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Running head: FRESHMEN TRANSITION PRACTICES

The Transition to High School: Freshmen Transition
Practices

Teresa J. McKenzie

May, 2009

A dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of
Lindenwood University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

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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THE TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL: FRESHMEN TRANSITION
PRACTICES

Teresa J. McKenzie

This dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

at Lindenwood University by the School of Education.



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Date



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Date



Dr. Brad Swofford, Committee Member



Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

"Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing."

Theodore Roosevelt

Studying freshmen transition practices has definitely been work worth doing. As a high school principal, I cannot think of a greater investment than the one that is put into the successful transition of freshmen into the high school. Although the work was challenging, I was so fortunate to have a support system that allowed me to pursue this professional goal.

First, I would like to thank my husband. Your encouragement, patience, and occasional back rubs were appreciated more than I can express. Secondly, I would like to thank my daughter for her patience and understanding when mommy wasn't able to play. Next, I would like to thank my mom and dad for teaching me the value of hard work and instilling in me the faith that anything is possible.

Beyond my personal family, I must recognize my family-away-from-family, the staff of the two school districts

that I worked for during this experience. Their cheerleading and support helped me through each day.

Finally, I want to thank all the members of my Lindenwood cohort which I can now call friends. This experience has united us in a special way. A special thank you to the members of my capstone committee: Dr. Reid, Dr. DeVore, Dr. Swofford, and Dr. May. Your diligence and encouragement were so valuable.

Abstract

The transition to high school is a pivotal time for freshmen. Recognition of the importance of the ninth grade year and establishing freshmen transition programs are critical in addressing the nation's declining graduation rates. The purpose of this study was to investigate the practices, programs, or interventions used in Missouri to assist freshmen in making a successful transition to high school. For this research, all high school principals across the state were given the opportunity to contribute to the study. There were 183 schools, both public and non-public, that responded to the survey. From the data, 60.1% of Missouri high schools currently have a freshmen transition practice in place. Format analysis led to the conclusion that a multi-dimensional approach to the transition of freshmen was perceived as more successful than a single-practice approach. The impact of freshmen transition practices on attendance and graduation rates was unable to be determined due to the fact 78.1% of all the practices currently in place were reported to have been implemented within the last five years.

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

The transition to high school has been called the most pivotal point in a student's educational life. The shift to a new environment of rigorous academic expectations in combination with the developmental needs of adolescents can create a volatile situation. Students who make a smooth transition to high school are more likely to pursue post-secondary training. Freshmen who experience course failure, attendance problems, and discipline referrals are much more likely to not complete high school in the traditional four years or drop out of school altogether. The number of students being lost from the public school system was the motivation for this research. The statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, hypotheses, and rationale for the study were included in Chapter One. This chapter also discussed the limitations to the study and the definition of terms.

Statement of the Problem

In 2001, the national graduation rate was 75% with only about half of African Americans and Latinos making it to graduation day in the traditional amount of time (Thornburgh, 2006). Over the last 30 years in the United States, more students are lost from the ninth grade than at

any other place in the K-12 education pipeline (Haney, Abrams, Madaus, Wheelock, Miao, & Gruia, 2005). Therefore, the ninth grade plays a critical role in the nation's declining graduation rate. America's schools need to make the transition to high school for freshmen a priority.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the practices, programs, or interventions used across the State of Missouri to assist freshmen in making a successful transition to high school. The analysis of the number and format of the freshmen transition practices implemented by high schools of various sizes may benefit administrators who are searching for a new approach to address the transition to high school. This study may also be useful for administrators looking to begin a freshmen transition program.

Research Questions

The following questions were addressed in the study:

1. What type of freshmen transition practices are used in high schools across Missouri?
2. What type of school improvement models are implemented by high schools with an existing freshmen transition practice?

3. What are the perceptions of school leaders on the effectiveness of their current freshmen transition practice?

Hypotheses

Null Hypothesis #1

The student enrollment of a high school will have no correlation to the number of freshmen transition practices being implemented.

Null Hypothesis #2

The number of freshmen transition practices implemented in Missouri high schools will have no correlation to the attendance rate.

Null Hypothesis #3

The number of freshmen transition practices implemented in Missouri high schools will have no correlation to the graduation rate.

Rationale for the Study

The rationale for this study was to provide school leaders with the current practices being implemented by Missouri high schools to assist freshmen in making a smooth transition. This research will benefit school leaders who are seeking to improve, change, or begin a transitional practice, program, or intervention for the most critical

grade in the educational pipeline. The ninth grade can be a very pivotal time for many adolescents.

Limitations of the Study

For this study, it was important to recognize the following limitations:

1. The study was limited to the state of Missouri.
2. The survey instrument was designed by the researcher.
3. Public and non-public high schools were included in the sample.
4. Only public schools are required to report average daily attendance and graduation rate to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in Missouri.
5. Public schools are responsible for self reporting average daily attendance and dropouts.
6. Nearly 80% of the current freshmen transition practices implemented in high schools have been in place for five years or less.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined to clarify the meaning of key words used throughout this study.

Adolescent. An individual of age eleven to seventeen is considered an adolescent (Harvard Family, 2007).

Attendance center. A school that may contain a variety of grade configurations in the same building is referred to as an attendance center for the purpose of this study.

Freshmen. According to Webster's dictionary, a freshman is a newcomer, beginner, or a first-year student (Mish, 1990). For the purpose of this study the plural term, freshmen, applies to students who are in the ninth grade, the first year of high school.

Freshmen transition practices (FTP). The programs, interventions, or strategies implemented to assist ninth grade students in making a successful shift to high school expectations and requirements.

Missouri Association of Secondary School Principals. The Missouri Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP) is a not for profit organization affiliated with the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). The purpose of this professional organization is for the on-going improvement of secondary education by providing professional development for school leadership at the middle school, high school, and assistant principal position (MASSP, 2009).

Missouri State High School Activities Association. The Missouri State High School Activities Association (MSHSAA) is the governing body for extracurricular activities in high schools. The MSHSAA classification system was used to create the enrollment categories on the freshmen transition survey used in this study. MSHSAA uses a five class system for basketball to evenly divide the teams across the state. Since most schools in the state have a basketball program, the researcher used this system to sort the results from the survey instrument. The standard enrollment breaks for the 2008-2009 school year set Class 1 to include high schools with 130 students or less. Class 2 included high schools between 131 to 245 students. Class 3 included high schools with an enrollment of 246 to 577 students. Class 4 included high schools with 578 to 1,202 students. Finally, Class 5 included high schools with 1,203 or more students (MSHSAA, 2008).

School improvement models. The methods or initiatives implemented by high schools to increase the performance, attendance, and persistence to graduation for all students.

Summary

The transition to ninth grade is the most critical point in a student's K-12 educational progression. As the nation is faced with declining graduation rates, the

transition to high school has been identified as a key place to reverse this thirty year trend. The purpose of this descriptive study was to investigate the practices, programs, or interventions used across the State of Missouri to assist freshmen in making a successful transition to high school. Three research questions guided the study and three null hypotheses were tested. Limitations and terms that were unique to this study were identified and defined in this chapter.

In the next chapter, a review of relevant literature was presented which focused on four different aspects of the transition to high school: the freshman as an adolescent, the structure of schools, school improvement models, and current freshmen transition practices. The research design was explained in Chapter Three followed by Chapter Four where the survey results and findings were discussed. Finally, the summary and recommendations from the study were included in Chapter Five.

CHAPTER TWO - REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The first year of high school marks a critical time in a student's education. The results from the freshmen year will set a student's trajectory into society. If a successful transition to high school is made, students are more likely to be on track to pursue post-secondary opportunities and begin preparing for a career. On the other hand, a poor transition to high school can result in course failure and students at risk of persisting to graduation four years later. According to the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES), there were 565,729 students who dropped out of public high schools in the United States during the 2005-2006 school year (NCES, 2008). The same government report tracked the Averaged Freshmen Graduation Rate (AFGR), an estimate of the percentage of an entering freshmen class graduating in four years. The AFGR for public high schools in the United States had fallen during the prior three consecutive reporting years. The averaged freshmen graduation rate was 75% in 2003-04, 74.7% in 2004-05, and 73.4% in 2005-06 (NCES, 2008). Schools are losing students between the ninth and tenth grade year. In a study of the last 30 years, the

number of ninth grade students not returning for their tenth grade year tripled in the United States (Haney et al., 2005).

To prevent a further decline in the averaged freshmen graduation rate, it is important for schools to understand the complexities of the transition to high school. The review of relevant literature focuses on different aspects of this transition. The first section began with a focus on the freshman as an adolescent. Stages of development, gender, and parental support play a role in how well the student will adjust to high school (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Harvard Family, 2007).

The next section in the literature review focuses on the structure of schools. Research on the structure and the configuration of grade levels in schools were examined. Does the number of building transitions affect academic achievement of students? Many districts are faced with the challenge of balancing rapid growth and meeting achievement standards. Research showed the school structure may affect the freshmen transition.

In the era of continuous school improvement, numerous models and initiatives have surfaced during the last twenty years. The third section focuses on the school improvement

models that have emerged to aid districts in improving student achievement and ultimately graduation rates. Most models contained components that support transition of ninth grade students. Finally, the literature review concludes with a focus on freshmen transition strategies and best practices being implemented in high schools.

The Freshman as an Adolescent

Freshmen are not only dealing with the transition into high school, but they are also making the transition from childhood to adulthood during their high school years. They are at a point in their lives of rapid change. Jett, Pulling, and Ross (1994) stated high schools need to recognize that thirteen- and fourteen-year-old students have different physical, social, and emotional needs than do older high school students. In this section, the stages of adolescent development, gender differences, and the importance of family during transition were addressed. This section concluded with the perceptions students have about making the transition to high school.

During adolescence, young people experience a wide array of physical, intellectual, emotional, and social changes (Potter, Schlisky, Stevenson, & Drawdy, 2001). In terms of physical development, adolescents are challenged

to adjust to a new sense of self. Students are going through rapid physical changes and often become focused on their physical appearance (Potter et al.).

Intellectually, adolescents are developing critical thinking skills and the ability to express more complex concepts through an expanded vocabulary (Potter et al., 2001). Since individuals develop at different rates, students can become frustrated by the demands of the high school classroom if they have not developed the ability to think abstractly. Tension between adolescents and their parents is also common during this period of change. The adolescent is trying to establish a sense of self and desires autonomy, independence, and more time with peers (Harvard Family, 2007). As adolescents fight for independence, they still yearn for the security, safety, and support of the dependent relationship with parents (Potter et al.). The emotional tug-of-war makes this stage of life quite challenging for adolescents.

Social development also plays a significant role in the adjustment to high school. Potter et al. (2001) stated, "The degree to which an adolescent is able to make friends and be part of an accepting peer group is a major indicator of how well the adolescent will adjust in other areas of

social and psychological development" (p. 53). Friendships are very important at this age, and as the adolescents learn to balance peer relationships they must also learn to manage their sexuality. With the onset of sexual maturity, teenagers must balance their personal identity with their attitude and values about sexual behavior (Potter et al.). For students to make a successful transition to high school, the rapid changes in the physical, intellectual, emotional, and social growth of adolescents must be taken into consideration.

School transition research indicates that negative outcomes, such as a decrease in self-esteem and academic motivation, occur for a number of students in transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). The adjustment to another school has many variables, and the psychosocial development of the male and female student can determine their perception of the transition from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school. A study by Patrick Akos and John P. Galassi (2004a) suggested that gender and race are influential variables in school transitions. The perceptions of transition difficulty, the sense of connectedness to the new school, and the persons who were most helpful to them during the transition were collected

from sixth grade students and ninth grade students. Akos and Galassi found "gender was not a significant variable in the overall perception of the difficulty of the transition" (2004a, p. 105). However, there were notable differences in the responses between boys and girls.

According to Akos and Galassi (2004a), girls felt more connected to school than boys after the transition to middle school, but in the transition to high school, boys reported feeling more connected to school. Adolescent girls tended to be less attached to school and have lower self-esteem than boys (Bearman & Burns, 1998). Boys perceived the support from peers as significantly more helpful in the transition to high school than did girls (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). Peer-related problems and psychological distress tended to increase over the course of middle school for girls. Subsequently, peer support was not reported as helpful in the transition to high school (Akos & Galassi, 2004b).

Relational opportunities were very important for girls transitioning into high school. Bearman and Burns (1998) found a positive relationship between the proportion of female students in a school and girls' attachment and self-esteem. "The higher the proportion of female students in a

school, the greater female students' feelings of school attachment and self-worth will tend to be" (Bearman & Burns, p. 11). To assist students in making a successful transition into high school, gender should be taken into consideration. The analysis by Bearman and Burns suggested single-sex schools benefit girls and do not harm boys. Schools can shape the social environment for students by considering single-sex classes and co-curricular activities. Studies have shown that peer relationships are different for boys and girls. This discrepancy can affect their perceptions about entering high school and, in turn, their level of success during high school.

In recent decades, the transition from childhood to adulthood has changed. "The fact that young people generally complete their education and marry later than they did in the previous generation provides a good example of how the transition to adulthood has lengthened" (Gitelson & McDermott, 2006, p. 855). Society has not recognized this shift and has not developed policies that accurately support the transition to young adulthood. Therefore, the parent role has become more important (Gitelson & McDermott). As adolescents prepare to enter high school, their greatest anticipation is more freedom

(Akos & Galassi, 2004b). Adolescents desire autonomy, independence, and time with peers, but at the same time, they continue to rely on guidance from parents and other adults (Harvard Family, 2007). Gitelson and McDermott suggested when parents provide opportunities for autonomous decision making throughout childhood, the transitions to adulthood may be easier. "It is also important that parents find ways of establishing authentic age-appropriate ways of communicating and problem solving in order to foster connection and mutuality between parents and young adults" (Gitelson & McDermott, p. 863). Parent involvement and stability of the family have a large impact on the adolescent's ability to cope with the challenges and opportunities that high school brings.

Parents, through the choices and decisions they made for themselves and their children, influenced how their children grew and developed over time (Cavanagh, Schiller, & Riegler-Crumb, 2006). The study by Cavanagh et al. revealed that family structure at birth predicted students' academic status in math in the ninth grade. Cavanagh et al. found adolescents born into single-parent families experience a 25 percent decrease in the odds of completing Algebra I in the ninth grade. More instability within a

family was associated with higher levels of psychological distress on developing adolescents.

The transition to high school can be difficult and may be compounded by the developmental challenges of transitioning to adulthood. In the 1994 article, *Preparing High Schools for Eighth Grade Students*, Jett, Pulling, and Ross suggested high schools must create ways and places for the youngest students to be natural in their feelings and behaviors. If adolescents were forced to suppress their feelings and behaviors, they would adopt the behaviors of older students. "In such circumstances, a social-emotional development gap can result, which can lead to delays in academic, social, and emotional development or to behavior problems that have serious consequences" (Jett et al., p. 91). The eighth graders in May will not have much time to mature before they enter high school only three months later. Freshmen struggle to meet the same behavior expectations that work for seventeen- and eighteen-year-old students. Meeting the developmental needs of freshmen is important for their success in high school.

In the book, *The Best Schools* (2006), Armstrong suggested high schools force many students to live lives that do not match their own developmental potential. In

many traditional high schools, the practices in place are not developmentally appropriate for students that attend. Armstrong compared the developmentally inappropriate practices used by traditional high schools to their appropriate counterpart: a) large impersonal high schools to small learning communities, b) shopping mall high schools to theme-based magnet or charter schools, c) tracking to career academies, d) too much time sitting in classrooms to internships, e) excessive academic pressure to entrepreneurial enterprises, f) impersonal student-teacher relationships to apprenticeships, and g) zero-tolerance policies to democratic communities. These appropriate practice recommendations will surface again in the section on high school reform.

The various stages and developmental needs of adolescents ultimately impact the transition to high school. The structure and configuration of the school building will be addressed as another feature of school transition that can be detrimental to student achievement. The actual school structure and grade level configurations in each building as a child progresses through a K-12 system may ultimately have an effect on a successful transition to high school.

The Structure of Schools

Education in the United States has been marked by age-graded schooling and transitions between buildings. They are by-products of the organization of American schools into distinct schooling forms (Weiss & Bearman, 2007). The difficulties that students experience when making the transition to high school are documented in numerous sources in educational research. The decline of grades, the dramatic increase in the likelihood of failing courses, the increase in behavioral problems, and an increase in absences have been associated with the transition (Weiss & Bearman). To ease the negative effects of school transition, it is important to review the work on schooling forms and grade-level organization in school districts and the impact on student outcomes.

There was conflicting research on the cause for the decrease in ninth grade performance. There was research which confirmed the decline between eighth grade and ninth grade would occur regardless of whether a student changes buildings (Weiss & Bearman, 2007). In contrast, some studies showed the number of school-to-school transitions have a significant impact on achievement loss and dropout rates (Alspaugh, 1998a, 1998b).

The research by Weiss and Bearman (2007) found the implications of students moving from eighth grade to ninth grade would occur regardless of whether the student moved to a new building or remained in the same location. Weiss and Bearman stated:

We find that student outcomes change as the students move from eighth grade to ninth grade; however, our findings suggest that these changes are driven by factors other than changing schools. Although there are important changes in the levels of both school-related and nonacademic outcomes examined, the magnitude of changes is remarkably similar for students who change schools and for those who do not. That is to say, moving from eighth grade to ninth grade results in changes in outcomes for all students, regardless of whether the move is accompanied by a change of schools. (p. 416)

These results imply that there will be noticeable changes in student outcomes in the move from eighth grade to ninth grade regardless of whether the student transitions to another building.

On the contrary, Alspaugh (1998a) studied achievement loss associated with the number of school-to-school

transitions. Students experience many changes in the school environment with the transition from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school.

Elementary schools are task-oriented and middle schools and high schools focus on performance. Another cultural change from building to building is the student-teacher relationship. In middle schools, teachers have many students for very short periods of time. "The findings imply that students placed in relatively small cohort groups for long spans of time tend to experience more desirable educational outcomes" (Alspaugh, 1998a, ¶ 30).

In another study, Alspaugh (1998b) explored the relationship between school district organization and high school dropout rates. The study included 447 Missouri school districts. The findings suggested an increase in the number of school-to-school transitions within a school district is associated with an increase in high school dropout rate. The lowest dropout rates were in school districts without intermediate level schools, in which students make only one transition from elementary to secondary school at the seventh grade level (Alspaugh, 1998b).

As the enrollment per attendance center increases, school districts are forced to make decisions on school reorganization. The current trend is for districts to add more intermediate level schools thus increasing the number of school-to-school transitions for students. Alspaugh (1998b) implied that school districts may want to reconsider adding more transitions for students as it relates to increased achievement loss and dropout rates.

With the goal being to increase academic achievement and create an atmosphere more conducive to learning, an increasing number of urban districts are converting from the middle school concept to a K-8 configuration (Yecke, 2006). In the article, "Mayhem in the Middle: Why We Should Shift to K-8," the results from three studies were cited as support for the conversion. The results from the Milwaukee Study, the Baltimore Study, and the Philadelphia Study led to the same conclusion: K-8 schools had higher academic achievement than their middle school counterparts (Yecke). Baltimore has opened thirty K-8 schools in the last few years, and Philadelphia will have increased from 61 to 130 K-8 schools by 2008 (Yecke). Some districts like Brookline, Massachusetts, and Cincinnati, Ohio, are now exclusively configured as K-8 buildings.

The world and society in which children live are changing at an astronomical rate, while the American educational system remains locked into a pattern that has been unchanged for decades. Thomas, Blackbourn, Britt, Blackbourn, Papason, Tyler et al., (2006) suggested the multiage or non-graded classroom approach to education encourages continuous pupil progress. Students are not bound to a grade level based on age but rather by the mastery of skills. For students to make successful transitions to the next level, they must have the necessary developmental and academic skills. School structure and grade organization pose a difficult challenge for districts as they must meet capacity needs while doing what is best academically for their students.

School Improvement Models

In the spring of 1983, the National Commission of Excellence in Education issued *A Nation at Risk*. This report highlighted the deficiencies in knowledge of the nation's students and population as a whole in the areas of literacy, mathematics, geography, and basic science. *A Nation at Risk* was one of many national reports and studies that claimed the traditionally organized comprehensive high school was no longer preparing students for the world that

had changed around them (National Commission, 1983). In the 1980s, the organization, instructional practices, bureaucratic structures, and irrelevant curriculum in high schools were blamed for the United States falling behind their international counterparts (Legters, Balfanz, & McPartland, 2002). The reports led to numerous high school reform models. Interestingly, most of the high school reform recommendations from the 1980s and 1990s centered on four major themes: high-standards, personalization, relevance, and flexibility with instructional strategies, and time and resources to provide multiple opportunities for success (Legters et al.).

Several key pieces of legislation were signed into law during the time of the high school reform movement. During the Clinton administration, Goals 2000: Educate America Act was passed on March 31, 1994. Goals 2000 set targets for American education. One of the goals was related specifically to high school: by the year 2000, the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90% (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). For Goals 2000 to hit the target of increasing the nation's graduation rate, it was critical that a standard graduation calculation be used across the United States. Public Law 107-110, better known

as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), brought national clarity to the issue of graduation rate. NCLB set a uniform definition called the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). All states were required to begin using this method of calculation by the 2010-2011 school year.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) released *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* in 1996. It was an inclusive list of 82 recommendations for reforming American high schools. In 2004, *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* was released by NASSP to provide high school leaders with strategies and practical applications for implementing the recommendations for high school reform. The strategies that particularly addressed the needs of freshmen were mentioned in the section on personalizing the school environment. The development of advisories, freshmen orientation, freshmen academies, and peer mentoring were suggestions for creating small units in which anonymity is banished (NASSP, 2004).

In 2007, the National High School Center, a central source of information on high school improvement issues, released a policy brief by Corinne Herlihy on the five key

challenges states, districts, and schools should address to support a successful transition to high school, particularly for students who are at high risk of failure. The five challenges were: 1) establish a data and monitoring system that will both diagnose why students are struggling and be used to hold schools and districts accountable; 2) address the instructional needs of students who enter high school unprepared for rigorous, college preparatory work; 3) personalize the learning environment to lower the sense of anonymity and address individual needs; 4) build capacity within faculty and school leadership in low-performing schools to address diverse student needs; and 5) create connections to the community, employers, and institutions of higher education to better engage students and help them see the relevance of their coursework (Herlihy, 2007).

The report, *Solutions for Failing High Schools: Converging Visions and Promising Models* (Legters et al., 2002), described the most dominate reform models to earn national recognition. The five models were America's Choice, Coalition of Essential Schools, First Things First, Talent Development High Schools, and High Schools that Work. These models established conceptual frameworks that

have been modeled by other high school reform efforts and, therefore, are briefly described in the paragraphs to follow.

In 1998, America's Choice School Design program was founded by the National Center on Education and the Economy (America's Choice, 2008). The National Center on Education and the Economy played an important role in the national standards movement in the early 1990s. Its central goal was to raise all students up to the internationally benchmarked standards of achievement in language arts and mathematics by the time they graduate from high school (Legters et al., 2002). In America's Choice high schools, the school is split into two divisions.

The lower division consists of ninth and tenth graders who are further organized into houses of 200 - 400 students. Classroom teachers follow students through the lower division and serve as their faculty advisor. If a student enters high school with language arts deficits, for example, then a double period of English is assigned during the freshmen year. The upper division of eleventh and twelfth graders is organized by common career interests. America's Choice schools work on five general design tasks: standards and assessments, learning environments, community

and service supports, public engagement, and high performance management (Legters et al., 2002). The annual cost of the America's Choice program was \$65,000 for professional development, technical assistance, and resource materials. According to the America's Choice website, several departments of education, such as Arkansas, New Mexico, and Mississippi, were using this program for intense school restructuring (America's Choice). America's Choice began its work with 40 schools in 1998. Over the next nine years, over 1,000 schools nationwide including elementary, K-8, middle, and high schools had adopted the design (America's Choice).

The Coalition of Essential Schools was founded by TedSizer to address the shortcomings in high schools discovered in his five-year study. The Coalition of Essential Schools did not outline a program for change, instead identified ten common principles about school that if adhered to will increase the amount and quality of learning (Legters et al., 2002). The ten common principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools were stated in *Solutions for Failing High Schools: Converging Visions and Promising Models:*

1. The school should be focused on helping students learn to use their minds well.
2. Less is more: Knowing few subjects thoroughly is more productive than learning little about many.
3. The goals of a school should apply to all students.
4. Teaching and learning should be personalized.
5. Students should be viewed as workers and teachers as coaches.
6. Students should demonstrate mastery of subjects through public exhibitions instead of test scores.
7. The school's climate should be one of trust and decency.
8. Teachers and administrators are primarily generalists and should assume responsibility for all students.
9. The school should attempt to meet certain administrative and budgetary guidelines: eighty students per teacher, adequate planning time for teachers, competitive salaries, and per pupil costs that are no more than ten percent greater than those of traditional schools.
10. Honor diversity, challenge inequity, and model democratic practices. (Legters et al., pp. 7-8)

There were three stages for schools joining the Coalition. The first stage was the exploring stage. The entire school community explored and discussed the common principles. The next stage was the planning stage where a vision statement and goals were established. The final stage was full membership where schools implemented actions to achieve their vision. In 2001, there were 1,084 schools involved in various stages of implementing the Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools (Legters et al., 2002).

Another national school reform movement was called First Things First (FTF). This model was developed by the Institute for Reform and Research in Education (IRRE). With a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the IRRE worked closely with large urban school districts (Legters et al., 2002). The pilot began in Kansas City, Kansas, in 1998 and has expanded to public urban high schools in Houston, Texas, New Orleans, Louisiana, and Kansas City, Missouri (Connell, 2008). The reform was grounded in research-based methods on how students develop and how schools promote students' engagement and learning (IRRE, 2008). FTF districts commit to strengthening relationships among students and adults; improving engagement, alignment,

and rigor of teaching and learning in every classroom everyday; and allocating all resources (budget, staff, time, and space) to achieve the first two goals (IRRE). First Things First Schools achieve reform by using three strategies: 1) small learning communities, 2) the Family Advocate System; and 3) instructional improvement (Connell, 2008). Building and maintaining relationships with students and parents was a key in FTF. Each staff member was assigned fifteen students. They worked with the same student and his or her family throughout high school. Academic and behavior progress was monitored and regular, productive communication with parents was established. Improvements in instruction were made by spending more instructional time on math and literacy skills, lowering the student/adult ratio, and giving attention to specific learning needs of individuals (Connell). The First Things First reform model helped the public high schools in Kansas City, Kansas, achieve improvements from the implementation in 1998 to 2002. The dropout rate decreased from 13% in 1999 to 5% in 2002. The attendance rates increased for the same time period and the parent conference attendance nearly tripled after beginning the Family Advocate System (Connell).

Continuing to examine nationally recognized high school reform initiatives, the Talent Development High School with Career Academies model must also be reviewed. Of the aforementioned models, Talent Development High Schools required the most intensive organizational change for large comprehensive public high schools that have serious problems with student attendance, discipline, achievement scores, and dropout rates. This reform was founded by the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) at John Hopkins University in response to the Maryland State Department of Education's need to reconstruct Patterson High School in Baltimore due to continued poor performance. After a year of planning, the Talent Development High School Model with Career Academies was implemented in 1995 at Patterson. The specific elements of the program included the Ninth Grade Success Academy, Career Academies, a four-period day, and Twilight School (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

The Ninth Grade Success Academy was a transitional program for students in their first year of high school. Students were placed in small interdisciplinary teams of four or five teachers who shared the same 150 students. The Ninth Grade Success Academy was located in its own part of

the building with a separate management team. Attendance, discipline, and learning problems were closely monitored and teacher teams worked together to find solutions and set goals. Students spent time in self-awareness activities to develop career interest and goals. Prior to the promotion to the next grade, students selected a Career Academy for the next three years of high school.

Career Academies were formed based on instructional strengths of the faculty and labor market demands. Students in grades ten, eleven, and twelve were sorted into smaller groups of 250 to 350 students of common interest. "Each Career Academy offers the same common core of demanding academic courses with an appropriate blend of career applications to match the particular Academy theme, so college entrance as well as entry to work is possible from every Career Academy" (U.S. Department of Education, 1998, ¶ 5).

The next aspect of a Talent Development High School was 90-minute class periods with four-period days. The ninth grade curriculum included double doses of mathematics and English for students who were not performing to grade-level standards. Extensive staff development was important

for teachers to utilize the 90-minute period with a variety of learning activities and higher-order practices.

The final structural element of Talent Development High Schools was the intervention plan. A twilight school was used for students with excessive attendance or discipline problems. Instruction was offered in small classes after regular school hours. The goal was for students to be able to return to the regular school day after a four to five week period. Other interventions included summer school, Saturday school, and after-hours credit school that provide students with an opportunity to recover from course failure (U.S. Department of Education, 1998).

Kemple and Herlihy (2004) analyzed the impact of Talent Development. At the time of their report, thirty-three high schools in twelve states had adopted this reform model. The key findings showed the reform was beneficial for freshmen. The percentage of ninth-graders completing a core curriculum increased from 43 percent on average before the implementation of Talent Development to 56 percent after implementation began (Kemple & Herlihy). The study by Kemple and Herlihy included the first three years of Talent Development implementation and suggested these preliminary

results should be interpreted with caution. They are planning to continue their work and track the data for five years. However, they believed the impact of Talent Development showed promise for helping freshmen. "Still, the initial evidence of Talent Development's capacity to keep ninth-grade students on track for graduation is encouraging" (Kemple & Herlihy, ¶ 8).

High Schools That Work (HSTW) is another school reform model that recognized the importance of successful transitions. HSTW involved coordinating the transition from middle school to high school and the transition from high school to post-secondary education or career. Starting in 1987 under the Southern Regional Education Board, HSTW, also known as Making Schools Work, was the nation's first large-scale effort to engage state, district, and school leaders in partnerships with teachers, students, parents, and the community to raise student achievement (Southern Regional Education Board [SREB], 2005). Legters et al. (2002) reported in May 2001, over 1,300 schools were members of High Schools That Work and twenty-one states were identified as member states.

The Southern Regional Education Board described HSTW as an effort-based school improvement initiative founded on

the conviction that most students can master rigorous academic and career/technical studies if school leaders and teachers create an environment that motivates students to make the effort to succeed (SREB, 2005). The HSTW school improvement design provided a scaffold of goals, key practices, and conditions for accelerating learning, and higher standards. The HSTW goals for continuous improvement were specific and measurable. They included a math, science, and English achievement goal; a goal for the number of students taking college-preparatory courses; graduation rate goal for entering freshmen; a goal for graduates to have met high standards so remedial courses were not needed after high school; and finally, a goal to work closely with the middle schools to increase the number of students entering high school prepared to succeed in college-preparatory courses (SREB, 2005).

To achieve these goals, the HSTW key practices must be followed. The keys to improving student achievement in the HSTW model were setting high expectations, following a program of study, aligning academic studies, providing challenging career/technical studies in high demand fields, incorporating work-based learning, providing time for teachers to work together, actively engaging students,

building relationships, providing a structured system of extra help to assist students, and creating a culture of continuous improvement (SREB, 2005).

HSTW focused on the success of ninth grade students. "The greatest failure rate in high school occurs in grade nine, resulting in a peak population of repeaters - the ninth grade bulge. Students who fail the ninth grade are at least 50 percent less likely to graduate from high school" (SREB, 2005, p. 7). For HSTW, building a strong bridge from middle grades to high school was essential in raising student achievement and keeping students in school. It is expected in the HSTW model for district, middle school, and high school leaders to work cooperatively to get middle school students prepared for rigorous high school courses by establishing readiness indicators, aligning curriculum, and increasing the number of students successfully completing Algebra I in eighth grade. The unprepared students participate in catch-up strategies such as accelerated programs in seventh and eighth grade for students who need more time in math and language arts; a four-week summer program that consists of intensive reading, writing, and mathematics; and expanded time to master English and Algebra I in a two-semester program.

High Schools That Work was described as a detailed reform initiative that could benefit any size school in any part of the country. For the five high school reform models mentioned in *Solutions for Failing High Schools: Converging Visions and Promising Models*, HSTW was found in more schools in Missouri than any other model mentioned in the report.

Beyond the previously mentioned high school reform movement of the 1980s and 1990s, more school improvement initiatives were being developed and implemented. The emergence of the work of Richard Dufour at Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois, moved onto the reform scene in the late 1990s as a systemic school improvement model. School personnel developed the capacity to function as a professional learning community (PLC) (Eaker, Dufour, & Dufour R., 2002; Dufour, Eaker & Dufour R., 2005). A professional learning community was defined by Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, and Many (2006) as:

A Professional Learning Community (PLC) is educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve.

PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to

improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators. (p. 3)

There were three major themes that should be evident in the policies, programs, and practices of a school that functions as a PLC: 1) a solid foundation consisting of collaboratively developed and widely shared mission, vision, values, and goals; 2) collaborative teams that work interdependently to achieve common goals; and 3) a focus on results as evidenced by a commitment to continuous improvement (Eaker, Dufour, & Dufour, 2002). Moving educators from a focus on teaching to a focus on student learning is a fundamental cultural shift that must take place to see systemic change in student achievement. The first core principle of the PLC model is ensuring that all students learn. There were three critical questions that drove the work of those within a professional learning community, "What do we want students to learn? How will we know when each student has learned it? What are we going to do if they do not learn it?" (Eaker et al., p. 41). Eaker et al. suggested it is the response that schools develop when students don't learn that separates PLCs from traditional schools. The levels of interventions provide

the additional time and support for students to reach achievement targets (Dufour et al., 2005).

School districts across the United States and Canada have incorporated the PLC concept. Some districts are working through state departments for the professional development to cultivate a PLC culture, and others are moving forward on their own with supporting materials and conferences available from Solution Tree. Regardless of the method, PLC is the dominate school improvement initiative being used by schools at the time of this literature review. The state of Missouri has recognized the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities and has incorporated the PLC conceptual framework into a state school improvement model.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education developed the Missouri Integrated Model (MIM) in an effort to assist the number of school districts not meeting the federal proficiency targets or Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the areas of communication arts, mathematics, and science. The proficiency targets for student achievement are based on the requirements of Public Law 107-110, better known as No Child Left Behind, enacted January 8, 2002. Under this law, schools receiving federal

funds to assist students from low-income families (Title I Schools) that do not meet AYP goals for two or more years face levels of sanctions. According to a news release from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDESE), there were 55.2 percent of the Title I schools in the state that did not meet AYP goals for 2008 (MDESE, 2008a). Through the support of a grant funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Missouri developed an improvement model that integrates three of the best practices being used in the state (Jenson, 2008). The Missouri Integrated Model combined the concepts of Professional Learning Communities, Positive Behavior Support, and Response-to-Intervention to improve collaboration within school teams, improve student achievement, increase inclusion time for students with disabilities, and improve transition planning (Jenson). Fourteen public schools served as pilot schools for the Missouri Integrated Model in the 2008-2009 school year (Jenson). Upon the lessons learned from the implementation in the pilot schools, Missouri will be able to support districts in their improvement efforts.

From *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 to the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2002, schools across the country are

in a state of continuous improvement. The initiatives and models may vary, but the foundations were quite similar - collaboration among teachers, small communities of learners, the use of research-based strategies, and the monitoring of results. For high school reform, every model emphasized the importance of the freshmen year and the need for a smooth transition. The next section will focus on the specific practices that schools are implementing to assist in the transition to high school.

Freshmen Transition Practices

The move to high school is the most challenging transition a student will make in their educational journey. The physical, social, and emotional aspects of the transition create a great deal of anxiety and frustration (Potter et al., 2001). Many schools are making efforts to eliminate some of the fear and impersonal nature of high school by implementing programs specifically designed for the success of ninth graders.

To create an effective program, high schools must know the concerns entering freshmen have about the transition and high school itself. Jordan (2001) analyzed survey data from 20 high schools (13,616 students) in five different states across the country. Students answered questions

about their early high school experiences and outlook on their educational future. The student data indicated that while family background, socioeconomic status, race, and gender played an important role in students' educational success, students' experiences, such as school-based support and teacher teaming, and behaviors, such as attending school regularly and study habits in ninth grade, had significantly positive correlations with student outcomes (Jordan).

Cushman (2006) interviewed students from Indianapolis, Indiana, just a few weeks after beginning ninth grade at two large comprehensive high schools. The interviews offered insight into what students worry about when entering high school. According to Cushman's interviews, the worries fell into three categories: 1) high school will be huge and confusing; 2) the work will be harder, and there will be more of it; and 3) older students will haze and bully the new students. The students that were interviewed offered suggestions on what would help them make a successful transition. The students brought up four ideas: 1) create regular contact with older high school students; 2) provide support in developing skills and strategies for high school success; 3) provide assistance

in making strong and mutually respectful connections with adults; and 4) provide bridge experiences in the summer after eighth grade (Cushman).

Hertzog and Morgan (1999) also suggested student responses be used to develop programs that give students positive, non-threatening activities to deal with these concerns. They developed an open-ended instrument based on the questions pertaining to the transition from middle school to high school. The instrument was administered to eighth grade and ninth grade students in four schools in Georgia. In the first question, students were asked what they were looking forward to in high school. The second question asked what they were not looking forward to in high school. Ten categories were developed from students' responses.

Freedom and friends were the top two responses for eighth grade and ninth grade students on what they are looking forward to most about high school (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001). The most frequent responses for what they are not looking forward to about high school were also the same for eighth and ninth grade students. The concern about more challenging work and the threat of being bullied topped both lists (Morgan & Hertzog). To address these

concerns, school districts implemented a variety of freshmen transition programs. Although the approach may be different, the goals of each program for entering ninth grade students were generally the same: increase academic achievement, reduce the number of disciplinary actions, decrease school absences, and increase involvement in school-related co-curricular activities (Monahan, 1992; Sheets, Izard-Baldwin, & Atterberry, 1997; Black, 2004).

The transitional practices used by American high schools range in time and intensity. Common freshmen transition practices include an orientation meeting, a one-day transition program, summer school designed to assist incoming freshmen, a required freshmen transition course, and freshmen academies (isolating ninth graders in their own wing or separate building). The traditional freshmen orientation is generally structured as an informational meeting followed by a building tour. The information given is valuable, but the structure is usually designed for one-way communication. It is difficult to address the fears and concerns of students and parents with this method.

With the need for a freshmen transition program well established, schools use many avenues to develop a practice that will benefit their students. Some programs are locally

generated, modeled from other districts, or even purchased. The Boomerang Project in Santa Cruz, California, developed a freshmen transition program over ten years ago called *Link Crew*. According to the *Link Crew* brochure, the program helps create an environment where freshmen learn that people at school care about them and their future by removing the culture of negativity toward freshmen and replacing it with support, connection, and a sense of comfort and belonging (Boomerang Project, 2008). *Link Crew* begins with a spirited and interactive freshmen orientation before the first day of school. Trained upper classmen, called *Link Leaders*, lead a group of ten freshmen through a series of activities designed to help them learn about each other and important campus information (Boomerang Project). Throughout the year, there are social and academic follow up sessions planned for freshmen. *Link Crew* was developed in California, but has spread across the United States and Canada as a viable option for a freshmen transition intervention. The *Link Crew* program and the middle school transition counterpart, called *WEB*, were used in over 2,100 schools during 2008-2009 (Boomerang Project, 2009). Schools that elect to purchase this freshmen transition program should be prepared to pay for training and associated

materials. To become a Link Crew school, the cost is \$2195 per person (Boomerang Project, 2008).

For Freshmen Only was a full-day transitional program which Haviland (2005) described as an effective way for assisting students to make a successful transition. During a one-day summer transition program, upper-class volunteers led school tours, study skills workshops, and answered questions from the entering freshmen (Haviland). By the end of the day, participating students could navigate the building, understand course and instructor expectations, and met some juniors and seniors that would be friendly faces on the first day of school. Haviland suggested the program offered valuable insight into how to navigate the building and how to accommodate the academic demands presented in high school.

Summer school can be a good way for entering ninth graders to become familiar with the building and one or two teachers. The two or four week summer sessions can provide some academic support for students considered at risk of not meeting expectations after the eighth grade. Summer school programs are traditionally focused strictly on the academic needs of students (Black, 2004). The research indicates the transitional needs of freshmen are much more

complex. "Many high schools try to pave the way for ninth graders, but one-shot orientation programs or remedial summer school sessions do little to solve ninth grade's deeply rooted problems" (Black, p. 44). The more promising methods involve whole school reform which provides continuous support for freshmen through transition coursework or a school of their own.

The need for freshmen transition support has been around for quite some time. However, the ideas of a year-long intervention or separate ninth grade school are relatively new. The Freshmen Transition Initiative, a project of the School Counseling Program at George Washington University, developed course standards for freshmen transition classes that meet the personal, social, educational, and career and life-skills goals of students (Dedmond, 2006). The standards provide schools a clear vision of what a freshmen transition class or a freshmen academy should address. The initiative was based on the development of a 10-year plan that takes students from high school through postsecondary education or training, and into the workforce. The plan can help students understand what it takes to become financially responsible adults (Dedmond, 2006). Dedmond suggested five requirements for a

successful freshmen transition course and initiative: a ten-year educational and career plan, a curriculum that meets the standards, well-qualified teachers, a school wide implementation initiative, and leadership continuity over the first four years (Dedmond, 2005).

A high school in Seattle, Washington, discovered the benefit of a required one-semester transitional course for all incoming ninth grade students. The Bridge Program was developed by a team of classroom teachers, counselors, librarian, activity director, nurse, intervention specialist, and administrator (Sheets et al., 1997). The curriculum for the Bridge Program included self-concept awareness, social survival, chemical dependency, multicultural awareness, study skills/work habits, business education, health/family life, goal setting/career planning, library skills, technology education, and school activities (Sheets et al.).

The Bridge Program involved 15 certified positions and all classes were scheduled during the first period of the day so whole-group activities could also be included. The whole-group activities scheduled strictly for the freshmen included an orientation meeting, pep assembly, club and team activity fair, career festival, and recognition

celebration. Through program evaluations, students reported the highlights of the Bridge Program were the whole-group events (Sheets et al., 1997).

The last freshmen transition intervention in this section is the practice of isolating the ninth grade students from the rest of the high school students by creating career development academies, houses, or school-within-a-school environments. There are also an increasing number of school districts that have opened one-grade attendance centers strictly for the ninth grade population. Black (2004) reported that in the year 2000, there were 128 separate ninth grade schools with more in the planning stages. Many large high schools have found that through individualization and learning teams the failure and dropout rates are reduced (Reents, 2002).

In "Delivering the Promise to 9th Graders," Walsh (2002) explained how Alexandria, Virginia, created a separate school for ninth graders to solve the problem of an enrollment surge and tight budgets. The positive results from isolating the ninth graders in their own school were a welcome surprise. The guiding principles and commitments to effective education were keys to the improvement. The school assigned students to teams of 140 students, with a

common core of teachers, no class exceeds 24 students, and each teacher served as an academic adviser to 13 to 15 students on a team (Walsh). The staff focused exclusively on the task of educating the city's fourteen- and fifteen-year-old students.

As mentioned previously, the Talent Development High School reform model was designed to transform the structure of large high schools. The Talent Development strategy for addressing ninth grade issues is through the Ninth Grade Success Academy. This small learning community has five main features: 1) a separate physical setting in which the needs of the incoming freshmen can be met in a distraction-free, concentrated way; 2) a team-teaching structure designed to divide the class into smaller groups to provide effective assistance to specific students; 3) incentives for students to attend school regularly and achieve academically; 4) a curricular regimen built upon block scheduling; and 5) the Twilight Academy, a specialized program for ninth graders who failed or experienced difficulty in the normal school setting (National High School Center, 2007).

Morgan and Hertzog have done extensive work in effective freshmen transition programs. They recommend

dividing the high school into clusters, houses, or academies that are interdisciplinary and provide ninth grade students with teachers who teach only ninth grade (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001). Isolating freshmen has proven to be a beneficial strategy for aiding students in the transition to high school. However, the most effective intervention is one that is multi-dimensional (Dedmond, 2006). In 1996, Hertzog and Morgan surveyed the freshmen transition practices that were in place in middle schools and high schools in Georgia and Florida. They found those schools that utilized two or fewer transition practices had significantly higher ninth grade attrition rates and high school dropout rates than those schools that had implemented three or more transition practices (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999).

Summary

The transition to high school is a pivotal time in the educational life of America's students. Since the time of *A Nation At Risk*, schools in the United States have been searching for ways to keep pace with their international counterparts. In the last 30 years, the rate of ninth graders who do not return for their tenth grade year has tripled (Haney et al., 2005). High school reform

initiatives recognize the need for personalizing the learning environment in small learning communities, improving instruction and assessment, and closely monitoring student progress. Strategies for assisting freshmen in making a successful transition to high school should be a top priority for schools. The transition strategies need to be multidimensional and address the physical, social, and emotional needs of the entering adolescents (Dedmond, 2006; Potter et al., 2001). The continuous support of students and parents during the transition time may help overall student achievement. The literature suggested that a focus on entering freshmen can result in decreasing discipline referrals, increasing attendance rates, and ultimately impacting graduation rates of America's high schools.

The next chapter outlined the method that was used to investigate the freshmen transition practices implemented in Missouri.

Chapter THREE - METHOD

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the practices, programs, or interventions used in Missouri to assist freshmen in the transition to high school. Chapter Two contained the relevant literature supporting how critical the transition to high school is for students to persist to graduation. If the transition to high school is not successful, students can become academically discouraged, socially disconnected, and may not make it to graduation day.

The methods used to collect, sort, and analyze the data of the freshmen transition practices being used in Missouri and their perceived effectiveness are described in this chapter. Included in Chapter Three were the subject selection, sampling procedure, research design, research procedure, hypotheses, and statistical treatment of the data.

Subjects

To acquire information about current freshmen transition practices used in Missouri schools, high school principals were the subjects for the study. The high school principal is the instructional leader for the building and is ultimately accountable for its success.

In the state of Missouri, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is responsible for reviewing and accrediting the 524 public school districts. According to the *Accreditation Standards for Public School Districts in Missouri*, fourteen standards are used to evaluate the performance and improvement of a school district in the areas of academic achievement, scholastic preparedness, career preparation, and educational persistence (MDESE, 2004). The outcomes are released each year in the Annual Performance Report (APR). With high schools bearing a majority of the accreditation standards, principals have a vested interest in the successful transition of ninth grade students.

Sampling Procedure

All high school principals in Missouri were included in the testing sample. Contact information for each principal was obtained from the Missouri Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP). The database included public and non-public high schools in Missouri.

Research Design

To obtain the necessary data for this descriptive study, the researcher designed an instrument (Appendix B) using an online survey tool called SurveyMonkey.com. This web-based tool has been available since 1999 and has been

proven to be a reliable source for collecting and sorting data (SurveyMonkey.com, 2008). The survey was divided into three sections: school demographics, programs and interventions, and study participation information. The instrument contained a total of sixteen questions.

In the first section, respondents were asked to self-report the student enrollment of the building where the ninth grade was located in their district, the grade configuration of the high school, the number of attendance centers that send students to the high school, and the improvement models currently being implemented. The last survey question in section one asked the participants if their high school currently had a freshmen transition practice, program, or intervention in place. If the respondents indicated the presence of a freshmen transition practice, program, or intervention, the survey proceeded to the second section of the instrument. If participants indicated their high school did not have a freshmen transition practice, program, or intervention in place, the online instrument allowed participants to bypass section two and advance directly to the final portion of the survey.

Section two inquired about the structure of the current freshmen transition practices, the number of years

the current program had been in place, the important topics covered, levels of participation from students and parents, and the perceived effectiveness of the current practice for assisting freshmen transition to high school. Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide a narrative describing their current practice. The final section of the survey concluded with respondents having the option to self-report the name and location of their high school.

Research Procedure

There were five major procedural steps followed during this study. The first step was to generate an instrument to gather information from high school principals about the current practices to assist students making the transition to the ninth grade. Once the freshmen transition study survey (Appendix B) was created, the next step was to encourage participation.

Two methods of recruitment were used during this study. A large percentage of Missouri high school principals are members of the professional organization, Missouri Association of Secondary School Principals (MASSP). With approval from the executive director of MASSP, Dr. Jim King, the researcher was able to promote the study at the MASSP Fall Conference on October 6, 2008, in Columbia, Missouri. MASSP district presidents were asked to

announce the forthcoming survey during their regional breakout sessions.

The third step was to make the survey available. After the promotion of the study at the MASSP Fall Conference, the researcher sent a letter (Appendix A) via email to 572 principals. The letter explained the study and included a hyperlink to the online survey for easy accessibility for principals who chose to participate. The survey was available for thirty-six days (October 6, 2008, to November 10, 2008) for participants to complete.

The fourth procedural measure was to sort and analyze the completed surveys. The online survey tool allowed the researcher to review all the responses to the survey and to generate special reports based on specified criteria. The results from the survey were exported into the Microsoft Excel 2003 spreadsheet program so the researcher was able to store, organize, and sort the data.

Finally, the attendance rates and graduation rates for each participating public school were found on the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website (MDESE, 2008b). This information was important for testing the null hypotheses.

Hypotheses

For the purposes of this study, three null hypotheses were tested.

Null Hypothesis #1

The student enrollment of a high school will have no correlation to the number of freshmen transition practices being implemented.

Null Hypothesis #2

The number of freshmen transition practices implemented in Missouri high schools will have no correlation to the attendance rate.

Null Hypothesis #3

The number of freshmen transition practices implemented in Missouri high schools will have no correlation to the graduation rate.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Descriptive statistics were used in this study to present quantitative data on the current freshmen transition practices being implemented in Missouri high schools. This single variable analysis involved the distribution and the central tendency of responses from the freshmen transition study survey. The Pearson product moment correlation coefficient, commonly known as Pearson r , was calculated using Microsoft Excel 2003 to determine

if a meaningful relationship was present for the null hypotheses of the study. According to Cohen's Guidelines for Small, Medium, and Large Correlation Coefficients (as cited in Runyon, Coleman, & Pittenger, 2000), a coefficient (r) between 0.5 and 1.0 is considered a large correlation. To confirm the statistical significance of the null hypotheses, the coefficient of determination (r^2) and coefficient of nondetermination ($1 - r^2$) were calculated. The coefficient of determination is the percentage of variance in one variable that can be described or explained by the other variable (Runyon, Coleman, & Pittenger).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the practices, programs, or interventions used in Missouri to assist freshmen in the transition to high school. All Missouri public and non-public high school principals were given the opportunity to complete an online survey. The instrument inquired about the current freshmen transition practices used in schools and the perceived effectiveness.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the results. The Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used to test the three null hypotheses of the study.

In the next chapter, the results and analysis of the data were presented.

Chapter FOUR - RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the practices, programs, or interventions used in Missouri to assist freshmen in the transition to high school. Contained in Chapter Four are the results from the freshmen transition survey, analysis of the data, and deductive conclusions.

Results

Of the 572 invitations to participate in the freshmen transition study, there were 183 (32%) respondents. The online instrument was completed primarily by building principals (89.1%). There were seven assistant principals, five counselors, and five teachers that also took the responsibility to respond for their school. From the 183 respondents, 122 (66.7%) reported their ninth grade students were located in a building that houses grades nine through twelve. There were 28 (15.3%) schools that contained grades seven through twelve and 22 (12.0%) schools that were in a kindergarten through twelfth grade configuration. Seven respondents were from ninth-grade centers and four were from alternative schools. Since the distribution list was obtained from MASSP, all principals

in the state are included, both public and non-public. In this study, fourteen of the respondent schools were non-public.

A majority (62.3%) of the respondents stated there was only one attendance center that sent students to their high school. The remaining schools reported two or more attendance centers send to one high school.

The MSHSAA basketball classification system was used to establish student enrollment categories. The participants were sorted into five categories of school size. The distribution is shown in Figure 1. High schools with a population of 246 to 577 students had the highest representation (24.6%), while high schools with 130 or less students had the fewest responses (15.8%).

With the pressures that schools face to improve student achievement, there were 91% of respondents that indicated an improvement model was being implemented within their school. The professional learning communities (PLC) concept was the most widely selected by schools. Close to three fourths of the participants (73.7%) indicated the use of professional learning communities as a means to reach their improvement goals. Response to intervention and

positive behavior support followed with 34.1% and 18.6% respectively.

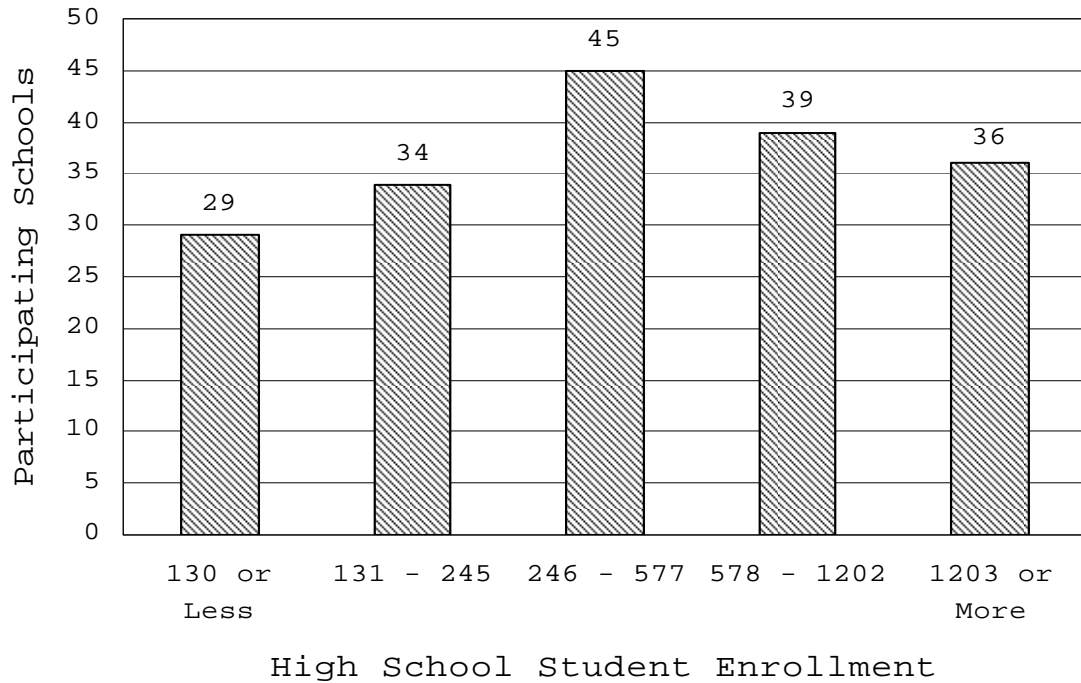


Figure 1. Distribution of Participants.

Although 91% of the high schools specified the use of an improvement model to increase student achievement, only 60.1% currently had a freshmen transition practice, program, or intervention in place. As shown in Table 1, the smaller schools had a lower percentage of responses indicating the existence of a freshmen transition practice, program, or intervention. Of the 73 schools without a

freshmen transition program, a majority (68.5%) had enrollments of 245 students or less.

Table 1

Existence of a Freshmen Transition Practice

Enrollment	YES (110)		NO (73)	
	N	%	N	%
130 or Less	3	2.7	26	35.6
131 - 245	10	9.1	24	32.9
246 - 577	29	26.4	16	21.9
578 - 1202	35	31.8	4	5.5
1203 or More	33	30.0	3	4.1

In Table 2, schools with a freshmen transition practice were compared to the total number of respondents in each enrollment classification. It was evident that as the size of the school increased, the percentage of respondents with freshmen transition practices also increased. The percentage of increase varied between each enrollment category.

Table 2

Freshmen Transition Practice by School Size

Enrollment	N	Schools	Percentage
		w/ FTP	w/ FTP
130 or Less	29	3	10.3
131 - 245	34	10	29.4
246 - 577	45	29	64.4
578 - 1202	39	35	89.7
1203 or More	36	33	91.7

As illustrated in Figure 2, the largest increase of schools with a freshmen transition practice occurred once student enrollment increased to the 246 to 577 category.

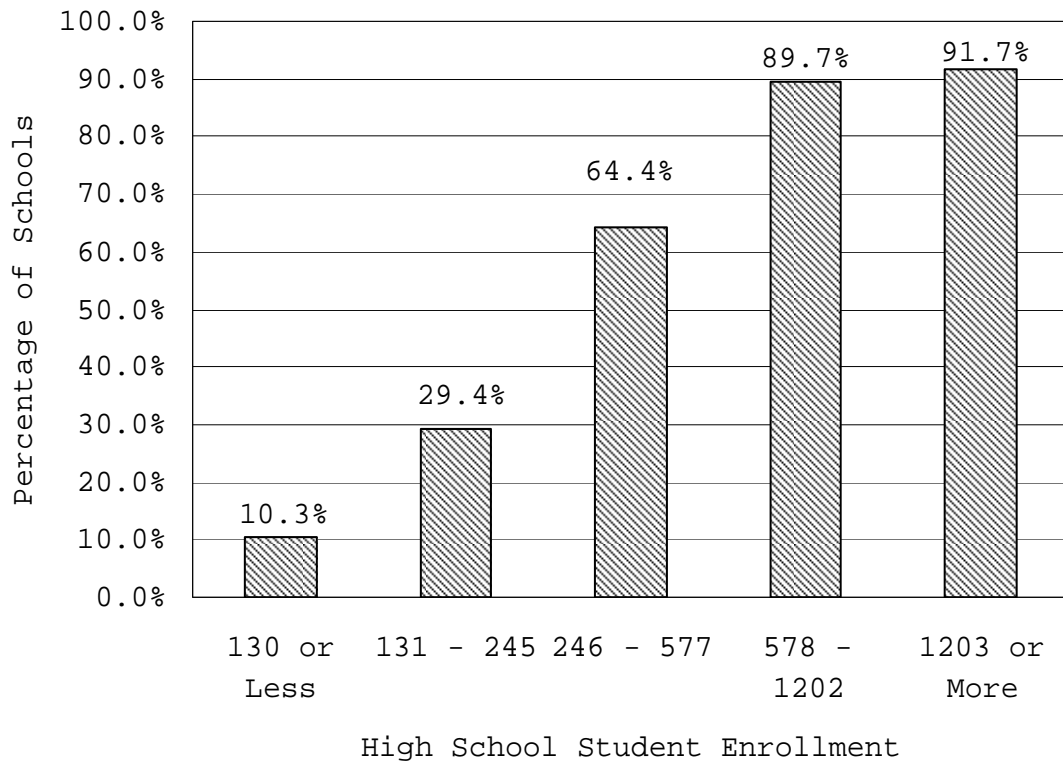


Figure 2. High Schools with Freshmen Transition Practices by Enrollment.

The survey instrument was designed so participants without a transition program were considered finished after a NO response was given on question number six (Appendix B). Only the respondents who indicated a current freshmen transition practice, program, or intervention was in place were asked to continue the survey. The remaining eight

questions inquired about the current transition practice used in the high school. The researcher wanted to specifically know how long their current practice had been in place, how the current practice was developed, the structure for the practice, the topics that were covered with freshmen, and the involvement of students and parents.

The inception period for a freshmen transition program in Missouri was relatively short (see Table 3). The survey had four duration categories: two years or less, three to five years, six to eight years, and nine or more years.

Table 3

Freshmen Transition Practice Duration

Implementation	Percentage
Years	w/ FTP
2 or Less	32.4
3 - 5	45.7
6 - 8	12.4
9 or More	9.5

The largest percentage (45.7%) of schools reported their current practice had been in place between three and five years. When the two shortest duration categories were combined, the percentage of schools with a current freshmen transition practice in place for five years or less was 78.1%.

Participants were asked how their current practice was developed. Of the practices, programs, or interventions that were currently being implemented in Missouri high schools, a majority (66.3%) of the respondents indicated the practice was generated locally. While 25% of the respondents claimed to have modeled their current practice after another district. Only 3.8% of respondents specified a program was purchased to assist freshmen making the transition to high school. Link Crew was the only purchased program designated by respondents.

The format of the current freshmen transition practice, program, or intervention used in Missouri high schools was collected from question eight on the survey. From reviewing literature, a list of the six most common transition structures was available on the instrument: an evening orientation, half-day session, one or two day boot camp, summer school program, freshmen advisory, or freshmen transition course. Respondents were asked to mark all that

applied to the current practices in their school. Freshmen advisory and an evening orientation were the most popular formats currently in place (see Table 4). A majority of the participating schools (62.8%) used more than one format for assisting freshmen in making a smooth transition to high school.

Table 4

Format of the Freshmen Transition Practice

Type of Practice	Number of	
	Schools	Percentage
Freshmen Advisory	59	56.2
Evening Orientation	52	49.5
Half-Day Session	37	35.2
1 - 2 Day Boot Camps	23	21.9
Freshmen Course	23	21.9
Summer School Program	22	21.0

Regardless of the format that schools were using for a transition intervention, there were some commonalities in the topics and information being disseminated to freshmen.

Participants were provided with a list of 12 possible topics that would be valuable in a freshmen transition program. Respondents were asked to select all topics that were covered in their current practice. In Table 5, the topics are ranked according to the percentage of selection.

Table 5

Freshmen Transition Content

Topic	Rank	Percentage
Rules / Regulations	1	89.5
Requirements for Graduation	2	85.7
Study Skills / Habits	3	81.9
Goal Setting	4	77.1
Extracurricular Activities	5	76.2
Social / Emotional Support	6	74.3
Grade Monitoring	7	73.3
Time Management	8	68.6
Parent Involvement	9	57.1
Leadership Skills	10	56.2
Career Exploration	11	48.6
Conflict Resolution	12	38.1

It was evident that a majority of respondents believed an essential component to helping students make the transition to ninth grade was a clear understanding of the rules and regulations of high school and the required elements for high school graduation.

Another important aspect of a transition program is the level of participation. The survey asked participants to indicate the expectation for student involvement in the current freshmen transition practice. The survey contained three levels of participation: student choice (all students are invited to participate), targeted population (selected groups of students are strongly encouraged to participate), and required participation (all students must participate). As shown in Table 6, over half of the schools (55.2%) required all students to participate in the freshmen transition practice, program, or intervention. Respondents were also asked about the expected level of parent participation. The review of related literature indicated parental support was important as students made the transition to high school. Similar categories were used for parent involvement: parent choice, targeted population, and required participation.

Table 6

Student Participation in Freshmen Transition Practices

Level of Participation	N	Percentage
Student Choice	39	37.1
Targeted Population	8	7.6
Required Participation	58	55.2

From Table 7, there were 86 schools that indicated all parents were invited to be involved in the transition program with their student. Only 10 schools required parents to be participants in the transition practice.

Table 7

Parent Participation in Freshmen Transition Practices

Level of Participation	N	Percentage
Parent Choice	86	83.5
Targeted Population	7	6.8
Required Participation	10	9.7

Respondents were asked many factual questions about their current freshmen transition practice. However, one question solicited the respondents' perception. The final element was the perception of effectiveness. Participants were asked to categorize their personal perception of how well the current practice was meeting the need of assisting ninth grade students make the transition to high school. There were 101 respondents who answered the question on the perception of effectiveness. Nearly 70% of the respondents perceived the current transition practice as moderately to extremely successful in meeting the transitional needs of their freshmen (see Table 8).

Table 8

Perceptions of Effectiveness

Level of Effectiveness	N	Percentage
Extremely Successful	18	17.8
Moderately Successful	52	51.5
Meeting the Need	14	13.9
Could Be Improved	15	14.9
Looking for a New Approach	2	2.0

Analysis of Data

The results from the freshmen transition survey provided the researcher with an insightful overview of the practices, programs, and interventions being used in Missouri to assist freshmen in making the transition to high school. There were 183 individuals who responded to the online survey. From those responses, 170 participants voluntarily included their school name on the survey. The identification allowed the researcher to mark the locations of the high schools on a map to analyze the geographical distribution of respondents. Each region of the state was represented in the sample. The greatest concentration of responses was from the St. Louis and Kansas City metro areas, followed by participation from southwest Missouri. A sparse response came from southeast Missouri. With the school names, the researcher was also able to find the attendance rate and graduation rate for each of the identified schools from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. The attendance rates and graduation rates for the 2007-2008 school year were used for this analysis.

Of the 183 participating schools, 60.1% currently have a freshmen transition practice, program, or intervention in place. Figure 2 illustrates the percentage of schools with

a freshmen transition practice by student enrollment. As the student enrollment increased, the percentage of schools with a freshmen practice, program, or intervention also increased. Of the 36 schools with a student population of 1203 or more, 91.7%, or 33 schools, had a freshmen transition practice, program, or intervention. The next enrollment category of between 587 to 1202 students had 39 respondents with 35 (89.7%) who indicated the existence of a freshmen practice, program, or intervention. Only 13 (11.7%) schools with student enrollment of 245 or less indicated the use of a freshmen transition practice, program, or intervention.

To further examine the characteristics of schools with and without a freshmen transition practice, program, or intervention, notable differences were identified in the school improvement models used in these high schools. In the aforementioned summary of the school improvement models, 91% of all the participating schools indicated the use of at least one school improvement model with 73.7% selecting the professional learning communities model. When the responses from the school improvement question were separated by schools with and without a freshmen transition practice, the model of professional learning communities was found to be valued more by schools with a current

freshmen transition practice in place. As shown in Table 9, 82.7% of the schools with a freshmen transition practice have implemented the model of professional learning communities. Conversely, 58.7% of the schools without a freshmen transition practice have implemented the same improvement strategy. The discrepancies between the other improvement models were not as significant in schools with a freshmen transition practice as compared to those without a current freshmen transition practice.

Table 9

Improvement Models Implemented in High School

School Improvement Model	Freshmen Transition Practice	
	YES	NO
Professional Learning Communities	82.7%	58.7%
Positive Behavior Support	19.2%	17.5%
Response to Intervention	37.5%	28.6%
High Schools That Work	18.3%	14.3%
Other	9.6%	14.3%

According to Dedmond (2006), successful transition programs are multi-dimensional. Of the 110 respondents that reported having a current freshmen transition practice, program, or intervention, 105 answered the eighth question (Appendix B) on the survey instrument on the format or structure of the current practice. Shown in Figure 3, there were 67 schools (63.8%) represented in this study that indicated two or more formats or structures were used as part of their current freshmen transition practice.

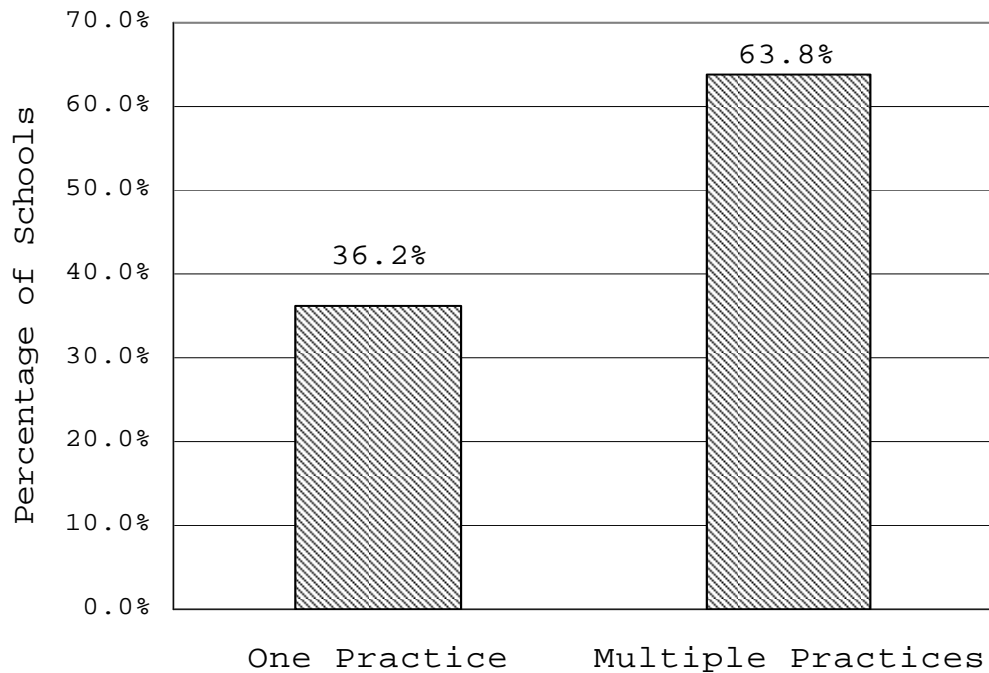


Figure 3. Dimensions of the Freshmen Transition Practice.

Hertzog and Morgan (1999) found those schools that utilized two or fewer transition practices had significantly higher ninth grade attrition rates and high school dropout rates than schools that had implemented three or more transition practices. From Figure 4, the majority (69.5%) of Missouri schools fall within the one or two freshmen transition practice category. There was a steep decline in the number of high schools that used four or more practices to aid freshmen in the transition.

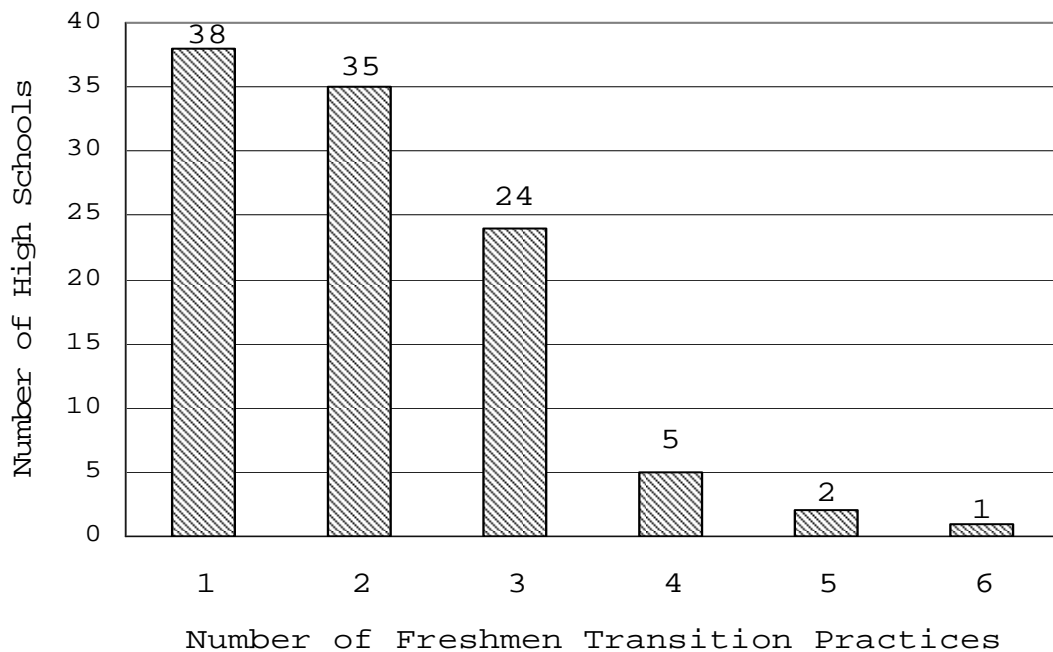


Figure 4. Freshmen Transition Practices Implemented in High Schools.

In this study, the number of freshmen transition practices implemented by each school and the transition format were recorded. There was an average of 2.06 practices being implemented by participating Missouri high schools to aid freshmen transition. As shown in Figure 4, only 32 of the 105 respondent schools had three or more dimensions to their transition practice as suggested by Hertzog and Morgan (1999).

Further analysis was completed on the schools who reported having only one freshmen transition practice in place. The breakdown of the format used by schools with a single-dimension approach to freshmen transition can be found in Table 10. The perceptions of effectiveness for the single-practice schools and multiple-practice schools were reviewed. The effectiveness responses were converted to a score for analysis purposes. The effectiveness categories of extremely successful, moderately successful, meeting the need, could be improved, and looking for a new approach were assigned a point value of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively.

The approach perceived as most effective from schools implementing only one transition practice was the freshmen transition course (see Table 10). Conversely, an evening orientation to support the transition of ninth graders as a

Table 10

Perceived Effectiveness of a Single Format Approach

Type of Practice	Number of Schools	Effectiveness Score
Freshmen Course	6	4.17
Summer School Program	5	4.00
Freshmen Advisory	9	3.89
1 - 2 Day Boot Camps	5	3.75
Half-Day Session	7	3.57
Evening Orientation	6	2.67

Note. The effectiveness score was calculated by averaging the respondents' perceptions of the current freshmen transition practice. Extremely successful = 5, moderately successful = 4, meeting the need = 3, could be improved = 2, looking for a new approach = 1.

sole practice was perceived to be unsuccessful. Only the categories of *meeting the need* and *could be improved* were chosen by the group using this practice. Recall in Table 4, close to half (49.5%) of the respondents use an evening orientation as part of their transition practice. It should

be noted that 88.5% of those schools use the evening orientation in conjunction with other transition formats.

The perception of effectiveness for the high schools that reported a multiple-dimensional approach to freshmen transition was also reviewed. Since multiple formats were selected on the instrument, it was not possible to isolate the perceptions on each individual practice. However, the overall effectiveness of the multiple practices was perceived with success. The categories of *extremely successful* and *moderately successful* were selected by 73.44% of the schools with more than one freshmen transition practice currently in place. There were 17.19% of the respondents who believed the current practices could be improved or a new approach should be explored.

The success of a freshmen transition practice is difficult to measure on its own merit. However, attendance rate and graduation rate could be considered indicators of an effective system. For this study, the researcher obtained the 2008 attendance rate and graduation rate on all respondents who voluntarily identified their schools on the final section of the survey. The attendance and graduation information from the 2007-2008 school year was acquired from the website of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Non-public schools are

not required to annually report attendance and graduation information to MDESE, therefore their rates were not accessible to the researcher. Once the non-public schools and the participants who chose not to be identified were removed, the attendance rate and graduation rate were found for the 128 remaining high schools.

The average attendance rate was calculated for each student enrollment category (see Table 11). As shown in Table 11, when the student enrollment increased, the average attendance rate for each category decreased.

Table 11

Average Attendance and Graduation Rates (2008)

Student Enrollment		Attendance	Graduation
Category	N	Rate	Rate
130 - Below	17	94.8	96.4
131 - 245	28	94.0	90.7
246 - 577	24	93.8	88.6
578 - 1202	31	93.1	87.8
1203 - More	28	93.4	89.5

An exception was observed for the largest enrollment category. There was a 0.3% increase in the attendance rate from the 578-1,202 category to the 1,203 or more category.

The average graduation rate was also calculated for each student enrollment category (see Table 11). It was observed that as the student enrollment increased, the graduation rate decreased except again for the largest enrollment category. There was a 1.7% increase in the graduation rates between the 578-1,202 category and the 1,203 or more category.

Further analysis of the attendance rates and graduation rates revealed close to 70% of the small high schools with the best attendance and graduation rates were K-12 or 7-12 campuses. This supports the work of Alspaugh (1998b) where it was found that the lowest dropout rates were in school districts without intermediate level schools, and students made only one transition from elementary to secondary school at the seventh grade level. Since the smaller schools are producing the higher attendance and graduation rates, it is justifiable why freshmen transition practices, programs, or interventions are not as prevalent at this level.

Hypotheses

For the purposes of this study on the freshmen transition practices used in Missouri, three null hypotheses were proposed. The Pearson product moment correlation coefficient, commonly known as Pearson r , was calculated to determine if a meaningful relationship was present for the hypotheses in the study. According to Cohen's Guidelines for Small, Medium, and Large Correlation Coefficients (as cited in Runyon, Coleman, & Pittenger, 2000), a coefficient (r) between 0.5 and 1.0 is considered a large correlation. To confirm the statistical significance of the null hypotheses, the coefficient of determination (r^2) and coefficient of nondetermination ($1 - r^2$) were figured. The coefficient of determination (r^2) gives the percentage of variance in one variable that can be described or explained by the other variable (Runyon, Coleman, & Pittenger, 2000).

Null Hypothesis #1

The student enrollment of a high school will have no correlation to the number of freshmen transition practices being implemented. To test this null hypothesis, the Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was calculated. The result was a Pearson r of 0.5695 (see Table 12). According to Cohen's Guidelines for Small, Medium, and Large

Correlation Coefficients (as cited in Runyon, Coleman, & Pittenger, 2000), a coefficient of 0.5 is considered a large correlation. Therefore, a large positive correlation exists between the student enrollment and the number of freshmen transition practices being implemented.

To confirm the statistical significance of the correlation, the coefficient of determination (r^2) and coefficient of nondetermination ($1 - r^2$) were figured. The coefficient of determination is the percentage of variance in one variable that can be described or explained by the other variable (Runyon, Coleman, & Pittenger, 2000). The coefficient of determination for null hypothesis #1 was $r^2 = 0.3243$. This value indicated the variance in the number of freshmen transition practices can be predicted by the student enrollment 32.43% of the time. The coefficient of nondetermination, $1 - r^2$, was 0.6757. Therefore, 67.57% of the differences among the number of freshmen transition practices and student enrollment are due to other factors that have yet to be determined. Null hypothesis #1 is rejected. A large positive correlation does exist between the student enrollment and the number of freshmen transition practices being implemented.

Null Hypothesis #2

The number of freshmen transition practices implemented in Missouri high schools will have no correlation to the attendance rate. The second null hypothesis of the study had a Pearson r value of -0.1577 (see Table 12). There was no relationship between the number of freshmen transition practices and the attendance rate. Using the coefficient of nondetermination, 97.5% of the variance among school attendance rates is due to other factors. Null hypothesis #2 was accepted. There is not a correlation between the number of freshmen transition practices and the high school attendance rate.

Table 12

Relationship to Freshmen Transition Practices

Null Hypotheses	Pearson r	Coefficient of Determination r^2	Coefficient of Nondetermination $1 - r^2$
#1	0.5695	0.3243	0.6757
#2	-0.1577	0.0249	0.9750
#3	-0.1784	0.0318	0.9682

Null Hypothesis #3

The number of freshmen transition practices implemented in Missouri high schools will have no correlation to the graduation rate. As shown in Table 12, the Pearson r for null hypothesis #3 was -0.1784 . There was not a meaningful relationship between the number for freshmen transition practices and the graduation rate. The variance among graduation rate can only be predicted by the number of freshmen transition practices 3.18% of the time. Therefore, null hypothesis #3 was accepted.

Deductive Conclusions

From the analysis of this study, six deductive conclusions were extracted:

1. The larger the student enrollment, the greater the chances a school had a freshmen transition practice, program, or intervention.
2. A freshmen transition practice that was multi-dimensional was more likely to be perceived as moderately successful to extremely successful.
3. Schools that used a single-practice approach to aid freshmen in the transition to high school were least satisfied with the evening orientation format.

4. Small high schools in the K-12 or 7-12 grade configuration had noticeably higher attendance and graduation rates, than do their larger 9-12 counterparts.
5. There was a positive correlation between the student enrollment and the number of freshmen transition practices implemented in Missouri high schools.
6. Since 78.1% of the current freshmen transition practices had been in place for less than five years, the impact of those practices on the attendance rate and graduation rate could not be determined at this time.

Summary

In Chapter Four, the results from the freshmen transition survey were reported and analyzed to address the three research questions and hypotheses. There were 183 high schools in Missouri that accepted the invitation to participate in this study. Of the total respondents, 60.1% reported a freshmen practice, program, or intervention currently in place. Most schools seemed to follow the recommendation from existing research and had implemented a multi-dimensional transition approach. The participating schools used on average 2.06 practices in the process of

assisting freshmen to make a smooth transition to high school. The evening orientation and freshmen advisory were the most popular selections in tandem with other practices. The evening orientation, as a single practice, was perceived as the least effective. Student enrollment also had a significant influence on the number of freshmen transition practices. There was a large positive relationship between student enrollment and the number of freshmen transition practices implemented by the high school. With the discovery that 78.1% of all freshmen transition practices had been in place for five years or less, it was not possible to examine the impact such practices had on the attendance and graduation rates.

In the next chapter, all the components of the study were summarized. Also included in Chapter Five were the implications for effective schools and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER FIVE - DISCUSSION

Introduction

The transition to high school is a critical time in a student's educational journey towards a diploma. If the transition to high school is not successful, students can become academically discouraged, socially disconnected, and may not make it to graduation day.

Chapter One discussed the need for this study and the necessity to focus on the transition to high school. The purpose of this study was to investigate the practices, programs, or interventions used across the state of Missouri to assist freshmen in making a successful transition to high school. Chapter Two provided a review of related literature in the area of freshmen transition to high school. The chapter included four sections: the freshmen as an adolescent, the structure of high schools, school improvement models, and existing freshmen transition practices.

The methodology for the study was explained in Chapter Three. Every high school principal in Missouri was invited to participate in the freshmen transition study by completing an online survey. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the responses from the 183 participants.

Chapter Four discussed the results from the survey and the data used to test the three null hypotheses proposed in this study. Of the Missouri public and non-public high school respondents, 60% reported to have a freshmen transition practice in place. Most schools used more than one format or approach to address the transitional needs of freshmen. A single-dimension approach was perceived as less effective than using multiple methods.

Null hypothesis #1 was rejected. It was proven there is a statistically significant positive correlation between student enrollment in high school and the number of freshmen transition practices being implemented. Null hypothesis #2 was accepted. A correlation between the number of freshmen transition practices and the attendance rate could not be proven at a statistically significant level. Null hypothesis #3 was also accepted. A correlation between the number of freshmen transition practices and graduation rate could not be proven in this study.

Implications for Effective Schools

As stated by Haney et al. (2005), grade nine plays a critical role in the education pipeline. If students do not advance due to failing courses and are retained, studies show that upwards of 70% of those students will not graduate from high school (Haney et al.). In this study,

Missouri high schools were surveyed to discover the transition practices in place to assist freshmen in making a successful move to high school. The following information could assist high school administrators who are seeking information on providing transitional support for incoming freshmen:

1. The use of a multi-dimensional approach to freshmen transition was perceived as more successful.
2. As the student enrollment increased, the number of freshmen transition practices incorporated in a school should also be increased.
3. An evening orientation was not perceived as successful when used as a single practice, but was quite popular when used in conjunction with other practices.
4. The concept of professional learning communities was the most widely used improvement model by high schools with a current freshmen transition practice.

Recommendations

Based on the research and the conclusions made from the data, the following recommendations for future study were made:

1. The attendance and graduation rates for K-12 and 7-12 grade configurations were noticeably higher than the more common grade 9-12 high school configuration. A correlational study between the number of building transitions students must navigate in their K-12 experience and graduation rate would benefit school districts that are forced to make decisions about grade configurations when addressing population growth.
2. In this study, the effectiveness of freshmen transition practices was not able to be determined due to the short time that each practice had been in place. To determine the effectiveness of a freshmen transition practice, program, or intervention, a longitudinal study of ninth grade course failure and graduation rate should be conducted within a single high school.

Summary

The transition to high school can be a scary time for many freshmen. Large high schools could eliminate this anxiety by implementing several freshmen transition practices during the critical ninth grade year. The multi-dimensional approaches that were continuous and on-going were perceived as most successful in this study. The evening orientation as a single approach was viewed as an unsuccessful transition practice.

As a nation, attention must be given to the declining enrollments and the decreasing graduation rates in high schools. Promoting a smooth transition to high school for all students is a worthwhile investment in the future.

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APPENDIX A

Participation Letter

Participation Letter

October 6, 2008

Hello Secondary Principals,

My name is Teresa McKenzie. I am a high school principal at Logan-Rogersville High School in southwest Missouri. For my doctoral program, I am researching the freshmen transition practices that are being used across the state. The transition to high school can be a very difficult time for students. The goal of this project is to determine if there is a correlation between the type of transition practice in place and student attendance and persistence toward graduation. Please take a few minutes to complete the 16 question survey. Simply click on the link below to begin or forward this email to the person that deals directly with the freshmen transition program in your district.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=9OFSmbh7vhtgkeydQVJ2ig_3d_3d

I appreciate your willingness to contribute to this research project.

Have a great day!

Teresa J. McKenzie, Principal
Logan-Rogersville High School
4700 S. State Hwy 125
Rogersville, MO 65742
(417) 753-2813

“Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.” Ralph Waldo Emerson

APPENDIX B

Instrumentation

*Instrumentation***FRESHMEN TRANSITION SURVEY****School Demographics**

The purpose of this study is to identify the most effective freshmen transition practices being used in Missouri. Data from this survey will be correlated with school attendance and graduation rate.

1) What is your position in the high school?

- Principal Counselor Other
 Assistant Principal Teacher

2) What is the current enrollment of your high school?

- 130 – Below 131-245 246-577
 578-1202 1203 +

3) Which choice best describes the campus where your freshmen are located?

- K – 12 7 – 12 9 – 12
 9th Only Other

4) How many different attendance centers (middle schools/junior highs) send to your high school?

- 1 2 3 4 5 +

5) Which improvement model(s) are being implemented in your high school? (Mark all that apply)

- Professional Learning Communities (PLC)
- Positive Behavior Support (PBS)
- Response to Intervention (RtI)
- High Schools That Work (HSTW)
- Other Please Specify:

6) Does your school currently have a freshmen transition program or intervention?

- Yes No

Programs & Interventions

Please provide information on the current freshmen transition practice being used in your high school.

7) Where did the idea for your current freshmen transition practice originate?

- Locally-Generated Modeled from another district
 Purchased Program Other

If Purchased Program was selected, please provide the name of the program:

8) Which format best describes your current transition practice? (Mark all that apply)

- Evening Orientation Summer School Program
 Half-Day Session Freshmen Advisory
 1 – 2 Day Boot Camps
 Freshmen Course (Semester or Year)

9) How long has your current freshmen transition practice been in place?

- 2 Years of Less 3 – 5 Years
 6 – 8 Years 9 + Years

10) Which topics are a part of your current freshmen transition practice? (Mark all that apply)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rules / Regulations | <input type="checkbox"/> Conflict Resolution |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Requirements for Graduation | <input type="checkbox"/> Grade Monitoring |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Study Skills / Habits | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Connection through Extracurricular Activities | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Goal Setting | <input type="checkbox"/> Parent Involvement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Career Exploration | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership Skills |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social / Emotional Support | |

If other, please list:

11) How would you describe the success of your current freshmen transition practice?

- Extremely Successful
- Moderately Successful
- Meeting the Need
- Could be Improved
- Looking for a New Approach

12) What type of participation is expected from the students in your current freshmen transition practice?

- Student Choice (All students are invited to participate)
- Targeted Population (Selected groups are strongly encouraged to participate, i.e. at-risk)
- Required Participation (All must participate)

13) What type of participation is expected from the parents in your current freshmen transition practice?

- Parent Choice (All parents are invited to be involved)
- Targeted Population (Selected groups of parents are invited to be involved)
- Required Participation (Parents are required to be involved)

14) Please briefly describe the current freshmen transition practice in your school.

Study Participation

15) For the purpose of this study, please enter your high school information

Name of High School:

City:

16) If you are willing to share more information about your current freshmen transition practice, please complete the contact information below.

Name:

Company:

Address:

City / Town:

State:

Zip:

Email Address:

Phone Number:

VITA

Teresa J. McKenzie was born in Jefferson City, Missouri, on January 1, 1974, to her parents, Gary and Erma Wrye. After graduating from Centralia High School, Centralia, Missouri, in 1992, she attended the University of Missouri in Columbia, from 1992 to 1996. She earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Education in May, 1996, with a certificate to teach science at the secondary level. While teaching ninth grade science at Sparta High School in Sparta, Missouri, she completed a Master of Arts degree in Educational Administration from Missouri State University in Springfield, in May, 2002. In December, 2007, McKenzie earned a Specialist degree in Educational Administration from Lindenwood University in St. Charles, Missouri. With the completion of this dissertation, she has completed the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree from the same institution. She served as the principal of Sparta High School from 2001-2008, and in July, 2008, she became the principal of Logan-Rogersville High School in Rogersville, Missouri. In her personal time, she loves spending time outdoors with her husband, Kirby, and daughter, Jenna.