiatives and accepting uncertain outcomes. They will conduct the research and determine the new and best practices for improved student learning (Dufour, 2007).

Corollary Questions

The Professional Learning Communities have several aspects that take a common sense approach to improve student achievement and effective practice. A school cannot function as a professional learning community until its staff has grappled with the questions that provide direction for the school as an organization and the individuals within it(Eaker et al., 2002). The base objective of a professional learning community is established in three base corollary questions.

1. What is it we expect to learn?
2. How will we know what has been learned?
3. How will we respond when students don't learn?

To successfully implement the Professional Learning Communities program, the framework must be followed and adjusted accordingly to each individual building. The first aspect is to shift teacher isolation to a culture deep and meaningful teacher collaboration. Common plan times along with dedicated contracted time are important factors for teacher success (Dufour, 2007). Many elementary schools in the United States have a common grade level plan time. At the middle school and high school levels, it has not traditionally been a common practice. The building populations have a direct effect on how the overall teacher schedules can be constructed. The culture of a Professional Learning Community is orchestrated, in part, by collaborative teams whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals (Eaker et al., 2002).

In a traditional setting, many teachers attend professional development meetings and are not involved. Workshops are traditionally set up for half or full days and with very little time for team collaboration. In a

Professional Learning Community, teachers are presented the questions that are associated with shared learning. Every teacher is involved with the presentation of their outcomes (Dufour, 2007).

An important aspect of a school district's culture change is the school mission. Every school has a generic school mission that commonly states every child will become productive citizens and life long learners. School missions normally do not reflect what a school district is actually accomplishing. In a Professional Learning Community, the mission statement breaks down the true meaning and establishes the three corollary questions. Addressing the three fundamental questions positions the school to move from a culture that has a primary emphasis on "teaching" to a culture with a primary emphasis on "learning". This component is an initial training that all teachers must collaboratively construct (Dufour, 2007).

Primary Focus

One of the most important cultural shifts that must take place if schools are to perform as professional learning communities involves the shift from the primary focus being on teaching to placing the primary focus on student learning (Eaker et al., 2002). To achieve this shift, extensive study is done with curriculum, research

results, and best practices. In a professional learning community, decisions are researched during collaborative team meetings, with teams determining best practices from concluded data results (DuFour, 2007).

The Professional Learning Community concept does not offer a short cut to school improvement. It presents neither a program nor recipe. It does provide a powerful, proven conceptual framework for transforming schools at all levels, but, alas, even the grandest design eventually degenerates into hard work. The Professional Learning Community's primary objective is to improve the student learning process (DuFour, 2007). A shift in culture from the traditional teaching process to a learning process is a common sense approach for improved student achievement. By establishing the support of a local school board, teacher groups, and school community, the success of this school improvement program will be built on a solid foundation. Dr. Dufour (2007) stated that persistence and commitment during implementation is vital. In today's teaching profession, the level of expectations on student assessment continue to rapidly increase. This is changing the educational profession and requiring leadership to research better learning practices. Teachers are no longer able to teach in isolation and expect to achieve state

mandated results. Teachers in today's educational setting can no longer concentrate on their own individual environment. They must be concerned for everyone's learning process (Eaker et al., 2002).

To reach all children and create the best learning practices, teachers are no longer the followers but are now transformed into leaders of their peers. When this culture change is accomplished, both administrators and teachers will have a shared leadership mission (Schmoker, 1999).

eMINTS Program

Studies have proven that Missouri's eMINTS program is raising student achievement. Research completed by Branigan (2002) stated that analysis of student test scores in Missouri offers solid evidence to suggest that using technology to facilitate an inquiry-based approach to learning can boost student achievement. Students who participated in Missouri's educational technology program scored "consistently higher in every subject area" on the state's standardized test compared with students not involved in the program, according to an analysis of 2002 test results.

Branigan (2002) took the study, called "Analysis of 2001 MAP results for eMINTS Students," and compared the

results of the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) for more than 6,000 third and fourth graders. Teachers were required to use technology within their district's curriculum in ways that made learning significant, rather than reading and reciting. Technology proved to be a benefit for student standardized testing (Branigan, 2002).

State Wide Tuition Incentive Programs

In the past fifteen to twenty years, several states across the country have developed similar college tuition incentive programs. These programs are geared toward high school aged students and give them a variety of in state opportunities to attend college. Each state has its own specific requirements, but many similarities can be established. The Georgia HOPE scholarship has been copied by eleven other states (Jacobson, 2003)

HOPE Scholarship

The HOPE scholarship was created in 1993 by the State of Georgia Legislature. It is a university scholarship program that has been adopted in similar fashion by several other states. HOPE is an acronym for "Helping Outstanding Pupils Educationally" and is funded entirely by revenue from the state lottery and administered by the Georgia Student Finance Commission (Jacobson, 2003).

Requirements for the program are merit based and are neither based on the student's ability to pay for his/her own education nor a factor in determining if he/she receives the HOPE scholarship (Wilmath, 2007). The basic requirements for the program are that a student must be a resident of the state of Georgia, must graduate from a high school in Georgia, and must maintain a 3.0 grade point average throughout college (Wilmath). The scholarship pays for full tuition, a $150 semester book allowance, and most mandatory fees for the recipient to attend any public university in Georgia until the semester during which the student takes his or her 127th college hour. In some instances, an equivalent amount is applied towards tuition for private universities in Georgia (Wilmath).

According to Wright (2008), the HOPE program boosts in-state black student enrollment but has done little to increase access to postsecondary education overall. From 1993 to 1998, the number of African American students enrollment in Georgia's four-year schools jumped 24%. That increase in enrollment is largely attributable to the seven year old program, which at this time is the largest state financed, merit based aid program. Wright (2008) added the 2001 48-page report, "The Enrollment Effects of

Merit-Based Financial Aid" revealed that black students enrollment in private four year colleges in the state also rose by 12%. It stated in his report that the increase in black enrollment gains at Georgia colleges and university likely came at the expense of historically black colleges and universities located in surrounding states. The study found that in 1994, enrollments in nearby black institutions such as Florida A&M, Alabama State, Tuskegee, Alabama A&M, and Tennessee State actually dropped 34 percent from before the inception of the HOPE scholarship program (Wright).

Financial Appropriations

With the enormous success of the HOPE program, there has become a concern that it could buckle under its own success. Jacobson (2003) reported that there are growing concerns that the program will eventually out price what the state lottery is able to earn. The program from 1993 through 2003 has paid almost $2 billion in scholarship money with over 700,000 students up to this date having used the program. But now, demand for the program appears as if it will exceed lottery revenues in a few years. According to state budget officials, the program could be $221 million in the red by 2007 (Jacobson). If that happened, Georgia would be forced to tap into reserve

funds to cover all eligible students. Due to the financial forecasts, the Georgia legislatures were required to form a commission, which will study ways to improve and preserve the HOPE Scholarships (Jacobson).

The state of Georgia paid out over $21 million in tuition in 1994, and that increased to $208 million in the year 2000 (Wilmath, 2007). The amount has grown to over $459 million in scholarship for the 2008 fiscal year. During the 2007-08 school years, the state reached a milestone of assisting its one millionth individual. The program has had great success over the past 15 years, and its future is very much uncertain without significant change in the scholarship policy (Wilmath). The state legislature is looking at capping the program or cutting back on the textbook allowances offered. The HOPE program has established its program as the top-rated academic-based financial aid program among the fifty states in America. This is evident due to so many states that have followed the Georgia model (Jacobson, 2003).

Concerns over how to pay for merit-based state scholarships are not unique to Georgia (Wilmath, 2007). Because of fiscal hard times in the economy over the past 15 years, other states, including Florida and New Mexico, have considered revising eligibility rules for their merit

based scholarship programs. Both of these programs were developed after the inception of the HOPE Scholarship. Around 18,000 fewer students qualified for the HOPE scholarship for the 2007 school year (Wilmath).

Bright Futures Program

In Florida, the state legislature developed a similar program and named it the Bright Futures Program. The Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program was created in 1997 by the Florida legislature (Braun, 2008). The Florida lottery-funded scholarship program, much like the Georgia's HOPE program, rewards students for their academic achievements during high school by providing funding for them to pursue post-secondary educational and career goals in Florida (Braun). The Bright Futures Program allows Florida high school seniors with academic merit the chance to earn a scholarship to any public college in the state. The scholarship does not apply if students choose to attend college outside the state of Florida (Braun). Many of the private schools in Florida take part and offer students tuition if they are Bright Futures recipients. Students who achieve an SAT score of 1270 or a score of 28 on an ACT can receive 100% of their tuition paid. The scholarship does not apply to summer

school semesters and is only available to be used at four year colleges (Braun).

Legislation

Braun (2008) reported the Florida Department of Education recently expanded its Bright Futures Scholarship Program so students could attend one of the 28 state community colleges and receive 100% of their tuition and fees. This new legislation was signed by Governor Jeb Bush and became effective July 1st, 2006. It now allows graduating students achieving a 3.0 grade point average in high school to receive free tuition and fees, if they attended a Florida public community college and enroll in classes toward an associate's degree. Under the previous legislation, the Bright Futures scholarship paid 75-percent of tuition for eligible scholars whether they attended a community college or state university. During the 2004-05 award year, more than 130,000 students received funding for a Florida Bright Futures Scholarship (Braun, 2008).

In a recent review of the Bright Futures program, Kaczor (2008) reported that critics say that Bright Futures is fundamentally unfair and causes economic problems for the universities, which get the bulk of the scholarship money. Their attempts to modify the program

have failed because of its vast public support. Kaczor stated that the program is growing faster than the lottery's ability to pay for it, and that it helps the children of the rich at the expense of the poor, who buy lottery tickets but are least likely to qualify for the scholarships. Because the Bright Futures can't afford large increases, the state artificially keeps tuition at the state schools among the nations lowest. It ranges currently from $3400 to $4000 for in–state students. Kaczor (2008) also explained with the tuition range so low, more state taxes have been diverted to the universities, popular schools cap enrollment, and some programs are lacking funding. Every year since being established, the Bright Futures program gets a bigger share of the lottery profits, cutting into money that goes to secondary and elementary schools.

Critics of the Bright Futures program also are concerned that it does not have any need-based criteria. The upper middle class and the wealthy get rewarded. That class of people have benefited and redirected private college funds into other purchases for their children (Braun, 2008). Braun also reported that the system is nothing more than a ticking time bomb. The concern from state representatives and university presidents is that

the program is eventually going to bankrupt as it continues to grow unless they set lower scholarship amounts. This program will not implode any earlier than the HOPE scholarship because it takes 80 to 90 percent of lottery funds compared to Florida's Bright Futures which takes 30 to 40 percent of lottery profits. In 2008, the Bright Futures Scholarship program awarded scholarships to 169,895 at a cost of $436 million in lottery proceeds (Braun).

One of the oldest and longest running state tuition incentive programs was established through the efforts of the Michigan Legislature in 1986. In a newsletter from the Michigan Office of Auditor (1995), it was reported that the Michigan Tuition Incentive Program was first utilized by Michigan high school students in the fall of 1988. During that school year, Michigan expended $807,290 in college tuition for more 895 participants. The program was implemented to address the lower income students to offer them an opportunity to attend post secondary school. Students must meet Medicaid eligibility between the 6th through 12th grades. Students upon graduation must enroll in a participating community college within four years of graduation or completion of a GED. The Michigan Tuition Incentive Program is continued based on completion of

secondary requirements and financial need. It will pay for $84 dollars per credit hour and up to $250 in standardized enrollment fees (Michigan Auditor Office, 1995).

The Associated Press (2004) reported that in North Dakota, lawmakers are hoping a newly enacted tuition incentive program will bring more young people to the state and provide an incentive for residents to stay. Fargo Senator Tony Grindberg calls the new incentive program North Dakota Promise Program. It is based on North Dakota high school graduates who have taken four years of math and science and have an American College testing score of 23 or better. The grants will range from 65% of a student's tuition bill to 100%. While in college, students will remain eligible for grants if they maintain a 3.0 GPA. This program is scheduled to start in 2012.

The Beginning of A+ School

In the early 1990s, Missouri's governor was very supportive of public education. The late Governor Mel Carnahan helped pass legislation when he was elected in 1992 that has supported quality education for Missouri students. He made it a priority to make Missouri one of the most active states in the school reform movement (MDESE, 2007a). The Missouri Legislature enacted the Outstanding Schools Act (Senate Bill 380) in May of 1993

as an answer to the federal government's study, A Nation at Risk, National Commission of Excellence in Education, (1983) which had a domino effect in the reform of America's public schools. Public school systems suddenly became accountable for the achievement of students, failure to create employable citizens, and the lack of post secondary and vocational training. The United States found itself in a race to produce students with educational skills equivalent to its foreign brothers (Toppo, 2008).

Outstanding School Act

Continuing to answer the call for reform, Missouri issued Senate Bill 380 (also known as the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993), which established several new programs and policies designed to refine Missouri's educational system (MDESE, 2007a). The Outstanding Schools Act contained provisions which changed the method for funding schools. It provided an increased minimum tax base to help increase revenue as well as increased minimum property tax rates. Senate Bill 380 was issued in response to the reality that 25%of Missouri students were not graduating from high school. The law requires that up to seventy-five academic performance standards be established that define the knowledge, skills, and competencies that

should be obtained before graduating from a Missouri school system (“Community,” 2006).

The Show-Me Standards, written in 1996 by some of Missouri’s best teachers, were adopted by the Missouri State Board of Education. Performance-based assessments have been developed to measure student progress toward the Show-Me Standards. The Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) is composed of multiple choice, constructed responses, and performance events which require students to demonstrate their ability to apply knowledge. Currently, there are still considerable changes that are being implemented with the development of high school exit exams. Missouri is now requiring all students in public high schools to pass exit exams in algebra, biology, and English for graduation requirements (MDESE, 2007a).

Senate Bill 380

The A+ School Program was designed as the answer to Senate Bill 380 requirements. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education A+ Fact Sheet(2007a) indicates that the program provides incentives for high schools to reduce dropout rates, raise academic expectations, eliminate “general track” courses, provide better “career pathways” for all students, and work more closely with business and higher-education leaders. MDESE

indicates that the key goal of A+ Schools is to assure that all students, when they graduate, are well prepared to pursue advanced education, employment, or both (“Community,” 2006). Specific provision for the A+ Schools Program is stated in the Missouri revised Statutes, Chapter 160, Sections 160.545. Missouri requirements for the administration of the A+ Schools Program are cited by MDESE in Title 5 CSR 60-120.060 on the MDESE website (2007).

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2007b), requires schools to meet certain requirements if they wish to be designated by the state of Missouri as an A+ School. Participating high schools are required to modify their curriculum to meet the needs of students, eliminate the general education track, and also provide fifty percent of the salary for an A+ Program Coordinator and various other expenses (Robison, 1995). Schools must develop a three-year plan of implementation which includes the following competencies in measurable terms that students must demonstrate to successfully complete each course offered by the school student performance standards that qualify students for graduation; the elimination of general education track; standards of competency in basic academic subjects for

vocational track students; and the development of a partnership plan designed to establish cooperation with the local businesses, identify potential at risk students, and assure counseling for students who enter the work force (MDESE, 2007a).

The three-year plan must contain major goals, objectives, activities, and anticipated expenditures for each of the three years (“Community,” 2006). The plan for the first year must be more detailed to include the actual activities planned, anticipated expenditures, and the timeline including starting and ending times for each of the activities by month and year. The plan must include a description of the program designed to decrease dropout rate and the services for at-risk students (MDESE, 2008).

A+ Evaluation

A method of evaluation must be described in detail that determines the effectiveness of the A+ School Program. Historical data covering the last four years which includes the dropout rate, persistence to graduation rate, the number of students enrolled by grade level, the number of graduates attending the work force, the number of students enrolled in vocational courses, vocational education placement, and the number of students identified as at-risk who dropped out of school, is required (Bliss,

2000). The plan must include a list of community/business members and their type of business associated with the partnership plan. It must include a detailed, line item budget including projected expenditures and identifying goals the expenditures are trying to achieve. Finally, an application for authorization of A+ Schools Program Expenditures form recording the amount of requested funds and a job description of the A+ Schools Coordinator must be included (“Community,” 2006).

A+ Legislation

School districts wishing to be designated as A+ Schools must make a certain promise of assurance to MDESE (Bliss, 2000). The assurances include the following: the district must establish student performance standards, maintain complete management and control of all fiscal procedures, match A+ grant funds with a minimum of 25%, each district must submit all A+ reports to MDESE, the district will provide MDESE with student history and demographic information, report dropouts, make the district facilities available for adult literacy training, and any facility improvements made with grant funds must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (“Community,” 2006).

Information from MDESE (2007a) indicates that during the 1994-95 school years, 38 high schools were eligible for up to $150,000 in annual grant awards for three total years. In the 1999-2000 school year, 79 high schools were eligible for funds. During the 2007-08 school year, 231 high schools were designated an A+ School. Grants are awarded on the basis of competitive applications (Johnston, 2000).

Students, community members, and school officials all benefit from the A+ Schools program. Since 1997, the state board of education has designated 231 public high schools as “A+ Schools,” and over 200,000 students have graduated and qualified for financial assistance from the state in the form of post secondary tuition. The Missouri Legislature approved initial grant funding of $5 million in 1994-95, $7.5 million for 1995-96, and $10.5 million in 1996-97. That amount has shown a steady increase from the initial $5 million to an estimated appropriation of $21 million for the 2008 budget year (MDESE, 2008). The first 38 designated A+ School districts became eligible in 1997 for tuition and book incentives for graduating seniors who fulfilled the perspective school’s A+ requirements (Bower, 2000).

Currently, the A+ program is granting tuition awards for up to 15 hours per semester and no reimbursement for books. The popularity of the program and state budget concerns in 2004 required MDESE to put further grants on hold. In 2006-07, MDESE offered the competitive grant opportunities again to Missouri public schools. From 2004 to 2006, there was an average of over 10,700 students utilizing the A+ financial assistance incentives (MDESE, 2007a).

Students must follow certain guidelines to be eligible for financial incentives through state assistance. Students must attend a designated A+ School for three consecutive years prior to high school graduation with a 2.5 or higher grade point average. They must have a minimum of 95% rate of attendance over their four years in high school and maintain a record of good citizenship. They must avoid illegal drug use and perform a minimum of 50 hours of unpaid tutoring or mentoring of younger students in an academic area. The students must then attend a Missouri community college or post secondary vocational-technical school on a full time basis and maintain a 2.5 grade point average (“Community,” 2006).

Tuitions will be reimbursed if the students meet their obligations in the participation agreement, the school maintains its requirements for A+ designation, and the funding is available (Robison, 1995).

Early A+ Schools

Johnston (2000) researched the implementation process and success rate of the Kennett School District's A+ program. In 2000, the Kennett school district awarded A+ Scholarships to three students in the first year of eligible tuition reimbursement. Their A+ Coordinator, Kathie Bruce, indicated that 29 seniors were in line for the graduating class of 2001. Students at Kennett High School were given an overview of the program prior to their freshman year. They were given a handbook and required to sign a contract with their parents that itemized the requirements of the program if they decided to become part of the program. A letter explaining the program is sent home to all eligible students' parents. Bliss (2000) clarified that students must first apply for Pell and other federal grants. Three Rivers Community College is one of several community colleges who provide A+ eligible students with an associate degree program. The college has become one that the state assists in paying

the difference of tuition and textbooks. Even students who do not participate in the A+ Schools program benefit from taking the associate degree courses.

There are over 45 schools in Southeast Missouri that have been appointed A+ schools, including Cape Girardeau. Cape Girardeau has over 300 students enrolled in the program. To better promote the program, a consortium has been developed with Three Rivers and Southeast public schools that will provide college courses at higher education centers in Kennett, Malden, and Sikeston for easier access by Cape Girardeau area students (Bliss, 2000).

Cape Girardeau was one of the original 38 schools that received state grant funding to start curriculum reviews and implement new and more challenging courses. The program does not dictate what courses must be taken. It allows more than just a college education. Johnston (2000) explained that the program allows for career training needed in today’s high tech society. The school was able to purchase equipment that allowed the school to expand courses and offer distance-learning classes.

Missouri has offered one of the most comprehensive and competitive programs in the nation. Eighty-five

percent of students who used funds from the A+ program to pay for their freshman year of a junior college, re-enrolled for their second year as compared to 50% of other college freshmen who dropped out after their first year of school (Johnston, 2000).

Summary

The process of reform in Missouri has been long and full of experimental approaches to achieve basically the same unified goal of a quality education for all students. The basic characteristics of the unified goal (high attendance and grade point averages, individual ownership, and community involvement) have been used as the foundation in establishing Accelerated and A+ Schools Programs. Both are designed to reduce dropout rate, increase attendance, improve student grade point average, and create an environment conducive to learning.

The impact of the A+ Schools Program is showing a positive impact for schools that are A+ designated. According to the MDESE report from 1999 through 2006, schools that were A+ designated had a lower dropout rate compared to the state average. A 0.2% to 0.5% positive difference was shown for schools with A+. The same report also showed from 1999 to 2006 a 1.5% to 2.9% positive

difference in graduation rates for schools A+ designated (MDESE, 2007a).

The review of literature focused on many improvements plans and methods that were created by educational reform initiatives over the past twenty-five years. The researcher can determine that most reform ideas discussed have all been based on a collaborative approach. With insurmountable pressure for our nation’s students to perform at a higher rate, it is evident through this research that the effort to improve is instilled in our nation’s educators.

CHAPTER III

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Introduction

Three components of the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 were focused on in this study: increasing students' attendance, lowering dropout rates, and improving student achievement (MDESE, 2007b). The A+ Schools Program was designed to promote attendance, lower dropout rates, and improve student achievement by providing the incentive of paid tuition for eligible students to attend community college or vocational schools upon graduation. The A+ Program was also established to open more doors for post-secondary training which includes vocational training. Students then have other career options to further their education and not attend a four year college (MDESE, 2007b).

A national trend for incentive based programs started occurring in the late 1980s with the needs based program developed by the state of Michigan (Michigan Auditor Office, 1995). This particular program was based on financial need and not academic performance. Several programs have been developed in the past 20 years and are becoming a national trend (Wilmath, 2007). The Missouri A+ Schools Program is very unique in its approach compared to

other successful programs. It is based on more than just academics and attendance. The most pivotal area that makes this program so unique is the citizenship requirement that makes students accountable for illegal action outside of the regular school setting (Robison, 1995).

Research Setting

The state of Missouri started the 2008 school year with 254 school districts statewide that had been designated as A+ Schools (MDESE, 2008). When researching the A+ schools program, it was determined that no research had been completed comparing A+ school districts against non A+ school districts in the categories of attendance, achievement, or dropout rate. The researcher was also able to determine that no relevant independent studies of this nature had been completed.

The A+ Schools Program was established to promote several areas of each Missouri student’s experience. This research was conducted to determine if there are differences with student behaviors in school districts that are eligible to offer tuition scholarships compared to schools that are not.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effect of the Missouri A+ Schools Program on student attendance,

dropout rate, and overall eleventh grade student Communication Art achievement. The hypothesis was three fold.

Hypotheses

Ho_1. The mean attendance of students in the A+ Schools Program is not significantly different from the mean attendance of students not eligible for A+ financial assistance.

Ho_2. The mean dropout rate of students is not significantly different from the mean dropout rate of students not eligible for A+ Financial assistance.

Ho_3. The mean MAP Communication Arts index scores are not significantly different from the mean MAP Communication Arts index scores of the students not eligible for A+ financial assistance.

Sampling Procedure

The state of Missouri started the 2008 school year with 254 school districts statewide that had been designated as A+ Schools (MDESE, 2008). After considerable research of the A+ schools program, it was determined that research had not been completed comparing A+ school districts against non eligible A+ school districts in the categories of attendance, achievement, or dropout rate. As

well, no relevant independent studies of the A+ Program have been completed. The A+ Schools Program was established to promote several areas of each Missouri student's experience. This study was conducted to determine if there are differences with student behaviors in school districts that are eligible to offer tuition scholarships compared to schools that are not.

The 2007-08 school year was chosen as the test period. All Missouri A+ designated school districts were aware of the criterion for eligibility to receive financial assistance and were part of the A+ Schools Program for the entire duration of the study. Criterion is established by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for the A+ Schools Program and is uniform between school districts.

Research Design Procedure

The research populations of fifty A+ designated school districts were randomly selected statewide and were compared to fifty school districts of the same population that were not A+ designated. The student achievement, dropout rates, and attendance averages during the 2007-08 school years was retrieved from the MDESE website data base for analysis. Achievement scores were compared from the eleventh grade level MAP Communication Arts test.

Dropout rates compared were compiled from the federal government Annual Yearly Progress report data base. Attendance rates from both populations were compiled from a high school average 9-12 level setting.

Treatment of Data

Data generated from the MDESE data sources were compared using a paired-comparison sample *t* test. The testing procedure was determined to be appropriate for a matched-pair *t* test design. Subject groups were matched on a variable related to the measure studied. The paired t test was used to compare the means of the two variables: A+ designed schools and non eligible A+ schools in attendance, dropout rate, and Communication Arts achievement averages. The difference between the two variables was statistically significant at the .05 alpha level.

The researcher has determined that a *t*-test can be used in any statistical hypothesis test in which the test statistic has a student's *t* distribution if the null hypothesis is true (SPSS, 1999). It is applied when the population is assumed to be normally distributed but the sample sizes are small enough that the statistic on which inference is based is not normally distributed. It relies on an uncertain estimate of standard deviation rather than

on a precisely known value. The data will be examined to determine whether this researcher will accept the null hypothesis or reject it. The data will need to indicate a significance of less than $\geq$.05, or, if higher, the hypothesis will be rejected. If rejected, then it can be determined that the Missouri A+ Schools program does not create a significant difference in the data studied for attendance, dropout rate, and student achievement. The researcher notes that the outcome of the studied data could vary by showing a significant difference in just one or more areas studied.

Summary

The State of Missouri, like many states across the nation, is vigorously looking for ways to promote educational opportunities. One such method to promote student opportunities is with post secondary education by keeping students within their home state. States across the nation have developed tuition based programs to motivate students to take post secondary educational opportunities.

According to the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2008), over 38,000 Missouri A+ Schools Program students have utilized at least one semester of tuition since 1997. In 2008-09, the State of

Missouri has appropriated over 25 million to fund the A+ Program. The No Child Left Behind Law continues to pressure school districts to find innovative ways to promote and enhance education opportunities. Schools will continue to search and secure ways to improve the educational setting for all students.

This study will determine if post secondary opportunities will actually improve a high school's setting in the areas of attendance, dropout rate, and student achievement. This study was necessary to determine if eligible A+ students would out perform students who are not eligible for A+ scholarship in the selected criteria.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The most recent research suggests that the incentives foundation of the A+ Schools Program is designed to provide the initiative to increase daily attendance rate, reduce dropout rate, and raise student achievement scores. With the requirements of the Missouri Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 placing increased levels of performance on school districts to perform at higher levels, the A+ Schools Program was developed to meet the demands. The increased demand has also changed the role of the school administrator in finding productive approaches to improve the educational setting.

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a difference in the attendance, dropout rate, and student achievement in schools that have been appointed as A+ Schools by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Data was collected to determine if the tuition incentive provided by those schools have been instrumental in increasing attendance rate, reducing dropouts, and improving MAP achievement scores of students who are eligible. The subject groups that were used for

this comparative study were selected from school districts that have not been appointed as A+ Schools by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Data collected from fifty randomly selected school districts were used to determine if there was an increase in average daily attendance, dropout rate, and students' achievement for districts that are eligible for A+ assistance compared to fifty randomly selected school districts that are not A+ eligible.

The randomly selected school districts that were A+ eligible have been determined to have been designated for tuition incentives for at least two years. Students in these school districts have utilized the tuition scholarship opportunity.

Data Analysis

This chapter is organized to present the results of the data analysis from this paired comparative study. The data in this project was analyzed by using a paired comparison t test by using the SPSS base statistical analysis program version 10.0 (1999). The results will be presented in three paired categories of average daily attendance, school district's dropout rate, and

Communication Arts Missouri Assessment Program achievements scores for the 2007-08 school year.

Null Hypothesis I

The mean attendance of students in the A+ Schools Program is not significantly different from the mean attendance of students not eligible for A+ financial assistance.

It was hypothesized in Chapter III that there is not a significant difference between the average daily attendances of A+ eligible students versus non eligible students. Subject groups were compared by using a paired comparison t test.

Table 1 shows the comparison of the two population groups. It can be determined by the data that the comparison of the two subject groups does not show a significant difference. Overall statistical mean average of the non eligible students is 93.77. The A+ eligible student population statistical average was a 94.22 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 1:

Paired Sample Mean Attendance of Students in Non A+ and A+ Schools

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Non A+ Eligible	93.7700	50	1.2404	.1754
A+ Eligible	94.2280	50	1.3234	.1872

Table 2shows the correlation analysis between the two subject groups. The correlation is within the factor of ≥.05 significance. The two subject groups do not show a significant difference in standard deviation with a 1.2404 factor for non A+ students verses a 1.3234 standard deviation for eligible students. The standard error mean does not exceed the ≥.05. Even though there is a difference of more than 0, the analysis is to accept the null hypothesis.

Table 2:

Paired Correlation Between Attendance of Students

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Non A+ & A+ Eligible Students	50	.053	.716

In table 3, the comparison of the two groups of attendance shows in a paired sample test that the mean comparison of the two groups was .4580. Under the 95% confidence interval, this does not show a significant difference between the two subject groups on attendance. The standard error mean of .2497 is relatively small compared to the 95% confidence interval. The attendance variable between the two subjects was accepted.

Table 3:

Paired Sample Test Attendance

	Paired Difference					
	Mean	Std Deviation	Std Error Mean	Lower		t
Non A+ vs. Eligible A+	.4580	1.7654	.2497	-.9597	4.373E-02	-1.83

Hypothesis II

The mean dropout rate of students in the A+ Schools Program is not significantly different from the mean dropout rate of students not eligible for A+ financial assistance.

It was hypothesized in Chapter III that there is not a significant difference between the average daily attendances of A+ eligible students versus non eligible students.

Table 4 shows the paired comparison of the two population groups. It can be determined by the dropout data that the comparison of the two subject groups does not show a significant difference. Overall statistical mean average of the non eligible students is 2.9660. The A+ eligible student population statistical average was a 2.4740 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This is determined by using the correlation factor of $\geq .05$.

Table 4:

Paired Sample Dropout Rate Between Non A+ and A+ Schools

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Non A+ Eligible Students	2.9660	50	2.1447	.1754
A+ Eligible Students	2.4740	50	1.8083	.2551

Table 5 will illustrate the correlation analysis between the two subject groups. The correlation is within the factor of ≥.05 significance. The two subject groups do not show a significant difference in standard deviation with a 2.1447 factor for non A+ students verses a 1.8038 standard deviation for eligible students. The standard error mean does not exceed the ≥.05 confidence factor. Even though there is a difference of more than 0, the analysis is to accept the null hypothesis.

Table 5:

Paired Sample Correlation Dropout Rate Between Non A+ and A+ Schools

	N	Correlation	Sig
Non A+ vs. Eligible	50	-.200	.163

In table 6, the comparison of the two groups of attendance shows a mean comparison of .4920. Under the 95% confidence interval this does not show a significant difference between the two subject groups on attendance. The standard error mean of .4337 is relatively small compared to the 95% confidence interval. The null hypothesis for the dropout variable between the two subjects was accepted.

Table 6:

Paired Sample Test Dropout Rate Between Non A+ and A+ Schools

	Paired					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower		t
Non vs. Eligible	.4920	3.0665	.4337	-.9597	4.373E-02	-1.8340

Hypothesis III

The mean of student achievement MAP communication arts index scores in A+ Schools is not significantly different from the mean student achievement MAP index scores of students not eligible for A+ financial assistance.

Table 7 below shows the comparison of the two population groups for Communication Arts MAP achievement index scores. It can be determined by the data that the comparison of the two subject groups does not show a significant difference in index averages. Overall statistical mean average of the non eligible students is 738.20. The A+ eligible student population statistical average was a 743.38 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 7:

Paired Sample Student Achievement Mean Between Non A+ and A+ Schools

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Non A+ Eligible Students	738.2000	50	10.8421	1.5333
A+ Eligible Students	743.3800	50	9.3697	1.3251

Table 8 shows the correlation analysis between the two subject groups. The correlation is within the factor of ≥.05 significance. The two subject groups do not show a significant difference in standard deviation with a 1.2404 factor for non A+ students verses a 1.3234 standard deviation for eligible students. The standard error mean does not exceed the ≥.05. Even though there is a difference of more than 0, the analysis is to accept the null hypothesis.

Table 8:

Paired Correlation Student Achievement Between Non A+ and A+ Schools

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Non A+ & A+ Eligible Students	50	.053	.716

In table 9, the comparison of the two groups of attendance shows a mean comparison of .4580. Under the 95% confidence interval, this does not show a significant difference between the two subject groups on attendance. The standard error mean of .2497 is relatively small compared to the 95% confidence interval. The attendance variable between the two subjects was accepted based on the small variance of difference.

Table 9:

Paired Sample Test Student Achievement

	Paired Diff					
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std Error Mean	Lower		t
Non A+ vs. Eligible	-5.1800	12.7306	1.8004	-.9597	4.373E-02	-1.8340

The sampling group that was randomly selected from the MDESE (2007) data base determined no significant difference in the paired comparison test. Therefore, other configurations with the same randomly selected subject groups will be evaluated by grouping the subjects into a small school variable and a large school variable. The intended outcome of this analysis is to determine if the

population size of the school districts will affect the paired comparison significance.

The following table below describes the analysis generated between the disaggregated data of subject population of twenty five schools. They were compared in two variables by taking the smaller size school populations and comparing them to the larger populations. The mean average of each group illustrated in Table 10 determines that this pairing mean analysis does not create a significant difference.

Table 10:

Disaggregated Data

	N	Attendance Mean	Dropout Mean	Com Arts Mean
A+ Large	25	93.45	2.84	745.24
A+ Small	25	94.11	2.34	742.98

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the differences of attendance rate, dropout rate, and student achievement between Missouri high school students eligible for A+ Program tuition incentives compared to students in Missouri high schools not eligible for the incentive. The two subject groups were randomly selected from the 2007-08 school year. The A+ Schools Program has been offering eligible students in Missouri tuition incentives since 1997. There were three hypothesis questions that were analyzed, and from each area it was determined to accept each null hypothesis.

Implications

The first hypothesis was an investigation to determine whether there would not be a significant difference between the two subject groups. It was determined by the mean average to be less than .05% which does not establish a significant difference within the analysis findings. It was noted in the related literature that incentives for student behavior and performance were being used with the hope that students would strive toward

higher goals. Within this particular hypothesis, it is determined that the tuition incentive did not create a significant difference within this question of study. The data did not appear to indicate that the incentives of paid tuition and fees may not be enough motivation nor had enough time to increase attendance. The possibility remains that the averages provided for daily attendance could have included students within A+ schools who were not eligible for A+ incentives and may have skewed the results of the comparison.

Hypothesis two was formulated to analyze the differences between dropout rates in the randomly selected groups. Dropout rate now being calculated into graduation rate has become a primary focus for schools across the country. Federal school improvement sanctions are pressuring schools to find improvement initiatives. Motivating students to excel is no longer a goal; it’s a priority. Within this analysis, the study also revealed very little significant difference, so hypothesis two was also accepted.

The federal No Child Left Behind Education Law now includes graduation rate as a main component of public school assessment. The new attendance standard focuses on a four year average of graduates and dropouts. Within the

analysis, the researcher found that a mean average of 2.9660 for non A+ schools was not significantly different than eligible A+ students which had a 2.4740 dropout rate.

There are several aspects that were indicated in the review of literature that demonstrate a national decline in the overall student dropout rate. One area in the related literature noted that the changing of the general track education was a primary focus of the A+ schools to improve the dropout rate in Missouri. The A+ Program allows for more than a college track education and includes a vocational track education.

Hypothesis three focused on the student MAP achievement of eleventh grade Communications Arts index scores of the two selected groups. The analysis indicated that the two subject groups did not show a significant difference in analysis. Hypothesis three was also accepted. One consideration in the analysis of student achievement is that the state test is required of eleventh grade students. The Communication Arts MAP test does not have any effect on the students' eligibility for A+ scholarship incentives.

Recommendations

The A+ Schools Program was created after the development of Senate Bill 380 in 1993 and was meant to be a motivational concept designed to meet the requirements of the Outstanding Schools Act. Additional data needs to be obtained on attendance, dropout rate, and student achievement in a three to five year period compared to this current study. The researcher does feel that this current study does have relevance and will be an approach to guide further and more extensive research on attendance, dropout rate, and student achievement.

It is recommended that additional or similar studies be made considering the following suggestions:

1. Data needs to be gathered only on A+ eligible student attendance rate, graduation rate, and student achievement.
2. The attendance information should include individual student data instead of overall averages.
3. A study should include an equal number of urban schools and rural schools to determine if an incentive is greater in those population areas.

4. The study needs to be increased to cover a three year time span of students who have been in an A+ School for at least three years.

Conclusion

The A+ Schools Program has proven to offer more opportunities for students to pursue post-secondary educational opportunities. The development of the A+ Schools Program is a lasting mark of the late Missouri Governor Mel Carnahan and the Missouri Legislative body of 1992. The program was developed to create more post secondary opportunities for the youth of Missouri.

The program’s inception was created to offer financial assistance to students across the state. It was not just intended for financially needy students but all students who meet the criteria. With the development and growth of this program, it was revealed in the review literature that the access to financial aid has increased the enrollments of two year institutions in the state of Missouri.

The statistical analysis of the study did not determine that a significant difference in student behaviors improved in the areas of attendance, dropout rate, and student achievement. Even though the analysis

did not produce the anticipated outcome, this researcher does feel strongly, based on the related literature, that the A+ Schools Program is having a positive impact on post secondary opportunities. With so many different programs developed to improve student success, it is evident that the A+ Schools Program is helping more students pursue post-secondary educational avenues.

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Appendix A

Designated A+ School Districts

School District - School Building Name
Adair Co. R-I School District - Adair Co. HS
Affton 101 School District - Affton HS
Alton R-IV School District - Alton HS
Arcadia Valley R-II School Dist. - Arcadia Valley HS
Aurora R-VIII School District - Aurora HS
Ava R-I School District - Ava HS
Bakersfield R-IV School District - Bakersfield HS
Bell City R-II School District - Bell City HS
Belton 124 School District - Belton HS
Bernie R-XIII School District- Bernie HS
Bevier C-4 School District - Bevier HS
Bloomfield R-XIV School District - Bloomfield HS
Blue Springs R-IV School District
- Blue Springs HS
- Blue Springs South HS

Bolivar R-I School District - Bolivar HS
Boone County R-IV School District - Hallsville HS
Boonville R-I School District - Boonville HS
Bowling Green R-I School District - Bowling Green HS
Branson R-IV School District - Branson HS
Brookfield R-III School District - Brookfield HS
Bunker R-III School District - Bunker HS
Cabool R-IV School District - Cabool HS
Camdenton R-III School District - Camdenton HS
Cape Girardeau 63 School District - Central Sr. HS
Carl Junction R-I School District - Carl Junction HS
Carrollton R-VII School District - Senior HS
Carthage R-IX School District - Carthage Sr. HS
Caruthersville 18 School District - Caruthersville HS
Cassville R-IV School District - Cassville HS
Center 58 School District - Center Sr. HS
Central R-III School District - Central HS
Centralia R-VI School District - Centralia HS
Charleston R-I School District - Charleston HS
Chillicothe R-II School District - Chillicothe HS
Clark County R-I School District - Clark County HS
Clarkton C-4 School District - Clarkton HS
Clearwater R-I School District - Clearwater HS
Climax Springs R-IV School District - Climax Springs HS
Clinton School District - Clinton Sr. HS

Cole Camp R-I School District - Cole Camp HS
Cole Co. R-V School District - Eugene HS
Columbia 93 School District - Columbia-Hickman HS
Columbia 93 School District - Rock Bridge HS
Concordia R-II School District - Concordia HS
Couch R-I School District - Couch HS
Crystal City 47 School District - Crystal City HS
Dallas County R-I School District - Buffalo HS
Desoto 73 School District - Desoto Sr. HS
Dora R-III School District - Dora HS
Dunklin R-V School District - Herculaneum HS
East Buchanan Co.C-1 School District - East Buchanan HS
East Carter Co. R-II School District - East Carter Co. HS
East Newton Co. R-VI School. District - East Newton HS
Eldon R-I School District - Eldon HS
Excelsior Springs 40 School District - Excelsior Springs HS
Farmington R-VII School District - Farmington Sr. HS
Fayette R-III School District -Fayette HS
Ferguson-Florissant R-II School District - Berkeley HS
Ferguson-Florissant R-II School District - McCluer HS
Ferguson-Florissant R-II School District - McCluer North High
Festus R-VI School District - Festus Sr. High School
Fordland R-III School District - Fordland HS
Fort Osage R-I School District - Fort Osage High School
Fox C-6 School District

- Fox Sr. HS
- Seckman Sr. HS

Francis Howell R-III School District - Francis Howell HS
Fredericktown R-I School District - Fredericktown HS
Ft. Zumwalt R-II School District

- Ft. Zumwalt East HS
- Ft. Zumwalt North HS
- Ft. Zumwalt South HS
- Ft. Zumwalt West HS

Fulton 58 School District - Fulton Sr. HS
Gainesville R-V School District - Gainesville HS
Gallatin R-V School District - Gallatin HS
Gasconade Co. R-II School District - Owensville HS
Gideon 37 School District - Gideon HS
Gilman City R-IV School District - Gilman City HS
Grain Valley R-V School District - Grain Valley HS
Green City R-I School District - Green City HS
Greenville R-II School District - Greenville HS
Grundy Co. School District - Grundy Co. HS
Hamilton R-II School District - Penney HS

Hancock Place School District - Hancock Sr. HS
Hannibal 60 School District - Hannibal Sr. HS
Harrisonville R-IX School District - Harrisonville HS
Hartville R-II School District - Hartville HS
Hazelwood School District
- Hazelwood Central HS
- Hazelwood East HS
- Hazelwood West HS

Hickman Mills C-1 School District
- Hickman Mills Sr. HS
- Ruskin HS

Hickory County R-I School District - Skyline HS
Hillsboro R-III School District - Hillsboro HS
Holden R-III School District - Holden HS
Houston R-I School District - Houston HS
Hurley R-I School District - Hurley HS
Independence 30 School District
- William Chrisman HS
- Truman HS
- Van Horn HS

Jefferson City School District - Jefferson City HS
Joplin R-VIII School District - Joplin Sr. HS
Kansas City 33 School District
- Lincoln College Preparatory
- Paseo Academy of Performing Arts
- Van Horn HS at East

Kennett 39 School District - Kennett HS
Kirksville R-III School District - Kirksville Sr. HS
Knob Noster R-VIII School District - Knob Noster HS
Knox County R-I School District - Knox Co. HS
Laclede Co. R-I School District - Conway HS
Lamar R-I School District - Lamar HS
Lawson R-XIV School District - Lawson HS
Lebanon R-III School District - Lebanon Sr. HS
Lee's Summit R-VII School District
- Lee's Summit North HS
- Lee's Summit Sr. HS
- Lee's Summit West HS

Lexington R-V School District - Lexington HS
Liberty 53 School District - Liberty HS
Licking R-VIII School District - Licking HS
Lincoln R-II School District - Lincoln HS
Lindbergh R-VIII School District - Lindbergh Sr. HS
Linn Co. R-I School District - Linn Co. HS
Logan-Rogersville R-VIII School District - Logan-Rogersville HS
Macon Co. R-I School District - Macon Sr. HS

Macon Co. R-IV School District - Macon Co. HS
Macks Creek R-V School District - Macks Creek HS
Malden R-I School District - Malden HS
Mansfield R-IV School District - Mansfield HS
Marceline R-V School District - Marceline HS
Maries Co. R-II School District - Belle HS
Marion C. Early R-V School District - Marion C. Early HS
Marshall School District - Marshall Sr. HS
Marshfield R-I School District - Marshfield HS
Maryville R-II School District - Maryville HS
Meadville R-IV School District - Meadville HS
Mehlville R-IX School District
- Mehlville Sr. HS
- Oakville Sr. HS

Meramec Valley R-III School District - Pacific HS
Mexico 59 School District - Mexico HS
Mid-Buchanan Co. R-V School District - Mid-Buchanan HS
Milan C-2 School District - Milan HS
Miller R-II School District - Miller HS
Moberly School District - Moberly Sr. HS
Monett R-I School District - Monett HS
Montgomery Co. R-II School District - Montgomery Co. HS
Morgan County R-II School District - Morgan County HS
Mountain Grove R-III School District - Mountain Grove HS
Mtn.View-Birch Tree R-III School District - Liberty Sr. HS
Mt. Vernon R-V School District - Mt. Vernon HS
NE Randolph Co. R-IV School District - Northeast HS
Neosho R-V School District - Neosho HS
Nevada R-V School District - Nevada HS
New Bloomfield R-III School District - New Bloomfield HS
New Franklin R-I School District - New Franklin HS
Nixa R-II School District - Nixa HS
North Callaway Co. R-I School District - North Callaway HS
North Kansas City 74 School District
- Winnetonka HS
- Oak Park HS
- North Kansas City HS
- Staley HS

North St. Francois Co. R-I School District - North Co. Sr. HS
Northwest R-I School District - Northwest HS
Northwestern R-I School District - Northwestern HS
Norwood R-I School District - Norwood HS
Oak Ridge R-VI School District - Oak Ridge HS
Odessa R-VII School District - Odessa HS
Oregon-Howell R-III School District - Koshkonong HS

Osage Co. R-II School District - Linn HS
Osceola School District - Osceola Sr. HS
Ozark R-VI School District - Ozark HS
Palmyra R-I School District - Palmyra HS
Park Hill School District
- Park Hill HS
- Park Hill South HS

Pattonville R-III School District - Pattonville Sr. HS
Perry Co. 32 School District - Perryville Sr. HS
Pierce City R-VI School District - Pierce City HS
Plato R-V School District - Plato HS
Platte Co. R-III School District - Platte City HS
Pleasant Hill R-III School District - Pleasant Hill HS
Poplar Bluff R-I School District - Poplar Bluff HS
Potosi R-III School District - Potosi HS
Prairie Home R-V School District - Prairie Home HS
Princeton R-V School District - Princeton Sr. HS
Putnam Co. R-I School District - Putnam Co. HS
Puxico R-VIII School District - Puxico HS
Raymore-Peculiar R-II School Dist - Raymore-Peculiar Sr. HS
Raytown C-2 School District
- Raytown Sr. HS
- Raytown South HS

Reeds Spring R-IV School District - Reeds Spring HS
Republic R-III School District - Republic HS
Richmond R-XVI School District - Richmond HS
Ritenour School District - Ritenour Sr. HS
Riverview Gardens School District - Riverview Gardens Sr. HS
Rolla 31 School District - Rolla Sr. HS
Salem R-80 School District - Salem Sr. HS
Salisbury R-IV School District - Salisbury HS
Santa Fe R-X School District - Santa Fe HS
School of the Osage R-II School Dist. - Osage HS
Scotland Co. R-I School District - Scotland Co. HS
Schuyler Co. R-I School District - Schuyler Co. HS
Sedalia 200 School District - Smith Cotton HS
Seneca R-VII School District - Seneca HS
Seymour R-II School District - Seymour HS
Shelby Co. R-IV School District - South Shelby HS
Shelby Co. C-1 School District - North Shelby HS
Sikeston R-VI School District - Sikeston Sr. HS
Slater School District - Slater HS
Smithton R-VI School District - Smithton HS
Smithville R-II School District - Smithville HS
South Harrison Co. R-II School District - South Harrison

HS
South Iron Co. R-I School District - South Iron HS
Southern Boone Co. R-I School District -Southern Boone HS
Sparta R-III School District - Sparta HS

Springfield R-XII School District
- Parkview HS
- Glendale HS
- Central HS

Spokane R-VII School District - Spokane HS
St. Charles Co. R-V School District - Orchard Farm Sr. HS
St. Charles R-VI School District
- St. Charles HS
- St. Charles West HS

St. Clair R-XIII - St. Clair HS
St. Elizabeth R-IV School District - St. Elizabeth HS
St. James R-I School District - John F. Hodge HS
St. Joseph School District
- Benton HS
- Lafayette HS

Ste. Genevieve Co. R-II School District - Ste. Genevieve Sr. HS
Steelville R-III School District - Steelville HS
Stoutland R-II School District - Stoutland HS
Sullivan C-2 School District - Sullivan Sr. HS
Summersville R-II School District - Summersville HS
Sweet Springs R-VII School District - Sweet Springs HS
Thayer R-II School District - Thayer Sr. HS
Trenton R-IX School District - Trenton Sr. HS
Twin Rivers R-X School District - Twin Rivers HS
Union R-XI School District - Union HS
Valley Park School District - Valley Park Sr. HS
Warren Co. R-III School District -Warren Co. Sr. HS
Warrensburg R-VI School. Dist. - Warrensburg HS
Warsaw R-IX School District - Warsaw HS
Washington School District - Washington HS
Waynesville R-VI School District - Waynesville Sr. HS
Webb City R-VII School District - Webb City HS
Webster Groves School District - Webster Groves HS
Wellington-Napoleon R-IX School District -Wellington-Napoleon HS
Wellsville-Middletown R-I School District - Wellsville HS
Wentzville R-IV School District
- Emil E. Holt Sr. HS
- Timberland HS

West Plains R-VII School District - West Plains Sr. HS

West Platte Co. R-II School District - West Platte HS
West St. Francois Co R-IV School District - West County HS
Willard R-II School District - Willard HS
Willow Springs R-IV School District - Willow Springs HS
Windsor C-1 School District - Windsor HS
Winona R-III School District - Winona HS
Wright City R-II School District - Wright City HS

(MDESE, 2008)

Appendix B

A+ Program Participation Requirements

(1) The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Division of School Improvement (division) is authorized to establish procedures for the implementation of the A+ Schools Program including:

(A) Public school district participation;

(B) Initial and continued designation as an A+ school; and

(C) Initial and continued student eligibility to receive reimbursement for the cost of tuition, general fees and up to fifty percent (50%) of the book cost, subject to legislative appropriation, to attend any Missouri public community college or career-technical school.

(2) To participate in the A+ Schools Program, the chief administrator and school board of a public school district with secondary schools must:

(A) Demonstrate a commitment to the established program goals. These goals are to ensure that all students:

1. Graduate from high school;

2. Complete a selection of high school studies that is challenging and has identified learning expectations; and

3. Proceed from high school graduation to a community college, post-secondary career-technical school, or high wage job with work place skill development opportunities;

(B) Provide assurance that the district will:

1. Establish measurable district-wide performance standards for the program;

2. Specify the knowledge, skills and competencies in measurable terms, that students must demonstrate to

successfully complete any individual course offered by the school, and any course of studies which will qualify students for graduation from the school;

3. Establish student performance standards, that lead to or qualify students for graduation, and meet or exceed the performance standards adopted by the State Board of Education (board);

4. Require rigorous coursework with standards of competency in basic academic subjects for students pursuing career-technical education or employment; and

5. Develop a partnership plan in cooperation and with the advice of local business persons, labor leaders, teachers, senior citizens, parents and representatives of colleges and post-secondary career-technical schools, with the plan then approved by the local board of education. The plan shall specify:

A. A mechanism to receive updated information on an annual basis from those who developed the plan in order to best meet the goals of the program;

B. Procedures used in the school to identify students that may drop out of school and the intervention services to be used to meet the needs of such students;

C. Counseling and mentoring services provided to students who will enter the work force upon graduation from high school, address apprenticeship and intern programs; and

D. Procedures for the recruitment of volunteers from the community to serve in the school;

(C) Designate a certificated employee to serve as the A+ Schools Program coordinator;

(D) Make facilities and services available for adult literacy training;

(E) Be classified as an accredited or provisionally accredited school district by the board under MDESE’s Missouri School Improvement Program; and

(F) Schools may request a designation review two (2) years after the submission of the Notification of Commitment Form and when they have met the requirements of the program.

(3) High schools seeking designation must provide DESE with notification of their intent to seek designation. The notification must contain:

(A) The name and address of the high school and school district applying for A+ status;

(B) The signature of the chief administrator and board president of the school district submitting the request for designation;

(C) Statement(s) of assurance that the school district will:

1. Demonstrate a commitment to the established goals of the A+ Schools Program;

2. Implement and annually update a partnership plan;

3. Establish a data and accountability system necessary to determine and report at least student demographics and enrollment, student completion and performance of coursework, student follow-up after leaving high school, program outcome, and student success relating to the implementation of the partnership plan, and student eligibility to receive student financial incentives available through the A+ Schools Program;

4. Comply with all reporting requirements of DESE;

5. Develop and implement a plan in compliance with all applicable state law and regulations to report students who drop out of school;

(D) Develop a plan of implementation which addresses each of the program requirements specified in this rule, including:

1. A listing of major objectives that include:

A. Curricular and instructional change;

B. Lower drop-out rates;

C. Student mastery of measurable learning expectations;

D. Successful transition from high school to continued education or employment;

E. A description of the process of the identification of and planned services for students considered to be at risk of educational failure and dropping out of school;

F. A plan to evaluate the effectiveness of the A+ Schools Program. Such evaluation should include but not be limited to:

1. Annualized high school drop-out rate;

2. Graduation rate;

3. Number of students enrolled by grade level, kindergarten through grade twelve (K–12);

4. Number of high school graduates continuing their education at four (4)-year colleges and universities, community colleges or career-technical schools. This data shall be recorded separately by category of institution;

5. Number of high school graduates entering the labor force;

6. Career education enrollment disaggregated by program/course and by location (local school district and area career-technical school); and

7. Career education follow-up/placement rates for local school district and career education programs in the area career-technical school; and

G. Name and description of each course offered at high school(s) and area career-technical school(s).

(4) The designated A+ Schools Program coordinator shall be employed at least half time without additional district responsibilities, and have specified coordination and implementation duties to administer the district’s

proposed A+ Schools Program objectives. In addition, the designated individual must possess a valid Missouri certificate of license to teach in the secondary grade levels, an administrator certificate of license to teach or a counselor certificate of license to teach.

(5) In preparation for designation participating public high school districts must:

(A) Accomplish at least the following requirements:

1. Establish measurable district-wide performance standards for each of the three (3) established program goals and specific measures to determine attainment of each standard;

2. Demonstrate that developmental activities have taken place within the district or high school to specify the knowledge, skills/competencies and mastery in measurable terms, that students must demonstrate to successfully complete all of the individual courses offered by the school, and in any course of studies which will qualify students for graduation from high school;

3. Demonstrate that procedures have been implemented within the district or school to eliminate the offering of a general track of courses that do not provide sufficient preparation for students upon graduation to successfully enter and progress in employment or postsecondary studies;

4. Establish a schedule of rigorous coursework with standards of competency;

5. Organize a local advisory committee of individuals that will meet annually to cooperatively develop and revise the school’s partnership plan. Members should include:

A. Business person(s);

B. Labor leaders;

C. Parents;

D. Community college and postsecondary career-technical schools;

E. Senior citizens;

F. Teachers; and

G. Students;

6. Demonstrate that specific knowledge, skills and competencies have been identified, in measurable terms, that students must demonstrate to successfully complete all individual courses offered by the school, and any course of studies which qualify students for graduation from the school and are a part of the school's curriculum;

7. Demonstrate that specific measurement and student mastery record keeping procedures have been developed for each item of knowledge, skill or competency identified for each individual course that the school offers;

8. Show evidence that a reduction in the number of high school students dropping out of school has occurred; and

9. Show evidence that procedures to ensure students who plan to participate in the A+ Schools Program financial incentives understand that:

A. Student financial incentives will be available for a period of four (4) years after high school graduation;

B. To be eligible, each student must:

(I) Enter into a written agreement with the school prior to high school graduation;

(II) Have attended a designated A+ School for three (3) consecutive years prior to high school graduation;

(III) Graduated from high school with an overall grade point average of two and five-tenths (2.5) points or higher on a four (4)-point scale, or graduated from a high school with documented mastery of institutionally identified skills that would equate to a two and five-tenths (2.5) grade point average or higher;

(IV) Have at least a ninety-five percent (95%) attendance record overall for grades nine through twelve (9–12);

(V) Performed fifty (50) hours of unpaid tutoring or mentoring; and

(VI) Maintained a record of good citizenship and avoidance of the unlawful use of drugs and/or alcohol;

C. To maintain eligibility, each participating student must during the four (4)-year period of incentive availability:

(I) Has enrolled in and attends on a full-time basis a Missouri public community college or career-technical school; and

(II) Maintain a grade point average of two and five-tenths (2.5) points or higher on a four (4)-point scale;

D. The financial incentives will be made available, subject to legislative appropriation, only after the student has made a documented good faith effort to first secure all available federal post-secondary student financial assistance funds that do not require repayment; and

E. The financial incentives will only be made available to reimburse the unpaid balance of the cost of tuition, general fees and up to fifty percent (50%) of the book cost subject to legislative appropriation after the federal post-secondary student financial assistance funds have been applied to these costs:

(I) If changes must be made to the above incentives due to legislative appropriation, DESE will endeavor to reimburse:

(a) First, the full amount of tuition;

(b) Second, the general fees; and

(c) Third, up to fifty percent (50%) of the book cost.

(6) Public high schools may be designated by the board as A+ Schools when they demonstrate that they have:

(A) Made significant progress or attained the three (3) established program goals of the A+ Schools Program; and

(B) Met the established program requirements of the A+ Schools Program.

(7) Missouri public community colleges or career-technical schools shall verify, for each student intending to participate in the A+ Schools Program, student financial incentives at their institution that:

(A) During the first semester of the student's participation:

1. Verification of student eligibility has been received from the high school from which the student graduated;

2. The eligible student is enrolled as a full-time student;

3. A good faith effort has been made to secure federal post-secondary student financial assistance funds; and

4. After federal post-secondary student financial assistance funds are applied, The A+ Schools Program student will receive financial incentive funds. The amount of funds will depend on the remaining costs of tuition, general fees and up to fifty percent (50%) of the book cost subject to legislative appropriation to attend that institution; and

(B) During the second and subsequent semesters of the student's participation:

1. The eligible student continues to be enrolled as a full-time student;

2. Good faith efforts continue to be made to secure federal post-secondary student financial assistance funds;

3. The student has earned and maintains a grade point average of two and five-tenths (2.5) points or higher on a four (4)-point scale; and

4. After federal post-secondary student financial assistance funds are applied, the A+ Schools Program student will receive financial incentive funds.The amount of funds will depend on the remaining costs of tuition, general fees and up to fifty percent (50%) of the book cost subject to legislative appropriation to attend that institution.

(MDESE, 2008)

VITA’

Jeffrey L. Hyatt was born in Springfield, Missouri, in May of 1968. He is the son of Joseph and Janet Hyatt of Southwest Missouri. He graduated from Ozark High School in Ozark, Missouri, and holds a Bachelor of Science Education degree from College of The Ozarks in Point Lookout Missouri. He holds a Masters Degree in Secondary Education and Specialist Degree in Superintendency from Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri. He achieved a Doctoral Degree in Educational Leadership from Lindenwood University, St Charles, Missouri in 2009.

Jeff’s professional career has been spent as a professional educator, coach, and administrator in the Southwest Missouri area. His career began in 1991 in Licking Missouri as a teacher and coach and it has progressed into administration where he currently holds the position of Sparta R-3 Superintendent of Schools. During his early years as a school superintendent he was awarded the New Superintendent of the Year for Southwest Missouri in 2005.

Outside of his educational occupation, he spends time with his family’s activities and is passionate about spending time relaxing on the Bryant River. Jeff was married to Heather in 2001 and they have two children, Morgan and Jadrien. The Hyatt family resides on the north

side of the family farm that was established in 1938. Jeff's parents still reside in the farm house that his grandparents lived in for over fifty years.