

Rowan University

Rowan Digital Works

Theses and Dissertations

4-28-1998

An internship experience in educational leadership at Oakcrest High School, Mays Landing, New Jersey, 1997-1998

Linda R. Brennan
Rowan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd>



Part of the [Educational Leadership Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brennan, Linda R., "An internship experience in educational leadership at Oakcrest High School, Mays Landing, New Jersey, 1997-1998" (1998). *Theses and Dissertations*. 1914.
<https://rdw.rowan.edu/etd/1914>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by Rowan Digital Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Rowan Digital Works. For more information, please contact graduateresearch@rowan.edu.

An Internship Experience in Educational
Leadership at Oakcrest High School
Mays Landing, New Jersey
1997 - 1998

by
Linda R. Brennan

A Masters Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment for the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree in The Graduate School of
Rowan University
May 1998

Approved by

Ronald L. Capasso, Ed. D.

Date Approved

April 28, 1998

Abstract

Brennan, Linda R.

Internship Experience at
Oakcrest High School
Mays Landing, NJ
1998
Advisor: Ronald L. Capasso, Ed.D.
Educational Leadership
Rowan University of New Jersey

Early identification of academically at-risk students combined with effective intervention has a significant impact on the academic performance of academically at-risk students. Students were identified as academically at-risk if they failed two classes in one report period or if they failed one class twice during their eighth grade year.

Faculty members volunteered to serve as mentors for these students. Through advising, referring to student resource personnel, reviewing work, or providing a quiet place to study, teachers were committed to providing additional time and assistance to their mentoree's educational process.

The identified students were also given contact time and opportunities to meet with community organizations who were committed to serving as mentors.

The intervention provided by the faculty mentors proved successful. The result of the first semester indicated that more than 50% of the identified students were academically successful and remained eligible to participate in extracurricular activities.

It is the conclusion of this intern that identifying academically at-risk students prior to their entering high school and organizing volunteer faculty mentors to assist in their educational process should become standard procedure.

Mini - Abstract

Brennan, Linda R.

Internship Experience at
Oakcrest High School
Mays Landing, NJ
1998

Advisor: Ronald L. Capasso, Ed.D.
Educational Leadership
Rowan University of New Jersey

Early identification of academically at-risk students and effective intervention impacts on academic performance of these students. Students identified as academically at-risk by failing two classes in one report period or one class twice during the eighth grade year. Teachers volunteered to mentor these students, more than 50% were academically successful.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Adam C. Pfeffer, Superintendent; Dr. Dennis J. Foreman, Principal and Mentor; Mrs. Lovie Lilly and Mr. Steven Ciccariello, Vice Principals; and Mr. Anthony Mongelluzzo, Director of Guidance, for their knowledge, understanding, and expertise in the field of educational leadership. This internship was accomplished because of their continued support, cooperation, time, and guidance.

I would also like to thank Dr. Ronald L. Capasso for his advice, guidance and understanding as my internship advisor. His learned experience has proven to be a valuable asset during my internship.

I wish to express gratitude to my sisters Barbara Haines and Abigail Haines, and my brother William Haines; and my aunt and friend, Judith Gibson who in sharing life's experiences have contributed to the person I am today. And to my daughter Meghan, I greatly appreciate her patience with my commitment to education, and the time she has spent with me on my projects.

Finally, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my grandparents, Ruth and Wallace Gibson, who taught me to respect and to value an education; and to my parents, Carolyn and Joseph Haines, their commitment to family in life and their strength in dying will be a model to me always. It is in their memory that I dedicate my work.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	ii
Chapter 1 Introduction: Focus of the Study.....	1
Problem Statement.....	1
Definitions.....	2
Limitations.....	3
Setting of the Study.....	4
Importance of the Study.....	7
Organization of the Study.....	8
Chapter 2 Review of the Literature.....	9
Identification.....	9
Intervention.....	10
School Identification.....	12
Summary.....	13
Chapter 3 Design of the Study.....	15
Research Design.....	15
Sampling.....	17
Data Collection.....	18
Chapter 4 Presentation of the Research Findings.....	19
Results.....	19
Chapter 5 Conclusion.....	21
Implications.....	22
Leadership Development.....	22
Organizational Change.....	23
Further Study.....	24

References.....	26
Biographical Data.....	28

List of Tables

Table	Page
1. First Semester Results 1997 - 1998	20
2. Five Year Comparison of Ninth Grade First Semester Ineligibility	20

Chapter One

Introduction: Focus of the Study

Problem Statement

The current practice at Oakcrest High School has been to identify academically at-risk students by reviewing their grade averages at the end of the first semester. Two failures at this point renders a student academically ineligible to participate in school activities, field trips, and athletics for the following semester. These students would then be identified for various interventions. Over the past three years, the group that has consistently started each school year with the highest number of academically ineligible students has been the sophomore class. These results are based on their academic performance during their ninth grade year. In a 9 -12 high school setting, the ninth grade is traditionally one of many adjustments and transitions for the students. The intent of this project was to diminish the high number of academically ineligible ninth grade students, at the end of the first semester as well as at the end of the year. By identifying the academically at-risk ninth grade students based on their eighth grade academic performance, and providing effective interventions, this intern's goal was to prevent at least 20% of the identified students from becoming classified as academically ineligible.

In order to attain this goal and effectively carry out this project, it was necessary for this intern to develop leadership skills. Specifically, this intern needed to develop the ability to initiate and effectively manage change as both a leader and as a member of a leadership team. In order to enlist and maintain the commitment of faculty members to mentor the identified students, this intern

needed to apply human relation skills to interact effectively with others. It was necessary for this intern to facilitate and coordinate community agencies with the capacity to provide appropriate resources to meet the needs of the identified students.

The organizational change experienced through this study was two fold. First, because of a higher percentage of students meeting academic success, fewer students experienced the frustration and negative association of failure, and were in turn able to participate in school activities and athletics, this enhanced the overall positive climate of the school. Secondly, a process has been established to identify early the academically at-risk students, before they enter the high school, and interventions can then be effectively implemented.

The purpose of this study was to identify academically at-risk ninth grade students based on their eighth grade academic performance, before they entered the high school, and to provide effective interventions to assist the students in facing the challenges of high school. The intended result of this effort was the academic success of the identified students.

Definitions

The following terms are pertinent to the understanding of this study.

Academically at-risk - based solely on academic performance; students with two failures in one marking period or two failures during the year in any one subject were identified as academically at-risk.

Mentor - For the purpose of this study, a mentor is a “wise, loyal advisor; a teacher or coach (Webster,1979).” To mentor then would be to advise or coach another person, in a wise and loyal fashion.

Limitations of the Study

The success of the study relied on the commitment of faculty members in their mentoring of the identified students. Limitations are then evident in the individual effectiveness of the faculty mentors. The intern provided mentoring suggestions, motivation, and feedback on the success of the project in order to maintain interest and commitment to the identified student. Community mentor groups were available for identified students based on the student's cultural background. As private, outside organizations, the intern could only monitor the groups' activities, and communicate the desired outcomes and objectives.

Two new curricular programs that may or may not have had an effect on the project, involved only the ninth grade students. The ninth grade Physical Education program for the first marking period used a curriculum entitled "Fitness for Life (1997)" requiring students to determine their fitness levels and develop a fitness plan to benefit them for life. The focus of the curriculum is to develop positive health habits for a healthy life. This may have acted as a reinforcement to the objectives of the project. The other new curricular program involved the interdisciplinary instruction of freshmen English and Social Studies. The ninth grade students spent two class periods, in succession, with the same cohort of students, sharing the same team of teachers. This would have had to have an impact on their socialization and transition into high school. These two curricular programs cannot be factored out of the students experiences, and the impact of these programs will not be clearly evident, the intern identified them solely as substantial independent variables in the project.

Another variable that effected the freshmen this year was the new homeroom program. Prior to this year, homeroom was a separate ten minute period, scheduled after the second period of the day. For the 1997-98 school

year, homeroom was incorporated into the beginning of the third period class. In doing this, there was one less hall passing, one less new teacher, and one less new environment for the student to adjust to during the day. This variable may have added to the positive transition to high school for the freshmen. The impact of this independent variable on the study cannot be determined.

Setting of the Study

Oakcrest High School is located in the center of Atlantic County, in Southern New Jersey, 50 miles east of Philadelphia, and 15 miles west of Atlantic City. The economic base of the community is primarily small industry, trades, agriculture, and tourism. The taxpayers are primarily blue collar workers and laborers. The advent of the casino industry and the construction of a large retail shopping district has contributed to the economic development and revenue of the community. Not only have the casinos and shopping districts added to the economics, they have also contributed to the rapid population growth. The population growth has increased dramatically over the past ten years.

Unofficial figures from the 1990 census show a county population of 224,327, an increase of 15.6 % over the 1980 count of 194,119. This is an accelerated growth rate over the 10.9 % posted between 1970 and 1980. It is also three times the state wide growth rate of 5 % for the past decade (New Jersey Department of Commerce, 1990).

This growing economic base supports an extensive educational system consisting of six K-8 school districts, one regional high school district comprised of two high schools, and a District Alternate School. Within the regional school district there are also two educational facilities of higher learning. The Atlantic Community College which offers a two year associate degree in several fields

of study. Stockton State College offers a variety of majors leading to a bachelors degree in one of many fields of learning.

The participating High School is one of the two regional high schools, receiving students from three of the K-8 sending districts. The participating High School is the largest geographic school district in the state of New Jersey. The school is supervised by an elected Board of Education consisting of nine members. The Superintendent is in his second year at this district, serving a three year contract. The Business Administrator is newly hired as of September 1997.

This High School is a large comprehensive high school originally built in 1960. Structurally, the building is attractive and well maintained, having gone through construction periods, providing three additions, the last of which was completed in 1990. The campus is situated on a one hundred and ten acre tract of land surrounded by rural woodlands. Instructionally the High School offers a traditional academic, grade 9 - 12 curriculum in English, Social Studies, Mathematics, Science, and Health and Physical Education. Additionally, the school presents elective offerings for the students in the fields of Agriculture, Business, Drama, Foreign Language, Family and Consumer Science, Music, Technology, and Visual Arts. The Learning Media Services provides an extensive resource for the students through printed material, as well as through computer technology and the internet access to county libraries and colleges. The school based television production studio provides exciting hands on opportunities for students interested in the field of communications. New last year, and expanded this year, are the computer laboratories. Two computer labs housing twenty CD-Rom terminals each, with internet access, are available for teachers as a resource room, for class work, and for student use as well.

Another addition to the curriculum this year is the interdisciplinary instruction of freshmen English and Social Studies. Each English and Social Studies cohort is also assigned a Reading Specialist to assist as needed. The Special Education Department meets the educational needs of approximately 20% of the student population who have been identified as needing special services. The High School also offers Advanced Placement courses in English III and IV, Calculus, Biology, and U S History I and II. Honors courses are offered in English, World History, Mathematics, and Science. The extra-curricular offerings are equally extensive. The High School provides 47 extra-curricular activities and 17 interscholastic athletic teams.

The parents and community are given a voice in the operations of the High School through several organizations. The Principal's Advisory Council consists of students, parents, community members, school board members, faculty, and administration who meet regularly to share concerns with the Principal regarding the operations of the school. From these meetings, the school goals are usually determined and developed. The Human Relations' Coalition is a group of faculty and administration who organize activities to improve the atmosphere of the school, using community resources and personnel to enhance their efforts. And the Substance Abuse Task Force is a committee of students, parents, community members, school board members, faculty, and administration, who develop activities to educate and improve the awareness of substance abuse among the student population.

The Principal of this High School has served the school for five years in his present position, following five years as the Vice Principal. Two of the three Vice Principals have been at the High School for five years, with the third Vice Principal newly hired as of October 1997. The Vice Principals handle all of the

discipline and supervise the activities. There are five building administrators who serve as supervisors for the various educational departments. The faculty consists of 112 members, including 5 guidance counselors. Twelve of the teaching staff are new this year. There are also six teacher aides, one for the library, one for the media arts, and four for the Special Education department. At this High School, more than half of the teaching staff have tenure exceeding 20 years, and more than 40% have advanced degrees.

The students come from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. One of the biggest challenges is the high student mobility rate, 32.8% in 1995-96 as compared to the state average of 14.4% (New Jersey School Report Card, 1995-96). The student population is approximately 1178, of that, 330 are freshmen. Of the 1178 students, 277 qualify to receive free lunch, and 126 qualify for reduced lunch, encompassing approximately 34% of the student body. Twenty percent of the student body are identified as having special needs (Middle States Report, 1996). There were 40 students who passed advanced placement tests in 1996, gaining college credit (N J School Report Card, 1995-96). All of the students in the district are bussed to and from school. Transportation is also provided for the after school programs. Forty-five percent of the student body participates in one or more extra-curricular activity each school year.

Importance of the Study

Through the process of early identification and intervention, academically at-risk ninth grade students will be provided the necessary resources to meet academic success. This study will provide documentation of an effective mentoring and intervention program to assist the academically at-risk student meet the challenges of high school. In response, identified students will

succeed at high school, maintain academic eligibility, and become active school citizens. As more students meet with academic success, less students end up on the ineligibility list, leaving more students able to contribute to the school through active participation in school programs, therefore a more positive school climate - and the circle will promote itself.

Organization of the Study

The study will be outlined in further detail in the following chapters. Chapter two will review the literature in support of early identification, intervention, and mentoring of At-Risk students. Chapter three will detail the design of the study and describe the data analysis plan. The results of the study will be presented in Chapter four. The conclusion of the study, its implications, and need for further study will be detailed in Chapter five.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The primary focus of this project was to identify academically at-risk ninth grade students early, in order for them to achieve academic success and remain eligible to participate in extracurricular programs. It was necessary to first develop criteria to identify the targeted students. Secondly, effective interventions needed to be developed and implemented. The intended outcome of this project would be that a large percentage of these students remain academically eligible and able to participate in school activities.

Identification

The identification of at-risk students relies on the definition of the term *at-risk*. At-risk students are described by Joyce Hardy, an educational consultant and an administrator in the Mt Diablo Unified School District, as those students who fall behind, school attendance is uneven, basic skills are limited, or who are bright but bored, who are in trouble with juvenile authorities, who are on drugs, who are pregnant, who are behavior problems, who speak English as a second language, or who come from a depressed socioeconomic status (Hardy, 1989). She further states that the at-risk student has become disaffected, and is at risk because he is a potential dropout.

Rogus and Wildenhaus also state that at-risk students are unlikely to successfully complete high school (Rogus and Wildenhaus, 1991). The factors they list as associated with being at-risk include alcoholism, drug abuse, family neglect and abuse, low self-esteem, and poverty. Their research found that at-risk students will demonstrate such behaviors as academic underachievement,

lack of self-respect, and lack of self-esteem.

Rodriquez (1990) lists nine indicators for at-risk students. The two most visible and earliest factors to identify are poor school attendance and poor academic performance. Other factors attributing to the at-risk classification include student behavior, attitude toward school, need for employment, lack of family support, involvement in juvenile justice system, drop out, and lack of school involvement.

All of the research cited to define at-risk use similar and overlapping factors, which are demonstrated in similar behaviors. Many factors were out the scope of a school's control. The factor that presents itself repeatedly is most clearly and significantly academic performance. This became the identifying indicator for this project. Students who demonstrated poor academic performance during their eighth grade academic year were classified as academically at-risk. The identifying criteria were outlined as two failures during any one marking period, or two failures in one subject during the academic year.

Interventions

Instead of harsh discipline, Karlin et al. (1993) found that teachers and administrators should provide students opportunities to develop positive relationships with teachers, other professionals, and positive peers. This positive connection serves to make school a place students prefer to attend.

Wircenski et al. (1990) state that the most critical element to success within a school is for a student to develop a close and nurturing relationship with at least one adult, whether it is a teacher, guidance counselor, or administrator. In support of this finding, Lenihan and Duquin (1991) state that one of the five keys to success in helping at-risk students is increased one-on-

one contact between students and adults. Students who believe that there are adults concerned with their schoolwork on a daily basis is an important factor in their academic improvement. One district's approach to providing a positive transition for at-risk students going in to high school from a middle school setting was to use the "Buddy System", faculty members chose a student who was potentially at-risk and provided positive reinforcement outside of the formal classroom routine (Nevetsky, 1991)

Wehlage et al. (1989) studied dropouts and found two relevant factors. These students demonstrated low self-esteem and perceived that teachers did not show much interest in them. Wehlage stressed that teachers must develop an extended role for these students in non-classroom settings.

DeBlois (1989) research on dropouts found that most did not consult with an adult at the school before leaving. DeBlois also stressed the need for students to work with teachers who have high morale even if it means missing class time.

Safran et al. (1990) surveyed 600 individuals ages 18 through 81 about their high school experiences and found that 86% of all those questioned said that a high school teacher had a significant and positive impact on their lives. This response indicates that the support of an individual teacher was critical to the development of student confidence and security.

Czikzenthmihalyi and McCormack (1986) also researched the influence of teachers on student performance. They found that 30% more students of high school age mentioned peers more than teachers when asked to identify what influenced them to become who they are. Yet 58% of the respondents mentioned one or more teachers as the most influential factor in their life.

Hamilton and Hamilton (1992) reported that there was something

powerful about the adult/student mentorships. They found, however, that successful programs were difficult to implement because adults are frequently busy and sometimes unable to meet the additional commitments to students.

Research thoroughly supports the positive impact of adult interventions on at-risk students' academic achievements. Strongly supported is the role of a teacher as the mentor, the influential factor in a students's school experience. This project offers opportunities for community mentors and peer mentors, but the strongest impetus for mentoring is the faculty mentor.

School Identification

At risk students often experience estrangement from school and school personnel (Rogus, 1991). An effective mentoring system can convey to the student that faculty members are concerned for their success and well being. As a result, students view themselves as part of a community. This sense of belonging provides incentive for students to come to school and improve participation.

Karlin et al. (1993) also states that the impact of a faculty mentor on a student's feeling of acceptance, is a bond that must occur in order for the student to identify with and feel a part of the school. Students' perceptions of themselves and their school is critical in determining whether or not a student stays in school.

Finn (1989) asserted that the ability of the school to encourage student participation as a promising intervention effort. He sited the participation-identification model as an opportunity to keep at-risk students in school. The model demonstrated that students were more likely to complete high school if varied and increasing opportunities for interaction and activity with the school were occurring.

Finn conducted further research on engagement and achievement (1993). He studied the role that student involvement had on measures of academic achievement. He confirmed that the extent of a student's school and classroom activities is a predictor of academic achievement. The key for all students was the degree of participation. The greater the degree of participation, then the greater the potential benefits.

Kristin Voelkl (1997) found in her study of school identification, that students who fail to identify with school may be predisposed to a pattern of negative behavior and eventual withdrawal from school. Feelings of belonging in school have been associated with levels of engagement, persistent effort in schoolwork, and academic motivation. Belonging is described as a student's sense of being personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school environment. This sense of belonging was positively related to student motivation and achievement. Voelkl found that this positive correlation was even more significant in later school grades.

Research supports what most people in the field of education know and believe, that school involvement is a motivator for academic success. For this project, students will be encouraged to become active members of a club, activity, or athletic team. As their identification with the school develops, so will their level of achievement.

Summary

Students are classified as being at-risk for success based on a variety of indicating factors. Most factors are based on the environment outside of the scope of the school. The resulting behaviors, though, are demonstrated within the school. One of the indicators most obvious to address in school is academic achievement. This leads to the development of academic criteria

used to identify the academically at-risk student. Once identified, students can be provided with effective interventions. Students have shown that they can be positively affected by concern expressed for them by peers, role models, and most significantly teachers. When poor achievers become active participants in their classes and school, their achievement levels can improve. Schools that have found the means to encourage at-risk students to increase their level of participation with teachers, other students, or school programs will benefit from a more motivated higher achieving student body.

Research confirms that the number of at-risk students continue to rise. It also confirms, however, that successful programs can be implemented to assist these students.

Chapter 3

Design of the Study

Research Design

This research was designed to identify academically at-risk students prior to their entering high school and to provide effective interventions in order to prevent academic failure. The initial intervention attempt was directed at parent involvement. The original 78 students and their parents were sent a letter, early in September, which informed them of their student's academic at-risk classification and requested their attendance at an evening meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to explain the identification process and the intervention services available for the identified student. Of the 78 letters sent out, two parents attended the meeting. Reasons for such poor attendance could be attributed to the large geographic area of the school district, and the distance the high school is from many of the students' homes. The meeting was scheduled for six o'clock in the evening, this may have been a bad time with parents getting home from work and being able to attend. There is also the common opinion among educators that at-risk students often have at-risk parents, and therefore a poor response in attendance at the meeting should have been expected.

The second intervention was directed at the teaching staff, requesting them to choose at least one student to mentor. A letter explaining the project and the identification process was sent to every member of the teaching staff asking them to select one student to mentor during the school year. Attached to the letter was a list of the identified students. The first response by the faculty

resulted in 25 teachers choosing 39 students to mentor. A follow up letter including the names of the remaining students, solicited further responses. Finally, this intern approached individual faculty members, until all of the identified students had at least one faculty mentor. The reason for the slow response from the faculty was twofold; one reason was their apprehension concerning the amount of time mentoring would require; and the second reason was based on the faculty not really knowing how to mentor a student.

A meeting was scheduled immediately after school during the last week in September for all of the faculty mentors. The entire staff was invited to attend the meeting as well. The purpose of the meeting was to clearly explain the project, it's objectives, the student selection process, and other planned interventions. The mentors were each given a copy of their students schedule and first marking period interim progress report. Included in the packet of information was a list of student resource personnel in the building. Also of importance was a handout listing suggestions for mentoring. The meeting ended with discussion of concerns, questions, and sharing of advice among the faculty. All of the 37 volunteer faculty mentors attended the meeting, except for 5 teachers who were in a department meeting.

The mentors were given follow up announcements in regard to the status of the project. The number of students with grades of 80% or better, one or less failures, and two or more failures, was distributed to the mentors. A copy of the first marking period report card for each student was given to the faculty mentors, as was the interim progress reports and report cards for every marking period.

An assembly/seminar was scheduled for the at-risk students early in December, just after report cards had been sent home. The seminar hosted a

panel of three faculty members who spoke on the topics of spirituality, passion, and the power of self talk. The objective of the seminar was to instill the concept that they are capable of success if they chose to succeed. The program ended in the cafeteria where students were able to meet with community and school organizations in order to network with various mentor resources. The students were excused from the last two class periods of the day in order to attend the program. The students were only told that they were selected to take part in a special program, and that refreshments were to be served. Student response was positive to the mentoring program and to the assembly.

After their initial contact with the students at the post assembly reception, the community mentor organizations arranged to meet the students on their own schedule. The intern served as the contact person between the organizations and the school personnel in order to arrange meeting locations, obtain schedules, and gather information.

Keeping the mentors informed of the general progress of the project was important in order to keep them motivated and committed to their mentorees. Periodic meetings were arranged in order for the faculty involved in the project to exchange ideas, voice concerns, or share frustrations. Providing feedback and sharing ideas helped to keep the mentors fresh and enthusiastic. The mentors were kept informed of all activities involving the group of identified ninth grade students. The mentors were invited to attend assemblies and join in the receptions following each activity.

Sampling

The purpose of the study was to identify academically at-risk freshmen prior to entering high school and provide interventions early in the high school experience. The students were identified according to their eighth grade

academic performance. Two failures in one marking period, or two failures in one subject during the school year, were the criteria used for identifying incoming freshmen as academically at-risk. The principals at the two sending district middle schools assisted in the identification process.

The list of identified at-risk ninth grade students was sent to the guidance supervisor to verify enrollment. Fourteen of the 78 students had transferred during the first two weeks of school. Three of the 78 had been retained at the eighth grade level. By the end of December, two more of the identified students had transferred. Of the original 78 identified students, 58 students remained as the population for the study.

Data Collection

The success of the project will be determined by the marking period grades. Particular attention will be given to the first and last semester grade averages. Students who have semester and year-end averages with only one or less failures will be considered successful. Further success will be determined by the level of participation in school activities.

Chapter 4

Presentation of the Research Findings

Results

At the start of this school year, 58 students were identified prior to entering ninth grade as academically at-risk based on their eighth grade academic performance. These students had failed two courses in one report period or failed one course twice during the school year. Starting in September of their ninth grade year, faculty members volunteered to mentor these students, to assist them in their transition to high school. These mentors were academic advisors, providing a place to study, an opportunity to discuss an assignment, or a resource for other personnel who could assist these students. The students were also provided a contact with and opportunities to meet with community mentor organizations.

At the end of the first semester, 26 of the 58 identified students had two or more courses with failing grade averages. These students represented 44.8% of the group of ninth grade academically at-risk students. The 26 students were then classified by the high school, according to school policy, as ineligible to participate in extra-curricular activities for the following semester.

Of the 58 students, 11 students received only one failing semester grade average, with 21 students attaining all passing averages. These 32 students represent 55.2% of the group identified as academically at-risk.

From the 58 academically at-risk group of students, there were 28 students who participated in extracurricular activities. Of the 32 students who remained eligible to participate, 21 had participated in extracurricular activities.

Of the 26 students who failed two or more courses during the first semester only 7 had participated in extracurricular activities, 19 had not participated.

Table 1

First Semester Results-1997 - 1998

	Passing all courses	Failing one course	Failing two or more courses
# of students out of the 58	21	11	26
extracurricular participants	21		7

Another perspective on the results of the project was to compare this year's freshmen class as a whole and the number of ineligible students with that of the previous four years. Table 2 indicates that the percentage of the class to be classified as ineligible had decreased over the five year span, with the smallest percent ineligible occurring this year.

Table 2

Five Year Comparison of Ninth Grade First Semester Ineligibility

	<u>1994</u>	<u>1995</u>	<u>1996</u>	<u>1997</u>	<u>1998</u>
<u>Class Size</u>	<u>294</u>	<u>272</u>	<u>308</u>	<u>287</u>	<u>311</u>
<u># Ineligible</u>	<u>93</u>	<u>83</u>	<u>69</u>	<u>72</u>	<u>63</u>
<u>% of Class</u>	<u>31.6</u>	<u>30.5</u>	<u>22.4</u>	<u>25.0</u>	<u>20.2</u>

The positive effect of faculty mentoring on the academic performance of the academically at-risk student is obvious. The role of the teacher as a mentor in the educational process is significant.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

The research for developing this project clearly stated that poor academic performance was one of the factors observed as an early indicator for at risk students. Poor academics can also greatly effect the esteem and self respect of a student. And when entering high school, ninth grade students face a number of transitions, both in school and personally. It is with this understanding that identifying students who are academically at-risk prior to their entering high school would be beneficial in assisting them in making a positive transition to high school.

Research supports that the role of a teacher as mentor is the most influential factor in a student's educational experience. Yet it was also indicated that successful mentoring programs are difficult to sustain because of the time commitment added to that already inherent in the profession. It was incumbent upon this intern to keep this in mind. Motivating the mentors by informing them of the success of the group and providing mentoring tips was crucial in the success of the project.

It can be concluded from this research that early identification and effective intervention can impact the academic success of the academically at-risk high school student. The result of this study exceeded the objective of the proposal. This intern had hoped for 20% of the 58 identified students, approximately 12 students, to achieve academic success. The actual result was 55.2%, 32 students achieved academic success. All students received mentoring from a faculty member. Though it was not the impetus of the project, it

is noted that of particular significance is the high percentage of the students who achieved success and were also involved in extracurricular activities - 21 of the 32 successful students participated in extracurricular activities. Whereas, only 7 of the students failing two or more classes participated in extracurricular activities.

Implications

Early identification of academically at-risk high school students is a worthwhile process. Faculty mentoring is a very effective and meaningful intervention for the academically at-risk student. The academic success of the students is important for their esteem and self respect. The mentoring relationship provides the student with a trustworthy adult who may refer them to other personnel when necessary. The function of this system is to assist the student in their transition to high school. These practices should become standard operating procedures for incoming freshmen.

Requiring freshmen to participate in an extracurricular activity of choice during their freshmen year should also be a consideration as it increases a student's identification with the school. A student's sense of belonging, his identification with the school, correlates with his sense of being personally accepted. Also a student's level of engagement influences the effort in school work and academic motivation. This supports the need for students to not only get involved, but to stay eligible for participation.

Leadership Development

This intern was able to initiate and effectively manage change to the organization as both a leader and a member of a leadership team. The intern was able to apply human relations skills in interacting effectively with other staff members, guidance counselors, administration, and community mentor

organizations. This intern was able to coordinate community agencies to assure appropriate resources were available for the students.

Faculty members were recruited to mentor students along with the intern. Through meetings and discussions the faculty mentors were able to form a united effort in guiding students along their first year in high school. The intern was able to research and provide information for the mentors to enable them to better perform their role. The periodic reports on the progress of the identified students and letters of encouragement to the mentors were helpful in keeping the mentors interested and motivated in carrying out their commitment to be a mentor. The community agencies further developed their initial contact and mentoring process for the students.

The success of the project relied on the respect of the staff for the intern and for the intern's personal commitment to the objective of the project. The intern's diligence in recruiting faculty and keeping them involved were key elements in the success of the project. The intern's ability to enlist the participation of colleagues is an administrative asset and a leadership quality.

Organizational Change

The organization experienced change in that a higher percentage of freshmen experienced academic success. More ninth grade students were able to avoid the frustration and negativity associated with failure. A higher percentage of ninth grade students were able to maintain eligibility status that allowed them to participate in extracurricular activities. All of these factors contributed to a more positive climate in the school.

The number of ninth grade students classified as ineligible at the end of the first semester was less than that of sophomores. It has been the trend for the past several years for the freshmen class to post the highest number of

ineligible students at the end of the first semester. This year that was not so. The early identification process and interventions provided by the staff and community agencies were a definite factor in contributing to this improvement, and warrant the process to become standard operations.

Other factors in the school that may have impacted positively on the freshmen's academic success were the integrated curriculum in social studies, homeroom inclusion, and Project PASS. This was the first year for Social Studies to be listed as a freshmen requirement, and to be instructed integratively with freshmen English. Having the same class mates in two consecutive classes may have made the transition to high school easier. The two courses so closely related could have led to better comprehension and higher academic performance. Homeroom was included into a regular but extended class period which eliminated an extra hall passing and kept students together for short amount of casual time. Project PASS was an evening program offered to freshmen and their parents to assist with the transition to high school. The sessions were scheduled one Tuesday evening once a month. Though attendance was not great, the sessions provided information pertinent to freshmen, and may also helped in the academic performance of the ninth grade class.

Further Study

The need for further study is apparent in that this was a one year project. This may have been an exceptional freshmen class regardless of the interventions provided. Though research does support the impact faculty mentoring has on students success, more research needs to be done on the academically at-risk student population. For a minimum amount of effort a high return was evident, this in itself warrants another year or two of continuing with

the practice of early identification and intervention for academically at-risk students. Mandating that all freshmen participate in at least one extracurricular activity is an aspect of this project worth further study. Research supports the premise that students involved in school activities, one who participates, will develop ownership and connection to the school. This is a positive association that returns with pride and a desire for improved academic performance.

The combination of connecting with at least one faculty member and the and connecting with the school through positive participation can be the key to every students academic performance.

References

- Czikszenhalmi, M., McCormack, J. (1986). The influence of teachers. Phi Delta Kappan, 67 (6), 415-419.
- DeBlois, R. (1989). Keep at-risk students in school: Toward a curriculum for potential dropouts. NASSP Bulletin, 73(516) 6-12.
- Finn, J.D. (1993). School engagement & students at risk. Buffalo, NY: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Finn, J.D. (1989). Withdrawing from school. Review of Educational Research, 59 (2), 117-142.
- Hamilton, S.F., & Hamilton, M.A. (1992). Mentoring programs: Promise and paradox. Phi Delta Kappan, 73(7), 545-550.
- Hardy, J. (1989). The at-risk student: A definition and an agenda. Thrust for Educational Leadership, Jan.89, 38-39.
- Karlin, A.R., Stevens, R., Smith, N.H. (1992-93). T.I.P.S. for being at risk and loving it. Teacher Education and Practice, 8(2) 43-50.
- Lenihan, K. Duquin, R. (1991). The learning team: A cooperative approach to helping students at risk. Schools in the Middle, Fall, 14-16.
- Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools: Commission on Secondary Schools. Report of the Evaluation Team., Oakcrest High School, 1996
- Nevetsky, J. (1991). at-risk program links middle school, high school programs. NASSP Bulletin, 75 (538) 45-49.
- New Jersey Department of Commerce and Economic Development (1990). New Jersey Works: Atlantic County. New Jersey, N.P.
- New Jersey School Report Card - Secondary (1995-96)
- Rodriquez, F. (1990). Current policies and promising practices for at-risk

youth. The Clearing House, 63(7) 322-327.

Rogus, J. F., Wildenhaus, C. (1991). Programming for at-risk learners: A preventive approach. NASSP Bulletin, 75 (538) 1-7.

Safran, J., Wahl, E., Thompson, E. Conley, L., Holter, D., & Lemon, K. (1990). Making the difference: Reflections on high school experiences. NASSP Bulletin, 74(530), 112-116.

Voelkl, K.E. (1997). Identificaton with school. American Journal of Education, 105, 294-316.

Webster's New World Dictionary, Basic School Edition. Prentice -Hall, Inc. , Inglewood Cliffs, NJ, 1979

Wehlage, G.G., Rutter, R.A., & Turnbaugh, A. (1989). A program model for at-risk high school students. Educational Leadership, 44 (6),70-71.

Wircenski, J.L., Sarkees, M.D., West, L.L. (1990). Instructional alternatives:Rescue strategies for at-risk students. NASSP Curriculum Report, 19(4) 1-6.

Biographical Data

Name: Linda R. Brennan

Date and Place of Birth: February 23, 1961
Ridley Park, Pennsylvania

High School: Ridley High School
Folsom, Pennsylvania
Graduated 1979

Undergraduate Degree: Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania
Bachelor of Science
Health and Physical Education
1984

Graduate Degree: Rowan University of New Jersey
Glassboro, New Jersey
Master of Arts
School Administration
1998

Present Occupation: Oakcrest High School
Mays Landing, New Jersey
Teacher of Physical Education