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Freshman Transition Programs:
Effect on Ninth Grade Student Preparedness

by

Samantha Ruth Sutton

December 2009

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

Doctor of Education

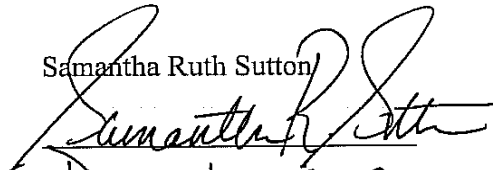
School of Education

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 here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name:

Samantha Ruth Sutton

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Samantha Ruth Sutton". The signature is written over a horizontal line.

Date:

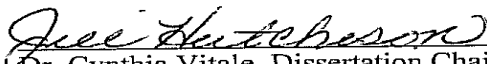
December 3, 2009

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Samantha Ruth Sutton

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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Abstract

Ninth grade is critical because students either gain the maturity and academic skills to succeed in high school or fail and eventually drop-out (Hardy, 2006). With a new school environment comes anxiety as new social, academic, and behavioral responsibilities arise. Incoming freshmen at the High School of Study experience greater social freedoms and accountabilities, difficult academic requirements that leave no room for failure, and more stringent discipline policies. Administrators at the High School of Study recognized these challenges and designed a program to help their freshmen make a successful transition into high school.

In 2006, the High School of Study implemented a one-day, voluntary transition program. The three components of the program included orientation to procedures, academic requirements, and general rules of conduct.

The purpose of this collaborative study was to determine if the implementation of the program had a positive effect on overall student preparedness, academic achievement, and minor disciplinary infractions. Specifically, the research questions addressed were

1. Does a one-day, voluntary transition program meet the needs of incoming freshmen, ultimately raising their overall preparedness as they enter their new high school environment?
2. Will the number of ninth grade semester failing grades decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program?
3. Will the number of ninth grade minor disciplinary infractions decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program?

The data gathered from this study were used to determine the program's effectiveness. Results indicated that the program improved freshman preparedness and orientation based on survey results; however, it had no statistically significant effect on academic success and/or disciplinary incidents.

Based on the results, recommendations were made to reexamine the current goals, mandate attendance for the current program, evaluate a more comprehensive program, initiate early interventions for identified at-risk students, and develop a study skills curriculum for all freshmen. Results of this study may assist school administrators as they develop new or continue to make adjustments to current transition programs to better prepare incoming freshmen to be comfortable and successful in their new school environments.

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Key to Abbreviations

DESE	Department of Secondary and Elementary Education
IRB	Institutional Review Board
SIS	School Information System

Chapter One – Overview of the Study

The transition from middle school to high school can be one of great difficulty for many students. High school tends to be a larger, faster-paced environment in which many students find themselves struggling to find their way. Recently, many school districts have recognized this challenge and have begun to implement a wide variety of transitional activities and programs to address the needs of incoming freshmen. The district in this study, referred to as the District of Study, is among the districts across the country looking at strategies to help incoming freshmen.

At the time of this study, the District of Study was home to over 5,000 high school students, approximately 1,450 of which annually were incoming freshmen. The district contained four comprehensive high schools. One of its high schools, referred to as the High School of Study, was the first in the district to address the growing concern that freshmen lack preparedness as they enter their new environment. The High School of Study implemented a one-day, voluntary transition program in the summer of 2006. The goals of the program were to (a) increase overall preparedness for the first day of high school, (b) decrease the number of freshman semester failing grades, and (c) decrease the number of minor disciplinary infractions common to many new students. The transition day has since expanded to all four comprehensive high schools in the district.

This was a collaborative research project in which co-researchers, Samantha Sutton and Angela Hahn, gathered data using two separate procedures. Both researchers are high school assistant principals in the District of Study. This researcher, Samantha Sutton, focused on student perceptions concerning anxiety and preparedness for their first day of high school, as gathered from a one-time, voluntary survey. All freshmen of 2006-

2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 were asked to complete a survey (Appendix A) using a rating scale from 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, regarding (a) general level of anxiety for first day of high school, (b) comfort level following course schedule, (c) comfort level of lunch procedures, and (d) level of awareness of general rules and procedures regarding tardies, cellular phones, dress codes, and student identification badges. Survey participants were also asked whether or not they attended the one-day, voluntary transition program and, if so, if they found it to be beneficial in regards to preparation for their first day of high school. Based on participant responses, two distinct groups emerged—those who opted to attend the one-day transition program and those who did not. Comparisons of these two groups were conducted.

The collaborative research partner, Angela Hahn, focused on ninth grade academic and disciplinary data gathered from the district's School Information System (SIS). Grade reports were obtained to determine the overall number of semester failing grades for the freshmen in the years 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, when no program was offered. These data were compared to the number of semester failing grades for the freshmen in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, when the transition program was offered. Discipline reports were generated to gather the collective number of minor disciplinary infractions conducted by these same freshman classes. Disciplinary infractions examined included (a) tardy, (b) dress code, (c) student identification badge, and (d) cellular phone violations.

The data gathered from the student surveys and the SIS program were used to study the one-day, voluntary transition program. Both researchers included all results and

discussion but included greater focus on their specific aspect of the study. The study was used to reflect upon the goals, successes, and failures of the current program.

Background of the Study

According to Hertzog and Morgan (1999), “Success or failure during the freshman year sets the tone for a student’s entire high school career” (p. 41). Hertzog and Morgan believed that if students are successful in their freshman year, there is a great likelihood that the students will not only graduate from high school, but they will also enjoy the high school experience. They also believed the converse to be true. “If students do not have a good experience that freshman year, the decision to drop out of high school is either consciously or subconsciously made at that time” (p. 41).

Recent statistics indicated that “as many as five percent of all high school students leave school each year. This number rises to ten percent among certain groups such as low-income students. At this rate, one in seven children born in the United States today will not graduate from high school” (Mizelle, 2007, p. 56). Because students fail ninth grade more than any other grade of school (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006), it is important to address their needs prior to entering high school.

Prior to the summer of 2006, high schools in the District of Study simply offered an annual orientation day held in the spring for eighth grade students for their upcoming high school experience. Each student had the opportunity to voluntarily visit their respective high schools to participate with their parents in a three-part evening informational program on (a) credit requirements, (b) general course offerings, and (c) various available activities for student involvement.

Eighth graders and their parents were invited to begin the evening in the auditorium of their respective high schools where they would hear an introduction of the administration and guidance counselors from the principal of the school. Traditionally, the principal presented accolades acquired by the school regarding athletics, academics, and fine and performing arts. The guidance department offered a presentation on graduation requirements, course requirements, and possible elective courses. Students and their families were released to the gymnasium and/or commons area where representatives from academic departments, clubs, and athletic organizations were available for information.

At the time of the spring orientation event, students did not know their specific course schedules, instructors, lunch schedules, lockers, or bus routes for their upcoming freshmen year. In addition, from an assistant secondary principal perspective, high schools have seen an increase in generational disciplinary infractions regarding the use of cellular phones and inappropriate clothing (e.g., sagging pants, short skirts and shorts, and revealing tops). Traditional disciplinary infractions such as tardies and student identification badge violations also continue to be a concern. Prior to the implementation of the one-day, voluntary transition program, the only means to obtain the above information was through packets and schedules distributed during August registration. Students opting not to attend the voluntary program were left to familiarize themselves solely through the registration process.

Academically, incoming freshmen of 2006 were about to encounter new Missouri state graduation requirements. In October 2005, the state increased the minimum credit requirement for graduation from 22 to 24 credits. All of the district's high schools follow

a traditional six period schedule. Without additional voluntary courses (classes offered before the start of the regular school day, summer school, and/or correspondence classes), the 2006 incoming freshmen could not fail a single course throughout the duration of their high school career. With six class periods each day, students can earn six credits towards graduation each year, thus reaching the minimum state requirement of 24 credits by the completion of their senior years. This leaves no room for failure. This creates an urgent need for students to be informed of Missouri state graduation requirements prior to the start of their high school careers.

The High School of Study was the first in the district to recognize the need to address these concerns and began to investigate transition days already offered by neighboring school districts. In the summer of 2006, the school implemented its first one-day, voluntary transition program to address these concerns. In August, just prior to the start of the new school year, the three-component program invited incoming freshmen to the high school for a day of orientation. At the time of this study, the annual program was still being implemented.

The three components of the transition day consist of (a) procedural orientation, (b) introduction to academic requirements including the new 24 credit system, and (c) an overview of general rules of conduct. The five hour program allows students to ride their buses, follow their schedules to the actual bells, practice their locker combinations, eat lunch following cafeteria procedures, and meet several of their teachers. Students gather in the auditorium to meet their principals and to learn about common disciplinary situations to avoid (e.g., tardy infractions, dress code violations, student identification infractions, and cellular phone violations). Break-out sessions conducted by guidance

counselors address academic support, graduation requirements, organization strategies, and study skills. At the end of the day, students gather back in the auditorium to receive their first school t-shirt and learn chants and cheers for pep assemblies.

Importance of the Study

The results of this investigation could be important to a variety of stakeholders within the District of Study, as well as other districts across the nation embarking on the implementation of their own freshman transition programs. The results will be provided to district administrators including the Superintendent of Schools and the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. District administrators will also receive recommendations for proposed changes and/or developments in the program. Building administrators at the middle and high school levels may use the information when planning specific building activities to enhance their own transition programs to meet the needs of students. The results of this study could be particularly important to the incoming freshmen and their families, as their perceptions are taken into account when evaluating the current program. Each year new adjustments to the program are made in an effort to better prepare incoming freshmen to be comfortable and successful in their new academic environment. As the program continues to develop, the District of Study should anticipate an increase in graduation rate and in student acclimation to the high school setting.

Statement of the Problem

Incoming freshmen in the District of Study are facing increasing demands and pressures regarding (a) overall acclimation to their new larger and faster paced

environments, (b) academic requirements, and (c) procedural and behavioral expectations. According to Lampert (2005),

middle schools usually have far fewer students than high schools and are structured into small teaching teams and ‘house’ arrangements that shield students from getting lost in the crowd. As they enter high school, young adolescents must adjust to older students, a wider array of teachers throughout the day, and increased social and academic pressures. Developmentally, many are poorly prepared to navigate such a demanding transition. (¶ 4)

In addition, current students attending the High School of Study are at a greater risk of dropping out due to the newly implemented state graduation requirements.

Administrators at the High School of Study recognized the importance of transitioning ninth grade students and therefore implemented the first summer transition day in 2006. Despite the need for such a program, administrators had to consider the cost of bus transportation and the provided lunch to participating students. Staffing requirements included recruiting volunteer teachers, student leaders, and club/organization sponsors. Furthermore, the High School of Study had to assign an administrator to organize and oversee the event. With the above factors considered, all four comprehensive high schools in the district had implemented the one-day, voluntary freshman transition program by the summer of 2008.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this investigation was to determine if the implementation of a freshman transition program at the High School of Study had a positive effect on (a)

overall student preparedness, (b) academic achievement, and (c) minor disciplinary infractions. Specifically, the research questions were

1. Does a one-day, voluntary transition program meet the needs of incoming freshmen, ultimately raising their overall preparedness as they enter their new high school environment?
2. Will the number of ninth grade semester failing grades decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program?
3. Will the number of ninth grade minor disciplinary infractions decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program?

Co-researchers evaluated the current program to determine effectiveness in meeting the three goals. This researcher focused on research question one while Angela Hahn focused on research questions two and three. Findings and summaries of all research questions are included.

Determining the effect of the current one-day, voluntary transition program at the District of Study on these factors will provide the district with the information that can be used to determine if the program should be unchanged, changed, or eliminated. The results of the study will assist the district in identifying successful as well as ineffective components of the program. The results will also aid in determining if the program is meeting the three initial goals set forth by the High School of Study. The three goals of the program were to (a) increase overall preparedness for the first day of high school, (b) decrease the number of freshman semester failing grades ultimately leading to an increase in first year credits earned, and (c) decrease the number of minor disciplinary infractions common to many new students.

Independent Variable

The independent variable was the opportunity to attend the one-day, voluntary freshman transition program. The data were examined using two separate procedures: a statistical analysis of student survey data and a SIS data analysis of the number of semester failing grades and referrals for minor disciplinary infractions.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable was the effect of the one-day, voluntary transition program on (a) overall student preparedness and anxiety levels for the first day of high school, (b) ninth grade semester failing grades, and (c) discipline referrals for minor infractions.

Hypothesis

The implementation of a one-day, voluntary transition program at the High School of Study will have a positive effect on ninth grade student preparedness and anxiety levels for the first day of high school as evidenced by data gathered from a student survey; however, the program will have no effect on ninth grade failure rates and/or minor disciplinary infractions as evidenced by data gathered from the SIS program.

Limitations of Study

Administrator characteristics threat. Each administrator was responsible for following established district disciplinary policies and guidelines. Although all district administrators were trained to follow policies in a consistent manner, not every student was disciplined by the same administrator, thus biases may have occurred.

Data collection time. The amount of time the survey participants had to respond and return the surveys was limited. Students were given one day to complete the survey during their mandatory Communication Arts course. Due to absenteeism, not every student completed the survey. In addition, due to the timing of the distribution of the surveys, the freshmen classes of 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 participated in the survey in the spring of their ninth grade years, while the freshmen of 2006-2007 participated in the survey in the spring of their tenth grade year. This lapse of time for the freshmen of 2006-2007 may have influenced results. Opinions of students who had left the district during this time could not be gathered.

Instrumentation threat. The students participating in the survey (Appendix A) may have interpreted the questions differently, thus skewing the results.

Mortality threat. Efforts were made to ensure that all students participated in the survey. Surveys were distributed by a teacher in a mandatory freshman course and time was provided for completion; however, participation was voluntary and not every subject returned a response. Freshmen of 2006-2007 reported 51.1 percent participation, freshmen of 2007-2008 reported 61.4 percent participation, and freshmen of 2008-2009 reported 81.0 percent participation in the survey.

Participant characteristics. Personal attitudes of the students responding to the survey questions about the one-day, voluntary transition program may have impacted the results. Although all students had the opportunity to participate in the survey, it was voluntary and those opting to participate may be more dedicated and diligent students. This may also reflect the same characteristics of students who opted to attend the one-day transition program. In addition, participants self-reported their opinions on the survey;

therefore, researchers had no means to verify the accuracy of the data provided by the students.

Respondent misinterpretation. Respondents may have misunderstood the written directions, rating scale, and/or questions on the student survey.

Survey development training. Co-researchers had no prior experience creating surveys for the purpose of investigative research. Prior to administering the student survey, it was evaluated by the former Assistant Dean of Education at Lindenwood University, the Principal at the High School of Study, and a veteran Communication Arts instructor who found the questions to be valid and applicable.

Delimitations of the Study

The one-day program has never been mandatory for incoming freshmen. The population of the students attending the program was not random. The characteristics of the students volunteering to attend may play a role in the general attitude towards entering high school as determined by the student surveys. In addition, co-researchers could not identify participants and therefore could not classify survey feedback into characteristic groups nor track specific academic and behavioral progress for various groups of students.

Definitions of Terms and Acronyms

Credit. A unit of measurement a student must acquire in order to meet the requirements for high school graduation (DESE, 2009).

Drop-out. Students who are enrolled in school at any time during the school year but are not enrolled at the end of the school year and did not transfer, graduate, or die (Dropout Rate Study Report, 2009).

Drop-out rate. A school's total enrollment is used as the population figure against which drop-outs are subsequently counted. The drop-out rate serves as a key indicator of a high school's success (Dropout Rate Study Report, 2009).

Missouri State Graduation Requirements. Criteria set forth by the state of Missouri that all students must achieve in order to earn a high school diploma. This criterion changed in 2006 affecting all students graduating in the 2009-2010 school year and beyond. The new standards raised the minimum number of credits needed for graduation from 22 to 24. Students are now required to earn four units in English and three units each in the areas of math, science, and social studies. This represents an increase of one full credit in each of the four core academic areas (DESE, 2009).

Ninth Grade Academy. "Schools-within-a-school especially tailored to the needs of ninth graders and can also include curriculum to prepare students for rigorous coursework" (Klump, 2008, ¶ 4). The goals of most ninth grade academies are to "provide structure, to provide a sense of belonging, and to ease the transition into high school while integrating content and increasing communication between teachers and parents" (Clark & Hunley, 2007, p. 41).

Orientation program. "A program that strives to make students aware of the demands of high school life and offer support during the transition process" (Queen, 2002, p. 66).

Student Information System. A web-based solution for student data management that aggregates up-to-the-minute information from every school site throughout a district to generate immediate, customized reports on areas such as academic, disciplinary, and demographic data (School Information Systems, 2009).

Transition program. A collaborative attempt between eighth and ninth grade buildings/personnel to help prepare their students for high school (“Transition Programs From Middle School to High School,” 2009).

Summary

“Educators call ninth grade a time when students face increasing peer pressure and are more likely to fail a grade (Garrow, 2008, ¶ 4). Because ninth grade is a critical year, there is a need to implement strategies to help transition these students. Therefore, a one-day freshman transition program was implemented in the High School of Study. Its effect on overall freshman preparedness and anxiety levels, academic achievement, and minor disciplinary infractions was explored.

Chapter two will review literature to examine research on the (a) general impact of transitions on students including minority and at-risk individuals; (b) roles of educators in transitioning students to high school; (c) varying types of transition programs including ninth grade academies, freshmen advisory programs, and orientation programs; (d) student concerns during transitions; and (e) elements and development of effective transition programs. Research pertaining to these components is beneficial when reflecting on, discussing the results of, and making recommendations for the current transition program being utilized in the District of Study.

Chapter Two - Review of Literature

Prior to the 1960s and the emergence of the Middle School Movement, most public schools were separated into two common grade organizations: a junior high school with grades 7-9 and a senior high school made up of grades 10-12. During the 1960s and 1970s, however, a new creation of middle age grades was formed. The ninth grade moved upward to form a grade organization of 9-12, a structure that still exists for many high schools today. This left middle schools with grades 6-8.

The decision to move ninth graders out of the middle level school was most often made for practical reasons, such as to make room for the influx of sixth graders being moved to the new middle level. Therefore, while ninth graders have been firmly situated at the high school level for over three decades, educators continue to question the best placement for ninth graders in the organizational framework of schooling. (Kerr, 2002, p. 5)

What educators do know is that the beginning of high school is “a critical time for students” (Kerr, 2002, p. 4). Research shows that making a successful transition to high school can “help students form lasting attachments to school and increase students’ likelihood of graduating from high school” (Kerr, p. 4). Delisio (2009) stated that “positive transition experiences not only can set the tone for a year – but an entire academic career (¶ 4). Unfortunately, many of today’s large, comprehensive high schools offer little support for incoming ninth graders. This lack of support has prompted many school and district leaders to examine their transitional practices and consider new organizational programs designed specifically for ninth graders (Kerr).

The programs that the districts put into place to help with the transition from middle school to high school must address many different needs. When adolescents move into high school, the anxiety they may feel is complicated further “by other normative changes such as puberty, social and emotional development, the growing importance of peer relationships, and the development of higher order cognitive skills” (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006, p. 15). Research shows that “students who experience the stresses of numerous changes often have lower grades and decreased academic motivation, and they eventually drop out of school” (Cauley & Jovanovich, p. 15). So how can schools prepare students for these changes? Cauley and Jovanovich believed that “schools can prepare students for the transitions by becoming aware of students’ needs and by taking a proactive role in addressing those needs” (p. 15).

When looking to expand the one-day, voluntary transition program already implemented at the High School of Study to the other three comprehensive high schools in the District of Study, it was imperative to investigate other programs and their successes and failures. The move from middle school to high school can be very stressful for many students. Both academic and social pressures appear to be compounded during this time. Because some students may not feel prepared to handle these new pressures and/or changes, disciplinary infractions can result, academic performance may suffer, and students could eventually drop out. The researchers conducted a thorough review of current literature to learn more about such orientations and to better plan and implement the new programs in the District of Study.

This literature review provides research on freshman transition programs, which aided in the development of the program that is the focus of this study. The literature

review explores the following topics: (a) general impact of transitions on students including minority and at-risk individuals; (b) roles of educators in transitioning students to high school; (c) varying types of transition programs including ninth grade academies, freshman advisory programs, and orientation programs; (d) student concerns during transitions; and (e) elements and development of effective transition programs.

The General Impact of Student Transitions

As students make the transition into high school, they may experience a larger, more impersonal, more competitive, and grade-oriented environment than they experienced in middle school. Often, more than one middle school feeds into one comprehensive high school, and students are required for the first time to earn credits towards graduation. Students also experience a greater diversity of teachers and peers, and for the first time, they have more choices to make in their curricular and extracurricular activities. “In this environment many young adolescents’ grades drop, and they do not attend school as regularly as they did. They also develop a more negative view of themselves and feel an increased need for peer friendships” (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000, p. 57-58). Students with behavior problems, low academic performance, or low socio-economic status are often those affected by the transition from middle school to high school.

At one time females had the most difficulty with the transition to high school, but with the age of terrorism and school violence, the anxiety has balanced equally to males and females. Peer relations are extremely important to both male and female students. Upon entering the high school, students of both

genders often find it extremely difficult to adjust because their friendship circle has been disconnected. (Queen, 2002, p. 3)

Another problem that is evident during the transition process involves those who experienced behavioral difficulties during the elementary school years. Students with behavioral problems “constantly disrupt the class setting and often end up in confrontations with other students or the classroom teacher. These students have an extremely difficult time adjusting to any school environment and most will become serious discipline problems in middle school and high school” (Queen, 2002, p. 3).

According to Queen (2002), students sometimes experience difficulty making a successful transition to high school because they “are not academically prepared” (p. 4). This may be attributed to the common practice of social promotion at the elementary and middle school level. Due to this inadequate preparation for the next level, students often “make lower scores on tests, fail to complete homework assignments, and rarely comprehend the assigned activity. This leads to higher levels of frustration, failure, and once at high school, the greater possibility of dropping out of school” (Queen, p. 4).

Students also experience difficulty making a successful transition because they lack “connectedness” to the school. Osterman (as cited in Anfara & Schmid, 2007) linked school connectedness to academic achievement, social and personal attitudes and participation in school. Eccles, Midgley, and their associates (as cited in Anfara & Schmid 2007) indicated that school engagement might serve as a protective factor against transitional problems. Research demonstrates that extracurricular participation has the potential to influence students’ sense of belonging and promote positive academic and psychosocial outcomes. Students who are engaged in extra activities show “more positive

perceptions of competence, autonomy, and relatedness in the school. They are also less likely to drop out and be involved in delinquent behavior” (as cited in Anfara & Schmid, p. 62).

Issues of disconnectedness may be exacerbated for poor and minority students. Ford and Stelle noted that “school transitions may challenge the academic success of poor and minority students who are more likely to feel unconnected to an environment whose culture seems irreconcilable to their own” (as cited in Anfara & Schmid, 2007, p. 62). Many of the students affected by the transition from middle school to high school are students from low socio-economic environments. One cause may be that many students living in poverty typically lack the parental support that could enable them to make more successful transitions. The degree of parental interest and participation in school and related events, and the extent to which parents supplement the learning process with educational activities is a major factor in the success of students transitioning from middle to high school (Queen, 2002).

To understand the impact the transition will have on particular students and what types of programs are available to help the students, it is imperative to look at the research on those individuals who are affected. Minority students and at-risk students are two groups that are greatly impacted by the transition from middle school to high school.

Minority Students

African American males are the individuals who experience the most difficulty when making a successful transition from the middle school to the high school. “In many cases, African American males fall into categories pertaining to behavior problems, low academic performance, and low socio-economic status” (Queen, 2002, p. 4). Nearly “one

of every three eighth-grade students in the United States does not graduate from high school, and half of Black and Latino students do not make it to graduation day” (Dedmond, 2006, p. 1). A limited number of studies have examined the effect that the transition process has on the academic adjustment and achievement of minority students, particularly African American students. Evidence suggests that minorities have the greatest academic difficulty following the move to high school. Reyes (as cited in Holcomb-McCoy, 2007) tracked eighth-grade students from urban, minority, low-income backgrounds beginning in their final year of elementary/middle school through their transition to high school and up until their expected time of high school completion. They found that the “minority students who eventually graduated from high school and the minority students who dropped out of high school both showed a decrease in grade point average following the middle-to-high school transition” (Reyes, as cited in Holcomb-McCoy, ¶ 9). In addition “the students who dropped out of school showed a sharper decline in grades and attendance in the ninth grade” (Holcomb-McCoy, ¶ 9).

The decline in engagement that many minority students experience as they move to high school suggests that the academic and social environments that African American students encounter in high schools have a huge impact. Holcomb-McCoy (2007) suggested five unique challenges that may influence the transitioning of African American adolescents: “stereotyping, scarcity of positive role models, lack of culturally competent schools, ethnic identity developments, and emotional/behavioral reactions to discrimination” (¶ 11).

School counselors need to be trained to provide the academic support that will be needed by African American students in order to meet the challenges they will be facing

when entering high school. It would also be advantageous for these students to have tutoring programs in place and to have other support activities, especially for the students who are experiencing academic problems. Since many schools do not have classes on how to study, research suggests that it would be best for counselors to provide ninth grade students with a course in study skills. African American students should have input on how the course can best fit their specific needs (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

The counselors at both the middle and the high schools need to work with eighth and ninth grade students to help the transition process. One suggestion is that they hold orientation meetings with small groups of students before they leave middle school and during the beginning of their ninth grade year. “Ongoing support groups that emphasize ethnic identity issues as well as transition issues should be made available to ninth-grade African American students” (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007, ¶ 26). Peer-mentoring programs are also helpful for ninth grade African American students. “Matching ninth grade African American students with African American students who have successfully transitioned to high school would enable the ninth grade student to have a support system beyond the adults at the school” (Holcomb-McCoy, ¶ 26).

Reyes’ study (as cited in Holcomb-McCoy, 2007) demonstrated that African American adolescents’ perceptions of the quality of their school environment and the quality of their relationships with peers and teachers decline markedly as they move into secondary schools.

Teachers’ reliance on stereotypes and prior expectations causes African American students to be at a disadvantage. School counselors can improve the transition of African American students by challenging their colleagues’

stereotypes of African American students. One way to challenge colleagues is by utilizing data to highlight disparities between African American ninth-grade students and their White peers. This data might include grades, test scores, attendance records, discipline records, and extracurricular memberships. By monitoring and keeping track of data, school counselors are able to initiate discussions on teacher expectations, the influence of stereotypes on instruction and school culture, and how staff can challenge ‘myths’ about student ethnic groups. (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007, ¶ 29)

“The need for stable and enduring bonds with caring adults is especially important for minority students” (Anfara & Schmid, 2007, p. 62). A school district must take into consideration the needs of their minority students, and they must implement programs that will address these needs. Anfara and Schmidt suggested programs such as study skills courses and mentoring programs for minorities may be successful, especially for those students who lack the parental involvement, academic success, and positive role models they need in order to succeed in their new environment.

At-Risk Students

Children *at-risk* constitute an important topic of education policy discussions that have come under increasing critical scrutiny” (Catterall, 1998, p.302). Students considered to be *at-risk* need special attention during this transition period. Once again, counselors need to be involved in the transitioning process. The American School Counselor Association recommends that “professional school counselors at all levels make significant, vital, and indispensable contributions toward the academic, career, and personal/social success of ‘at-risk’ students” (Turner, 2007, ¶ 3). Turner suggested that

counselors should “provide proactive leadership in the areas of (a) identification of at-risk students; (b) preventive program planning; (c) individual, group, family, and crisis counseling; and (d) individual educational planning” (§ 3). Turner believed that these efforts will prevent students from dropping out of high school.

“Transition theories suggest that one way to decrease school dropout rates among entering high school students is early transitional planning and preparation. Preparation of at-risk students, before they begin high school, can help them better adjust to the demands of a new environment” (Turner, 2007, § 4). So the question is, how do schools prepare these incoming high school students? Researchers have found many different solutions. Chapman and Sawyer (2001) researched the Culbreth Middle School Communities-In-Schools High School Transition Initiative, a program designed to make connections between a supportive middle school program for at-risk students and the high school environment.

The Culbreth Middle School Communities-In-Schools (CIS) High School Transition Initiative began in February, 1989, when an intern placed in a middle school CIS program began discussing the upcoming move to high school with the 11 eighth grade students participating in the program. When discussing the upcoming transition with the students, the intern discovered that students had significant concerns about moving to the high school.

The students and the intern identified three program goals: (1) to introduce students to the high school environment while they had the support of their current teachers, peers, and counselors; (2) to give their parents a chance to discuss their children’s transition to high school in a small group; (3) to begin

to help the students think about career choices and the role of school in those choices. (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001, p. 6-7)

These activities took place during the last six weeks of the school year. The program was designed to focus on transition activities one day each week. Each “transition day” included a presentation by a different professional. An important day to the students was the day they spent at the high school they would attend. Each student was assigned a high school student mentor who took them on a tour of the school and to a class with them. Students were also given the opportunity to meet the principal and guidance counselor. The principal and counselor discussed success strategies for high school, and the students were given an opportunity to ask questions and make comments (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001).

It is imperative to discuss strategies with the students, but the parents of at-risk students also need to be involved. “Parents’ Night” was an important piece of the program. This night created a bond between the families of these at-risk students and the high school administrators. A meeting was held and parents were given the opportunity to discuss their concerns (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001).

According to Chapman and Sawyer (2001), the Culbreth Communities-In-Schools High School Transition Initiative was a success. The students who participated experienced success and expressed satisfaction with the program. “Students were highly invested as evidenced by their attendance, active participation, and willingness to plan the program” (Chapman & Sawyer, ¶ 11).

Manchester High School in Chesterfield County, Virginia, is another school experiencing success with their at-risk students.

Their Success Program has resulted in reducing the failure rate for ninth graders from 10.3 percent to 2.7 percent and increasing scores on the Standards of Learning tests. They report that in the most recent year Success students scored a minimum of 70 percent on each Standards of Literacy test. In addition, administrative referrals are down and attendance is up. The sophomore failure rate has been reduced by about two-thirds. (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006, p. 22)

The Success Program begins by identifying at-risk students and putting them in a special sociology class their first year that teaches study skills, organizational methods, self-discipline, tolerance and diversity awareness, anger management, and other relevant topics. In the second year, the at-risk students enroll in a special study-skills class. This class divides half of the class time to academic study and the other half to community service with the severely disabled students within the school. In years three and four, many of the students return as mentors to the ninth graders (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

In an attempt to help at-risk eighth graders who are soon to make their move to ninth grade, teachers in the Ithica City School District wrote a summer transition program. The middle school teachers and counselors worked together to create a list of “at-risk” students who would benefit from a “crash course of skills” (Rachetta, 2005, ¶ 7). The focus was to

1. introduce students to high school level expectations,
2. show them how to manage their time and develop good study skills,
3. orient them to the building so they know their way around,

4. go over key skills like reading their own schedule and using textbooks

(Rachetta, 2005, ¶ 7).

The Ithaca School District began “The Introduction to High School” summer transition program in 2004 with 42 students. The program consisted of two two-week sessions. During these sessions, students studied English, math, science, and social studies. The students also participated in self-reflective activities to identify areas of strength and need, role-plays, and team building activities. The results of the program exceeded the district’s expectations. “Ninety percent of the students who participated in this program remained at Ithaca High School and were promoted to tenth grade” (Rachetta, 2005, ¶ 8).

How can school districts identify these at-risk students once they are in ninth grade? According to the National High School Center, “there are readily accessible indicators that schools can use to identify which students are on track to graduate and which will most likely drop out in time to intervene and prevent it” (Kennelly & Monrad, 2009, p. 14). One such model was developed by the Chicago Consortium for School Research and includes the following:

1. The student has accumulated five full course credits, the number often needed to be promoted to tenth grade
2. The student has no more than one semester F (that is, one-half of a full credit) in a core subject (English, math, science, or social studies) (Kennelly & Monrad, 2009, p. 14).

Keeping track of ninth grade academics, especially for at-risk students, can help school districts target the specific needs and intervene as quickly as possible.

In summary, at-risk students need special attention during the transition period. Many schools have created special programs such as the Culbreth Communities-In-Schools Transition Initiative, the Success Program, and the summer introduction to high school program. If the transitioning needs of these students are not addressed, districts may find the number of students not achieving academic and social success and eventually dropping out growing each year.

Roles of Educators in Transitioning Students to High School

One of the most critical times for educators to be most sensitive to the socialization of all students, including minority and at-risk students, is during the transition from middle school to high school. “In the age of accountability and with several of the standardized tests being administered at the ninth grade level, more attention is being paid to this transitional period” (Queen, 2002, p. 27). Educators today are required to not only educate students in reading, writing, and arithmetic, but they now must also equip students with the motivation and skills needed to continue learning after graduation (Queen).

Good communication between school officials and teachers can help in the transition process. The needs of the educators must be addressed if a smooth transition is to occur. The school must also arm the staff with skills that make the transition easier and a clear understanding of the characteristics of the cognitive, social, and emotional development of adolescents. “When students make the transition from the middle school to the high school, there is a need for staff members to understand and accept all students regardless of their varying backgrounds” (Queen, 2002, p. 29).

Unfortunately, research shows that teachers are not always attuned to the students needs during this crucial transition time. “In ninth grade—the make-or-break year for many students on the path to dropping out—students are more likely than their upper-grade counterparts to be taught by inexperienced, uncertified teachers” (Viadero, 2008, p. 8). Neild (as cited in Viadero, 2008) studied Philadelphia high schools and believed that student attendance can be greatly affected if students have a less qualified teacher. When all other factors were equal, the findings of the study suggested that high school students taking at least two classes taught by less qualified or uncredentialed teachers missed an average of two more school days a year than peers with more-qualified teachers. “When you have people teaching ninth grade who are so inexperienced and who know so little about teaching ninth grade, it’s potentially a problem” said Neild (as cited in Viadero, 2008, p. 8).

Neild and Farley-Ripple examined staffing patterns in the 200,000 student Philadelphia school district after working in high schools there and noticing that the ninth graders seemed to have more than their share of novice teachers and teachers without credentials. “You hear that this happens in middle schools and high schools. Teachers work their way up to better students, better classes, and better schedules,” Neild said; “It’s almost like the youngest students have the lowest status” (Neild, as cited in Viadero, 2008, p. 8).

The researchers found that “over the 1999-2000 school year, 29 percent of all ninth grade courses were taught by new or uncredentialed teachers. The corresponding figure for tenth grade was 28 percent. In eleventh and twelfth grades, 24 percent and 21 percent, respectively, of students’ courses were staffed by teachers with those

characteristics” (Viadero, 2008, p. 8). This can cause a major issue for students who are struggling with the transition process.

In order to reach all students, including minorities and at-risk students, during this pivotal year, it is imperative to have meaningful teacher involvement. Giving the least seasoned teachers to the ninth grade students does not necessarily afford them the education they deserve, nor does it always meet their emotional needs.

Because of all of the research on this crucial point in a student’s life, school districts can no longer ignore its importance. Schools across the world have implemented practices to target ninth grade students. There is a myriad of ways teachers can help these students during their transitions. The most common are ninth grade academies, freshman advisory programs, and orientation programs.

Ninth Grade Academies

Ninth grade is a critical year. Research shows that it is when students either gain the maturity and academic skills to succeed in high school or fail and eventually drop out. “By separating ninth graders into smaller learning communities, ninth grade academies can focus on the unique needs of this vulnerable population” (Hardy, 2006, p. 20). Many districts have created ninth grade academies to provide special attention to students in the first year of high school. In the state of Georgia, Houston County High School created a special program for ninth graders to help them succeed in making the transition from middle school to high school. This program was created because more than 60 percent of discipline referrals at the 2,200 student school were for ninth graders. After the program was in place for six years, discipline incidents were down 55 percent and grade retentions decreased 46 percent (Chmelynski, 2004).

Many freshman academies are held in a separate wing of the regular high school. This was the case for the first five years of the Houston County High School. However, in 2004, the academy was moved to a separate building. Many schools feel that the separate building is more conducive for the ninth grade academies. Vashon High School in St. Louis, Missouri, also chose to transfer its freshmen to a separate site. Williams transferred all the ninth graders to the former middle school not only because of discipline incidents but also because, “Half the ninth grade was failing” (Williams, as cited in Hardy, 2006, p. 20).

Williams came to St. Louis from Philadelphia where the Philadelphia school system began using freshman academies in all of its 54 high schools in 2004. According to Gueerin (2004),

these students receive a double dose of English and math instruction and get extra help on how to study on the high school level and how to digest material. The objective is to prepare these kids to succeed in high school. When you look at when kids tend to drop out of school, it’s the end of ninth grade. (as cited in Chmelynski, 2004, p. 49)

In Georgia, the Houston Academy also wants to prepare their students so they offer an elective class called High School 101 which covers time management, decision-making skills, study skills, test-taking strategies, learning styles, social tolerance, computer research skills, and career alignment (Chmelynski, 2004). In the case of Vashon High School, district officials did not believe that the students were being prepared for their future. In fact, “barely two-thirds of the ninth-graders were showing up for class and they were responsible for three-quarters of the fights and other disciplinary

infractions at the school. It was either move them, or watch them fail” (Williams, as cited in Hardy, 2006, p. 21). In 2003 in the state of New York, Albany High School placed their ninth grade class on an entire floor to themselves. “In a comprehensive high school this large, 2,600 students, kids can get lost in the shuffle. Keeping the freshmen together helps kids from becoming lost and helps teachers better know their students” (Clement, as cited in Chmelynski, 2004, p. 50).

The Philadelphia school system based their academies on the Talent Development School, a federally designated school reform model similar to the format of other ninth grade academies, developed at Johns Hopkins University that takes a comprehensive approach to improving high schools. A 2001-2002 study found the following gains in the Talent Development Schools:

1. Attendance rates improved by 15 percent. The number of students with 90 percent or better attendance has doubled.
2. The number of students reaching eleventh grade doubled in the first two schools to adopt the Talent Development model.
3. Overall, suspensions and arrests are significantly lower in each Talent Development School.
4. Ninth grade achievement in reading and math is improving. In one year, over half of the ninth graders gained one full year in math, and many gained two years. In reading, one out of five students improved by two years. (Black, 2004, p. 44)

The U.S. Department of Education does not keep statistics on the number of ninth grade academies across the country, but there are regular accounts of programs forming

not only in Missouri and Philadelphia but in districts all over the country. “What these single-grade academies try to offer is a personalized education that can guide young adolescents from the nurturing environment of elementary and middle school to the more competitive world of high school” (Hardy, 2006, p. 21). Chattanooga Central High School in Harrison, Tennessee, began a ninth grade academy in 2003 to create “a nurturing program that would enable ninth graders to acclimate to high school with less pressure from older students” (Prince, as cited in Chmelynski, 2004, p. 49). The program also aimed at providing opportunities for teachers to interact more with students to identify their needs and help them learn (Chmelynski, 2004).

“Suspensions dropped significantly from 29.4 percent to 17.8 percent during the first year of the academy in Tennessee” (Chmelynski, 2004, p. 49). At Vashon’s ninth grade academy, the number of discipline infractions for all grades “came down from 20 or 30 a week to one or two, and attendance was inching up from 72 percent at midyear to 78 percent by the end of the year” (Hardy, 2006, p. 23).

Muhlenberg South High School in rural Greenville, Kentucky, does not receive a federal grant to help implement a ninth grade academy as many large high schools like Albany High in New York. These grants do not usually target rural schools, so Muhlenberg South developed a freshman academy that does not rely on grants or outside sources. According to Clark and Hunley (2007), “Creative scheduling and collegiality address many of the concerns that entering freshmen encounter” (p. 41).

“The faculty at Muhlenberg South noticed that many freshmen were becoming discontented with high school, leading to increased absenteeism, increased discipline problems, declining test scores, and an overall negative attitude toward school”

(Chmelynski, 2004, p. 49). Because of this, the faculty decided that creating a version of a freshman academy was imperative, and four teachers were chosen to pilot it. The freshman academy at Muhlenberg South moved the ninth grade students to one wing of the building to isolate them from the upperclassmen. The benefits the Muhlenberg South academy experienced were greater than just increased attendance and decreased discipline referrals. The students also enjoyed increased academic success.

During the 2003-2004 school year, the initial math computation scores were below average (33rd percentile). It was determined that one of the academy's goals would be to improve math computation skills. The final testing showed an increase of 19 percentile points (52nd percentile) in math computation skills. For the 2003-04 school year, the complete composite score rose from the 46th percentile to the 50th percentile. (Clark & Hunley, 2007, p. 45)

Other academies have found success with test scores once implementing a ninth grade academy. The academy at Chattanooga Central High School had success with their reading scores. "A significant number of students have been brought up to grade level in reading" (Chmelynski, 2004, p. 49).

Dudley High School in Greensboro, North Carolina, first experimented with a ninth grade academy in the 1999-2000 school year with 100 students who were deemed the most in need of extra help. "Retention and discipline problems decreased while academic achievement rose, so the school expanded the program to the entire ninth grade" (Chmelynski, 2004, p. 50). Not all students are required to attend. Ninth grade students who are enrolled in the school's early college program are exempt. Dudley ninth graders, like those at Albany High School in New York, are physically separated from

upperclassmen in their own wing. “Being a little more restrictive in a smaller learning community is helpful to some ninth graders. They have limited movement, less distractions, and they’re far more focused” (Chmelynski, 2004, p. 50).

Many districts create ninth grade academies for more practical reasons. The Minnie Howard School in Alexandria, Virginia, was created because of the district’s desire to transform existing junior high schools that included grade 9 into grades 6-8 middle level schools. But then, the problem of where to put the ninth graders needed to be solved. Often, as was the case at Minnie Howard, the receiving high school would be overcrowded if it attempted to handle the large influx of students. Therefore, the district realized that they had three options: build a new high school, expand the existing high school building to accommodate the ninth graders, or remodel an existing structure to accommodate the district’s ninth graders. Because of budget constraints and other considerations, the last option was chosen (Rourke, 2001).

In 2001, the Minnie Howard School was in its eighth year and had won over many skeptics who questioned the ninth grade-only concept. “Having a separate campus is the key to our successful development of an age-appropriate climate. If we do our job well, we lose 100 percent of our students every year. Consequently, we start over every year” (Walsh, as cited in Rourke, 2001, p. 28). Starting over every year requires an unusual commitment on the part of the faculty. They must understand each student before he or she enters Minnie Howard’s doors in the fall. “In February, April, and July, we study the individual profile of each eighth grader,” Walsh notes; “The staff then restructures the program every year to meet the students’ needs” (as cited in Rourke, 2001, p. 28).

Walsh emphasized that the internal organizational structure and expectations of staff are fundamental to a positive climate. A team approach breaks instructional teams and students into six groups. One of these is an alternative 'mainstream recovery' program designed to provide intensive support for students who are deemed highly at risk for truancy and dropping out of school. Goals for these students are to develop an awareness of personal potential, to increase self-advocacy skills, and to ensure promotion to the tenth grade in a mainstream setting. (as cited in Rourke, 2001, p. 28)

According to Rourke (2001), "Walsh and the staff believe that the team approach allows teachers to share ideas and compare notes about student progress. Problem areas are identified quickly, and it is apparent when students need the extra support of personalized instruction because the staff knows the students individually" (p. 28). At Minnie Howard, each teacher is responsible for 15 or fewer students in an advisory capacity. "Because these students are all the same age, they share similar problems and are generally in the same stages of development" (Rourke, p. 28).

At Minnie Howard, the staff believes that it is important for students to get to know one another before entering high school. They also realize the importance of learning the rules and expectations of high school before actually entering the building. "The ninth grade-only structure provides a transition between the stability of middle school and the busy, intimidating corridors of the high school and eliminates confrontations with upperclassmen during a time when students are going through their own personal transitions" (Rourke, 2001, p. 28). The efforts at Minnie Howard have paid

off. The school has seen the numbers of truant students drop, a drop in suspension rates, and increased participation in honors classes. “Staff members also feel that students are better prepared for tenth grade” (Rourke, p. 28).

All of the attention given to the needs of their students did not go unnoticed for Minnie Howard. In December, 2001, the Education Trust named Minnie Howard school one of only two “high flying” secondary schools in the metropolitan Washington area. This is a prestigious honor only given to schools that serve a student body that meets specific criterion. The criterion set forth states that more than 50 percent of the student population is minority and that more than 50 percent of the students qualify to receive federally subsidized meals; however, the students achieve higher scores than 70 percent of the rest of the state on statewide standardized tests (Walsh, 2002).

The MacArthur Ninth Grade School in Houston, Texas, is another successful ninth grade academy. It was created because of the research reports that show that ninth grade students are more at risk in three areas than students in any other grade: dropping out of school, poor or irregular attendance, and pregnancy. “The district also found that students are more likely to be graduated if they earn enough credits during ninth grade to progress to the tenth grade on schedule” (Rourke, 2001, p. 29).

The officials in the Aldine Independent School District utilized this data when they opened the MacArthur Ninth Grade school during the 1999-2000 school year. In fact, in what Hickman calls a decision with “tremendous foresight” (as cited in Rourke, 2001, p. 29), Aldine ISD committed to establishing a ninth grade campus near each of the four traditional high schools in the district (as cited in Rourke). The district decided to open them in 1998 and 1999 in order to keep freshmen from getting lost in the corridors

and classrooms of already massive high schools, ranging in size from 1,900 to 2,300 tenth through twelfth grade students. “By providing them with their own campus, students become better acquainted with the rigors of a high school curriculum and mature in the process” (Kujawa, as cited in Reents, 2002, ¶ 6). The school district experienced success both with their dropout rate and their attendance rate. The dropout rate at the ninth grade level had decreased dramatically and their attendance rate had increased. Kujawa also believes the “isolation of this pivotal grade is helping to raise student achievement” (as cited in Reents, ¶ 9). From 1996 to 2001, the district earned a “recognized” rating from the Texas Education Agency—the second highest in the state’s system of accountability. The district received this rating based on student performance on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills, dropout rates, and attendance (Reents).

All of the effort put into ninth grade academies may seem worthless to some. “It sounds almost like hand-holding, and, you know, that’s what it is,” says Hertzog. “If we can get kids to the tenth grade, they’re going to graduate, and if we have to do that by holding their hands, so be it” (as cited in Hardy, 2006, p. 21).

Despite believing in the value of ninth grade academies, Hertzog does have some concerns. “Ninth grade academies are increasing, but my concern is that it’s sometimes done for the wrong reasons, such as overcrowding or because there’s an old school available” (as cited in Chmelynski, 2004, p. 50). A study on the issue, co-authored by Hertzog, concluded that “Transition is a process, not an event.” Hertzog (as cited in Chmelynski) says,

Ninth grade academies are absolutely a good idea, but they have to be done right.

They are most successful when ninth graders attend school in a separate part of

their future high school with a team of teachers dedicated to working with ninth graders only. (p. 50)

This was the case for Capital High school in Kanawha County, West Virginia. School officials wanted a small learning community that would help new freshmen make a successful transition. Capital High administrators like those in the Aldine School District decided to undertake the effort after reviewing literature and examining data suggesting that new freshmen often struggle to do well during their transition to high school. They were concerned that “CHS freshmen were struggling as evidenced by the fact that during the 2002-2003, 42 percent of CHS’s 288 ninth graders were reading below the 50th percentile, according to standardized test scores” (Hughes, Copley, & Baker, 2005, p. 3). The program at Capital High was a school-within-a school model. This model incorporated special scheduling, embedded study skills, research-based instructional and classroom management strategies, and culturally responsive teaching and schooling practices (Hughes, Copley, & Baker). This school-within-a-school approach is one option for a ninth grade academy.

Hertzog also believed that when developing a transition program between middle school and high school, a school district needs to find a dedicated faculty that is willing to teach only ninth graders. “The teachers should look at assignments and agree on policies and procedures for turning in assignments, taking tests, etc...” (as cited in Reents, 2002, ¶ 43). Hertzog believed that this would provide the ninth grade students with some concrete guidelines across the curriculum which would in turn help them stay organized (as cited in Reents).

A disadvantage to the ninth grade academy model is that it can create divisive rivalries or fracture existing relationships, both with students and with staff. At Vashon High School, many students were angry about leaving friends; while others felt that they were being punished (Hardy, 2006). When separating teachers into teams, conflicts can occur. Conflict can also develop from the commitment a teacher feels toward the school versus the smaller unit that can lead to rivalries. “Teachers begin to worry about how they can move from one school to another or that they will not gain autonomy” (McIntosh & White, 2006, p. 41). However, despite any disadvantage, research shows that ninth grade academies help ease student transition.

Hertzog believed that a key element in a successful academy is a transition committee of parents of eighth and ninth graders, teachers, administrators, and students. You can’t template a successful transition; what works for one group, might not work for another. Data is out there that shows if we can get kids to the tenth grade, they will probably graduate from high school. Ninth grade is the critical year. The academy approach seems to be working in the schools that have tried it. And the beauty of it is the cost is minimal. (as cited in Chmelynski, 2004, p. 50)

Another attribute of the ninth grade academy is the attitudes and findings from students and staff members alike. “It seems like we’re learning more,” said Darnesha from Vashon in St. Louis (Hardy, 2006, p. 23). Other ninth graders say there’s less to distract them at the new school. “All the loud noises in the hallway kept you from doing your work,” said Terell, also from Vashon (Hardy, 2006, p. 23). A staff member from Vashon who admits to being a “naysayer” at the beginning now feels, “The whole thing

has been a blessing to them (the students). I think they realize it's all for them—for once” (Hardy, 2006, p. 23).

Before students enter the ninth grade academies, many districts hold meetings to acclimate the students to their new surroundings. The Findlay City School District in Ohio is sure to meet with current eighth grade students and their parents before the start of the school year.

The freshman principal, counselor, and intervention specialist meet with eighth grade counselors in early December to discuss parent meetings, course selections, registration, and identification of at-risk students. Meetings are held in January with parents at each middle school. An open house night and an ‘Are you interested in Advance Placement or Honors Classes?’ night are held at the high school for eighth graders and their parents prior to class registration. (McIntosh & White, 2006, p. 44)

Other transition activities in the spring of the eighth grade year in the Findlay School District are visits to all middle schools by the freshman principal, counselor, intervention specialist, activities director, student council advisor, and former students. The district feels that this informal visit gives the students time to ask questions. The freshman “Voices in Perfection” Show Choir and athletic director also visit the middle schools. A student-produced video, “A Day in the Life of a Freshman” is shown to all eighth graders (McIntosh & White, 2006).

Orientation to ninth grade is an important aspect of ninth grade academies. In the Findlay School District, their orientation is held in late August.

This three-hour program gives the students the opportunity to meet some of

their teachers and upper class students, tour the building, review the student handbook, find their lockers, and get their schedules of classes. During orientation, freshmen are involved in a scavenger hunt, drawing for school items, and a visit to the snow cone stand in the courtyard. Freshman orientation also provides an opportunity for freshman parents to discuss questions, concerns, and fears they may have with the administration in an informal setting. This time with the parents alleviates concerns they have with their child's transition to high school (McIntosh & White, 2006, p. 44).

Muhlenberg South also takes the freshman academy one step further and meets with all incoming freshmen and their parents one week prior to school starting for an orientation. School officials believe that this orientation lessens the anxiety parents and students feel. During this orientation, the students and parents participate in many different activities. The students are first separated into homerooms where they receive their schedules, take a tour of the building, and rotate through their schedule to meet their teachers and find their classrooms. At the end of the day, the students are reassembled and participate in team-building activities with the faculty. The orientation ends with an informal evening meal during which the academy teachers mingle with the new students and their parents. These activities "have proven to be invaluable, especially when conferences are needed later in the school year" (Clark & Hunley, 2007, p. 42).

All of these districts that have successfully implemented ninth grade academies had to first sell the program. The Aldine School District believed that to start a ninth grade program, school districts must first sell the notion to parents. "It is a different concept and you have to be prepared to address their concerns about splitting up the

school into different units” (Kujawa, as cited in Reents, 2002, ¶ 44). The Rush-Henrietta Central School District in Rochester believed that “to sell a successful program, the district administration must treat the ninth grade center as equal in importance to the senior high school, not as an extension program” (Graham, as cited in Reents, ¶ 45).

There is a need for transitioning activities between the eighth and ninth grade years, and the ninth grade academy model works well in transitioning these students. Hertzog and Morgan have been studying the transition from middle to high school since the mid 90s. After much research, Hertzog stated that “our belief is that this approach will provide ninth grade students with ‘touchstones’ to help them acclimate to their new surroundings and a faculty that is transitional in nature and dedicated to teaching ninth grade students” (as cited in Reents, 2002, ¶ 18). The researchers also found that school systems with full-blown transition programs have noticed a significant impact on the number of student dropouts—“an eight percent dropout rate at schools with such a program versus a 24 percent rate at those without” (as cited in Reents, ¶ 19). By implementing the ninth grade academy model, schools provide the transitioning students “an opportunity to adjust to the new facility, acquire the skills to succeed in a competitive educational environment, and enjoy a feeling of security similar to what they experienced in middle school” (Hertzog, 2006, p. 61).

Freshman Advisory Programs

Not all school districts have ninth grade academies. Many districts have given help to their incoming freshmen with different programs. When Maine East, a large, diverse school outside of Chicago, found that sizable numbers of its first-year students were unable to successfully adjust to high school and pass all of their classes, a Freshman

Advisory program was implemented. Lampert (2005) decided to take a proactive approach after realizing that

sizable numbers of first-year students were unable to successfully adjust to high school and pass all of their classes. They created a school wide Freshman Advisory program where sophomore, junior, and senior student mentors provide structured academic and social guidance to almost all the freshmen throughout their first high school year. Each year, 50 upper class mentors, 16 advisory teachers, and a program coordinator work together to help nearly 400 ninth graders survive and thrive during this transitional year. (Lampert, 2005, p. 61-62)

In a study by Cotton (as cited in Lampert, 2005), it was found that academic achievement is strongly influenced by the quality of a student's social environment and by how strongly the student feels attached to school. In 1996, the National Association of Secondary School Principals urged large schools like Maine East to develop strategies to ensure that each student is known well at school, that each student's progress is closely monitored, and that all students believe they have academic and social support (as cited in Lampert). This is why the Freshman Advisory slogan at Main East is "Doing well and being well." District officials believe that the slogan reflects a dual emphasis on grounding students academically and socially (Lampert).

Lampert realized the importance of including all the stakeholders when trying to establish a Freshman Advisory Program; therefore, they assembled a planning team of students, parents, teachers, administrators, and counselors that met for two years. The team researched the literature on advisory programs so that they could make informed

decisions when developing specifics for their program at Maine East. “The program’s goal would be increased academic success of freshmen—indicated by a reduction in first-year failure rates—and increased participation in extracurricular activities” (Lampert, 2005, p. 62).

The curriculum designed by the Advisory Committee and presented in advisory sessions was driven by three concepts related to helping first-year students become socially and academically secure: attachment, achievement, and awareness. The outcomes of this curriculum focused on two areas: reducing the percentage of first-year students failing their freshman year and to increase freshman students’ participation in school activities. (Lampert, 2005, p. 62)

Lampert stated that in the first year they met the first of the goals: “overall, the freshman failure rate has decreased from 37 percent in the first semester of the 2002-2003 school year to 23 percent in the first semester of the 2004-2005 school year” (2005, p. 63). The results on increasing first year students’ participation in extracurricular activities were less dramatic. “At the end of the first year of the program (2002-2003), 72 percent of the freshmen reported that they had participated in an after-school club or activity during the school year; at the end of the second year of the program, this rate had increased slightly to 78 percent” (Lampert, p. 63).

Lampert was encouraged that over the three years after the Advisory Program was implemented, support for the program increased. “Faculty and staff members who initially denigrated the idea have come to believe that the advisory is an important resource” (Lampert, 2005, p. 63). The school staff listed the advisory program as one of

the top five resources that the school that positively affect student achievement (Lampert).

A program similar to the Freshman Advisory Program at Maine East is the Link Crew program. The Link Crew program provides the link for students to successfully transition from middle school to ninth grade. “The innovators of the Link Crew based their program on the premise that No Child Left Behind caused education to shift its focus to standardized test scores and student achievement data” (Boomerang Project, 2009). Unfortunately, as research shows, the ninth grade students are often lost in the shuffle and struggle to fit in to their new surroundings. “This decreased student connection to the school community has spawned, in some cases, tragic results” (Boomerang Project). Over 200 high schools in the United States make use of this program. The specifics of the program are as follows:

The program links freshmen with specially trained senior peer mentors. Each senior is assigned a group of approximately 12 freshmen to mentor during the critical first year. The students get together for social events that aim to welcome the freshman students and to project a sense of belongingness onto the newcomers. They also meet for assemblies on more serious topics such as school programs, study habits, and the impact of freshman grades on the overall grade point average. (Queen, 2002, p. 66)

In Yerington High School, Nevada, freshman referrals to the principal’s office are down 45 percent, freshman suspensions are down 50 percent, and freshman failure is down 32 percent since implementing the Link Crew program (Boomerang Project, 2009). At Central High school, 80 percent of the incoming freshman class participated in the last

Link Crew orientation day. They met new friends, ate pizza, met their teachers, got their lockers, and received their class schedules. The juniors and seniors on the Link Crew trained for four days in preparation for the orientation and activities that follow during the school year (Martin, 2008).

Another advisory program which utilizes upperclassmen as mentors is the Peer Group Connection, a component of the Princeton Peer Leadership program. This program also specifically trains selected seniors and faculty advisors in human relations and facilitation skills. The program is in place in districts in the Northeast including districts in New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia. This program has freshman students interacting with students outside of their usual circle of friends. The program also gets the ninth grade students involved in school activities. The Peer Group Connection measures success by improved grades, attendance, and behavior on the part of the freshmen. Because of the success of the program, it has grown to include a Peer Counseling Corps. “This specially trained group of seniors works individually with freshman students who are experiencing more difficulty with the high school transition and are not performing well academically. The seniors provide counseling and academic support to the ninth grade students” (Queen, 2002, p. 66-67).

When a ninth grade academy is not an option or what a district believes to be the answer to the problem of freshman transition, freshman advisory programs have often been implemented. Advisory programs may be personalized, such as the program at Maine East High School, or they may be programs utilized across the country, like the Link Crew program and the Peer Group Connection. These programs are not as all-inclusive as a ninth grade academy, but many have felt success.

Orientation Programs

Some schools address freshman transition with smaller activities. Joseph E. Haviland (2005) implemented a *For Freshmen Only* day in his school. In the past Haviland had participated in many activities that he felt addressed the needs of the incoming freshmen. He had offered tours to rising freshmen and their parents. Teachers, counselors, administrators, and students from the high school were sent to the middle school to speak with eighth graders. Haviland had also visited the middle school's parent group. Parents and students were invited to a course selection night to speak about the curriculum. Lastly, he bused eighth graders to the high school for a co-curricular activities recruitment fair. Haviland believed his transition activities were sufficient, but some parents changed his mind. It was because of the concerns of the parents that he found the *For Freshmen Only* program. Haviland was interested in this particular program because "it could serve as a worthwhile service that juniors and seniors could offer incoming freshmen; it could offer opportunities for ninth graders to develop positive relationships with upper classmen; it could give participants a leg up as they entered the more competitive, more grade-oriented high school environment; it could ease anxiety and better equip ninth graders to navigate unfamiliar surroundings (Haviland, 2005, p. 30).

For Freshmen Only looks like this

One day during the summer between eighth and ninth grades, rising freshmen are invited to spend a full day at the high school. Teams of upperclassmen, recruited from the local chapter of the National Honor Society (NHS), square small groups of 'newbies' about the school. By the end of the day, participating

students feel comfortable navigating from point A to point B in the large high school. And as these groups tour the school, freshmen pepper their upper-class tour guides with question after question. And all of this is purposeful. The tour is an opportunity for kids to ask kids questions they might not ask in the presence of adults. And if helping kids feel ‘in the know’ helps ease their transition, then providing lots of time for students to be alone with upper-class students is an important ingredient in a comprehensive transition program. (Haviland, 2005, p. 30)

After the tour, the freshmen rotate through a series of workshops. These workshops are once again given by trained upperclassmen. Workshop leaders identify one of the skills described in Snider’s book *How to Study in High School* and offer examples of how that specific skill might be used to advantage in high school. “Students teach the skills from their own experiences in the high school, with the very same curriculum and with the very same faculty members that the rising freshmen will encounter in September” (Haviland, 2005, p. 30).

Combs (1993) believed that when planning transition activities it is important to acclimate students with their new school system. He also believed that these activities should make students feel important. Haviland (2005) argued, “Is there a surer way to make teenagers feel cared for than to feed them?” (p.30). The freshmen during *For Freshmen Only* receive snacks throughout the day. Breakfast items are served in the morning and lunch is served in the afternoon.

Despite the benefits described by Haviland (2005), only 10-15 percent of each rising freshman class participates in the program. However, he believed that “the program

builds connections, extends a welcoming hand to newcomers, and offers valuable insight into how to navigate the building and how to accommodate the academic demands and opportunities presented in high school” (p. 31). At Buckeye Union High School, attendance is also voluntary, yet school officials believe that “regardless of whether it is mandatory or voluntary, the kids that attend the summer success program have better test scores across the board” (Gordon, 2009, ¶ 9).

Another orientation activity occurs at Worthington Kilbourne High School in Columbus, Ohio. The freshmen have the school to themselves on the first day. The students begin by meeting in the auditorium. The faculty, student body president, and administration are introduced. The students are also introduced to the rules, rituals, and values of the school. Because of the importance of knowing the school’s expectations, the students meet in their homerooms. Homeroom teachers review the handbook, discuss expectations, and help with lockers. It is also important for freshmen to know the location of their classes; therefore, freshmen follow their schedule and meet their teachers. Lunch can often be a difficult situation for ninth graders, so the program includes a cookout where students socialize with each other and with their teachers. The whole day is videotaped, and a ten-minute compilation is played for students at the end of the day. Another important aspect of the one-day program is the evening parent/student assembly (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

Some schools take the shorter orientation approach a bit differently. Hebron High School in Carrollton, Texas, has designed Hawk Camp for its incoming freshman students. Sophomores and juniors run the day-long camp. It is designed to combine social activities with small group discussions. The upperclassmen running the camp share their

freshman year experiences, easing newcomers' anxieties. The upperclassmen also have the freshmen write goal-setting letters to themselves. The purpose of the letters is to help the freshmen focus on long-range planning (Queen, 2002). Another camp experience is held at Monticello High School. At Monticello High School, the students participate in Panther Camp. The program was designed to not only be an introduction to the school, but "it was designed to help students break the ice with their peers and hopefully begin new friendships" (Monticello High School, 2009, ¶ 1).

Another one day orientation occurs at Western High School. At Western's orientation, freshmen were split up into teams with upperclassmen as their leaders. The upperclassmen facilitated team-building exercises with the incoming freshmen. A scavenger hunt that helped acquaint the new students with the school was held. Question and answer sessions were also held and at the end of the day, and the incoming students received ice-cream and their first class t-shirt. Ganton, 14, said the orientation helped her get familiar with her surroundings and that it helped get her nerves out ("Orientation Helps Freshmen," 2008). This is the ultimate goal of many freshman orientation programs.

The schools incorporating these orientation programs do so with the hope that the orientation program will "help lay the foundation for much student success over the coming months (Huntington Public Schools, 2008). Freshmen at Huntington High School are given the opportunity to attend a two-day orientation that is "meant to smooth the transition from the middle school level and allow the teenagers to get off to a strong start when classes resume" (Leonardi, as cited in Huntington Public Schools). Day one of the program consists of students meeting the administrative staff and ice-breaker activities. A

guest speaker then addresses the students on making the right choices (Huntington Public Schools).

Day two of the orientation program involves the parents. Department directors meet with the parents to share information about courses, requirements, testing and expectations. A question and answer session is also held with the administrators. Representatives from the Parent-Teacher-Student Association make a presentation and encourage parents to join the organization and participate in its activities as well. The guidance counselors work with the freshmen to discuss study skills and the organizational techniques used by successful students. Students are also given their locker combinations and an opportunity to locate and try out the combination to their new locker. The day ends with a picnic for both parents and students (Huntington Public Schools).

Another two-day orientation program occurs at Lakeland Regional High School. An essential element of their program is the interaction of the freshmen with two peer leadership groups, Leaders Encouraging Adolescent Progress and Speak With a Peer. These peer groups “educate classmates about positive and negative lifestyle choices and their consequences” (Edmund, 2009, ¶ 3).

Because more students fail ninth grade than any other grade in school, the transition is an important one, one that many believe is worthy of more than a one-day program. Bunting wrote,

One time experiences are insufficient. The single day given over to touring high school or the day set aside to learn from guest speakers about life in high schools do not fully prepare middle school students for the challenges they

will encounter. Sustained experiences are needed. They should begin early in the final year of middle school and repeat until familiarity develops. These experiences should be integrative, giving transitioning students insight into high school academics, as well as sensitive to the risks waiting in this new and untested setting. (Bunting, 2004, p. 146)

There is research to support Bunting's statement. Hertzog and Morgan (as cited in Dedmond, 2006) found that "programs that consist of minimal activities, building tours, and assistance in registration reported the highest drop-out and retention rates (p. 3). On the other hand, "students enrolled in the most extensive and comprehensive programs were able to maintain their grade-level placement in high school and thus had the lowest drop-out rates" (as cited in Dedmond, p. 3).

According to Maute and Brough (2002) "tours of the high school, explanations of curricular programs and after school activities, and other safety and security issues still need to be in place; however, they should not be the only component addressed in the transition process" (p. 17). Maute and Brough believed that "the key to knowing how to help students make the transition successful is knowing what they are most concerned about" (p. 16).

In May 1991, 693 eighth grade students in six Illinois schools were asked what concerned them most about their transition to high school. Using the Transition Concerns Survey developed by Maute, students were asked to rate 32 concerns on a scale of 1 (no concern) to 4 (great concern). Additional open-ended questions allowed them to comment on their concerns about high school. The top ten concerns in 1991 were: getting good grades, preparing for life, taking tests and

final exams, preparing for college, being successful in class, keeping friends, getting all the work turned in on time, having a lot of homework, making new female friends, and parent expectations. (Maute & Brough, pp. 16-17)

A decade later, the Transition Concerns Survey was given to 598 students in Nebraska, Georgia, and Pennsylvania. The purpose was to see if eighth and ninth graders' concerns in 1991 were different from adolescents' concerns in 2001. The top ten concerns in 2001 were: "getting good grades, preparing for life, taking tests and final exams, preparing for college, having a lot of homework, taking difficult classes, getting work turned in on time, being successful in class, organizing time, and parent expectations" (Maute & Brough, 2002, p. 17). As can be seen, there was not much change. Keeping friends and making new female friends were replaced by taking difficult classes and organizing time (Maute & Brough).

Because so many concerns in both surveys were related to esteem and self-actualization issues, Maute and Brough believed that "one of the best preparations is to help students gain confidence as successful learners. Students need to learn how to learn, how to study, and how to take tests in ways that prove to them that they can be successful academically" (Maute & Brough, 2002, p. 17). In order for this to occur, staff members must have knowledge and be able to recognize students' varying intelligences and learning styles. The authors believe that "you cannot do these things in a short orientation to high school activity. There is a need for ongoing activities" (Maute & Brough, p. 17).

Strategies such as peer mentoring, ninth grade teaming, ongoing orientation and question-answer sessions for small groups of students, integrated units about change, and interactions with a teacher advisor have all been implemented at various schools to

address the transitional needs of students. One school district in Pennsylvania addresses these concerns by orienting a cadre of incoming freshmen recommended by their eighth grade students as caring and helpful adolescents.

These students meet during the summer to learn to mentor their peers, provide friendship and assistance when necessary, and answer questions that other students may ask. At the beginning of the school year, these freshmen wear t-shirts designating them as peer helpers. The students then can feel safe asking them questions and sharing concerns. (Maute & Brough, 2002, p. 18)

Another reason that extensive transition programs are important according to research is to help fight failure and dropout rates. Hertzog and Morgan (1999) found that “schools with extensive transition programs have significantly lower failure and dropout rates than schools that provided students fewer articulation activities” (as cited in Mizelle & Irvin, 2005, ¶ 9). They concluded that “the best transition programs were those that included a variety of activities-in particular, counseling, school visits, and special summer courses to help students understand their new school” (as cited in Mizelle & Irvin, ¶ 9). Mac Iver (as cited in Mizelle & Irvin, 2005) also found that “fewer students were retained in the transition grade when middle school students experienced a high school transition program with several, diverse articulation activities” (¶ 8). Mac Iver and Epstein (as cited in Mizelle & Irvin, 2005) found that “middle school principals indicated that they expected fewer of their students to drop out before graduation when the school provided supportive advisory group activities or responsive remediation programs” (¶ 8).

Despite the research that states that one-day transitional programs do not have as much of an effect as those that are more extensive, many schools utilize them to help

acquaint the incoming freshmen to their new environment. The research shows that knowing what the students are concerned about when creating a freshman program is vital.

Student Concerns

As Maute and Brough (2002) stated, the key to knowing how to help students make the transition is to know what they are concerned about. No matter what the type of transition program a district has in place, the eighth grade students have apprehensions about entering high school. “Academic concerns and social concerns have both been identified as the primary concern in transition studies” (Akos & Galassi, 2004, p.212). To determine what areas most concern students as they move from middle level to high school, Morgan and Hertzog (2001) developed an open-ended instrument based on questions pertaining to transition from middle level and high school personnel.

This instrument was distributed to all of the eighth and ninth grade students in four northwest Georgia school systems during the 1998-1999 academic year (approximately 1,400 students in each grade in six middle schools, grades 6-8, and four high schools, grades 9-12). These schools were selected because their administrative and guidance personnel expressed interest in learning more about transitional processes. (p. 11)

The instrument was administered in a class setting with “94 percent of the students enrolled in the eighth grade and 92 percent of the students enrolled in the ninth grade in the four school systems participating in the study” (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001, p. 11). From the usable returns (81 percent), “approximately 400 from each grade level

were randomly selected and analyzed to determine student concerns regarding transition from the middle school to the high school” (Morgan & Hertzog, p. 11).

Although the responses were anonymous, school officials supplied demographic information about their respective student bodies.

The typical eighth grade student in these schools ranged from 13 to 15 years of age, and the typical ninth grade student ranged from 14 to 16 years. Each of the grades had balanced numbers of males and females. Approximately 60 percent of the students were Caucasian, 30-35 percent were African-American, and less than 10 percent represented other races. Approximately 52 percent of the students in the schools received free or reduced-price lunch.

(Morgan & Hertzog, 2001, p. 11)

Ten categories were developed from the students’ responses. The creators of the survey rank ordered the responses on the basis of the number of times the category was mentioned. Because of the nature of the instruments, students could describe more than one concern under each question. Table 1 represents student responses to the first question by grade and in rank order; Table 2 represents student responses to the second question by grade in rank order (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001).

Table 1

Student Interests—Survey Responses

What are/were you most looking forward to at the high school?			
Eighth Grade Responses	Percent of Responses	Ninth Grade Responses	Percent of Responses
Freedom	53	Friends	58
Friends	51	Freedom	53
Opposite Sex	43	Opposite Sex	45
Graduation	37	Graduation	37
New Classes/More Classes	34	Cocurricular Activities	27
Cocurricular Activities	28	New Classes/More Classes	24
Do Not Want To Leave M.S.	24	Having Fun	20
Driving	21	Nothing at All	18
Getting Out of M.S.	18	New Teachers	15
Lunch	11	Learning	12

Note. From “Designing Comprehensive Transitions” by Lena Morgan and Jay Hertzog, 2001, p. 12. *Principal Leadership*.

Table 2

Student Concerns—Survey Responses

What are/were you not looking forward to about going to the high school?			
Eighth Grade Responses	Percent of Responses	Ninth Grade Responses	Percent of Responses
More/Harder Work	67	More/Harder Work	62
Upperclassmen/Bullied	58	Being Bullied	55
Homework	55	Being a Freshman	48
Mean/Hard Teachers	50	Mean/Hard Teachers	45
Size of the Building/Lost	43	Homework	40
Being a Freshman	30	Size of the Facility	28
Discipline/Violence	26	Longer Classes	24
Separation from Friends	20	Discipline/Violence	20
Longer Classes	17	Finals	17
Making Bad Grades	11	Principal	13

Note. From “Designing Comprehensive Transitions” by Lena Morgan and Jay Hertzog, 2001, p. 13. *Principal Leadership*.

Once this data was gathered, the authors wanted more information; therefore, they visited two of the middle schools and two of the high schools to conduct focus groups with the students. “Each focus group included 8-12 students per grade level. The first five responses in both grades were almost identical with regard to what the students were ‘looking forward to’ and ‘not looking forward to’ about their move to the high school” (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001, p. 11). Based on these responses, Morgan and Hertzog grouped student concerns related to transition into five categories: “curriculum, facilities, safety and discipline, teachers and administrators, and general concerns” (p. 12). Because of the data gathered, Morgan and Hertzog contend that educators should develop programs to address each of these areas and give students positive, nonthreatening activities to deal with these concerns. Activities suggested included (a) making ninth grade textbooks available for eighth grade students to examine; (b) developing packets of

sample high school tests, homework assignments, and student work for eighth grade students to review; (c) holding an eighth grade celebration dance hosted by sophomores at the high school; (d) distributing high school newsletters to eighth grade students; (e) swapping a ninth grade teacher and an eighth grade teacher for one day so the high school teacher can talk with eighth grade students about high school and eighth grade teacher can reconnect with students from the previous year; and (f) developing a counseling unit on making successful transitions (2001).

Morgan and Hertzog (2001) believed that by focusing on the five categories of concern: curriculum; facilities; safety and discipline; teachers, counselors, and administrators; and general information, a school can provide beneficial transition activities that help middle school students feel comfortable in their new environment.

Because of the importance of students' perceptions to the transition process, much research has focused on this area. Butts and Cruzeiro (2005) shared the findings of a survey research study that addresses areas of greatest influence to the success of high school ninth grade students. The subjects for this study were "students who entered the ninth grade for the first time at a large Midwest comprehensive high school with a student population of approximately 2300, grades 9-12" (Butts & Cruzeiro, ¶ 4). The high school studied in this research article "did not have an established transition program in place to assist new ninth grade students to feel a sense of belonging and support; however, students had academic success" (Butts & Cruzeiro, ¶ 3). The survey study questioned new high school students to "determine the factors that had the greatest influence on their successful transition from middle to high school" (Butts & Cruzeiro, ¶ 3).

Students were asked to respond to 30, questions with a scale choice that included the following:

1 'really doesn't help'; 2 'doesn't help'; 3 'helps'; 4 'really helps.' They were also asked to respond to the one 'yes' or 'no' item ('I feel I'm being successful') and one open-ended question. That question asked, 'What did you need the most (and did not get) to help you make the transition to ninth grade?' This study obtained survey responses from 495 first-time ninth grade students for a 93.4 percent response rate. (Butts & Cruziero, 2005, ¶ 7)

For the statement "I feel that I'm being successful" at high school,

66.1 percent of the students responded 'yes.' Eighty-one students did not answer the question; therefore, it was recorded as 'no response/not answered.' 'No' was given as an answer by 17.58 percent (87). A 'no' response was recorded for 16.36 percent (81) of the respondents. (Butts & Cruziero, 2005, ¶ 8)

The open-ended question "What did you need the most (and did not get) to help you make the transition into ninth grade?" was answered by 73.5 percent of the survey participants. "The top five comments given were identified as: 'Nothing' (41 responses), 'More help in eighth grade' (28 responses), 'Support from family/friends' (19 responses), and 'Teachers helping me' (16 responses)" (Butts & Cruziero, 2005, ¶ 9).

For the numbered items to which students responded, helpful factors included "having teachers who explained things well, having an interest in class, having friends in class, and going to class daily" (Butts & Cruziero, 2005, ¶ 10). Factors that were not helpful for success included "limiting time with friends, having a mentor, having tutors help with work, being in a larger school, and forgetting outside problems" (Butts &

Cruziero, ¶ 10). Table 3 shows the mean for each survey item. A higher mean indicates an item students found to be more helpful (Butts & Cruziero).

Table 3

Student Ratings of Ninth Grade Success Factors

Survey question	M	SD	n
1. Teachers who care	3.24	.75	495
2. Teachers who explain well	3.62	.62	495
3. Teachers who are easy to talk to	3.44	.71	495
4. Work hard to do work on time	3.31	.76	495
5. Understand class expectations	3.43	.71	494
6. Good study/work habits	3.28	.74	493
7. Interesting classes	3.58	.64	494
8. Structured environment	3.04	.70	491
9. Self-discipline to be successful	3.16	.83	495
10. Participate in school activities	2.72	.99	494
11. Feel welcomed at Central	3.16	.83	495
12. Confidence to do work	3.16	.77	495
13. Parent/guardian support	3.16	.89	493
14. Have friends in class	3.54	.77	494
15. Hang out with right people	3.20	.84	495
16. Mentor, big brother/sister	2.32	1.00	485
17. Tutors help with school work	2.47	.98	487
18. Students and teachers cooperate	3.26	.69	494
19. Good classroom behavior	3.17	.74	487
20. Get homework done at school	3.48	.70	495
21. Go to class every day	3.60	.68	495
22. Make new friends	3.12	.85	492
23. Limit my time with friends	2.11	.92	494
24. Avoid negative influences	3.28	.92	492
25. Forget my outside problems	2.71	.94	495
26. Make good use of time	2.87	.95	492
27. Prepared by my last school	2.90	.90	491
28. Larger school than my last school	2.52	.96	492
29. Longer classes (block schedule)	2.97	1.05	493
30. Classes with fewer students	2.95	.99	491

Note. From “Student Perceptions of Factors Leading to an Effective Transition from Eighth to Ninth Grade” by Michael J. Butts and Patricia A. Cruzeiro, 2005, p. 73. *American Secondary Education.*

The results of this study led to the conclusion that “full transition programs are needed to address the areas necessary for new ninth grade students to be successful in

their new setting. Full transition programs work for students “only when the school provides complete support” (Butts & Cruziero, 2005, ¶ 16). The complete support system includes

interesting class options, effective teachers who use a variety of methods to engage students, mentoring programs, social support programs to assist students in their needs to feel comfortable and welcomed in their classes and extra-curricular activities, and organized events that include parents and students to get to know their new surroundings prior to the transition into high school. All of these components working together help to create a more seamless transition into the high school setting, setting students up for a more successful high school career. (Butts & Cruziero, ¶ 17)

Part of the complete support system is parental involvement. The importance of parent involvement during the transition from middle school to high school is vital. According to Wilcock (2007), “Parents want to help their children, but they are often uncertain as to how they can help” (¶ 8). Research shows that when parents are involved in students’ transition to high school, they tend to stay involved in their child’s school experience. “When parents are involved in their children’s high school experiences, students have higher achievement, are socially adjusted, and are less likely to drop out of school” (Queen, 2002, p. 93). Epstein (1996) found that “parent involvement in young adolescents’ school related activities decreases during the transition from middle school to high school, unless schools and teachers work to keep parents involved” (as cited in Mizelle, 2005, p. 58). During the transition, good communication is imperative. The teachers and administrators at the middle school level need to inform parents about all

transition activities and encourage them to participate. Not only do they need to get parents involved initially, they also need to keep them involved in their child's education and school activities during the students entire middle school career so that the parents are comfortable coming to school and confident that their involvement makes a difference in their child's academic success (Mizelle).

Unfortunately, in a study by Cooper (as cited in Mizelle, 2005), it was found that parent involvement typically "drops significantly by eighth grade and may drop even more during students' transition from middle school to high school unless schools and teachers work to keep parents involved" (p. 58). Then, as the time for transition approaches, "teachers should keep parents informed about all transition activities and encourage them to participate" (p. 58). There are many activities that the schools can provide that will involve parents in the transition process.

Parents may be invited to participate in a conference with their child and the high school counselor to discuss course work and schedules; they may be invited to visit the high school with their child in the spring and/or the fall; they may be invited to spend the day at the high school to help them understand what their child's life will be like; they may even be invited to help design and facilitate some of the articulation activities for students. In planning activities for parents, high school educators should remember that parents of students who are already in high school are an excellent resource for other parents and may also help to encourage new parents to be more involved in school activities. (Mizelle, 2005, p. 59)

As Maute and Brough (2002) stated, “the key to knowing how to help students make the transition is to know what they are concerned about” (p. 16). Once school districts are aware of both student and parental schools, they can incorporate activities that address these needs. Some areas that need to be addressed are curriculum, facilities, safety and discipline, teachers and administrators, and general concerns. The research by Butts and Cruziero (2005) suggested that in order to meet all student concerns, extensive transitions need to be in place.

Elements of Effective Transition Programs

When school districts become aware of the research concerning the negative effects the ninth grade transition can have on students, it is imperative to develop an effective transitional plan. Effective transition programs typically are defined as ones that improve student attendance, achievement, and retention. Several elements must be in place to achieve this goal.

1. Research suggests that effective transition programs have five or more diversified activities. The most common activities are bringing the incoming students to visit the new school, hosting meetings with administrators of both exiting and receiving schools to discuss programs and articulation, and having counselors from both school meet.
2. The most effective transition programs are comprehensive and target activities to students, parents, and teachers. Students and parents have concerns about the academic environment and social community of the new school, as well as school procedures. All of these should be addressed to ease the fears about

transition. Because they are an important support system for students, teachers and parents need to be knowledgeable as well.

3. An effective transition system should involve continuous planning among teams of teachers and school leaders. Communication between the two levels of schools should focus on the rising expectations for students, the necessary amount of academic preparation, and the high expectations and additional help that low-performing students may require to meet the standards. The transition committee should meet regularly to review, evaluate, and revise the program.
4. Effective transition programs attend to those students who are likely to have greatest difficulty with systemic transitions: girls, students with behavior problems, low achievers, and minority or low socioeconomic status students.
(Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006, p. 18)

An effective transition program has diversified activities, is comprehensive and targets all stakeholders, involves continuous planning, and attends to those students who are likely to have the greatest difficulty with the transition process.

Weldy (as cited in Anfara & Schmid, 2007) also noted that effective transition programs help “(a) build a sense of community, (b) respond to the needs and concerns of the students, and (c) provide appropriate, faceted approaches to facilitate the transition process” (p. 65). These programs also

- (a) encourage collaboration among elementary and middle school teachers, students, and parents, (b) encourage school leaders to become knowledgeable about the needs and concerns of young adolescents in transition, (c) provide

counseling at both the elementary and secondary levels to address transition concerns and assure students of the availability of ongoing support, and (d) assist students in turning their anxieties into positive action by learning about school rules, locker procedures, and other routines and expectations. (cited in Anfara & Schmid, 2007, p. 65)

Weldy (1991) also gave guidelines that have been successful and well tested for planning transition programs. Local school systems should:

1. Provide several activities that will involve students, parents, teachers, and staff from both schools in the transition process;
2. Establish a transition protocol that can be easily replicated and updated annually;
3. Establish a timeline for the transition process;
4. Schedule meetings between collaborative groups from the sending and the receiving schools and schedule discussions for adults and students about the issues;
5. Assess the human and financial resources available to support the transition process; and
6. Ask students, teachers, guidance counselors, parents and others to evaluate the transition program. (Queen, 2002, p. 135)

Weldy has found that these guidelines have been successful in the planning and implementing of freshman transition programs.

Research also suggests that effective transition programs should be a

collaboration between the middle and high schools. This is done in several ways. Many middle schools are now collaborating with the corresponding ninth graders' teachers to ensure that the eighth grade instruction is establishing the proper foundation for ninth grade. Research also suggests that the academic, social, and organizational similarities and differences between middle and high school should be addressed ("Transition Programs from Middle School to High School," 2009). Letrello and Miles (2003) suggested that one important element of an effective transition program is to "address the students' needs and fears regarding the move to high school in the eighth grade" (p. 3).

According to Hertzog (2006), when developing transition programs, it is "essential for principals to acknowledge that, given the emphasis placed on student success, no permanent template can be developed" (p. 60). Hertzog believed that because every eighth grade class is unique, they must be treated accordingly when transitioning. "Evaluation of various transition program components, such as grades, absences, discipline referrals, and counselor visits, must be conducted and benchmarked to gather relevant data concerning the exiting eighth grade class" (Hertzog, p. 60).

Hertzog (2006), like Weldy, believed that it is vital to include all the stakeholders when developing a program. Stakeholders, once again, include eighth and ninth grade students, their parents and teachers, and administrators and counselors from both the middle and high school.

This group needs to begin its work during the summer before the start of the eighth grade year in order to discuss the needs of the transitioning students, develop activities and events to address these needs, set a timetable for

implementation, and establish an ongoing data-gathering system. (Hertzog, 2006, p. 60)

Another aspect Hertzog (2006) believed is important in the transitioning process is the meeting of the student, his or her parent or guardian, and the school counselor. During this meeting, a plan is developed “to carry forward for the rest of the high school years and beyond. Although this plan is not binding, it provides the student with a glimpse of what lies beyond high school and serves as an impetus for graduation” (p. 61).

Best practices must be supported with effective and sufficient professional development and the necessary resources (both financial and personnel) to ensure successful implementation. Anfara and Schmid (2007) urged practitioners and policymakers to consider best practices for transitioning. The elements required in an effective transition plan as outlined by Weldy (1991) are many and must be well planned out in order for the transition to have an effect on the students. All stakeholders must be involved when planning and implementing an effective transition program.

Summary

Entering ninth grade can be “one of the most emotionally difficult, most academically challenging times in children’s lives” (Reents, 2002, ¶ 1). Without proper transitional programs in place, “school districts risk watching their ninth graders fall through the cracks” (Reents, ¶ 1). In fact, “researchers have identified ninth grade as the most critical point to intervene and prevent students from losing motivation, failing and dropping out of school” (Reents, ¶ 2). How do schools keep these students from dropping out of school?

This researcher investigated research question one which involved a survey on student preparedness and anxiety levels for the first day of high school. The literature showed that in order to help students feel better prepared for their first day of high school, it is vital to listen to their concerns when developing a transition program. A one-day orientation program can have a positive effect on student preparedness. Many of the orientation programs mentioned in the literature allowed students to follow their course schedule, become familiar with lunch procedures, and meet their new teachers. The students in the literature felt more prepared for their first day of school after attending an orientation program.

The collaborative researcher, Angela Hahn, focused on research questions two and three which involved ninth grade semester failing grades and minor disciplinary infractions. In order to help freshmen with academic and minor disciplinary issues, it is important to have a full-year program in place. This is most important with minority and at-risk students. Each particular school district must decide which type of full-year program to implement. They must also look at the role their educators play in the transitioning and teaching of ninth grade students.

The findings from this collaborative study and the information provided in the review of literature collectively present the data and information required to develop an effective transition program. It is important that districts provide such programs to meet the specific needs of their incoming freshmen as they embark on a new stage in their development and education.

Chapter Three - Methodology

Each year, thousands of young adolescents make the crucial transition from middle school into high school. As they do so, they often look forward to their new school experience with apprehension. Some of their biggest concerns are that students will harass them, that they will get lost in their new school's hallways, that schoolwork will be harder, and that high school teachers will not help them (Mizelle, 2005). The District of Study recognized the need to help incoming freshmen acclimate into their new environment. The High School of Study was the first in the district to implement a one-day program to address these concerns. The goals of the program implemented in 2006 were three-fold: (a) increase overall preparedness for the first day of high school, (b) decrease the number of freshman semester failing grades ultimately leading to an increase of first year credits earned, and (c) decrease the number of minor disciplinary infractions common to many new students.

The purpose of this study was to determine if the three goals set forth regarding the one-day program at the High School of Study were achieved. This investigation will assist the District of Study in identifying successful as well as ineffective components of the program. The results will be utilized when reevaluating the freshman transition programs in all four comprehensive high schools in the district.

This collaborative study addresses the following research questions:

1. Does a one-day, voluntary transition program meet the needs of incoming freshmen, ultimately raising their overall preparedness as they enter their new high school environment?

2. Will the number of ninth grade semester failing grades decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program?
3. Will the number of ninth grade minor disciplinary infractions decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program?

This researcher focused on research question one and provided extensive data and results pertaining to student preparedness for their first day of high school. As this was a collaborative research study, research questions two and three were addressed in a separate data analysis. A summary of those findings is included and was used to complete the comprehensive analysis.

Research Methodology

The research method utilized in this quantitative study falls under the classification of associational research. “In associational research, the relationships among two or more variables are studied without any attempt to influence them” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 335). Specifically, the study conducted was causal-comparative in nature where researchers “attempt to determine the cause or consequences of differences that already exist between or among groups of individuals” (Fraenkel & Wallen, p. 370). However, “interpretations of causal-comparative research are limited because the researcher cannot say conclusively whether a particular factor is a cause or a result of the behavior(s) observed” (Fraenkel & Wallen p.12).

This collaborative study focused on an investigation to determine if the goals of the one-day transition program set forth at the High School of Study were met. Over the years, the District of Study recognized a need for acclimating ninth grade students into their new, fast-paced environments. The causal-comparative research was the best

approach to this investigation because (a) the study compared two groups that had already been formed and (b) groups had already been exposed to the transition day. The goal of the research was to (a) focus on the one-day program instituted at the High School of Study, (b) evaluate the results of the data, and (c) reflect on the effectiveness of the program in meeting the initial goals.

In this investigation, researchers studied the effects of a one-day transition program following two separate procedures. One method utilized a voluntary student survey and compared the responses of two groups of students—those who opted to attend the one-day transition program and those who did not. The second method utilized data to study the effects of the program on two ninth grade classes who had the opportunity to attend the one-day program to the two previous ninth grade classes who had not been offered this same program. All subjects had already been exposed to the independent variable (the opportunity to attend the one-day, voluntary freshman transition program) prior to the investigation.

Participants

The participants for the anonymous student survey component of the study included ninth grade students who attended the High School of Study during the 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and the 2008-2009 school years. The subjects for the data analysis component of the research were members of the freshman classes during the years of 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, when no transition program was offered, and 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, when a program was offered. Individual students were not identified in either aspect of the research. The data collected from the SIS program analyzed total numbers from unidentified individual subjects.

An estimated 1,000 students received the hand-written survey on February 13, 2009. The participants included approximately 317 current freshmen, 327 sophomores, and 356 juniors. The sophomores and juniors were offered the program in 2006 and 2007 respectively.

The High School of Study opened in St. Charles County in 1960 offering credits to student in grades 7 through 10. At that time, the enrollment was 1,147. The first commencement was in 1963. Fifty-four seniors received their diplomas that June. Currently the High School of Study has 1,374 students, 347 of whom are freshmen. The 2008 reported demographics include 92.70 percent white, 0.10 percent Indian, 1.70 percent Hispanic, 5.0 percent black, and 0.40 percent Asian. Of the 1,347 students, 11.2 percent qualify for free or reduced lunch. The total drop-out rate is 3.1 percent, and the graduation rate is 87.3 percent (DESE, 2009).

Research Design

This research study was quantitative in nature and utilized data derived from two instruments. Specifically, the causal-comparative research method was used to investigate students' perceptions of preparedness for their first day of high school and their academic and behavioral performances their freshman year. The purpose was to “establish relationships between pre-established variables and look for and sometimes explain the causes of such relationships through carefully designed and controlled data collection and analysis” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006, p. 15).

Researchers were interested in the opinions of all ninth grade students who were afforded the opportunity to participate in the one-day transition program; therefore, a survey instrument was developed to collect data used to determine their level of

preparedness for their first day of high school. A data collection analysis was utilized to investigate the relationship between the optional program and the academic and behavioral characteristics of the ninth grade classes of students.

Instrumentation

This collaborative research project relied on two types of instrumentation to collect and analyze data. An anonymous student survey (Appendix A) was developed to gather opinions on comfort levels for the first day of high school, following the new course schedule, acclimating with new lunch procedures, and general awareness with rules and procedures such as tardy, dress code, identification badge, and cellular phone violations. Opinions from those who attended the program were compared to those who did not. The survey was developed by the researchers and distributed to students through their mandatory Communication Arts class. Instructors were responsible for implementing and gathering the completed surveys. A designated administrator at the High School of Study collected all surveys and returned them to the researchers.

The questions on the survey (Appendix A) were written in second person format. This allowed the survey questions to be delivered in a manner similar to that of an interview. Participants were first asked to identify their current year in high school. The actual survey included four opportunities for the participants to rate their comfort level using a 1 to 5 scale, 1 being the lowest and 5 the highest. Categories included comfort levels for the first day of high school, new schedule, lunch procedures, and awareness of general rules and procedures pertaining to tardies, cellular phones, dress code, and identification badges; however, only results from the first category were analyzed for this study. Finally, participants were asked to specify if they attended the one-day transition

program, and if so, if the program was helpful in their preparation for their first day of high school. Based on participant responses, two distinct groups emerged—those who opted to attend the one-day transition program and those who did not.

The second instrument utilized by the researchers was an academic performance and disciplinary data analysis of information collected from the High School of Study's SIS program. Data on semester failing grades and minor disciplinary infractions were collected by year and without association to specific student names.

The number of ninth grade semester failing grades were counted for the freshmen in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, when no transition program was offered, and 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, when a ninth grade transition program was offered. Once grades were counted, researchers determined the number of students contributing to the total number of failing grades. In addition, the number of students contributing to more than one failing grade per semester was counted.

The number of ninth grade minor disciplinary infractions was also counted for the freshmen in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, when no transition program was offered, and 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, when a ninth grade transition program was offered. Disciplinary infractions examined included tardy, dress code, student identification badge, and cellular phone violations. The researchers again examined the data by total number of disciplinary infractions and number of students contributing to the discipline referrals.

Validity and Reliability

Validity means the degree to which correct inferences can be made based on results from instruments; validity is dependent not only on the instrument itself but also

on the instrumentation process and the characteristics of the group surveyed (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Validity is the “appropriateness, correctness, meaningfulness, and usefulness” (Fraenkel & Wallen, p. 151) of the ninth grade transition program student survey and the SIS academic performance and disciplinary data analysis.

The survey instrument utilized in this quantitative research study should be evaluated on content validity. The student survey (Appendix A) was evaluated by the former Assistant Dean of Education at Lindenwood University, the Principal at the High School of Study, and a veteran Communication Arts instructor who found the questions to be valid and applicable. Content validity is the degree to which an instrument logically appears to measure an intended variable (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The reading level of the student survey was measured at a 7.3, which corresponds with a seventh grade level. This is well below the reading level of the high school participants, adding to the validity of the survey. The ninth grade transition program student survey appears to have appropriate content to measure its intended purpose; however, there is a concern with format, specifically question one, which may lead to potential respondent misinterpretation. The survey was distributed to all ninth graders in attendance in a voluntary format, which may have limited the number of responses.

The SIS program was purchased by the District of Study and is used to electronically tabulate and organize student data. In specific regards to academic and disciplinary information, the SIS program is an accurate and reliable source of gathering data. Overall, both instruments utilized in the study appear to provide information relevant to the questions presented in the study.

Internal Validity

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2006), internal validity means that “the observed differences on the dependent variable are directly related to the independent variable, and not due to some other unattended variable” (p. 169). As with any research study, there may be other factors contributing to the outcome of the research. This particular study was completely anonymous without knowledge of student characteristics. The specific characteristics of the type of student attending the one-day, voluntary transition program were unknown; therefore, the survey results may not represent the characteristics of the entire student body. This same threat to internal validity may have impacted the results of the disciplinary analysis. In addition, in 2006, the State of Missouri implemented a change in graduation requirements from 22 to 24 credits. Students falling under the new graduation requirements may have had additional academic pressures, thus potentially affecting the academic data.

Procedures

To begin the collaborative study, a letter of consent to the district Superintendent (Appendix B) was written to conduct educational research on the current High School of Study’s one-day transition program. An Institutional Review Board (IRB) application (Appendix C) was filed and then approved on April 28, 2008, by Lindenwood University (Appendix D) before conducting the research. The research involved anonymously surveying students and collecting general academic and disciplinary data from the district’s SIS program.

The methodology behind this collaborative study followed two separate procedural formats. One component of the research used a survey to elicit student

perceptions in regard to the one-day program offered at the High School of Study. The survey was anonymous, questioning all ninth grade students of 2006-2007, 2007-2008, 2008-2009 whether they attended the voluntary program or not. Participants were asked to rate using a scale from 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, their opinions on the following:

1. General level of anxiety for their first day of high school
2. Comfort level following their new course schedule
3. Comfort level with new lunch procedures
4. Awareness of general rules and procedures such as tardies, cellular phones, dress code, and student identification badges

In addition, students were asked if they attended the one-day, voluntary transition program and, if so, whether it was beneficial to their preparation for their first day of high school. Based on participant responses, two distinct groups emerged—those who opted to attend the one-day transition program and those who did not. The survey results were tabulated and analyzed in the following manner:

1. Survey responses from the freshmen of 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009
2. Statistical analysis (Chi-squared test) to determine if a difference in anxiety levels existed between groups of students who opted to attend the program and those who did not
3. Statistical analysis (two population proportion test) to analyze participation rates of students reporting high anxiety for their first day of high school

4. Statistical analysis (two population proportion test) to analyze participation rates of students reporting low anxiety for their first day of high school
5. Statistical analysis (one population proportion test) to determine if students who attended felt better prepared after participating in the one-day transition program

The second component of the research used an analysis of academic and disciplinary data retrieved from the District of Study's SIS program. Data collected was not student specific, rather it was gathered collectively from the ninth grade classes in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, when no voluntary program was offered, and 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, when the students had the option of attending the one-day program.

Freshman academic reports include the tabulation of first and second semester failing grades from each of the four school years being researched. The discipline reports consist of minor disciplinary infractions, specifically addressing tardy, dress code, student identification badge, and cellular phone violations. Data were tabulated and analyzed in the following manner:

1. Ninth grade academic and disciplinary data
2. Statistical analysis (two population proportion test) comparing ninth grade failure rates and disciplinary data in 2004-2005 to 2005-2006 when no transition program was offered
3. Statistical analysis (two population proportion test) comparing ninth grade failure rates and disciplinary data in 2006-2007 to 2007-2008 when the one-day program was offered

4. Statistical analysis (one tailed, two population proportion test) comparing academic and disciplinary data from 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, when no program was offered, to 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, when there was a ninth grade transition program offered

Summary

Chapter three described the methodology for the quantitative causal-comparative research study on the one-day, ninth grade transition program at the High School of Study. Subjects in the High School of Study had already been exposed to the voluntary transition day prior to this investigation. Researchers collected data through an anonymous student survey and reports generated through the SIS program. Data were used to investigate a potential relationship between the one-day transition program and overall comfort level for the first day of high school, academic achievement, and disciplinary infractions.

Chapter four presents the results of the ninth grade transition program student survey as well as academic and disciplinary data gathered through the High School of Study's SIS program. This information will be necessary in determining the overall effectiveness of the one-day transition program.

Chapter Four - Results

The results of this portion of the collaborative study were generated through the collection of the voluntary and anonymous student surveys. Three research questions were proposed in chapter one.

1. Does a one-day, voluntary transition program meet the needs of incoming freshmen, ultimately raising their overall preparedness as they enter their new high school environment?
2. Will the number of ninth grade semester failing grades decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program?
3. Will the number of ninth grade minor disciplinary infractions decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program?

The survey analysis specifically addressed the first research question which was answered using tables and narratives obtained throughout this study. As this is a collaborative research study, research questions two and three were addressed in a separate data analysis conducted by Angela Hahn. A summary of the data analysis used to answer these questions is provided at the end of chapter four.

Description of the Sample: Freshman Transition Day Student Survey

All students in the freshman classes that were afforded the opportunity to attend a one-day transition program were provided a voluntary and anonymous survey in order to obtain feedback on the effectiveness of the program. The forms completed by participating students from the freshman classes of 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 were used for this study. Participants were asked to use a rating scale from 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest, to determine their level of anxiety for their first

day of high school. Participants were then asked to identify whether they attended the one-day transition program or not. Those who attended the program were asked to complete one last question: Did attendees feel better prepared for their first day of high school after attending the program?

Responses from the Freshman Transition Program student survey were tabulated and analyzed in the following manner:

1. Survey responses from the freshmen of 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009
2. Statistical analysis (Chi-squared test) to determine if a difference in anxiety levels existed between groups of students who opted to attend the program and those who did not
3. Statistical analysis (two population proportion test) to analyze participation rates of students reporting high anxiety for their first day of high school
4. Statistical analysis (two population proportion test) to analyze participation rates of students reporting low anxiety for their first day of high school
5. Statistical analysis (one population proportion test) to determine if students who attended felt better prepared for their first day of high school after participating in the one-day transition program

Student Survey Responses

Table 4, Table 5, and Table 6 outline the responses from participating freshmen of 2006-2007, 2007-2008, and 2008-2009 respectively. These data were used to determine statistical significance in reference to proposed hypotheses.

Table 4

Freshmen in 2006-2007 Student Survey Responses

Freshman in 2006-2007/Graduating Class of 2010						
359 Students in Class/185 Responded to Survey (51.1% Participation)						
80 Students in Class Actually Attended Program/64 Responded to Survey as Attending (80%)						
	1	2	3	4	5	
	Low			High		
Level of Anxiety for First Day of High School for those who attended program	6	12	24	16	6	64
Level of Anxiety for First Day of High School for those who did not attend program	28	30	36	16	9	119
						183
						* 2 Students did not respond to this specific question

The data in Table 4 presents the responses from the freshmen in 2006-2007. This was the first year of the optional, one-day transition program. The High School of Study reported 80 students of a possible 359, or 22.3 percent, opted to attend the program. One hundred eighty-five students, or 51.1 percent of the class, volunteered to participate in the survey. Sixty-four students responded as attending the one-day transition program, calculating to 80 percent of the students who actually attended.

Table 5

Freshmen in 2007-2008 Student Survey Responses

Freshman in 2007-2008/Graduating Class of 2011						
394 Students in Class/242 Responded to Survey (61.4% Participation)						
230 Students in Class Actually Attended Program/152 Responded to Survey as Attending (66%)						
	1	2	3	4	5	
	Low			High		
Level of Anxiety for First Day of High School for those who attended program	12	34	50	28	28	152
Level of Anxiety for First Day of High School for those who did not attend program	8	13	29	16	14	80
						232
						* 10 Students did not respond to this specific question

The data in Table 5 presents the responses from the freshmen in 2007-2008. This was the second year of the optional, one-day transition program. The High School of Study reported 230 students of a possible 394, or 58.4 percent, opted to attend the program. Two hundred forty-two students, or 61.4 percent of the class, volunteered to participate in the survey. One hundred fifty-two students responded as attending the one-day transition program, calculating to 66 percent of the students who actually attended.

Table 6

Freshmen in 2008-2009 Student Survey Responses

Freshman in 2008-2009/Graduating Class of 2012						
347 Students in Class/281 Responded to Survey (81.0% Participation)						
240 Students in Class Actually Attended Program/213 Responded to Survey as Attending (88.8%)						
	1	2	3	4	5	
	Low			High		
Level of Anxiety for First Day of High School for those who attended program	33	41	69	43	27	213
Level of Anxiety for First Day of High School for those who did not attend program	17	15	16	8	12	68
						281

The data in Table 6 presents the responses from the freshmen in 2008-2009. This was the third year of the optional one-day transition program, the first year transportation was provided. The High School of Study reported 240 students of a possible 347, or 69.2 percent, opted to attend the program. Two hundred eighty-one students, or 81.0 percent of the class, volunteered to participate in the survey. Two hundred thirteen students responded as attending the one-day transition program, calculating to 88.8 percent of the students who actually attended.

Anxiety Level Comparison: Attendees vs. Non-Attendees

Table 7 presents the data comparing the anxiety levels of the freshmen who opted to attend the one-day transition program compared to those who did not. The data is divided by the classes of freshmen and is used to determine if there is a statistically significant difference in anxiety levels between attendees and non-attendees. For the

purposes of the chi-squared statistical analysis, responses from students who did not attend the program were considered observed data. Responses from students who did attend the program were used as the expected data. All analyses were originally conducted at the default 0.05 alpha level. Tests proving significance were again run at an alpha level of 0.01 to determine the lowest possible significance level for each test.

Table 7

Chi-Squared Statistical Analysis of Anxiety Levels for the First Day of High School

Chi Squared Analysis
Is there a significant difference in anxiety levels between those students
who attended the one-day transition program and those who did not?

Year of Transition Program	Chi Squared Value
2006-2007 (Class of 2010)	36.5182072 **
2007-2008 (Class of 2011)	2.20687955
2008-2009 (Class of 2012)	9.61103236 *

* Significant at the 0.05 level (c value = 9.4888)
** Significant at the 0.01 level (c value = 13.277)

The data presented in Table 7 first provides a comparison between the reported anxiety levels of the freshmen of 2006-2007 who responded to the survey as attending the one-day transition program to the reported anxiety levels of those who did not. The researcher proposed the following null and alternate hypotheses:

$H_0: P_1 = P_2$ The population of freshmen of 2006-2007 responding as not attending the one-day transition program (P_1) will experience no difference in anxiety levels for their first day of high school than the population of those who did attend the program (P_2).

$H_a: P_1 \neq P_2$ The population of freshmen of 2006-2007 responding as not attending the one-day transition program (P_1) will experience a difference in anxiety levels for their first day of high school than the population of those who did attend the program (P_2).

This chi-squared statistical analysis was calculated using an alpha value of 0.01 and a critical value of 13.277. The analysis determined a chi-squared value of 36.5182 resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis. There is statistical evidence, at the 0.01 level, to support a significant difference between the anxiety levels experienced by the freshmen of 2006-2007 who attended the one-day, voluntary transition program and those who did not attend.

The data presented in Table 7 secondly provides a comparison between the reported anxiety levels of the freshmen of 2007-2008 who responded to the survey as attending the one-day transition program to the reported anxiety levels of those who did not. The researcher proposed the following null and alternate hypotheses:

$H_0: P_1 = P_2$ The population of freshmen of 2007-2008 responding as not attending the one-day transition program (P_1) will experience no difference in anxiety levels for their first day of high school than the population of those who did attend the program (P_2).

$H_a: P_1 \neq P_2$ The population of freshmen of 2007-2008 responding as not attending the one-day transition program (P_1) will experience a difference in anxiety levels for their first day of high school than the population of those who did attend the program (P_2).

This chi-squared statistical analysis was calculated with a default alpha value of 0.05 and a critical value of 9.4888. The analysis determined a chi-squared value of 2.207 resulting in the retaining of the null hypothesis. There is not enough statistical evidence to support a significant difference between the anxiety levels experienced by the freshmen of 2007-2008 who attended the one-day, voluntary transition program and those who did not attend.

The data presented in Table 7 lastly provides a comparison between the reported anxiety levels of the freshmen of 2008-2009 who responded to the survey as attending the one-day transition program to the reported anxiety levels of those who did not. The researcher proposed the following null and alternate hypotheses:

$H_o: P_1 = P_2$ The population of freshmen of 2008-2009 responding as not attending the one-day transition program (P_1) will experience no difference in anxiety levels for their first day of high school than the population of those who did attend the program (P_2).

$H_a: P_1 \neq P_2$ The population of freshmen of 2008-2009 responding as not attending the one-day transition program (P_1) will experience a difference in anxiety levels for their first day of high school than the population of those who did attend the program (P_2).

This chi-squared statistical analysis was calculated with a default alpha value of 0.05 and a critical value of 9.4888. The analysis determined a chi-squared value of 9.611 resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis. There is statistical evidence, at the 0.05 level, to support a significant difference between the anxiety levels experienced by the freshmen of 2008-2009 who attended the one-day, voluntary transition program and those who did not attend.

Overall, there is significant evidence to support that a difference in anxiety levels for entering high school exists between the students who opted to attend the one-day transition program and those who did not.

Analysis of Students Reporting High Anxiety

Table 8 presents the data gathered from student respondents who reported on the survey as experiencing high anxiety for their first day of high school. The three classes of freshmen who were afforded the opportunity to attend the one-day transition program are combined on one table.

Table 8

Statistical Results for Students Reporting High Anxiety

Statistical Results for Students Reporting High Anxiety for First Day of School (Combining 4s and 5s from Student Surveys)			
Year of Transition Program	Percentage of Students Not Attending who Reported High Anxiety (4 + 5)	Percentage of Students Attending who Reported High Anxiety (4 + 5)	Statistical Results (z value)
2006-2007 (Class of 2010)	21.00% 25 out of 119	34.40% 22 out of 64	$z = -1.974 *$
2007-2008 (Class of 2011)	37.50% 30 out of 80	36.80% 56 out of 152	$z = 0.996$
2008-2009 (Class of 2012)	29.40% 20 out of 68	32.90% 79 out of 213	$z = -0.531$
* Significant at the 0.05 level (c value = 1.645)			
** Significant at the 0.01 level (c value = 2.33)			

The data presented in Table 8 provides the information used to determine if a relationship exists between students experiencing high anxiety levels for the first day of high school and attending the one-day, voluntary freshman transition program. To determine high anxiety, the researcher combined the fours and fives from the student freshman transition survey. For the purposes of this two population proportion test, population one (P_1) refers to the group of students who reported as not attending the transition day. Population two (P_2) refers to the group of students who did attend the program. The one-tailed z tests were originally conducted at the default 0.05 alpha level. Tests proving significance were again run at an alpha level of 0.01 to determine the

lowest possible significance level for each test. The researcher proposed the following null and alternate hypotheses:

$H_0: P_1 \geq P_2$ The population of freshmen who opted not to attend the one-day transition program (P_1) reported greater than or the same proportion of students experiencing high anxiety for the first day of high school as the population of the students who did attend the program (P_2).

$H_a: P_1 < P_2$ The population of freshmen who opted not to attend the one-day transition program (P_1) reported a lesser proportion of students experiencing high anxiety for the first day of high school than the population of the students who did attend the program (P_2). The researcher hypothesized that the population of those who did not attend the one-day program already would feel low anxiety for their first day of high school and therefore opted not to attend the transition program.

Table 8 outlines the results of the z tests for the three years the one-day program was offered to freshman at the High School of Study. The statistical test for 2006-2007 was analyzed using a default alpha value of 0.05 and a critical value of 1.645. The test determined a z value of -1.97375 which resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis. There is statistically significant evidence, at the 0.05 level, to support that the population of freshmen in 2006-2007 who did not attend the one-day transition program reported a lesser proportion of students experiencing high anxiety for the first day of high school than the population of those who attended the program that same year.

The statistical test for 2007-2008 was analyzed using a default alpha value of 0.05 and a critical value of 1.645. The test determined a z value of 0.98615 which resulted in the retaining of the null hypothesis. There was not enough statistical evidence to support

that the population of students who opted not to attend the program experienced a lesser proportion of students experiencing high anxiety than the population of students who did attend the program for that year.

The statistical test for 2008-2009 was also analyzed using a default alpha value of 0.05 and a critical value of 1.645. The test determined a z value of -0.53118 which also resulted in the retaining of the null hypothesis. Again there was not enough statistical evidence to demonstrate that the population of students who did not attend the program reported a lesser proportion of students experiencing high anxiety for their first day of high school than the population of those who chose to attend the one-day program.

Overall, there is not enough evidence to support a significant relationship between students who reported experiencing high anxiety levels for the first day of high school and attending the one-day, voluntary freshman transition program.

Analysis of Students Reporting Low Anxiety

Table 9 presents the data gathered from student respondents who reported on the survey as experiencing low anxiety for their first day of high school. The three classes of freshmen who were afforded the opportunity to attend the one-day transition program are combined on one table.

Table 9

Statistical Results for Students Reporting Low Anxiety

Statistical Results for Students Reporting Low Anxiety for First Day of School (Combining 1s and 2s from Student Surveys)			
Year of Transition Program	Percentage of Students Not Attending who Reported High Anxiety (1 + 2)	Percentage of Students Attending who Reported High Anxiety (1 + 2)	Statistical Results (z value)
2006-2007 (Class of 2010)	48.70% 58 out of 119	28.10% 18 out of 64	$z = 2.699$ **
2007-2008 (Class of 2011)	26.30% 21 out of 80	30.30% 46 out of 152	$z = -0.641$
2008-2009 (Class of 2012)	47.10% 32 out of 68	34.70% 74 out of 213	$z = 1.824$ *
* Significant at the 0.05 level (c value = 1.645)			
** Significant at the 0.01 level (c value = 2.33)			

The data presented in Table 9 provides the information used to determine if a relationship exists between students experiencing low anxiety levels for the first day of high school and not attending the one-day, voluntary freshman transition program. To determine low anxiety, the researcher combined the ones and twos from the student freshman transition survey. For the purposes of this two population proportion test, population one (P_1) refers to the group of students who reported as not attending the transition day. Population two (P_2) refers to the group of students who did attend the program. The one tailed z tests were originally conducted at the default 0.05 alpha level. Tests proving significance were again run at an alpha level of 0.01 to determine the

lowest possible significance level for each test. The researcher proposed the following null and alternate hypotheses:

$H_0: P_1 \leq P_2$ The population of freshmen who opted not to attend the one-day transition program (P_1) reported less than or the same proportion of students experiencing low anxiety for the first day of high school as the population of the students who did attend the program (P_2).

$H_a: P_1 > P_2$ The population of freshmen who opted not to attend the one-day transition program (P_1) reported a greater proportion of students experiencing low anxiety for the first day of high school than the population of the students who did attend the program (P_2). The researcher hypothesized that the population of those who did not attend the one-day program already would feel low anxiety for their first day of high school and therefore opted not to attend the transition program.

Table 9 outlines the results of the z tests for the three years the one-day program was offered to freshmen at the High School of Study. The statistical test for 2006-2007 was analyzed using an alpha value of 0.01 and a critical value of 2.33. The test determined a z value of 2.698752 which resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis. There is statistically significant evidence, at the 0.01 level, to support that the population of freshmen in 2006-2007 who did not attend the one-day transition program reported a greater proportion of students experiencing low anxiety for the first day of high school than the population of those who attended the program that same year.

The statistical test for 2007-2008 was analyzed using a default alpha value of 0.05 and a critical value of 1.645. The test determined a z value of -0.64109 which resulted in the retaining of the null hypothesis. There was not enough statistical evidence to support

that the population of students who opted not to attend the program experienced a greater proportion of low anxiety than the population of students who did attend the program for that year.

The statistical test for 2008-2009 was also analyzed using a default alpha value of 0.05 and a critical value of 1.645. The test determined a z value of 1.824449 which resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis. There is statistically significant evidence, at the 0.05 level, to demonstrate that the population of students who did not attend the program reported a greater proportion of students experiencing low anxiety for their first day of high school than the population of those who chose to attend the one-day program.

Overall, there is evidence to support a significant relationship between students who reported experiencing low anxiety levels for the first day of high school and opting not to attend the one-day, voluntary freshman transition program.

Analysis of Responses Concerning Preparedness After Participation in the Program

Table 10 presents the statistical results from the information gathered from survey respondents who attended the one-day transition program. The participants from the three freshmen classes of study who responded as attending the program are combined on one table. The data was used to determine if there is statistically significant evidence to support that the majority of attendees felt better prepared for their first day of high school after participating in the voluntary one-day transition program.

Table 10

Statistical Results for Responses Concerning Preparedness After Participation in the Program

Statistical Results for Students Who Attended the One-Day Transition Program Did Students Feel Better Prepared for Their First Day of High School After Participating in the Program?		
Year of Transition Program	Percentage of Attendees Who Reported Better Prepared After Participation	Statistical Results (z value)
2006-2007 (Class of 2010)	73.40% 47 out of 64	$z = 3.75^{**}$
2007-2008 (Class of 2011)	87.50% 133 out of 152	$z = 9.247^{**}$
2008-2009 (Class of 2012)	86.90% 185 out of 213	$z = 10.757^{**}$
* Significant at the 0.05 level (c value = 1.645)		
** Significant at the 0.01 level (c value = 2.33)		
Researcher hypothesized that the majority (> 50%) would feel better prepared for their first day of school after participating in the program.		

The data provided in Table 10 is used to determine the effectiveness of the one-day transition program on the overall preparedness of incoming freshmen for their first day of high school. To determine effectiveness, the researcher used a value of greater than 50 percent to measure if the majority of students who attended the program felt better prepared after attending. For the purposes of this one population proportion test, population one (P_1) refers to the group of students who attended the transition day. The one tailed z tests were originally conducted at the default 0.05 alpha level. Tests proving

significance were again run at an alpha level of 0.01 to determine the lowest possible significance level for each test. For all three analyses, an alpha value of 0.01 and a critical value of 2.33 were used. The researcher proposed the following null and alternate hypotheses:

$H_0: P_1 \leq 0.50$ The population of freshmen who attended the one-day transition program (P_1) reported feeling less or equally prepared for their first day of high school after attending the program.

$H_a: P_1 > 0.50$ The majority of freshmen (greater than 50%) who attended the one-day transition program reported feeling better prepared for their first day of high school after attending the one-day, voluntary transition program.

Table 10 outlines the responses from attendees and the corresponding z tests for the three years the one-day program was offered to freshman at the High School of Study. Sixty-four students representing the freshmen in 2006-2007 responded on the student survey as attending the one-day transition program. Of those 64 students, 47, or 73.4 percent, reported feeling better prepared for their first day of high school after attending the transition day. The statistical test for 2006-2007 determined a z value of 3.75 which resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis. There is statistically significant evidence, at the 0.01 level, to support the majority of the 2006-2007 attendees felt better prepared for their first day of high school after attending the program.

One hundred fifty-two students representing the freshmen in 2007-2008 responded on the student survey as attending the one-day transition program. Of those 152 students, 133, or 87.5 percent, reported feeling better prepared for their first day of high school after attending the transition day. The statistical test for 2007-2008

determined a z value of 9.246621 which resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis. There is statistically significant evidence, at the 0.01 level, to support the majority of the 2007-2008 attendees felt better prepared for their first day of high school after attending the program.

Two hundred thirteen students representing the freshmen in 2008-2009 responded on the student survey as attending the one-day transition program. Of those 213 students, 185, or 86.9 percent, reported feeling better prepared for their first day of high school after attending the transition day. The statistical test for 2008-2009 determined a z value of 10.75746 which resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis. There is statistically significant evidence, at the 0.01 level, to support the majority of the 2008-2009 attendees felt better prepared for their first day of high school after attending the program.

Based on the information provided by the attendees from all three years of study, there is strong evidence to support a significant relationship between attending the one-day transition program and feeling better prepared for the first day of high school.

Effectiveness of One-Day Transition Program on Overall Preparedness

The overall results of the student survey analysis supported that a difference in anxiety levels does indeed exist between the students who opted to attend the one-day transition program and those who did not. Furthermore, there is statistically significant evidence to support that those students opting not to attend the program classified themselves as experiencing low anxiety for their first day of high school. Of the students who did choose to attend the one-day transition program, a significant majority reported that they felt better prepared for their first day of high school after attending the program.

Collaborative Results: Effectiveness on Failure Rate and Discipline

Co-researcher, Angela Hahn, conducted a data analysis to determine the effectiveness of the one-day, voluntary transition program on ninth grade failure rates and minor disciplinary infractions. Academic data were collected using the High School of Study's SIS program and were analyzed in the following manner:

1. Ninth grade academic data (Appendix E)
2. Statistical analysis (two population proportion test) comparing ninth grade failure rates in 2004-2005 to 2005-2006 when no transition program was offered (Appendix F)
3. Statistical analysis (two population proportion test) comparing ninth grade failure rates in 2006-2007 to 2007-2008 when the one-day program was offered (Appendix G)
4. Statistical analysis (one tailed, two population proportion test) comparing ninth grade failure rates in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, when no program was offered, to 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, when there was a ninth grade transition program offered (Appendix H)

Disciplinary data were also gathered using the High School of Study's SIS program and were analyzed in the following manner:

1. Ninth grade disciplinary data (Appendix I)
2. Statistical analysis (two population proportion test) comparing ninth grade minor disciplinary infractions in 2004-2005 to 2005-2006 when no transition program was offered (Appendix J)

3. Statistical analysis (two population proportion test) comparing ninth grade minor disciplinary infractions in 2006-2007 to 2007-2008 when the one-day program was offered (Appendix K)
4. Statistical analysis (one tailed, two population proportion test) comparing ninth grade minor disciplinary infractions in 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, when no program was offered, to 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, when there was a ninth grade transition program offered (Appendix L)

Results of Academic Data: Ninth Grade Failure Rates

Appendices E, F, G, and H present the data gathered to determine the effectiveness of the one-day, voluntary transition program on ninth grade failure rates. Appendix E illustrates the overall breakdown of academic data. Appendix F presents a baseline to determine if a difference in failure rate exists between the freshmen in 2004-2005 and freshmen in 2005-2006, where both groups were not offered the transition program. Appendix G also presents a baseline to determine if a difference in failure rates exists between the freshmen in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, where both groups were afforded the opportunity to attend the ninth grade transition program. These two groups, the two ninth grade classes without the program and the two ninth grade classes with the program, were then compared to determine if the opportunity to attend the transition day had a statistical effect on the reduction of ninth grade failing grades and are represented in Appendix H. The overall results of all three comparisons presented no statistical evidence to support that the one-day, voluntary program had an effect on the reduction of ninth grade failure rates.

Results of Disciplinary Data: Ninth Grade Minor Infractions

Appendices I, J, K, and L present the data gathered to determine the effectiveness of the one-day, voluntary transition program on the number of ninth grade minor disciplinary infractions. For the purposes of this study, minor disciplinary infractions included eight categories: warnings in the areas of tardies, student identification badges, inappropriate clothing, and cellular phones and further violations in the same four areas. Appendix I illustrates the overall breakdown of disciplinary data. Appendix J presents a baseline to determine if a difference in total number of minor disciplinary infractions exists between the freshmen in 2004-2005 and freshmen in 2005-2006, where both groups were not offered the transition program. Appendix K also presents a baseline to determine if a difference in total number of minor disciplinary infractions exists between the freshmen in 2006-2007 and 2007-2008, where both classes were afforded the opportunity to attend the ninth grade transition program. These two groups, the two ninth grade classes without the program and the two ninth grade classes with the program, were then compared to determine if the opportunity to attend the transition day had a statistical effect on the reduction of ninth grade minor disciplinary infractions and are represented in Appendix L.

The overall results of the baseline comparison between the two years where no program was offered to incoming freshmen presented a difference in disciplinary infractions solely in the areas of tardy violations and cellular phone warnings. The overall results of the baseline comparison between the two years where the transition program was offered presented a difference in half of the categories: tardy warnings, student identification badge warnings and violations, and cellular phone warnings. The final

comparison between the ninth grade classes without the opportunity to attend the transition program and the ninth grade classes with the opportunity presented a greater amount of evidence to support that the program had no statistical effect on the reduction of minor disciplinary infractions (Hahn, 2009).

To determine the effectiveness of the transition program on disciplinary infractions, the researcher hypothesized that the ninth grade classes not offered the program would account for a greater number of disciplinary infractions than those who were offered the program. Only three of the eight areas analyzed demonstrated a difference in number of minor disciplinary infractions, showing that the ninth grade classes not offered the transition day conducted a greater number of infractions than those who were. Those areas were student identification badge warnings and violations and cellular phone violations. Furthermore, in the areas of tardy violations and cellular phone warnings, the exact opposite was found, showing that the group who had the opportunity to attend the program actually had an increase of infractions in these areas (Hahn, 2009).

Summary

Chapter four was a disaggregation of student data gathered during this collaborative research study. This researcher focused on data gathered from a student survey which was used to address research question one. Results included statistical evidence to support that the type of student opting not to attend the one-day transition program classified themselves as experiencing low anxiety for their first day of high school. Of the students who chose to attend, a significant majority reported that they felt better prepared for their first day of high school after attending the program.

Co-researcher, Angela Hahn, focused on the academic and disciplinary data gathered from the High School of Study's SIS program which addressed research questions two and three. Results presented no statistical evidence to support that the program had an effect on the reduction of ninth grade failure rates or on minor disciplinary infractions.

In chapter five, the results of the study will be reviewed and the three research questions will be answered. In addition, conclusions to the collaborative study will be presented along with recommendations for further research.

Chapter Five - Conclusions

When the District of Study became aware of the research concerning the negative effects of ninth grade transitions on students, it was important to address the needs of these incoming students. The District of Study recognized that incoming freshmen experienced many struggles and challenges concerning the transition from middle to high school. In 2006, one of the four comprehensive high schools in the District of Study initiated a summer transition program to address the needs of incoming ninth grade students. The goals of the one-day, voluntary program were to (a) increase overall preparedness for the first day of high school, (b) decrease the number of freshman semester failing grades ultimately leading to an increase in first year credits earned, and (c) decrease the number of minor disciplinary infractions common to many new students.

The District of Study continues to grow in population each year. In 2008, the reported demographics for the High School of Study included 5.0 percent black, 0.10 percent Indian, 1.70 percent Hispanic, and 0.40 percent Asian. Minority students represented 7.2 percent of the total population in 2008; however, that number is expected to grow each year. Because “one of every three eighth grade students in the United states does not graduate from high school, and half of Black and Latino students do not make it to graduation day” (Dedmond, 2006, p. 1), it is important for the High School of Study to implement strategies that give minority students the help they need during the transition to high school. The review of literature demonstrated that students considered to be at-risk need special attention during this transition period. As Turner (2007) reported, “preparation of at-risk students, before they begin high school, can help them better adjust to the demands of a new environment” (§ 4). In 2008, the High School of Study

reported 206 students with Individual Education Plans, 78 of whom were freshmen, who could be considered in but not exclusive members of at-risk groups. It is important that the school implement strategies that will keep students on track for graduation.

The District of Study regularly implements strategies to decrease the number of students dropping out of high school. Turner (2007) reported that “one way to decrease school drop-out rates among entering high school students is early transitional planning and preparation” (¶ 4). An effectively implemented transition program may be a significant step toward retaining these students in the educational environment.

Several formats for transitioning incoming freshmen were reviewed in chapter two. Researchers specifically investigated the program implemented at the High School of Study. The collaborative research team set forth to answer the following questions:

1. Does a one-day, voluntary transition program meet the needs of incoming freshmen, ultimately raising their overall preparedness as they enter their new high school environment?
2. Will the number of ninth grade semester failing grades decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program?
3. Will the number of ninth grade minor disciplinary infractions decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program?

This researcher focused on research question one. Student perspectives concerning anxiety and preparedness for the first day of high school were gathered from the collection of voluntary and anonymous student surveys. Co-researcher, Angela Hahn,

focused on research questions two and three which were addressed through the collection of ninth grade academic and disciplinary data. Conclusions, recommendations, and answers to all three research questions are included in this chapter.

There were several limitations identified in this collaborative study. Efforts were made to ensure that all students participated in the survey; however, it was voluntary, and not every subject returned a response. The amount of time the participants had to respond to the survey was limited. Students were given a portion of one class period to complete the survey, and due to student absenteeism, not every subject was afforded the opportunity. Student responses may have been skewed due to misinterpretation of the questions, personal attitudes towards the survey, and misunderstanding of the directions, rating scale, and/or questions. In addition, participants self-reported their opinions on the survey; therefore, researchers had no means to verify the accuracy of the data provided by the students. Regarding the collection of disciplinary data, characteristics of each administrator issuing and documenting disciplinary infractions vary and, therefore, biases may have occurred.

Several delimitations were also present in the study. The one-day program was not mandatory for all incoming freshmen. The population of the students attending the program was not random. The characteristics of the students volunteering to attend may have played a role in the general attitude towards entering high school as determined by the student surveys.

Summary of Findings Based on Student Surveys

The overall results of the student survey analysis supported that a difference in anxiety levels exists between the students who opted to attend the one-day transition

program and those who did not opt to attend. The evidence supports that those students opting not to attend the program classified themselves as experiencing low anxiety for the first day of high school. It appeared from the study that students who already felt low anxiety did not perceive the program to be valuable and therefore opted not to attend the transition day. Students who reported feeling highly anxious for the first day of high school seemed to recognize value in the optional program and therefore may have chosen to attend. Of those students who chose to attend the one-day transition program, a majority reported that they felt better prepared for their first day of high school after attending the program.

The answer to research question one, Does a one-day, voluntary transition program meet the needs of incoming freshmen, ultimately raising their overall preparedness as they enter their new high school environment? was yes. The evidence proved that the one-day, voluntary transition program was effective in addressing the needs of these students. Orienting students with their new, larger, and faster paced environments greatly influences their overall success. According to Cauley and Jovanovich (2006), it is important for freshmen to become familiar with their new course schedules, locker locations, and lunch procedures to adequately acclimate them to their new surroundings. The High School of Study's one-day, voluntary transition program successfully addressed these needs and more adequately prepared attending students for their first day of high school.

Summary of Academic Findings Based on SIS Data

The overall results of the academic data analysis showed no difference in failure rates between the ninth grade classes who were not afforded the opportunity to attend the

one-day, voluntary transition program and those that were afforded the opportunity to attend the program. Prior to this final analysis, two baseline comparisons were conducted to analyze the two ninth grade classes prior to the implementation of the program and the two ninth grade classes immediately following the implementation of the one-day program. In all cases, no difference in academic performance was found. It appears from the study that a one-day, voluntary transition program is not comprehensive enough to fully address academic needs of incoming freshmen (Hahn, 2009).

The answer to research question two, Will the number of ninth grade semester failing grades decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program? was no. There was no statistical evidence to prove that the one-day, voluntary transition program was effective in meeting the academic challenges faced by incoming ninth grade students (Hahn, 2009). In order to address such academic needs, a more comprehensive program is necessary. According to Bunting (2004), one time experiences are insufficient in addressing high school academic challenges. Hertzog and Morgan (1999) suggested that school districts that offer extensive and comprehensive programs have a greater number of students who maintain their grade level placement staying on track for graduation and thus have fewer students dropping out of high school.

Summary of Disciplinary Findings Based on SIS Data

The overall results of the disciplinary data analysis showed a variance in results. Two baseline comparisons were conducted between the two ninth grade classes prior to the implementation of the program and the two ninth grade classes immediately following the implementation of the one-day program. These two groups were then

compared to determine if the opportunity to attend the program proved effective in the area of disciplinary infractions (Hahn, 2009).

Both baseline comparisons showed areas of differences as well as areas of no differences in disciplinary infractions, suggesting that the implementation of the transition program had no influence on results. Therefore, when comparing the ninth grade classes without the opportunity to attend the program (baseline comparison one) to the ninth grade classes with the opportunity (baseline comparison two) any differences or lack thereof cannot be attributed to the transition program. Furthermore, in the areas of tardy violations and cellular phone warnings, results showed that the ninth grade classes prior to the implementation actually had fewer infractions than the ninth grade classes with the opportunity to attend the program. Possible factors contributing to the variations in results could be changes in administrative personnel and/or changes in district disciplinary priorities (Hahn, 2009).

The answer to research question three, Will the number of minor disciplinary infractions decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program? was no. There was no statistical evidence to prove that the one-day, voluntary transition program was effective in reducing the number of minor disciplinary infractions common to many ninth grade students (Hahn, 2009). In order to address such disciplinary infractions, some school districts have implemented a more comprehensive program, such as a ninth grade academy. The number of discipline incidences in schools such as Houston County High in Georgia have fallen significantly after implementing a more comprehensive program (Chemelynski, 2004).

Recommendations for the School District of Study

The District of Study must examine its specific goals for acclimating incoming freshmen with their new high school environment. Based on the results of this investigation, it is evident that, collectively, the three goals originally set forth by the District of Study are not being met. The current one-day, voluntary transition program has proven to be effective in alleviating anxiety and helping with overall preparation for the new educational environment; however, it has shown to be ineffective in reducing the number of ninth grade failing grades and minor disciplinary infractions. Perhaps the format of the current transition program is not enough to sufficiently transition these students.

As specified in the review of literature, minority and at-risk students are at a heightened danger for failure in this first year of high school. Minority students have the greatest academic difficulty following the move to high school (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Although this study did not identify participants and therefore could not group feedback nor track specific academic and behavioral progress for these groups of students, it is important for the District of Study to take the needs of minority and at-risk students into consideration.

This researcher focused on student perceptions, gathered from voluntary surveys, which were used to answer research question one, Does a one-day, voluntary transition program meet the needs of incoming freshmen, ultimately raising their overall preparedness as they enter their new environment? Although the research from this study supports that the answer to this question was yes, does the voluntary program effectively address the needs of minority and at-risk students? Are they in the profile of students who

are opting to attend the transition day? One could present a case that minority students are the very individuals who would demonstrate the greatest amount of stress and anxiety for their first day of high school, as they may already view themselves as different from the rest. In addition, at-risk students have already been identified as struggling in their previous middle school environment and many very well experience a greater struggle and feeling of hopelessness as they enter the faster paced and more demanding high school environment. If the one-day, voluntary transition program does not meet the needs of all students, perhaps the District of Study needs to do more.

Co-researcher, Angela Hahn, focused on academic and disciplinary data which were used to answer research questions two and three, Will the number of ninth grade semester failing grades decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program? and Will the number of ninth grade minor disciplinary infractions decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program? The answers to these questions were no. A one-day program was not enough to positively affect academics and discipline.

When combining these findings with current literature, the District of Study should consider reevaluating the structure of its current program. With current economic stresses and a growing number of families moving into and out of the district, one could anticipate a potential increase in both minority and at-risk students. Research from this study, as well as the review of literature, support that that the one-day program is not only insufficient in addressing academic and disciplinary needs, but the voluntary aspect of the current program potentially makes it even more ineffective in reaching the needs of all students.

In order to effectively address the preparatory and orientation needs as well as the academic and disciplinary needs of all incoming freshmen, the School District of Study must investigate more comprehensive and ongoing programs, such as a ninth grade academy or a freshman advisory program. Research suggested that a transitional year between middle and high school helps to keep students on track. Hertzog and Morgan found that school systems with full-blown transition programs have noticed a significant impact on the number of student drop-outs (as cited in Reents, 2002).

The following are recommendations for the District of Study as they examine the purpose and effectiveness of the current one-day, voluntary transition program:

1. Reexamine the three goals of the current program. Of the original three goals set forth by the High School of Study, only one, student preparedness, was positively influenced by the current model.
2. Continue to use the one-day, voluntary program to better prepare highly anxious incoming ninth grade students for their new high school environment.
3. Consider making the current program mandatory in order to reach all incoming freshmen.
4. Elicit assistance from administrators and counselors from the feeder middle school(s) to identify incoming freshmen considered to be at-risk. Develop a program/course schedule to be implemented throughout their ninth grade year to provide these students with early interventions, close mentoring, and academic support.
5. Evaluate cost considerations, space availability, and district personnel and community support for a more comprehensive transition program, such as a

ninth grade academy, to meet the academic and disciplinary needs of incoming freshmen.

6. Develop a ninth grade curriculum to be implemented in mandatory English I classes to address study, test taking, and organizational skills.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following are recommendations for future studies:

1. Replicate this study using identifying factors to track specific feedback as well as academic and behavioral progress for specific groups of students.
2. Replicate this study to include data from all four comprehensive high schools that are now participating in the one-day, voluntary transition program.
3. Replicate this study using data from neighboring districts who also implement some model of a transition program.
4. Further investigate the correlation between the classes with the opportunity to attend the one-day program and their graduation and drop-out rates.

Implications for Effective Schools

The results of this study indicated a need to assist middle school students in their transition into high school.

Entering ninth grade can be one of the most emotionally difficult, most academically challenging times in children's lives. Along with the self-esteem issues, developmental changes and environmental shakeup faced by the young adolescents, school districts risk watching their ninth graders fall through the cracks without proper transitional programs in place. (Reents, 2002, ¶ 1)

The research findings indicated that high schools should investigate the specific needs of their students based on social, academic, and demographic characteristics if they are to help the students through this challenging first year. High schools should develop effective transition programs to meet the social and academic needs of their specific students.

Summary

Reents (2002) identified “ninth grade as the most critical point to intervene and prevent students from losing motivation, failing and dropping out of school” (¶ 2). The High School of Study identified the needs of its incoming freshmen and developed a transition model to meet those needs.

The High School of Study set out to develop and implement a transition program to meet the needs of its incoming ninth grade students. The program consisted of three components: (a) procedural orientation, (b) academic requirements including the new 24 credit system, and (c) general rules of conduct. These components guided researchers to develop three correlating research questions:

1. Does a one-day, voluntary transition program meet the needs of incoming freshmen, ultimately raising their overall preparedness as they enter their new high school environment?
2. Will the number of ninth grade semester failing grades decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program?
3. Will the number of ninth grade minor disciplinary infractions decrease in the freshman classes that were offered the one-day, voluntary transition program?

This researcher focused on research question one, gathering student perceptions concerning anxiety and preparedness for their first day of high school from a voluntary survey. During the program's first three years, a great majority of attendees reported feeling better prepared for high school after attending the voluntary transition day: 73.4 percent of attendees in 2006, 87.5 percent in 2007, and 86.9 percent in 2008. In addition, there was statistically significant evidence to support that those students opting not to attend the program classified themselves as feeling low anxiety for their first day of school, perhaps leading them to feel little or no value in attending the program. The program proved successful in helping to ease apprehension and prepare students for their first day of high school.

According to Haviland (2005), one-day orientation days are successful in helping students feel less anxious and more prepared for their new environment. Haviland believed that this type of program "builds connections, extends a welcoming hand to newcomers, and offers valuable insight into how to navigate the building and how to accommodate the academic demands and opportunities presented in high school" (p. 31). In addition, he believed "it signals to parents that the high school faculty is a partner in support of their children's academic and social adjustment to high school" (p. 31).

These findings were combined with the results from research conducted by Angela Hahn pertaining to research questions two and three to create a comprehensive study of the current one-day, voluntary transition program. Overall, the results of this study have demonstrated that the program implemented in the High School of Study was effective in preparing volunteering students for their first day of school; however, it had little effect on helping students with academic and disciplinary challenges.

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FORT ZUMWALT SCHOOL DISTRICT
DISTRICT ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES

110 Virgil Street
O'Fallon, Missouri 63366

Honored for "Distinction in Performance" by the State Board of Education

Telephone: (636) 272-6620
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Dr. Bernard J. DuBray
Superintendent of Schools

Letter to Superintendent

(Appendix B)

February 25, 2008

Dear Dr. DuBray:

We are currently enrolled in the doctoral program at Lindenwood University. Because we are nearing the end of the program, we are in the beginning stages of writing our dissertation. When narrowing down topics for our paper, we knew we wanted to write on a current topic of interest for the Fort Zumwalt School District. With this in mind, we have chosen to examine the freshmen transition day held at North High School as well as established transition programs in other districts.

The transition from middle school to high school is very important. When looking at the freshmen transition program already established at North High, we want to distinguish if there is a correlation between the classes which had the opportunity to attend the program and their number of minor discipline referrals (such as ID's, tardies, dress code violations, and cell phone usage) as well as semester failing grades. We will compare these numbers to the two classes prior which had no transition program in place.

In order to conduct our study, we will need access to the following information:
Overall discipline data for the freshmen in 04-05, 05-06, 06-07 and the 07-08
Student enrollment numbers for the above years
Overall academic records for the above years

Furthermore, we plan to conduct an all school survey measuring the anxiety level of freshmen on their first day of high school. We will compare the comfort level of students who attended the freshmen transition day to those who did not attend. We have included a copy of the survey for you to view.

We hope our exploration into freshmen transition programs will benefit the students in all Fort Zumwalt High Schools. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact either of us.

Thank you,

Angela Hahn, Assistant Principal

Samantha Sutton, Assistant Principal

Board of Education

Mary Givens* Carol Russell* Mike Cummins* Jane Landstra* Barbara Story* Scott Grasser* Mike Swaringim
President Vice President Member Member Member Member Member

*C.B.M. – Certified Board Member

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY
Application for IRB Review of
Research Proposal Involving Human Subjects

(Appendix C)

1. Title of Project: Project # _____
(To be filled out
by IRB chairman)

**Freshmen Transition Program and Its Effect on Ninth Grade Discipline
and Academic Performance**

2. Faculty Advisor: Department: Extension: e-mail:
Dr. Cindy Vitale **Education** **949-4315** **cvitale@lindenwood.edu**

3. Primary Investigator(s): Department: Local phone: e-mail:
Hahn, Angela **Education** **(636) 978-1212** **ahahn@fz.k12.mo.us**
Sutton, Samantha **Education** **(636) 379-0300** ssutton@fz.k12.mo.us

4. Anticipated starting date for this project: **December, 2007**

5. Anticipated ending date for this project: **May, 2009**

6. State the hypothesis of the proposed research project:

The implementation of a freshmen transition program on incoming Fort Zumwalt North ninth graders will have a positive effect on discipline, academic performance, and student preparedness, thus decreasing the number of ninth grade minor disciplinary infractions, ninth grade semester F's, and freshmen anxiety levels.

7. State the purpose (objectives) and rationale of the proposed project. Include any questions to be investigated.

The purpose of this investigation is to determine if there is a correlation between the implementation of a freshmen orientation/transition program and ninth grade discipline, academic performance, and general attitude toward starting high school. The study will be investigated from two different perspectives. One will be a data generated study focusing on discipline and academic performance while the other will focus on overall attitude toward high school determined by personal surveys. Currently, one Fort Zumwalt high school has experimented with a transition program. North High has implemented a program during the summers of 2006 and 2007. The other three Fort Zumwalt high schools plan to use this data to replicate and/or adjust the program to fit the needs of their incoming freshmen.

8. Has this research project been reviewed or is it currently being reviewed by an IRB at another institution? If so, please state when, where and disposition (approval/non-approval/pending).

No

9. Participants involved in the study:

a. Indicate how many persons will be recruited as potential participants in this study.

LU participants _____ Undergraduate students
 _____ Graduate students
 _____ Faculty and/or staff

Non-LU participants _____ Children
 _____ Adolescents
 _____ Adults
 _____ Seniors
 _____ Persons in institutional settings (e.g. nursing homes, correctional facilities, etc.)

Other (specify): **No recruitment of participants. This is a causal-comparative study where the adolescent aged study groups have already been formed and have already been exposed to the independent variable. A survey will be given to freshmen and sophomore students currently attending Fort Zumwalt North High School.**

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

_____ LU undergraduate and/or graduate classes
 _____ LU Human Subject Pool (LU HSP)
 _____ Other LU sources (specify)
 X School boards (districts) ***Fort Zumwalt School District—North High School***
 _____ Greater St. Charles community
 _____ Agencies (please list) _____
 _____ Businesses (please list) _____
 _____ Health care settings, nursing homes, etc. (please list) _____

Other (specify):

c. If any persons within the selected group(s) are being excluded, please explain who is being excluded and why. (Note: According to the Office of LU HSP, all students within the LU Human Subject Pool must be allowed to participate, although exclusion of certain subjects may be made when analyzing data.)

None

d. Describe how and by whom the potential participants will be recruited. Provide a copy of any materials to be used for recruitment (e.g. posters, flyers, advertisements, letters, telephone and other verbal scripts).

Participants will not be recruited. Subject groups are already formed. A survey will be given to current freshmen and sophomore students.

e. Where will the study take place?

_____ On campus – Explain:
 X Off campus – Explain: **Fort Zumwalt School District—North High School**

10. Methodology/procedures:

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

- **Gather information on different types of freshmen transition programs and note their effects on discipline, academic performance, and student preparedness.**
 - **Conduct causal-comparative research—study groups are already formed.**
 - **Ninth graders in 2004-2005 (No Transition Program Offered)**
 - **Ninth graders in 2005-2006 (No Transition Program Offered)**
 - **Ninth graders in 2006-2007 (Transition Program Offered)**
 - **Ninth graders in 2007-2008 (Transition Program Offered)**
- Run School Information System reports for the following categories that were specifically addressed during the freshmen transition program for each of the above four groups: tardies, ID violations, dress code violations, cell phone violations/inappropriate behavior, and semester F's (Prior to 2007-2008, cell phone violations were included in inappropriate behavior)**
- **Compare SIS data percentages between the four classes globally. (Data will be gathered as entire classes and not broken down into groups of students who attended to those who did not. Data will be examined simply to see if there has been a decline since implementation in incidences/F's from the entire classes of students as a whole.)**
 - **Conduct a Likert survey of the four above mentioned classes of students to gather information on freshmen preparedness/anxiety levels.**

b. Which of the following procedures will be used? Provide a copy of all materials to be used in this study.

- Survey(s) or survey(s) (mail-back)-Are they standardized?
- Survey(s) or survey(s) (in person)-Are they standardized? **(No)**
- Computer-administered task(s) or survey(s)-Are they standardized?
- Interview(s) (in person)
- Interview(s) (by telephone)
- Focus group(s)
- Audiotaping
- Videotaping
- Analysis of secondary data (no involvement with human participants)
- Invasive physiological measurement (e.g. venipuncture, catheter insertion, muscle biopsy, collection of other tissues, etc.) Explain:

Other (specify):

11. How will results of this research be made accessible to participants? Explain and attach a copy of any forms that will be used.

The survey will be given to current students enrolled at North High School (Freshmen through Senior classes). The results will be made available to the Fort Zumwalt Administrative Office to distribute to other district high schools. If the hypothesis is found to be true, data will be made available to future incoming freshmen and parents at all Fort Zumwalt high schools when being informed of the program.

12. Potential Benefits and Compensation from the Study:

- a. Identify and describe anticipated benefits (health, psychological or social benefits) to the participants from their involvement in the project.

The goal of the study is to benefit future incoming freshmen classes in all Fort Zumwalt high schools. The Fort Zumwalt School District understands that incoming freshmen experience great changes in routine, requirements, and overall atmosphere in their education. This research will be used to determine the benefits (or lack thereof) of the current program being implemented and will further be used to develop more effective programs for the district in the future.

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

The goal of the study is to better provide successful transition skills to incoming freshmen that they can apply to future endeavors.

- c. Describe any anticipated compensation (monetary, grades, extra credit, other) to participants.

There will be no compensation given to the participants.

13. Potential Risks from the Study:

- a. Identify and describe any known or anticipated risks to participants involved in this study. Include physiological, psychological, emotional, social, economic, legal, etc. risks/stressors. A study-specific medical screening form must be included when physiological assessments are used and associated risk(s) to participants are greater than what would be expected in normal daily activities.

None

- b. Will deception be used in this study? If so, explain the rationale.

No

- c. Does this project involve information about sensitive behavior, such as sexual behavior, drug/alcohol use, or illegal behavior? If so, explain.

No

- d. Are vulnerable populations (children, institutionalized persons, pregnant women, persons with impaired judgment) used as subjects for this study? If so, explain.

No—Participants will not be recruited. Students have already been exposed to the independent variable.

- e. Describe the procedures or safeguards in place to protect the physical and psychological health of the participants in light of the risks/stresses identified above. Include procedures in place for handling any adverse events, referral services, etc.

Current students will participate in an anonymous survey approved by the head principal at Fort Zumwalt North High School.

14. Informed Consent Process:

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

- Information letter with written consent form for participants or their legally authorized agents; provide a copy.
- Information letter with written or verbal consent from director of institutions involved; provide a copy.
- Information letter with written or verbal consent from teachers in classrooms or daycare; provide a copy.

Other (specify):

Subject groups are already formed and have already been exposed to the independent variable. All classes will be surveyed. Data will be gathered, organized, and analyzed.

b. What special provisions have been made for informed consent for non-English speaking persons, mentally disabled or other populations for whom there may be difficulty in providing informed consent?

Does Not Apply

15. Anonymity of Participants and Confidentiality of Data:

a. Explain the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity of participants and confidentiality of data both during the research and in the release of the findings.

School Information System information will be gathered based on each class of students as a whole. No names will be associated with the data and upon compilation of summary data, all hard copies will be destroyed. Survey data will be anonymous. Only the group data will be used.

b. How will confidentiality be explained to participants?

The subject groups have already been exposed to the independent variable. Only researchers will have access to School Information System hard copies of entire class information as a whole. Once summary data has been compiled, hard copies will be destroyed. Surveys will be conducted anonymously.

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

Paper Records

- Confidential shredding after _____ years.
- Data will be retained indefinitely in a secure location.
- Data will be retained until completion of specific course and then destroyed.

Audio/video Recordings

- Erasing of audio/video tapes after _____ years.
- Data will be retained indefinitely in a secure location.
- Data will be retained until completion of specific course and then destroyed.

Electronic Data

- Erasing of electronic data after _____ years.
- Data will be retained indefinitely in a secure location.
- Data will be retained until completion of specific course and then destroyed.

Other:

Specify Location:

Data collected is kept electronically in School Information Systems. Hard copies of SIS reports as well as individual surveys will be destroyed after summary data has been compiled.

16. Researchers must ensure that all supporting materials/documentation for their applications are submitted with the signed, hard copies of the IRB Research Proposal Form. Please check below all appendices that are attached as part of your application package. Submission of an incomplete application package will increase the duration of the IRB review process.

- Recruitment materials: A copy of any posters, fliers, advertisements, letters, telephone or other verbal scripts used to recruit/gain access to participants (see 9d).
- Materials: A copy of all surveys, surveys, interview questions, interview themes/sample questions for open-ended interviews, focus group questions, or any standardized tests used to collect data (see 10b).
- Feedback letter (see 11).
- Medical screening Form: Must be included for all physiological measurements involving greater than minimal risk, and tailored for each study (see 13a).
- Information letter and consent forms used in studies involving interaction with participants (see 14a).
- Information/Cover letters used in studies involving surveys or surveys (see 14a).
- Parent information letter and permission form for studies involving minors (see 14a).
- Other: **Letter requesting permission to conduct research study from superintendent of schools of research study**

I certify the information in this proposal is complete and accurate.

<u>Cindy Vitale</u> Signature of Doctoral Committee Chair	<u>2/25/08</u> Date
<u>Lay Matthews, Ph.D.</u> Signature of Doctoral Committee Member	<u>12-4-07</u> Date
<u>Shaham M. Weir</u> Signature of Doctoral Committee Member	<u>12/3/07</u> Date
<u>[Signature]</u> Signature of Doctoral Committee Member	<u>2/25/08</u> Date
<u>[Signature]</u> Signature of Doctoral Committee Member	<u>2/25/08</u> Date
<u>[Signature]</u> Signature of Primary Investigator	<u>12-4-07</u> Date
<u>[Signature]</u> Signature of Primary Investigator	<u>12/4/07</u> Date

IRB Approval

(Appendix D)

08-054
IRB Project Number

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board Disposition Report

To: Angela Hahn and Samantha Sutton

CC: Cindy Vitale

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed the revised proposal for research: Freshmen Transition Programs and their Effect on Ninth Grade Discipline and Academic Performance

The Institutional Review Board:

XXXXXX Approves the revised proposal.

_____ Tammi Pavelec _____ 4/28/08 _____

Signature IRB Chair

Date

Student Information System Data—Freshmen Semester Failure Rates

(Appendix E)

	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Enrollment	324	318	359	394
Total Possible F's each semester	1944	1908	2154	2364
Total Possible F's entire year	3888	3816	4308	4728
Total # of semester F's for entire year	348	325	315	407
Average # of students w/ at least one F	74.5	72	69.5	83.5
Average # of students w/ more than one F	43	43.5	37	49.5

Semester Failure Rates for the Freshman Classes Without Transition Program

(Appendix F)

	2004-2005	2005-2006	Statistical Results
Total Number of semester F's for the entire year	348	325	z value = 0.674 p value = 0.27
Average Number of Students w/ at least one F	74.5	72	z value = 0.106 p value = 0.1
Average Number of Students w/ more than one F	43	43.5	z value = -0.151 p value = 0.1

* Significant at the 0.05 level

** Significant at the 0.01 level

Semester Failure Rates for the Freshman Classes With Transition Program

(Appendix G)

	2006-2007	2007-2008	Statistical Results
Total Number of semester F's for the entire year	315	407	z value = -2.270 * p value = 0.01
Average Number of Students w/ at least one F	69.5	83.5	z value = -0.625 p value = 0.27
Average Number of Students w/ more than one F	37	49.5	z value = -0.970 p value = 0.17

* Significant at the 0.05 level

** Significant at the 0.01 level

Semester Failure Rates Comparing Classes Without to Classes With Transition Program

(Appendix H)

	2004-2006	2006-2008	Statistical Results
Total Number of semester F's for the entire year	673	722	z value = 1.739 * p value = 0.04
Average Number of Students w/ at least one F	146.5	153	z value = 1.134 p value = 0.13
Average Number of Students w/ more than one F	86.5	86.5	z value = 1.122 p value = 0.13

* Significant at the 0.05 level

** Significant at the 0.01 level

Student Information System Data—Minor Disciplinary Infractions

(Appendix I)

	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007	2007-2008
Enrollment	324	318	359	394
Tardy Warning	213	232	221	290
Tardy Detention	112	105	127	149
ID Warning	167	164	117	65
ID Violation	22	22	19	10
Clothing Warning	2	1	3	5
Clothing Detention	1	2	3	1
Cellular Phone Warning	2	20	32	83
Cellular Phone Detention	1	3	4	8

Minor Disciplinary Infractions for Freshman Classes Without Transition Program

(Appendix J)

	2004-2005 Total Number of Students with Discipline	2005-2006 Total Number of Students with Discipline	Statistical Results
Tardy Warning	145	151	z value = - 0.694 p value = 0.2451
Tardy Violation	52	80	z value = -2.855 * p value = 0.0022
Clothing Warning	2	1	z value = 0.563 p value = 0.2877
Clothing Violation	1	1	z value = -0.013 p value = 0.496
ID Warning	103	103	z value = -0.163 p value = 0.4364
ID Violation	21	18	z value = 0.435 p value = 0.3336
Cellular Phone Warning	2	19	z value = -3.816 * p value = 0.0002
Cellular Phone Violation	1	3	z value = -1.022 p value = 0.1539

*Significant at the 0.05 level

** Significant at the 0.01 level

Minor Disciplinary Infractions for Freshman Classes With Transition Program

(Appendix K)

	2006-2007 Total Number of Students with Discipline	2007-2008 Total Number of Students with Discipline	Statistical Results
Tardy Warning	127	194	z value = -3.842 * p value = 0.001
Tardy Violation	93	103	z value = -0.074 p value = 0.4721
Clothing Warning	3	4	z value = -0.256 p value = 0.4013
Clothing Violation	3	1	z value = 1.097 p value = 0.1379
ID Warning	72	48	z value = 2.948 * p value = 0.0016
ID Violation	17	4	z value = 3.097 * p value = 0.0013
Cellular Phone Warning	32	81	z value = -4.469 * p value = 0.001
Cellular Phone Violation	4	8	z value = -1.003 p value = 0.1587

* Significant at the 0.05 level

** Significant at the 0.01 level

Disciplinary Infractions Comparing Classes Without to Classes With Transition Program

(Appendix L)

	2004-2006 Total Number of Students with Discipline	2006-2008 Total Number of Students with Discipline	Statistical Results
Tardy Warning	296	321	z value = 1.303 p value = 0.0968
Tardy Violation	132	196	z value = -2.40 p value = 0.0082
Clothing Warning	3	7	z value = -1.020 p value = 0.1539
Clothing Violation	2	4	z value = -0.625 p value = 0.2676
ID Warning	206	120	z value = 7.105 * p value = 0.001
ID Violation	39	21	z value = 3.015 * p value = 0.0013
Cellular Phone Warning	21	113	z value = -7.414 p value = 0.001
Cellular Phone Violation	4	12	z value = -1.697 * p value = 0.0455

* Significant at the 0.05 level

** Significant at the 0.01 level

**Professional Vitaé
for
Samantha Sutton**

Academic Degrees

EdD (pursuing)	Lindenwood University Educational Leadership	2009
MS	Lindenwood University Educational Administration	2002
BS	Truman State University Biology (Dean's List)	1997

Professional Experience

Fort Zumwalt School District Assistant Principal Fort Zumwalt West High School	2005-Present
Fort Zumwalt School District Educator of Science Fort Zumwalt North High School Unified Science; Biology; Anatomy & Physiology	1999-2005

Certifications

Missouri Administrator (7-12) Certification
Missouri Unified Science: Biology (9-12) Certification

Professional Academic Affiliations

Member ASCD—Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
Member NASSP—National Association of Secondary School Principals
Member MASSP—Missouri Association of Secondary School Principals

Administrative Assignments and Activities

Professional Evaluation of Teachers
Evaluation of Support Staff

Instructional Supervision of Science and Family/Consumer Science Departments
Development and Collaboration of Building Professional Development
Development and Implementation of Building New Teacher Program
Student Discipline
Development and Implementation of Building Student Leadership Programs

Awards and Honors

Lindenwood University 4.0/4.0
Teacher of the Year Nominee—Fort Zumwalt North High School
Best Buy Te@ch Award Recipient
University of Chicago Outstanding Teacher Award
Truman State Univeristy Deans' List