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Freshmen First: An Evaluation of a Ninth Grade Transition Program

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Acknowledgements

Hard to believe this five year journey is about to come to an end. While it's hard not to feel a little proud of myself as I write this, I am quickly reminded that my wife is spending one last Saturday morning chauffeuring our three boys to various sporting events without the help of dad. So, it is very evident that before I can't feel too cocky, I must first thank those who have helped me along the way.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Abstract

FRESHMEN FIRST: AN EVALUATION OF A NINTH GRADE TRANSITION PROGRAM

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This study examined the effect of a freshmen transition program on student success. Success was measured by achievement in test scores and grades, retention, attendance, and discipline. This study also examined the differential effects of student outcomes by student characteristics to include, sex, race, previous middle school, economic status, disability status, and proficiency in English. There were no significant differences between participant and control groups in the bivariate analysis. There were limited findings when considering students characteristics. There were main effects on Earth Science and World Geography test scores when previous middle school was held as a constant, and there was a main effect on the Earth Science test when disability status was held as a constant. There were two interaction effects. One of these was a negative effect in which males in the participant group actually scored worse on the Algebra I

SOL score than did males in the control group. The other interaction effect was that black students in the participant group had fewer disciplinary incidents than did black students in the control group.

Chapter 1: Introduction

How will I know when to eat lunch? I hope I don't miss lunch. What if I can't find my classes? What if I get lost? I've heard that seniors will lock freshmen in the lockers on the first day of school. I hope I can find my locker. If I do find it, I hope I don't get stuffed in it. If I do get locked in my locker, I hope I at least get lunch.

Although these seem like the ramblings of a mad person, they are actually the typical worries and fears of rising ninth grade students in the days and hours before their first day of high school. This particular narrative outlines three of the biggest procedural worries associated with the beginning of high school - - lunch, lockers, and getting lost (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). While procedural worries occupy a great deal of the concerns of students prior to the beginning of high school, academic concerns such as the amount of homework and the difficulty of classes and social concerns such as dressing out for physical education and having classes with friends become more important once the school year starts (J. S. Smith, Akos, Lim, & Wiley, 2008).

The research regarding transition programs for high school students is focused primarily on three themes. The first theme deals with the stakeholder concerns about ninth grade (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; J. S. Smith, et al., (2008). The stakeholders in the research are the parents, teachers, and students.

Understanding the concerns of the stakeholders will help educational leaders better prepare transition programs. The second theme from the research is about student outcomes (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Alspaugh, 1998; Clark, 2007; Domecq, 2004; Hertzog & Morgan, 1998; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Jones, 2005; Neild, 2008; Pitts, 2005; Sikes, 2002; J. B. Smith, 1997; J. S. Smith, 2006; Weiss & Bearman, 2007). The difficulties associated with transitioning to high school are clearly outlined in student outcomes with poor attendance, grades, and behavior. This combination of poor outcomes typically results in high levels of dropouts in that when students are not successful in the ninth grade, they are much more likely to drop out of school. The research on student outcomes and transition programs is also concerned with determining if there are any differential effects between students based on student characteristics such as disability status, gender, race, and economic status. The final theme from the literature is about the important components of successful transition programs (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; J. S. Smith et al., 2008). This is an important piece in that administrators considering developing their own transition programs are concerned with determining what components should be included.

Clearly research indicates that the first year of high school is a difficult year for students (Capstick, 2007; Caldwell, 2007; Clark, 2007; Domecq, 2004; Jones, 2005; Pitts, 2005; Sikes, 2002; Torres, 2004). Research also shows that

this first year of high school can be a predictor of success for a student's high school career (Alspaugh, 1998; J. S. Smith, 2006). As schools recognize the importance of the first year of high school, many school leaders have begun developing transition programs to help assist with the transition. For example, a school district in northern Virginia launched a pilot ninth grade transition program at one of its five high schools in order to assist students with the transition to high school. In determining the success of the program, the district will examine the student outcomes of attendance, behavior, achievement, and retention. Therefore, this study is of the effectiveness of a specific ninth grade transition program for one high school in a school district in northern Virginia.

This study used an experimental design. The participants were students who were determined to be at risk in that they failed either their math or English SOL tests for the seventh grade. Permission was granted from the district to use the data as a secondary data analysis. Data was gathered from Business Objects, an online data warehousing software. The data was converted to Excel and then loaded into SPSS in order to be analyzed. Descriptive statistics was used to describe the participants and the control groups. Basic tests of difference (e.g. t-tests, ANOVAs, etc.) were used to analyze the differences between the participant and control groups on the various outcome indicators such as achievement in SOL scores, achievement in grades, attendance, and discipline. Also, multivariate analyses involved two different tests. A repeated measures factorial analysis of

variance was used to test for difference in grades for each grading period. A two-way analysis of variance was used to test for main effects and interaction effects between the experiment groups and the student characteristics on the dependent variables such as behavior, attendance, and achievement.

There were several hypotheses for this particular study. The district was anticipating that the students in the participant group would have significantly higher grades and SOL scores than the control group. The district was also anticipating that the students in the participant group would have significantly fewer absences and disciplinary incidents that the control group. Finally, the district was anticipating that the participant group would have significantly more students who are promoted to the tenth grade than in the control group. The district was also concerned with understanding if there were differential effects on the student outcomes based on student characteristics.

The results of this study were of great importance to the district piloting the study. As a result of the study, the district is considering expanding the program to include more of its five high schools; however, more research is needed. The district is looking carefully at the specific demographic groups that were affected by the program in that the transition program could possibly be tailored for those students who find it most beneficial. Developing a program for only a specific demographic group could be a fiscal advantage during lean budget years. Finally, the district is very concerned with achievement as measured by

both grades and SOL scores. The data from this study has been and will continue to be a great resource for the district as they continue to develop and modify the best possible transition programs for at-risk ninth graders.

The results of this study will hopefully have implications for other school districts as well. There are be many facets to the study which other districts might find interesting For example the significant components used in this study can be duplicated for schools wanting to create their own transition program. Other districts or schools might find the two-way ANOVAs that examine the main effects and interaction effects of the treatment groups and the student characteristics against the dependent variables more important if they are trying to target specific groups of students such as students with disabilities or specific outcome indicators such as behavior or attendance. Overall, this study has a great deal of value for both the piloting district and other school systems seeking to better understand the impact that a transition program can have on students, especially students who struggled academically prior to high school and are, therefore, particularly at-risk for failure in high school.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction

This study addressed the effectiveness of a freshmen transition program on student outcomes. Specifically, this study addressed the following two questions:

1. Were students who participated in a freshmen transition program more successful in high school than students who did not participate in a transition program?
2. Were there differential effects of a freshmen transition program on student outcomes by student characteristics?

The answer to these research questions adds to a growing literature base on the topic of freshmen transition, and will hopefully provide some new findings especially in the areas of student characteristics and achievement based on standardized test scores.

Many researchers (Capstick, 2007; Caldwell, 2007; Clark, 2007; Domecq, 2004; Jones, 2005; Pitts, 2005; Sikes, 2002; & Torres, 2004) attribute poor attendance, achievement, and behavior during the first year of high school to the difficulties associated with the transition. For this reason educational leaders have begun experimenting with programs to assist students in overcoming the difficulties associated with the transition to high school. With a growing number of schools developing such transition programs, the literature base for the topic of

ninth grade transitions is also expanding. This literature review will provide a synthesis of the studies on the topic of ninth grade transition in order to better understand the manner in which these programs have been studied and to also consider other areas of the literature base that have been overlooked.

The literature reviewed on freshmen transition can be conceptualized into three themes. The first of these themes relates to the transition concerns of key stakeholders such as the students, parents, and teachers. The second theme relates to literature that examines the effect of the transition to high school on student outcomes. These studies consider the outcomes of achievement, retention, attendance, and behavior. A subcomponent of this theme is focused on the differential effects that transitioning to high school has on student outcomes by student characteristics. Studies within this section are focused on the characteristics of race, gender, and disability status. The third theme derived from the literature is focused on the important components of ninth grade transition programs.

Methodology of the Literature Review

An electronic search for current studies and literature reviews was conducted using the electronic education data base Education Research Complete of EBSCO Publishing. Education Research Complete offered over 1060 full text journals and allowed for peer review searches. Also, InfoTrac, an online database

that offered nearly 6,000 periodicals, was utilized. Gale, a part of Cengage Learning, provided the InfoTrac database. Keyword identifiers "transition programs, ninth grade transition, and freshmen transition" were used. Searches were limited to peer-reviewed journals. As the review of the literature was conducted, articles were selected based on their relevance to the current study of freshmen transition programs and student outcomes, student characteristics, and stakeholder concerns. Literature reviews or studies that described specific components of programs were also selected for review. In addition, the reference lists of key studies were reviewed in order to find original sources.

A search of dissertations was conducted using the OCLC FirstSearch data base. Keyword identifiers from the dissertation database were "ninth grade" or "freshmen" and "transition." The search yielded 106 dissertations ranging from 1980 to 2008. Of the 106 dissertations yielded, 65 of them came during or after the year of 2000. A review of the abstracts yielded nine dissertations from 2002 – 2008 that provided some relevance to the current study on ninth grade transition and the variables of student outcomes, student characteristics, and stakeholder concerns. These dissertations were ordered for review. The search of dissertations proved to be valuable as this database provided several studies that evaluated the effectiveness of existing ninth grade transition programs. With the combination of studies reviewed, there was a tremendous amount of overlap

among findings indicating a high level of saturation in regards to the current review of literature.

Findings

The literature reviewed could be synthesized into three themes. The first of these themes is the need for transition programs in high schools. The second of these themes is the effect that ninth grade transition programs can have on the student outcomes of achievement, retention, attendance, and behavior. Within the second theme is a subtheme of the effect of ninth grade transition on student outcomes based on student characteristics such as gender, race, and disability status. The third of the three themes is the important characteristics of ninth grade transition programs. Thus, the literature review is organized around the following three questions: Why are transition programs important? What outcomes might we expect from transition programs? What are the common components of effective transition programs?

Need for Transition Programs: Stakeholder Concerns

A key component in the development of transition programs is to understand the needs of the stakeholders involved. A great deal of the literature on ninth grade transition programs is focused on the needs and concerns of the stakeholders (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Cauley &

Jovanovich, 2006; Cooper & Liou; 2007, Frasier, 2007; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Lundblad & Tappan, 2008; J. S. Smith et al., 2008). The stakeholders referenced throughout the literature are the students, parents, and teachers.

Student concerns.

While Akos and Galassi (2004b) note that the three key stakeholders involved in the process of transitioning to high school are students, parents, and teachers, it is the students' needs that are most prevalent in the literature. From surveys of 320 ninth grade students, Akos and Galassi (2004b) found that the top concerns for students were homework, hard classes, and getting lost. Akos and Galassi administered their student questionnaires in October during homeroom of the students' first year in high school.

J. S. Smith, Akos, Lim, and Wiley (2008) also looked at the concerns of students about the transition to high school. J. S. Smith et al. (2008) examined student concerns from prior to the transition as well as after the transition to high school. J. S. Smith et al. concluded that the 172 students in their study expressed significantly more academic concern in areas such as pressure from parents to do well in classes and the difficulty of classes after the transition to ninth grade than they did prior to the transition. Prior to the transition to high school, student concerns were more centered on procedural and organizational items. The

researchers emphasized that the anxiety about procedural concerns lessens greatly after only a few days in school.

Some of the literature focused on the transitional concerns of specific demographic groups such as students with disabilities. For example Letrello and Miles (2003) examined the transition concerns of students with disabilities. In a study about the student perceptions of the transition process, Letrello and Miles (2003) interviewed six disabled and six non-disabled ninth grade students in order to determine what transition activities were most helpful to the students. The researchers were also concerned with noting any differences between the disabled students and the non-disabled students on helpful transition activities. The results of this naturalistic inquiry indicated that students with disabilities relied more on help from peers and teachers to be successful in the first year of high school as compared to students without disabilities. Also, students who were disabled participated in fewer extracurricular activities even though they understood the importance of such activities in helping with a smooth transition to high school. The researchers also noted that social concerns were of high importance for both groups. It should be noted that this study provided no information as to the selection process for the participants, creating some concern for validity.

The research of Akos and Galassi (2004a) is also concerned with the transitional needs of specific demographic groups. The researchers used student questionnaires to examine the differential effects of gender and race on the degree

to which the students felt connected to their high school after the transition. The sample of 320 ninth-grade students included 153 boys, 161 girls, and 6 unspecified students. In regards to ethnicity, 244 of the students were Caucasian, 33 were African American, 18 were Asian, 11 were Latino, 7 were multiracial, and 6 were unspecified. The researchers determined that boys felt significantly more connected to the high school than did the girls. This finding might implicate that schools should target girls for participants in ninth grade transition programs. There were no significant differences in regards to race and feelings of connectedness; however, Latino students, significantly more so than other students, perceived that high school counselors were helpful in the transition to high school. This might indicate less support from home for Latino students and more reliance on the assistance from school counselors making Latino students a good target student for ninth grade transition programs. The demographic research of Akos and Galassi (2004a) adds to the research about the transition concerns of students from specific demographic groups, and it is helpful to educational leaders who might want to target specific demographic groups.

Parent and teacher concerns.

While a great deal of the literature regarding stakeholders concerns is focused on the students' concerns, it is important to note that the concerns of the teachers and parents are also an important component in developing any transition

program. Akos and Galassi (2004b) surveyed 61 parents and 17 teachers in their study on stakeholder perceptions of ninth grade transitions. During the second month of the ninth grade year, the surveys were administered to students and parents. Students completed them in class, and the surveys were mailed home to parents. Using a one-way analysis of variance, Akos and Galassi compared the perception of students, parents, and teachers on the difficulty of transitioning to high school. The results indicated that parents and teachers perceived the transition to high school to be more difficult than did the students. In contrast, the teachers and parents had a good understanding of what students felt were the most difficult challenges associated with the transition to high school. Some of the concerns indicated from all three groups were homework, pressure to do well, making friends, hard classes and not knowing what to do. The results of this study are interesting in that they indicate that although the parents and teachers perceive the transition to high school to be more challenging than do the students, all three groups agree about the areas that are the most challenging in regards to transitioning to high school.

J. S. Smith et al. (2008) also studied parent and teacher concerns about the transition to ninth grade. The researchers adapted surveys and interviews from Akos and Galassi (2004b) to compare parent, teacher, and student perceptions about the transition to a freshmen center, a high school of only ninth grade students. The researchers administered both pre-transition surveys and post-

transition surveys to the students and parents. Teachers and guidance counselors were interviewed. Results of the pre-transition survey indicated that students had a significantly more positive outlook on their academic freedom than did their parents. The students were significantly more concerned than the parents with the academic issues such as homework and difficult teachers. Parents were significantly more concerned with social issues such as bullying and peer pressure than were the students; however, the students were more concerned with organizational issues. The interviews with school staff revealed concerns in the areas of students' lack of understanding about earning credits, academic expectations, and attendance procedures. Lastly, the staff at the freshmen center emphasized the importance of better communication between the ninth grade and eighth grade teachers in order to assist with the transition process. The studies of J. S. Smith et al. (2008) and Akos and Galassi (2004b) provide an important perspective as to the concerns of stakeholders involved in ninth grade transition.

As educational leaders consider developing their own transition programs it is important to consider the specific needs of the stakeholders (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). The literature has indicated that those developing transition programs should consider the concerns of teachers, parents, and students (Akos & Galassi, 2004b & J. S. Smith et al., 2008). Specifically, leaders should address the academic concerns of homework and teacher expectations. The procedural concerns regarding lunches, the lockers, and navigating the building were of top

importance to the stakeholders, and the worries of fitting in and making friends were the most frequently mentioned social concerns. There is also literature indicating that the needs of specific demographic groups that should be considered when deciding what groups of students should be targeted for participation (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Frasier, 2007; Letrello & Miles, 2003). The research indicated that students with disabilities, some minority groups, and females have more concerns and anxiety associated with the transition to high school; and thus, might be good candidates for a transition program. The studies in the next section of the literature examine student outcomes associated with the transition to ninth grade.

Effects of Transition Programs on Student Outcomes

Do ninth grade transition programs work? A great deal of the literature on ninth grade transition programs is concerned with student outcomes including achievement, attendance, behavior, and retention (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Alspaugh, 1998; Clark, 2007; Domecq, 2004; Hertzog & Morgan, 1998; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Jones, 2005; Neild, 2008; Pitts, 2005; Sikes, 2002; J. B. Smith, 1997; J. S. Smith, 2006; Weiss & Bearman, 2007). While some of the studies examine the effect that the actual transition to high school can have on student outcomes, other studies examine the effect of programs designed to assist with the transition to high school. Both areas of study are important in that one

theme of study helps demonstrate the difficulties associated with the transition to high school, while the other theme of study helps determine the effectiveness of transition programs.

Achievement.

When considering whether ninth grade transition programs are effective or not, one of the most valid concerns of educational leaders and researchers is the effect that such programs can have on achievement. Clearly programs are needed based on the difficulties associated with the transition to high school. In fact, studies demonstrate that the difficulties associated with the transition to high school are responsible for achievement loss in students (Alspaugh, 1998; J. S. Smith, 2006). However, the literature also reveals that this loss in achievement can be countered by the use of ninth grade transition programs. The studies documenting the impact of ninth grade transition programs on G. P. A. (grade point average) indicate that students who participated in transition programs performed significantly better than students who did not participate in transition programs (Clark, 2007; Domecq, 2004; Jones, 2005; Pitts, 2005; Sikes, 2002).

Alspaugh (1998) examined the achievement loss associated with the transition from middle school to high school and found that all of the groups of students in his study experienced a mean achievement loss in the transition to high school. Alspaugh also found that students who attended middle schools

experienced significantly more achievement loss as compared to students who attended K-8 schools. The sample for the study consisted of three groups of 16 rural school districts totaling 48 districts. The districts were grouped based on the structure of their K-12 schools. Group one had a K-8 and 9-12 organization with no middle school. The second group consisted of districts with one elementary, one middle school, and one high school. The third group was composed of districts with two or more elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. Using the Missourti Mastery anti Achievement Tests (MMAT) as a measure of achievement, Alspaugh compared grade 8 and grade 9 mean achievement loss. Alspaugh (1998) concluded that the close proximity of transitions from elementary to middle, and again to high school was responsible for the higher achievement loss associated with the students who attended middle school as compared to students in the K-8 systems.

J. S. Smith (2006) also studied the achievement loss associated with the transition from middle to high school by examining the long-term effects of achievement loss. J. S. Smith examined the impact that achievement loss between the middle and high school would have on a student's first year in college. Using a logistic regression analysis, he found that high-achieving middle school students who experienced significant achievement loss were more likely to leave their first college as opposed to high-achieving students who did not experience achievement loss. Data for the study was extracted from the 1988 National

Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) and subsequent follow-up studies though 1994. A total of 2,048 students who were identified as high-achieving middle school students were selected as the sample for the study. The researcher identified high-achieving middle school students by selecting students who were one standard deviation or higher than the mean G.P.A. Achievement loss was quantified by a significant decrease in G.P.A. from middle school to high school. The study of J. S. Smith (2006) is significant in that it emphasizes the long term effects of a poor transition to high school suggesting that one poor transition could lead to a poor transition to college. Clearly the studies of Alspaugh (1998) and J. S. Smith (2006) indicate that achievement loss is certainly a detriment associated with the transition to high school. Achievement loss, however, can be addressed through the use of ninth grade transition programs, which is addressed in the next section of the review.

Clark (2007) found significant differences in achievement as determined by G.P.A. between control and treatment groups of two different cohorts who went through a seven-phase freshmen transition program that began in January of the eighth grade year and continued to the beginning of the ninth grade year. In the first cohort, the mean G.P.A. at the end of the first semester of ninth grade for the treatment group was 2.68 and 1.9 for the control group. In the second cohort, the mean G.P.A. at the end of the first semester for the treatment group was 2.90 and 2.58 for the control group. The researcher indicated that a great deal of the

differences between the grades seemed to happen in the first nine weeks and then level off some during the second grading period that marked the end of the first semester.

While the results of Clark's (2007) study seem to indicate a positive effect on achievement for ninth grade transition programs, it is important to note some of the limitations regarding the selection for participants in the study. Rather than a random selection, students volunteered for the transition program. It is possible that volunteers would already have more interest in succeeding in high school compared to the control group who did not volunteer for the program. Also, certain phases of the program required a fee that might have limited access to some students and thus provided more opportunities for students who were already financially advantaged. More valid results would have been yielded had students been selected for the program from a random selection.

Clark's program involved seven phases that began during February of the cohort's eighth grade year when counselors and an assistant principal met with the cohort. This was followed by an open house even at the high school in March, and then a visit from the Navigators, upperclassmen assigned to help with the transition, to the middle school to meet in the classrooms. Phase four included shadow days in which groups of students would visit the high school and shadow a Navigator. Phase five included another visit in the spring from the cohorts in order to view an orientation video as well as participate in a question and answer

period with the Navigators. The sixth phase was a one-day transition camp in which students participated in activities designed to make the students feel comfortable in the school such as opening lockers, learning lunch routines, and meet new friends. The final phase was a staggered start which meant that on the first day of school, only freshmen reported.

It should be noted that Clark's program did not incorporate any interventions during the school year. It should also be noted that only students who participated in all seven phases were considered to be part of the treatment group; whereas, students who participated in none or some of the phases were included in the control group. This assignment of groups creates a concern of reliability in that students who completed some of the program were included in the control group. Possibly the differences might have been greater had the students who participated in only some of the phases not been included in the program.

Domecq (2004) examined three separate cohorts over a three year time frame in order to determine the impact of a ninth grade transition program. Each cohort contained a treatment group that participated in the ninth grade transition program and a control group that did not. Students were chosen for the cohorts based on their performance on eighth grade math and reading Standards of Learning tests (SOLS). Domecq examined G.P.A. based on eight different measures for each of the three cohorts yielding a possibility of 24 significant

findings. Overall grade point averages were compared by first grading period, by semester, and by content areas of English and math. Of the 24 t-tests, only two of them yielded significant results. In the third cohort of the targeted math students, the participant group had a significantly higher overall math G.P.A. than did the control group. Also in the third cohort, the treatment group for the targeted reading students had a significantly higher overall G.P.A. than did the control group. It should be noted that the control groups for the second and third cohorts had significantly higher scores on their eighth grade reading SOL tests even though all individual scores still fell within the required range of 380-420. Even though the control group for cohorts 2 and 3 had significantly higher reading scores at the start, the groups were still very similar overall, which made for high validity for this quasi-experimental design. Since the study yielded only two out of 24 significant effects of a transition program on G.P.A., this study clearly does not support the use of ninth grade transition programs to positively affect achievement as measured by G.P.A.

Domecq (2004) also used math SOL scores from the ninth grade year as an outcome indicator of achievement. Domecq examined the mean SOL scores and found no significant differences between participant and control groups. This is of particular interest in that the proposed study will also examine the effect of a ninth grade transition program on SOL scores with the only difference being the proposed study will examine scores from math, science, and geography.

Domecq's (2004) study utilized a yearlong program. The program began in the spring of the cohort's eighth grade year and included a visit from one of the assistant principals to the school. During the summer, students were invited to attend a five-day camp for five hours each day. The camp offered team building, academic, and procedural activities. During the school year, the students met with a faculty mentor once or twice a month. Also, one of the assistant principal's met with the participants at the end of the grading period to discuss grades, behavior, and social issues.

While the program in Clark's (2007) study was more involved during the spring of the cohort's eighth grade year, the program in Domecq's (2004) study appears to have more overall involvement. One might question as to why Domecq's study had few significant findings as compared to Clark's study. One possible theory is that Domecq used SOL scores as a means to select his participants (students who scored between 380-420), and SOL scores from the eighth grade are not a good indicator of future success in high school. Also, in Clark's study, participants were chosen based on their completion of all phases of the program as compared to the control group who chose not to participate. Thus, Clark's significant differences could be explained in that the participants were more eager to be successful as indicated by their full participation in the transition program.

Retention.

In the research literature on ninth grade transition programs, retention is typically used as an outcome measure and is defined as keeping students in school as opposed to students dropping out of school (Clark, 2007; Neild et al., 2008; J. B. Smith, 1997; Torres, 2004).

J. B. Smith (1997) used data from the National Educational Longitudinal Survey (NELS) collected in 1988, 1990, and 1992 in order to determine the effects of ninth grade transition programs on students being promoted versus retained. J. B. Smith defined the transition programs as either "none, partial, or full." Full transition programs addressed the needs of not only students, but also included parents and staff in the process. Partial transition programs involved activities that targeted only one or two of the groups but not all three. For example, both full and partial programs typically involved the visit of high school counselors to middle schools. The results of the study indicated that students who participated in either a full or partial transition program were less likely to drop out of school when compared with students who had no transition program. Thus, participation in a ninth grade transition program would decrease retention (failures) and increase promotion. While J. B. Smith's work is of significance in that it involved a large sample over time, the definitions of partial and full programs are broad in that they do not specify the type of activity.

The studies of Clark (2007) and Torres (2004) also considered the student outcomes of promotion and retention in relation to ninth grade transition programs. Clark's two-year study of two cohorts of 57 and 70 students revealed a significant result for the cohort of 57 students, noting that students who participated in the ninth grade academy were more likely to stay in school as opposed to dropping out. Clark relied on the school division's own analysis of number of days absent combined with grade point average attained at the end of the first semester of ninth grade to determine the likelihood of retention. Torres (2004) also found a positive impact on the promotion rate on students who participated in a ninth grade transition program. Torres' study of two different cohorts of 432 and 502 students revealed that during the second year of implementation, the promotion rate of the treatment group was significantly higher than the promotion rate of the control group; however, no significant difference was found during the first year of the program.

Alspaugh's study (1998) also examined the relationship between dropping out of high school and the transition from middle to high school. Alspaugh examined the dropout rates between districts of various grade-level structures and determined that students transitioning from middle schools as compared to students transitioning from K-8 schools were significantly more likely to drop out of high school. Alspaugh concluded that the frequency of multiple transitions for

students from middle schools resulted in the increased dropout rates for the middle school students as compared to students from the K-8 systems.

Neild, Stoner-Eby, and Furstenberg (2008) do not examine a ninth grade transition program and its effects on retention, but they do examine the link between dropout rates to the difficulties associated with the transition to the ninth grade year. Specifically, Neild et al. (2008) examined the effects of class failures and days absent on dropout predictability. Their study is important to understanding specifically why the ninth grade year is deemed by so many as such a difficult year. Neild et al. concluded that an increase of 20 percentage points in the percentage of courses failed would increase the odds of dropping out of school by more than one third. Thus, for every one out of five classes that a student failed, the likelihood of dropout status increased dramatically. The researchers also concluded that each additional week of school attended decreased the odds of dropout by seven percent.

Since many other factors could influence a student to drop out of school, Neild et al. (2008) used a logistic regression to control for differences in the students such as SES, race, gender, previous grades, previous test scores, and previous attendance. Neild et al. studied the Philadelphia public schools using survey and student record data from the Philadelphia Education Longitudinal Study (PELS) that documented the high school careers of 1,457 students. The sample included a random selection of 45 schools from the 93 available. Students

and parents were randomly selected to participate in 30 minute telephone interviews during the summer after the eighth grade year, and again during the fall of the next four years. The work of Neil et al. (2008) is important in that it links failure and truancy during the ninth grade year to drop out rate while at the same time controlling for many other factors. Thus, the researchers conclude that failure in the first year of high school is not simply due to a previous set of circumstances, but based more on the difficulties of the transition itself. The authors also conclude that programs should be developed to help students negotiate the difficulties associated with the transition.

Behavior.

The student outcome of behavior is also addressed in the literature of ninth grade transition programs (Clark, 2007; Weiss & Bearman, 2007). Clark (2007) measured behavior by the number of disciplinary incidents resulting in a suspension and found that students who had participated in the transition program had a significantly lower number of suspensions that did the control group for the first cohort of students. However, for the second cohort of students in the subsequent year, there were no significant differences between the treatment and control groups.

Weiss & Bearman (2007) studied the effect of transitioning to high school on several outcomes including specific behavioral outcomes such as fighting,

truancy, alcohol, drug, or tobacco use; and having a weapon at school. Weiss & Bearman (2007) were interested in whether or not the transition difficulties were related to the change in the physical building or if it was other changes. The researchers determined that the change in the physical building had almost no impact on either academic or nonacademic outcomes. This directly opposes the research of Alspaugh (1998) in that he concluded that students transitioning between middle schools had more difficult transitions as compared to students from other forms of schools. Weiss and Bearman (2007) did find some small difference in nonacademic outcomes between students who attended traditional middle schools as compared to students who attended another form of middle school. One of these was that a significantly greater percentage of students who changed schools between the eighth and ninth grades brought a weapon to school as compared to those students who did not change schools. The researchers also concluded that alcohol, tobacco, or drug use significantly increased between the transition of eighth and ninth grade for both students transitioning from middle schools as compared to students from other schools. While Weiss and Bearman contend that there are only few differences between the outcomes of students transitioning from middle schools as compared to other forms of schools, they do encourage the use of freshmen transition programs noting that transition should be seen as an opportunity to help those who have previously struggled.

Attendance.

Attendance is another student outcome in the literature reviewed (Capstick, 2007; Clark, 2007; Domecq, 2004). In Clark's (2007) study of two separate cohorts, students who participated in a freshmen transition program had a significantly lower number of absences that did students who did not participate in the program. Clark defined attendance by the total number of absences during the time of the study. For the first cohort the treatment mean was 4.8 days absent as compared to 10.3 from the comparison group; and for the second cohort, the treatment mean was .80 days absent as compared to the control group of 2.5. Attendance data was collected during the first semester of the ninth grade year which is a period of 93 school days.

Domecq (2004) also examined the effect of transition programs on attendance. In the three cohorts of study, only one of the cohorts had a significantly different mean attendance rate for the treatment group, students who participated in the program, as compared to the control group, students who did not participate in the program.. In Domecq's first cohort, the treatment group had a mean number of days absent of 8.87 as compared to the control group who had a mean number of days absent of 16.09. Domecq indicated that in order for transition programs to be more successful, that more time during the summer as well as the actual school year is necessary.

Capstick (2007) also analyzed attendance as an outcome indicator of a transition program and found no significant differences between the students who participated in the program and those who did not participate in the program. In fact, the students who did not participate in the program actually missed fewer class periods than did the students who participated in the program. Capstick measured the number of class periods missed for both excused and unexcused absences over the 27-week school year. The treatment group missed a mean of 30.45 days absent while the control group missed a mean of 22.06 days absent. Thus the transition program in Capstick's study clearly had no impact on attendance. Capstick suggested that the semester-long freshmen transition program that incorporated a daily intervention period with student and teacher mentors did not compensate for the lack of team support that students were missing with the move from the middle school to the high school. Thus, Capstick suggested that a more team-oriented program might have more of an impact on student attendance.

Student Outcomes by Student Characteristics

Some of the studies on ninth grade transition include the disaggregation of findings by student characteristics (Akos & Galassi, 2004a; Estell et al., 2007; Frasier, 2007; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). This is important in that this provides

educational leaders some insight as to whether particular demographic groups might benefit more from the implementation of a ninth grade transition program.

Frasier (2007) noted that while the transition to high school is difficult for many students, it is even more difficult for students with disabilities. According to the 2005 National Center for Educational Statistics, approximately 27% of all 15-16 year old students receiving special education services drop out of school every year (as cited in Frasier, 2007). Furthermore, the 2002 President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education claimed that the national dropout rate for students receiving special education services from ages 15 to 22 exceeds that of non-disabled students by more than 50% (as cited by Frasier, 2007).

Akos and Galassi (2004a) studied the outcome measure of school connectedness disaggregated by gender and race for students who had recently transitioned to high school. The results indicated that boys felt significantly more connected to school than did girls. There were no significant findings for race as a variable for feelings of connectedness. The researchers sampled 320 ninth grade students, approximately 71% of the ninth grade class, and used student questionnaires to help determine the degree to which ninth grade students felt connected to the school after the transition. Participation was based on students who chose to participate during homeroom. Separate univariate ANOVAs were run in order to examine the impact of gender and race on student feelings of connectedness to the school.

Estell, et al. (2007) examined the substance abuse associated with the difficulties of the transition from middle to high school in rural minority youth. The researchers noted that the pattern of middle school behavior and grades was related to the ability of the student to successfully transition to high school. Students who had poor patterns of behavior and grades in middle school were more likely to experiment with drugs in high school and have a more difficult time with the transition to high school. The study consisted of 390 African American students from grades six through nine. During the spring of each year, homeroom teachers completed questionnaires for each of their students in order to indicate the student's interpersonal competence scale. Students completed a substance abuse questionnaire, and grades were collected from school records. The researchers developed profiles for the students based on the data and then compared the profiles to ninth grade data of grades and self-reported drug abuse. Using ANOVAs, the researchers determined that negative patterns of behavior in middle school resulted in lower grades and more frequent drug abuse in the ninth grade. The researchers indicated that interventions such as transition programs would not be successful unless they began early in the middle school years by identifying at-risk students.

Holcomb-McCoy (2007) examined the effect of transition to high school based on student outcomes on African American students. In her literature review, Holcomb-McCoy noted that minority students are at greater risk for

dealing with the difficulties associated with the transition. Holcomb-McCoy noted that one of the difficulties associated with African American students was the negative stereotyping that is based on race. Holcomb-McCoy noted many stereotypes for African Americans and especially African American males such as being athletically inclined rather than academically talented. Holcomb-McCoy also noted that many of today's schools are lacking in cultural sensitivity and awareness. Holcomb-McCoy noted a history of distrust between African American parents and schools. She also noted that African American parents indicated that they felt alienated by the school in that the schools did not embrace any of the African American cultures, customs, or practices. Holcomb-McCoy referenced many reasons why African American students experience difficulties when transitioning to high school. She indicated that transition programs designed specifically for students and parents are needed in order to assist African American students with the difficult transition to high school.

Important Components of Transition Programs

While the literature is lacking on specific components that are more necessary than other components in developing a successful freshmen transition program, studies do suggest an overlap of strategies that have been utilized. It is important to review the strategies and components most frequently referenced in the literature; however, for practitioners developing programs, it should be noted

that there are few studies that credit specific components as the cause of a successful program. Thus, determining which components of a freshmen transition program is an area for future research that is needed.

While it is difficult to understand which components of a freshmen transition program are most successful, it is important to review the most frequently utilized strategies in successful programs. In general, the curriculum development of freshmen transition programs should address the academic, social, and procedural needs of the transitioning students (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Smith, et al., 2008). Much of the literature reviewed mentions specific strategies to help students in dealing with these specific areas (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Cooper & Liou; 2007, Frasier, 2007; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Lundblad & Tappan, 2008; Smith et al., 2008).

Since procedural concerns were a source of anxiety prior to the entry to high school, a great deal of the literature suggests addressing the procedural needs of the students prior to or at the beginning of the school year (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Frazier, 2007; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Lundblad & Tappan, 2008; Smith, et al., 2008) For example, Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) list several strategies that would address procedural needs prior to the beginning of the year. In their literature review, Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) note strategies such as hosting several orientation

programs during the students' eighth grade year as well as the summer prior to the ninth grade year in order to give the students many opportunities to visit and become comfortable with the procedures of the school. These days or evenings would be opportunities for students to become familiar with class schedules, lockers, lunch procedures, and specific rules of the school.

The use of a freshmen only day was also mentioned as a strategy to help assist students with procedures (Cauley and Jovanovich, 2006; Clark, 2007). In Clark's study of a freshmen transition program, the school board granted permission to allow only the freshmen to begin on the first day of school. Only sophomores, juniors, and seniors attended on day two, and all students came on day three. The strategy of separating the freshmen for a period of time is a consistent strategy used in addressing procedural concerns in that students may be less anxious without upperclassmen in the building.

Frasier (2007), in his study of a particular transition program in suburban Los Angles, also mentions the importance of addressing the procedural needs prior to the start of the school year. Frasier (2007) lists 17 activities that take place in the spring prior to the start of the ninth grade year. Specific strategies to assist student with disabilities in the transition are mentioned. One example of such a strategy to help special education students with procedural needs was to organize joint Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meetings with both the middle school and high school team members. These meetings would take place

at the high school. Frasier (2007) also emphasized a special summer transition program for all students to help with the many procedural concerns of transitioning students. It is difficult to determine if implementing procedural strategies into a transition program is an integral part of helping students in their overall success during their freshmen year; however, the components and strategies reviewed most certainly should lessen the procedural concerns of parents and students as they prepare to begin their first year in high school.

As with procedural needs, social needs were also of great concern prior to the transition (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Cooper & Liou, 2007; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Lundbland & Tappan, 2008; Smith, et al., 2008). As previously mentioned, it would be difficult to determine which components of a freshmen transition program would help students with their social needs; however, it is still important for the researcher or practitioner to understand that a freshmen transition program should be composed of components that do address the social needs as it is clearly a major concern of students entering their first year of high school (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). One research-based strategy from the literature that was designed to help foster the social needs of students during transition is the use of peer or buddy groups for the freshmen (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Letrello & Miles, 2003). These peer helpers assist with the transition process and provide an immediate human connection to help students with their transitioning. Cauley and Jovanovich

(2006) suggested developing pen pal programs, hosting small discussion groups on various topics, and even hosting a spring social for the rising ninth graders in order to help with the social transition to high school.

One of the concerns with determining which components of a transition program are successful in helping students deal with their social needs is that social success in school is difficult to measure. As with procedural concerns, social concerns are difficult to quantify, but the concerns of fitting in and belonging to a school are critical concerns of students entering high school (Akos & Galassi, 2004b). One possible method of measuring social success would be to use a test of school engagement such as a student survey for the participants. Capstick (2007) used such a survey in his study of a freshmen transition program; however, his study found no significant differences in the levels of school engagement between the students involved in the transition program and those who were not. It is important to note that Capstick's study was a quasi-experimental design that used one school as the treatment group and another school with similar demographics as the comparison group. Thus no randomization as well as the separate schools allowed for several threats to the internal validity. However, an instrument for measuring school engagement such as the one utilized in Capstick's study could be useful in determining if a program helped in addressing a student's social needs.

While procedural and social needs dominate the concerns of ninth grade students prior to entering high school, academic concerns are more prevalent once the students settle into their freshmen year (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Cooper & Liou, 2007; Letrello & Miles, 2003; Lundbland & Tappan, 2008; Smith, et al., 2008). The literature suggests having counselors address academic requirements and offerings early in the spring and continuing throughout the summer and school year in order to clearly communicate the importance of academic success during the ninth grade year (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Clark, 2007; Domecq, 2004; Cooper & Liou, 2007; Lundbland & Tappan, 2008). After school tutoring programs as well as specific programs to address specific skills such as note taking are mentioned in the literature as strategies to help with the academic needs of students during the transition (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Lundblad & Tappan, 2008). Students who are weak academically should be encouraged to participate in summer remediation programs to help develop weak skills (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006 & Frasier, 2007).

In Clark's (2007) study of a freshmen transition program, he notes seven different interventions that would address the academic as well as other needs of students. Although it might be difficult to determine if one component or intervention was more useful than the other, it is important to note that in the two cohorts of students involved in the study, the students who participated in the full

transition program had a significantly higher grade point average when compared to those students who did not participate in the complete program. It is important to note that each of the seven interventions outlined in Clark's study took place between the spring of the student's eighth grade year and the first day of the student's ninth grade year. The activities in the spring, summer, and days leading up to the school year involved many meetings that outlined all phases of student expectations in the high school; however there was no direct focus on remediation or tutoring. One might conclude based on the academic success of those students who participated in the full program that components that help students with social and procedural needs of a school might also assist students academically by lessening their anxiety and helping them focus on instructional matters.

Domecq (2004) argues in his study of three different cohorts that more effort should be made during the actual school year to work with students in order for freshmen transition programs to be successful. Domecq's study involved a yearlong mentor program in which students met with teacher advisors once or twice each month during the school year. These meeting were designed to review grades and discuss progress toward goals that were set during the summer camp in which students participated. Also at least one assistant principal from the school made a personal contact with each participant in the program to discuss the student's progress toward academic success as well as any other concerns. There was only limited success in Domecq's quasi-experimental study in that only two

of the 24 t-tests between those students who participated in the transition program and those who did not participate in the transition program yielded significant results in regards to academic achievement as measured by grade point average. However, the specific components such as the advisor meetings and goal reviews throughout the year are certainly deserving of further research to determine if they are components that would assist students in becoming academically successful during their transition to high school.

Discussion

Summary of Findings

In conclusion, the findings indicate that the ninth grade transition programs have been studied in various ways. Researchers have reviewed components needed for successful transition programs, they have studied the outcomes associated with the transition programs, and they have examined student outcomes of transition based on individual characteristics. One of the clear and distinct findings from the literature in regards to key components of a transition program is that development of a program should address the academic, social, and procedural needs of students (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Smith et al., 2008). Another consistent finding in the literature regarding student outcomes is that the typical outcomes that have been associated with transition to ninth grade are achievement as measured by G.P.A., attendance,

behavior, and retention. Findings indicate that ninth grade transition programs have had positive effects on student outcomes; however, the studies are by no means conclusive.

Commentary

The literature on ninth grade transitions is well balanced in that there is a substantial body of literature relating to the important components needed for successful programs as well as literature examining the relation of student outcomes on transitions to ninth grade. The program evaluation literature designed to demonstrate whether a transition program can impact specific outcomes is limited but growing quickly. The studies evaluating transition programs on the basis of student outcomes were almost all written within the last five years.

In the current era of high stakes testing, it was interesting that no researchers attempted to define achievement by state standardized tests such as the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) tests. Also, the studies on the outcomes of achievement and retention were more extensive than the studies of attendance and behavior. Finally, the literature is very limited in regards to studies that examine which demographic groups might benefit the most from a ninth grade transition program.

Based on the interest in freshmen transition as indicated in the literature, a northern Virginia school district launched a pilot study to determine the effectiveness of a transition program. The program was piloted in one of the district's five high schools. The transition program utilized many of the components mentioned in the literature.

The study will examine the effectiveness of the program by examining the outcome indicators of achievement, attendance, behavior, and retention. The proposed study will measure achievement not only by grades as mentioned in the literature, but by SOL scores as well. As SOL scores are of great importance in school accreditation, school leaders are highly interested in the effect that such a program might have on SOL scores. This study will also examine the differential effects of the freshmen program on student outcomes by student characteristics. This is an important piece of the study for the school district in that budget constraints may have to limit the program to only groups of students where the most benefit is evident. The results of this study will be shared with the piloting district in that they may better plan for future expansion of the program.

Chapter 3: Research Methods

Overview

In that the school district in which the study was being conducted was concerned with the difficulty that freshmen have transitioning to high school, the district developed a pilot program that would examine the impact that a freshmen transition program might have on student outcomes. This study used the data from the district's program to determine the effects that such a program can have on student outcomes. Specifically, this study examined the effect of the program on student achievement, attendance, retention, and behavior. The results of this study will be shared with the school district and used in determining if the program should be expanded and/or refined.

Research Questions

In order to determine the effectiveness that a freshmen transition program can have on student outcomes, the following two research questions were developed:

1) Are students who participate in a freshmen transition program more successful in high school than students who do not participate in a transition program? 2) Are there differential effects of the freshmen transition program on student outcomes by student characteristics? Research question one was answered by

examining the differences between the participant and control groups in the student outcome areas of achievement, attendance, retention, and behavior. Research question two was developed in order to determine if there were differential effects of the freshmen program on student outcomes by the student characteristics of race, gender, disability status, economic status, status of English proficiency, and previous middle school attended.

Research Design

This study used an experimental design. As explained in McMillan and Schumacher (2006), experimental design is defined by its use of random assignment to groups. McMillan and Schumacher (2006) also explain that it is the random assigning to groups that helps the researcher conclude that results from the experiment are not due to differences in the groups that were already present prior to the treatment. Thus, many researchers consider the results from experimental designs to be more valid than other designs (Trochim, 2006).

The strength of the experimental design comes from the strong internal validity inherent in the design. When making inferences about a program evaluation as in this study, one must be able to conclude that it is the treatment that made the differences between the participant and control groups rather than some extraneous event (Key, 1997). When there are factors other than the specific treatment that could contribute to the differences between the two

experimental groups, then the validity of the experiment is said to be weak. Strong experimental designs check for strong internal validity, and this begins with random sampling. By starting with a random sample, there was a greater opportunity that the treatment and control groups were equivalent prior to the treatment. This equivalence between groups helped increase the validity of the experiment in that since both groups were the same prior to the treatment, then it is more probable that the treatment, as opposed to some other event was responsible for the change between the two groups.

In using an experimental design it is important to consider all threats to internal validity (Key, 1997; McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The threat of selection occurs when control and treatment groups are different at selection. By using random groups, the experiment controlled for the threat of selection in that the groups were not different at selection. Maturation is another threat to the internal validity of an experimental design and is defined as the process of maturing that takes place which is not a result of the treatment (Key, 1997). It was difficult to control for this threat in that students mature at different rates during their ninth grade year, creating skewed results. Mortality was also be a threat to validity. Mortality is defined as the loss of subjects from comparison groups that could affect the results. Students who were selected to both the control and treatment groups that moved, transferred, or dropped out of school

were not represented in the data set. In that the data set was small, the mortality rate for the data set could certainly skew any results.

Setting

The setting for the study was a suburban school district in northern Virginia. The school district is located in a county that covers 2000 square miles and is on the I-95 corridor approximately 50 miles south of Washington D.C. The population of the county is approximately 120,000 people (U. S. Census Bureau, 2006). Although there is some industry in the county, it is widely considered a bedroom community as many of the citizens commute to Washington D.C.

The school district has been met with tremendous growth over the last ten years. In that time, the division has grown from approximately 15,000 students to over 25,000 students. The school district employs approximately 3,500 employees. In the past ten years the district has built two high schools, three middle schools, four elementary schools, and one maintenance and bus facility. The district has also remodeled several buildings during this time. The district has a total of 31 schools divided into five high schools, seven middle schools, seventeen elementary schools, and two alternative schools.

The pilot school for the study is one of five schools in the district. It is a school of approximately 1900 students from grades nine through twelve. The school opened in September of 1998 and has grown rapidly requiring an eight

room addition in 2005. The demographic make-up of the school is 60% White, 28% Black, 8% Hispanic, and 4% other. Thirteen percent of the students receive special education services, 23% of the students are economically disadvantaged as defined by receiving free or reduced lunch, and 3% of the students are labeled as Limited English Proficient. Approximately 45% of the students from the pilot school attend a four-year college while approximately 35% of the students attend a two-year college. Six percent join the military and 8% go directly into employment. A total of 18 advanced placement courses are offered, and the school strongly promotes participation in the advanced placement courses. Average SAT scores are 495 for reading, 483 for math, and 478 for writing.

Sample

Choosing the sample

Using the district's data warehousing software, a report was run to show the number of seventh grade students who failed either their math or reading SOL. The two grade 7 tests were chosen as the criteria for the sample in that the district felt that failing SOL tests might yield a population of students who were academically at risk and would thus benefit from additional support that a transition program would provide. Also, the grade 7 SOLs were used to select the students rather than the grade 8 SOLS because the notification process began in the spring of 2008, prior to the results of the grade 8 SOLS.

The initial report generated 152 students. After reviewing the list, it was determined that three of the students should not have been on the list based on reporting errors; and thus, the final list was a total of 149 students. Each student was assigned a number from 1 to 149. Then, using Research Randomizer (Urbaniak & Plous, 2009), 60 random numbers were generated and the associated students were selected to be the participants (see Appendix A). The 60 students were selected based on the budget from the district as well as consideration of the necessity of a control group. The initial group of 60 students was invited by letter (see Appendix I). The middle school counselors handed the students the letter during the spring of their eighth grade year and asked the students to return the letter after speaking to their parents. After receiving 30 confirmations, a second random list was generated (see Appendix B) in order to fill vacancies. For this list, letters were mailed home, and phone calls were made. A third random list (Appendix C) was generated to fill the remaining 10 slots. Letters were mailed home and follow-up phone calls were made. After confirming with the 60 students through phone calls and letters, a letter of confirmation was sent to the 60 participants (see Appendix J).

Although 60 students confirmed, there were 14 students who did not show for the transition summer camp. These 14 students were removed from the experiment and were not included in either the control or participant list. The students who failed to show for the summer camp were removed from the overall

sample in that it was concluded that their failure to attend the program might indicate a predisposition regarding lack of effort or parental support as compared to the other students in the sample. Thus, the final count for students participating in the transition program was 46. The control group was formed from the remaining students; however 15 students were also deleted from the control group because they were not enrolled in the high school at the beginning of their ninth grade year. Follow up on these students revealed that they had either moved or transferred to another school. Thus, the final participant group included 46 students and the control group included 74 students making the total number of subjects involved in the study 120.

About the Sample

Demographic data for the two groups of students were analyzed via a frequency report in SPSS (see Table 1). It is important to note that the random assignment of groups resulted in a fairly even distribution of the students based on demographic groups. It is also important to note that although the control group has 26 more students in number, the percentages are very close for most of the characteristics. The only unique differences in control and participant groups are found in the student's previous middle school. The percentage of students in the control group from Middle School T (58%) is much greater than the percentage of students in the participant group from Middle School T (30.2%). In contrast,

Middle School B had a greater percentage of students in the participant group (53.5%) than the control group (30.4%) This uniqueness in the control and participant groups between the two schools could certainly lessen the validity for any significant findings that were based on the independent variables of the students previous middle school attended. Possible explanations for these differences could be related to the differences in notifying potential candidates about the program between the counselors at the two schools.

Table 1

Demographic Data for Treatment and Control Groups

Category	Student Characteristic	Control Frequency	Participant Frequency	Control Percent	Participant Percent
Gender	Female	36	19	52.2%	44.2%
	Male	33	24	47.8%	55.8%
	Total	69	43	100.0%	100.0%
Ethnicity	Asian	2	4	3.0%	9.3%
	Black	25	18	36.2%	41.9%
	Hispanic	7	1	10.1%	2.3%
	WhiteHispn)	35	20	50.7%	46.5%
	Total	69	43	100.0%	100.0%
ECD	ECD	24	12	34.8%	27.9%
	Non-ECD	45	31	65.2%	72.1%
	Total	69	43	100.0%	100.0%
SWD	Non-SWD	54	35	78.3%	81.4%
	SWD	15	8	21.7%	18.6%
	Total	69	43	100.0%	100.0%
LEP	LEP	4	5	5.8%	11.6%
	Non-LEP	65	38	94.2%	88.4%
	Total	69	43	100.0%	100.0%
Previous	B Middle	21	23	30.4%	53.5%
Middle	S Middle	8	7	11.6%	16.3%
School	T Middle	40	13	58.0%	30.2%
	Total	69	43	100.0%	100.0%

Although all 112 students involved in the experiment failed either the Grade 7 math or English SOL, it is interesting that the mean scores for both the control and participant groups are very similar (see Table 2). For the English SOL, the control mean was 415 and the participant mean was 420. For the math SOL, the control mean was 336 and the participant mean was 346. There was a

much higher percentage of students who failed the math SOL than the English SOL (see Table 3). The percentage of students passing the Grade 7 English SOL for the control group was 66%, while the percentage of participant students passing the Grade 7 English SOL was at 63%. In math, the scores were much lower; however, still equivalent. The pass rates for both the control and participant groups were only 7%. Clearly the entire sample had a weakness in math; however, it is important to note that both groups were similar in their performance for the end of course SOL tests for Grade 7 English and Grade 7 Math.

Table 2

Means for Scaled Grade 7 Math and English SOLs

	Control Mean	Participant Mean
Grade 7 English Scaled SOL	415	420
Grade 7 Math Scaled SOL	336	346

Table 3

Pass Rates for Grade 7 English and Math Scores

	Control Percent Pass	Participant Percent Pass
Grade 7 English	66%	63%
Grade 7 Math	7%	7%

Treatment

The treatment for this study was a four-day summer camp during the summer prior to the ninth grade year followed by several interventions during the school year. While the main component of the transition program was the camp, the district also developed follow-up activities throughout the year intended to help with the transition. The four day summer camp was from the hours of 8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. During the camp, students rotated through programs specifically designed to assist students with the academic, social, and procedural concerns of transitioning to high school (see Appendices D,E,F, & G).

There were many activities designed to help the students become attached to the school. Ideally, the students would have some ownership in the school by the end of the camp or at least by the end of their freshmen year. Activities such as painting ceiling tiles, planting flowers, and getting a free shopping spree in the

school store were designed with the intent of increasing student ownership in the school. Students worked in groups to paint their own ceiling tiles with either their names or initials. These tiles were placed in ninth grade rooms so that the students would see them when they came back to the school. The students also participated in a school beautification project in order to have some ownership in the school. In the fall of the school year, the students planted bulbs in the front of the school. These bulbs came up in the spring. One of the most exciting activities designed to help students become more attached to the school was the shopping spree in the school store. Through district money, students were provided $15.00 gift cards to the school store. The store had special pricing on t-shirts, lanyards, sweatshirts and other school apparel. On the last day of the camp, all students were outfitted with their school apparel and were already demonstrating a sense of school connectedness.

Social concerns of the students were a clear focus of the program. The coordinators of the program felt that if students felt comfortable socially in the school, they would be able to concentrate more on academics. Activities such as lunch with their senior buddies, Panther Pals, as well as an online component called the Buddy Blog helped students foster their social needs. Students were introduced to the Buddy Blog in the summer prior to coming to the camp. Students were able to communicate with their senior buddy online prior to the camp. It was concluded that the Buddy Blog should have started much earlier

into the student's eighth grade year in order to reinforce the communication prior to the summer. One of the key elements in fostering social concerns of the students was to keep the day fun. One way this was accomplished was through short sporting competitions each day such as kickball and wiffleball that would help promote some energy and get the students moving. During the activities, principals, teachers, and guidance counselors participated in order to help develop relationships with students prior to the start of the school year.

Procedural needs were met with tours from the senior buddies as well as guest speakers from the school who met with the students each morning. One of the teachers who worked solely with at risk ninth graders discussed study skills. Also, the athletic director met with the students and discussed the many opportunities regarding athletics and clubs. Students were afforded transportation to and from the camp in that the pilot high school was also hosting summer school for the rest of the district, so students became acclimated to the bus routine.

The academic needs of the students were the essential components of the program. During the camp, the instructors focused on one or two key elements that would be used during the ninth grade year and emphasized these elements. The instructors kept the instruction active so that students would be engaged. For example, in Earth Science, students learned how to use the GPS; and in Algebra, the students determined the appropriate number of bulbs that the class would need to purchase to plant in a specific area. These skills were emphasized each day

during the academic portion of the camp. Some of the rules for the teachers were to have no worksheets, keep learning active, and to teach one or two skills that would be applicable for the entire year.

On the last day of the camp, the students participated in a scavenger hunt that connected the academic, social, and procedural needs of the students together into one culminating activity. During the competitions such as wiffleball and kickball, students received points for their place in the tournament. On the day of the culminating activity, students were told that the point value of the last activity was worth enough so that any team had a chance at the grand prize (a school t-shirt for each member of the team). The questions on the scavenger hunt involved the curriculum from the class instruction to reinforce the academic focus of the camp. The structure of the scavenger hunt was developed so that students went to all parts of the school and campus to become more oriented to the building and grounds which would help with the procedural knowledge of the students. For the social concerns, the senior buddies assisted with the activity and joined the freshmen for ice cream when it was finished.

As the procedural and social concerns were of primary focus in the summer camp, the academic concerns became much more prevalent during the school year interventions (see Appendix H). Participants were assigned a teacher advisor who was one of their normal classroom teachers. The teacher advisor met with the students formally half-way through each grading period for a "midway

monitor" session. The advisor would treat the students to M&M candies, and discuss the grades of the student. For any student who was failing or missing assignments, the teacher advisor would communicate this to the coordinators of the program. These students would be assigned to a late library day in an effort to make up work and improve grades. The coordinators of the program would stay after school in the library while teachers would drop off assignments or meet with students for tutoring. Also, at the end of the first semester, a report was run by the district to analyze student achievement in the program. For students who were failing any classes for the semester, the coordinators of the program met with them and discussed the changes that would be needed in order to improve grades. Also, students who had all C's and above for the semester received a ticket for a free ice cream which they could redeem at lunch. Social activities still continued with notes of encouragement from the senior buddies; however, the academic focus was clearly more emphasized in the school year as compared to the summer camp.

Data Collection

The data being used are data otherwise compiled by the district. Reports were run using the district data warehousing software and then converted to Excel. The Excel documents were then imported to SPSS in order to analyze the

data. Data was extracted in July of 2009 following the completing of the participants entire first year of high school.

Data Analysis

Descriptive Analysis

The first analysis was descriptive statistics so that the sample could be clearly portrayed. The descriptive analysis also served to address any concerns of equivalence about the two groups.

Bivariate Analysis

There were four categories of student outcomes. These categories (dependent variables) were achievement, behavior, attendance, and retention. Data from the dependent variables was defined by the following criteria: The variable for behavior was defined by the total number of disciplinary incidents recorded during the ninth grade year. The variable for attendance was defined by the total number of absences for the school year. The achievement variable was divided into two sub-variables. Achievement / Core was based on the means of the numerical grades from the core classes of Math, Earth Science, English, and World Geography. Achievement / SOL was the other sub-variable that was defined by the mean SOL scores of Earth Science, Algebra I, and World Geography (see Table 4). Thus, for student outcomes, there were a total of nine

dependent variables with seven of these coming from different measures of student achievement. Retention was defined by whether or not a student passed five or more classes for the school year. Students who passed five or more classes were considered promoted and were coded as "1", while students who passed fewer than five classes were retained and coded as "0".

Table 4

Defining the Dependent Variables

Dependent Variable	Description
Achievement SOL	There were three dependent variables from the three SOL tests that the students took at the end of the ninth grade year. These were Algebra, Earth Science, and World Geography.
Achievement Core	There were four dependent variables from the four core classes of English 9, World Geography, Earth Science, and Algebra I.
Attendance	This variable was created by the total number of days absent for each student.
Behavior	This variable was created by the total number of disciplinary incidents recorded for each student.
Retention	The retention variable was be a categorical variable that represented whether or not a student passed the five classes needed to be promoted to the next grade..

The initial tests of difference between the control group and participant group for the dependent variables were independent samples t-tests. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), an independent samples t-test is used to test the difference between a treatment group and a control group mean. Since the initial test of difference was a test of means between the participant and control groups on 9 out of 10 of the dependent variables, the independent samples t-test was an appropriate test. As there were nine dependent variables that were used to measure student outcomes by means, there were be a total of nine independent samples t-tests.

In order to determine if there were differences between the participant and control groups in regards to retention (the tenth dependent variable), the chi square test of difference was used. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006), the chi-square test is used to test difference between variables that are in nominal form. Since the retention variable was coded as a "0" for retained and a "1" for promoted, a test comparing means was not appropriate. The chi-square test revealed whether or not the number of retentions and promotions of the participant group was proportionately related to the number of retentions and promotions of the control group.

Multivariate Analysis

In order to determine if there were any differential effects of the program on student outcomes based on student characteristics, multivariate statistics were run. Multivariate statistics are tests that examine the relation of two or more variables on another variable (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). For the multivariate tests, one of the independent variables was the participant / control group while the other independent variables were one of the six categorical independent variables of sex, race, economic status, disability status, proficiency in English, and previous middle school. A two-way analysis of variance was run for each of the dependent variables against two independent variables at the same time. A two-way analysis of variance (two-way ANOVA) is a multivariate analysis that involves two independent variables and one dependent variable being analyzed at the same time (McMillan and Schumacher, 2006). Each of the six categorical independent variables along with the independent variables of the participant and control group were analyzed against each of the dependent variables in order to determine if there were any main effects between of the independent variables on any of the dependent variables. Also, the two-way ANOVA was used to determine if the interaction of two of the independent variables had a significant effect on any of the dependent variables. With six categorical independent variables and nine dependent variables, there was a total

of 54 separate two-way ANOVAS run. Post-Hoc tests were run for any main effects and interactions revealed. The Scheffe test was used for post hoc comparisons as it is generally considered to be the more conservative and thus more likely to show a true significance (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Another multivariate test was run in order to examine the longitudinal data between the control and treatment groups in relation to the achievement core variable. In other words, was there a difference in the grades for each grading period? A repeated measures one-way analysis of variance was used for this test. This test is used to determine if there are differences between the means of the two groups at different intervals (Trochim, 2006). The results of this test helped determine how time had an impact on student achievement in regards to grades.

To conclude, this study used a secondary data set. The design was experimental with a random assignment of participants. The analysis of data involved descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate analysis.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if there were any effects of a ninth-grade transition program on student outcomes. Specifically, this study addressed two questions:

1. Were students who participated in a freshmen transition program more successful in high school than students who did not participate in a transition program?

2. Were there any differential effects of a freshmen transition program on student outcomes by student characteristics?

In order to answer the first research question, nine independent samples t-tests were completed to compare the means between the two groups (i.e. those in the program and those not in the program) for each of the dependent variables. The t-tests were completed for the following dependent variables:

- SOL tests for Algebra I, Earth Science, and World Geography
- final grades for Algebra I, Earth Science, W. Geography, and English 9
- attendance
- behavior

For the retention variable, a chi-square test was used to compare the two groups because the retention variable was coded as a dichotomous (yes-no) variable.

In order to answer the second research question, a series of multivariate analyses was run in order to determine if there were any differential effects of the program on student outcomes by characteristics. The multivariate test that was used was a 2-Way ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) in which the treatment variable was combined with one of six other independent variables in order to be tested against the 10 dependent variables. Those independent variables were sex, ethnicity, economic status, disability status, limited English status, and previous middle school attended.

In order to test for longitudinal differences in relation to grades, repeated measures one-way ANOVAs were run. The quarterly grades for each of the core subjects (English, Algebra I, Earth Science, and World Geography) were compared to see if the program had any effect on grades over time. While the results of the repeated measures one-way ANOVA were not significant, there were some significant differential effects revealed through the two-way ANOVAS.

Findings

For the bivariate analyses, only two significant differences were discovered: SOL scores for Earth Science and World Geography. Furthermore, while these differences were not significant at the 95% confidence level, the mean scores (see Table 5) and p values (see Table 6) indicated that they were trending

toward significance. On average participants scored 15.17 points higher than the non-participants on the Earth Science SOL. This difference is trending toward significance (p=.058). Also, on average participants scored 17.4 points higher than the non-participants on the World Geography SOL. This finding is trending toward significance (p=.069).

Table 5

Average SOL Test Scores for Earth Science and World Geography

	Participant	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Earth Science	Control	69	425.39	41.611	5.009
	Participant	43	440.56	39.359	6.002
World Geography	Control	69	425.09	46.904	5.647
	Participant	43	442.49	51.857	7.908

Table 6

Independent Samples T-Test for Earth Science and World Geography

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Earth Science	Equal variances assumed	.000	.983	-1.915	110	.058	-15.167	7.920
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.940	93.014	.055	-15.167	7.818
World Geography	Equal variances assumed	.786	.377	-1.833	110	.069	-17.401	9.492
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.791	82.498	.077	-17.401	9.717

After completing the bivariate analyzes, the multivariate analysis was completed by running a series of 2-way ANOVAs. One of the significant findings was an interaction effect between the treatment and race on behavior as measured by number of disciplinary incidents (see Table 8). The two-way ANOVA showed a main effect for ethnicity and an interaction effect between ethnicity and the treatment. In other words, the program had a differential effect on behavior based on the student's ethnicity ($p<.05$). Given the group means (see Table 7) a comparison of means was run between black participants and non-participants in order to determine which race was demonstrating a significant

difference in behavior (see Table 9). The results indicated that black students who participated in the program had significantly fewer disciplinary incidents on average than did the black students who did not participate in the program. On average, black participants had 2.2 fewer disciplinary incidents than did black non-participants.

Table 7

Average Number of Disciplinary Incidents by Ethnicity

Participant	Ethnicity	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Control	Asian	.50	.707	2
	Black	3.64	4.142	25
	Hispanic	1.71	2.289	7
	White	2.74	4.381	35
	Total	2.90	4.081	69
Participant	Asian	1.25	1.500	4
	Black	1.44	2.148	18
	Hispanic	14.00	.	1
	White	2.20	3.254	20
	Total	2.07	3.232	43
Total	Asian	1.00	1.265	6
	Black	2.72	3.588	43
	Hispanic	3.25	4.833	8
	White	2.55	3.985	55
	Total	2.58	3.784	112

Table 8

Differential Effects of the Treatment and Ethnicity on Behavior

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	206.508[a]	7	29.501	2.219	.038
Intercept	365.647	1	365.647	27.501	.000
Participant	51.299	1	51.299	3.858	.052
Ethnicity	113.582	3	37.861	2.848	.041
Participant * Ethnicity	174.070	3	58.023	4.364	.006
Error	1382.769	104	13.296		
Total	2335.000	112			
Corrected Total	1589.277	111			

Table 9

Comparison of Means for Black Students

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
# Incidents * Participant	Between Groups	(Combined)	50.447	1	50.447	4.219	.046
	Within Groups		490.204	41	11.956		
	Total		540.651	42			

Participants in the program scored on average 15.17 points higher on the Earth Science SOL test than did non-participants (see Table 10). When looking for interactions between the program and disability status on Earth Science SOL test scores, a main effect for the participant groups was located (see Table 11). This adds some important clarity to the finding from the bivariate analysis where the differences between the two groups were trending toward significance. Now, holding the effects of disability status constant, a main effect for the participants on the Earth Science SOL test ($p<.05$) was discovered. Said differently, the inclusion of students with disabilities in the bivariate analyses may have muddied an important difference in test scores.

Table 10

Average Earth Science SOL by Disability Status

Participant	SWD/Non-SWD	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Control	Non-SWD	432.00	40.107	54
	SWD	401.60	39.313	15
	Total	425.39	41.611	69
Participant	Non-SWD	442.03	37.280	35
	SWD	434.13	49.861	8
	Total	440.56	39.359	43
Total	Non-SWD	435.94	39.116	89
	SWD	412.91	45.005	23
	Total	431.21	41.253	112

Table 11

Differential Effects of Treatment and Disability Status on the Earth Science SOL

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	17349.411[a]	3	5783.137	3.641	.015
Intercept	1.224E7	1	1.224E7	7708.167	.000
Participant	7584.319	1	7584.319	4.775	.031
SWDNonSWD	6145.018	1	6145.018	3.869	.052
Participant * SWDNonSWD	2119.687	1	2119.687	1.334	.251
Error	171547.446	108	1588.402		
Total	2.101E7	112			
Corrected Total	188896.857	111			

In comparing averages for the Earth Science SOL test by previous middle school, the participants scored 15.17 points higher than did the non-participants (see Table 12). When controlling for previous middle school, a main effect was reported for participants as compared to non-participants for the Earth Science SOL test (see Table 13). In other words, holding the effects of previous middle school constant, there was a main effect for the participants on the Earth Science SOL test ($p<.05$).

Table 12

Average Earth Science SOL Score by Previous Middle School

Participant	Middle School	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Control	B Middle School	434.29	47.907	21
	S Middle School	409.63	57.896	8
	T Middle School	423.88	33.829	40
	Total	425.39	41.611	69
Participant	B Middle School	440.48	44.503	23
	S Middle School	444.43	40.738	7
	T Middle School	438.62	30.794	13
	Total	440.56	39.359	43
Total	B Middle School	437.52	45.723	44
	S Middle School	425.87	52.060	15
	T Middle School	427.49	33.439	53
	Total	431.21	41.253	112

Table 13

Differential Effects of the Treatment and Previous Middle School on Earth Science SOL

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	9989.791[a]	5	1997.958	1.184	.322
Intercept	1.457E7	1	1.457E7	8632.387	.000
Participant	6740.528	1	6740.528	3.994	.048
MiddleSchool	1484.772	2	742.386	.440	.645
Participant * MiddleSchool	2290.232	2	1145.116	.678	.510
Error	178907.066	106	1687.803		
Total	2.101E7	112			
Corrected Total	188896.857	111			

A similar finding was discovered in reviewing the World Geography SOL test. The participants on average scored 17.4 points higher on the World Geography SOL test than did the non-participants (see Table 14). There was a main effect for participants as compared to non-participants reported on the World Geography SOL test when controlling for previous middle school (see Table 15). Thus, as with the Earth Science SOL, when holding the effect of previous middle school constant, there was a main effect for the participants on the Geography SOL test ($p<.05$).

Table 14

Average World Geography SOL Test Score by Previous Middle School

Participant	Middle School	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Control	B Middle School	432.90	45.476	21
	S Middle School	410.13	56.907	8
	T Middle School	423.97	45.977	40
	Total	425.09	46.904	69
Participant	B Middle School	437.74	48.626	23
	S Middle School	453.14	65.763	7
	T Middle School	445.15	52.891	13
	Total	442.49	51.857	43
Total	B Middle School	435.43	46.665	44
	S Middle School	430.20	62.978	15
	T Middle School	429.17	48.121	53
	Total	431.77	49.371	112

Table 15

Differential Effects of the Treatment and Previous Middle School on World Geography SOL Test Scores

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	12551.321[a]	5	2510.264	1.031	.403
Intercept	1.470E7	1	1.470E7	6040.106	.000
Participant	10339.599	1	10339.599	4.248	.042
MiddleSchool	152.317	2	76.159	.031	.969
Participant * MiddleSchool	4322.340	2	2161.170	.888	.415
Error	258010.644	106	2434.063		
Total	2.115E7	112			
Corrected Total	270561.964	111			

For the 83 participants and non-participants who took the Algebra I SOL test, males in the control group scored higher on average than males in the participant group; however, females from the participant group scored higher than the females from the control group (see Table 16). There was an interaction effect of the treatment and the sex of the participants on the Algebra I SOL test scores (see Table 17). In order to determine which group was causing the interaction effect, a comparison of means of only selected cases was run for both

males and females, and it was only the males in the control group that did significantly better (see Table 18). Thus, while it appeared that there might have been an interaction effect for females in the participant group, the mean comparison revealed that the males in the program actually did significantly worse than did the males who did not participate in the program. In other words, the males in the control group scored significantly higher on the Algebra I SOL test than did the males in the participant group ($p<.05$).

Table 16

Average Algebra I SOL Test Score by Sex

Participant	Sex	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Control	Male	454.18	35.251	22
	Female	441.64	33.472	28
	Total	447.16	34.488	50
Participant	Male	429.79	41.642	19
	Female	455.79	37.505	14
	Total	440.82	41.438	33
Total	Male	442.88	39.804	41
	Female	446.36	35.062	42
	Total	444.64	37.291	83

Table 17

Differential Effects of Treatment on Algebra I SOL Test Scores by Sex

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	8183.940[a]	3	2727.980	2.036	.116
Intercept	1.546E7	1	1.546E7	11540.908	.000
Participant	511.877	1	511.877	.382	.538
Sex	882.421	1	882.421	.659	.419
Participant * Sex	7235.634	1	7235.634	5.400	.023
Error	105845.216	79	1339.813		
Total	1.652E7	83			
Corrected Total	114029.157	82			

Table 18

Comparison of Algebra I SOL Test Scores by Males

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Algebra I * Participant	Between Groups	(Combined)	6065.960	1	6065.960	4.128	.049
	Within Groups		57308.431	39	1469.447		
	Total		63374.390	40			

Summary

There were limited significant findings for the freshmen transition program. In fact, independent t-tests of the 9 dependent variables including SOL tests, final grades, attendance, and behavior revealed no truly significant differences between the control and participant groups (see Table 19). Only the World Geography and Earth Science results were reported in this study as the mean differences between participant test scores were trending toward significance.

Table 19

Summary of Bivariate Analysis

Dependent Variable	Description	Significant Differences Between Groups
Achievement SOL	SOL Tests of Algebra I, Earth Science, and World Geography	None
Achievement Core	Numerical grades of English, Algebra I, Earth Science, and World Geography	None
Attendance	Number of absences	None
Behavior	Number of disciplinary incidents	None
Retention	Categorical variable representing promotion (passing 5 classes)	None

Significant findings based on the multivariate analysis were also limited. The interaction effect between race and treatment on behavior was an item of interest in that the treatment did have a significant impact on black students in relation to behavior. That is, black students in the program had significantly fewer disciplinary incidents than did the black students who were not in the program. The only other significant interaction resulted in a finding in which the males in the control group performed better on average than did the males in the participant group on the Algebra I SOL test. Thus, for interactions of the treatment combined with the six other independent variables, there were only two significant findings for which one had a negative impact on the participants (see Table 20).

While there was only one interaction that would encourage the use of a freshmen transition program, there were three main effects revealed. Two of these main effects were found when controlling for previous middle school. When holding the effects of previous middle school constant, there was a main effect for the participants for both the Earth Science SOL test and the World Geography SOL test. The other main effect was on the participant scores of the Earth Science SOL test when holding the effects of disability status constant (see Table 20).

Table 20

Summary of Multivariate Analysis

Independent Variable	Description	Significant Differences Between Groups
Sex	Male or Female	Males in the control group performed better on average on the Algebra I SOL test than did males in the participant group.
Race	Black, White, Hispanic, Other	Black students in the participant group had fewer disciplinary incidents that did black students in the control group.
Economic Status	Based on students who qualify for free or reduced lunch	None
Disability Status	Based on students who qualify for special services	There was a main effect on the Earth Science SOL test when holding the effects of disability status constant.
Proficiency in English	Based on students who are limited in English	None
Previous Middle School	Three different middle schools from which the sample attended	There were main effects on Earth Science and World Geography tests when holding the effects of the previous middle school constant.

To conclude, the findings indicate that the overall impact of the freshmen transition program was limited. While the bivariate analysis indicated some

differences in World Geography and Earth Science SOL tests that were trending toward significance, there were still no conclusive statistical results that would indicate that the freshmen transition program had a direct impact on student success. Likewise, the multivariate analysis indicated only limited significant findings. From the 54 ANOVAs, there was only one interaction that indicated that black students benefited from the program based on their number of disciplinary incidents. Of the three main effects, two indicated a significant impact on both Geography and Earth Science SOL test scores when controlling for previous middle school. The other main effect indicated a significant impact on the Earth Science SOL test scores when controlling for disability status. While these results were limited, they do indicate that a freshmen transition program may help provide for some student success in the outcomes of behavior, Earth Science SOL tests, and World Geography SOL tests.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Research indicates that the first year of high school is a difficult year for students (Captstick, 2007; Caldwell, 2007; Clark, 2007; Domecq, 2004; Jones, 2005; Pitts, 2005; Sikes, 2002; Torres, 2004). Researchers attribute poor attendance, achievement, and behavior during the first year of high school to the difficulties associated with the transition. Furthermore, Neild et al. (2008) notes that students who undergo academic difficulty during their freshmen year are more likely to drop out of school. For many students, anxiety associated with a new school creates a great deal of the difficulties (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; J. S. Smith et al., 2008). As concerns about the difficulties of the first year of high school become more apparent through research, many school leaders are developing transition programs to assist with the transition process. For example, a suburban district in Northern Virginia launched a pilot ninth grade program at one of their five high schools in an effort to help their students in the transition. The purpose of this study was to analyze the data from that pilot program in order to determine if the program was successful. This study used an experimental design to answer the two research questions:

1. Were students who participated in the freshmen transition program more successful in high school than students who did not participate in the transition program?

2. Were there differential effects of the freshmen transition program on student outcomes by student characteristics?

Discussion of Findings for Question One

While the bivariate analysis resulted in no significant findings for achievement, attendance, behavior, or retention, there were two group differences that were trending toward significance. The two differences that were trending toward significance were SOL scores in the Earth Science and Geography tests. While mean scores between the two groups certainly appear significant, possibly the small sample size prevented a significant finding for the bivariate analysis (see Table 5).

Discussion of Findings for Question Two

With an increased emphasis on accountability, standardized testing has recently become an important measure of achievement for schools. This study is unique to the research in that it used standardized test scores as a measurement of achievement. While simple bivariate analyses showed differences that were only trending toward significance for the Earth Science and Geography SOL scores, the more sophisticated multivariate analyses showed that when the effects of certain variables (i.e. disability status, previous middle school, and race) were held constant, program effects were noticed.

Main Effect on Test Scores Based on Previous Middle School

There was a main effect for the Earth Science SOL test (see Table 12) and the World Geography SOL test (see Table 15) when controlling for the previous middle school. It is interesting to note that the bivariate analysis resulted in differences that were only trending toward significance for both the World Geography and Earth Science tests; however, in the multivariate analysis, with the addition of the independent variable of previous middle school being held as a constant, a significant difference between the participant group and the control group was noted.

Main Effect on Test Scores Based on Disability Status

There were significant findings in this study between control and participant groups when holding the effects of disability constant. These findings were significant for the Earth Science SOL test (see Table 11). These findings do not indicate that the program assists students with disabilities more than it does students without disabilities. This result does indicate that the program clearly had a positive effect on achievement as measured by the Earth Science SOL test when disability status was held as a constant. Thus, it is important to note that although the simple bivariate analysis did not show a significant difference between the participant groups for the Earth Science SOL, the multivariate

analysis that applied disability status as a variable did show significant differences.

Effect on Behavior for Black Students

One of the most interesting findings discovered in the multivariate analysis was that black students in the program had significantly fewer disciplinary incidents than did black students from the control group (see Table 9). This is of particular interest in that research indicates that there is a disproportionate rate of disciplinary incidents for black students as compared to white students (Day-Vines & Terriquez ,2008; Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002; Morris & Goldring, 1999; Schiraldi & Ziedenberg, 2001). In fact the National Center for Education Statistics, notes that black students are twice as likely to be suspended from school as white students (NCES, 2003). Thus, while research indicates that black students traditionally have higher rates of behavior problems than white students, this study notes that black students in the program had lower rates of behavior problems than did the black students who did not participate. Research also suggests that black students have a more difficult time with transition to high school as compared to non-minority students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). In that there is research documenting both the disproportionate rate of behavior incidents and the difficulties transitioning to high school for black students, the findings in this study are of great importance to

school administrators attempting to lessen the behavior incidents of black students transitioning to high school. Having a program that will help black students transition to high school by improving their behavior is clearly a need for many public schools making this sole finding one of great importance to school officials.

While Clark (2007) found significant differences between control and participant groups in regards to disciplinary incidents, Clark's study did not add the additional variable of race. Thus, the current study adds depth to the literature base in regards to how a freshmen transition program can assist with curtailing misbehavior. Students who are receiving fewer disciplinary incidents are clearly adjusting better. While it may not be fiscally prudent to offer a transition program to all students, school administrators may want to consider offering a transition program to at risk minority students.

Non-Effect on Test Scores for Males

While there were a few significant findings that would favor the use of a freshmen transition program, there were many findings that were not significant, and even one finding that found that the control group performed better than the participant group. For the Algebra I SOL test, males in the control group scored significantly higher than did the males from the participant group (see Table 18). On further review of the mean scores, it should be noted that only 83 of the 112

participants took the Algebra I SOL (see Table 16). Of the 24 males in the participant group, 19 took the test, and of the 33 males in the participant group, only 22 took the test. Thus 79% of male participants took the Algebra I test while only 66% of the control group took the test. This difference of 13% less students taking the test would certainly skew the averages. While there are several possible reasons why there was a 13% difference in participation on the Algebra I SOL scores between the participant and control groups, one very logical reason is that it is common practice to have struggling students in Algebra I to repeat the first half of the course at semester level in order to give them extra time to prepare before taking the Algebra I test. Thus, it is very possible that the participant group was actually doing much better in Algebra I when you consider that 13% more participant students were eligible to take the test when compared to the control group.

Summary of Findings

This study clearly adds data to the much discussed area of transition to high school. While the answer to research question one was that students who participated in the program were not more successful than students who did not participate in the program, there were some indications that such a program could be helpful that were found in research question two. Research question number two focused on a few significant differences between the two groups based on

student characteristics. For example, significant differences were found in the Earth Science and World Geography SOL tests once the additional variable of the previous middle school was added. Likewise, significant findings were found for the test scores of the Earth Science SOL test once the additional variable of disability status was added. Finally, significant differences were found between the two groups in the number of disciplinary incidents once the variable of race was considered in that black students in the program had significantly fewer disciplinary incidents than did black students who did not participate in the program.

Suggestions for Future Program Implication

While the Freshmen First program provided few significant results on student outcomes, it is important to note that this was the first year of the program. As the program is tailored over the years, it is probable that it will be more beneficial. While there are many elements of a transition program, there are two that should be considered when developing future programs. The first element involves the before-the-start-of-school program, and the second element is the follow-up. The leaders of Freshmen First dedicated a great deal of concentrated time on preparing students for the first day of school; however, interventions during the school year were much less intense than those during the summer camp. During the summer, the students in the program met for four

straight days from 8:00 – 3:00. They rotated from the core academic classes of English, Earth Science, Algebra, and Geography to more social activities such as wiffle ball games and scavenger hunts. During the summer, students also had the opportunity to learn some of the procedures of the school through tours of the building and meetings with senior buddies (see Appendix D, E, F, & G).

Even though the research indicates that the summer and preschool transition activities are more important than the follow-up activities (Domecq, 2004; Clark, 2007), it is very possible that this lack of a more focused follow-up resulted in few findings. Once school started, activities were limited to only once or twice each grading period (see Appendix H). Teacher mentors kept up with the progress of the students and met with them when interim grades were distributed. It is possible that a more intense effort during the school year such as weekly progress reports and multiple teacher mentors for the students would have resulted in a more successful program.

While organizers of transition programs might have the best of intentions of planning interventions during the school year for at risk students, the many scheduling conflicts of a high school many times prevent this from happening. While the summer camp is a wonderful time to develop a bond between the at-risk students, this bond will quickly fade away once the school year begins unless a direct effort is made to keep the at-risk students together throughout the freshmen year so that they can continue that bond and support one another. One

practical way of making this happen would be to hand-schedule at-risk freshmen into a directed study hall. This study hall would incorporate a teacher / mentor to work with students on making up work and keeping their grades up. Also, in an effort to maintain the social piece of transition, the students would periodically be rewarded with ice cream, pizza, and a class period to play kick ball or wiffle ball as they did in the summer. By keeping the students together and continuing to provide opportunities for the students to foster their connection with the school and each other in a structured atmosphere, the positive energy of the summer camp can continue throughout the year.

In that anxiety begins very early for both parents and students (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; J.S. Smith et al., 2008), school leaders should consider beginning transition activities early in the spring prior to the transition year. As in the study of Clark (2007), school leaders need to develop many activities and interventions for rising freshmen from early spring until the first day of school to help with the transition. While it is very difficult to tell which component of a transition program is most beneficial, based on the research that indicates a great deal of anxiety for stakeholders prior to the beginning of high school (Akos & Galassi, 2004b; J.S. Smith et al., 2008), it is important to plan several preschool activities for transitioning students.

Suggestions for Future Research

While there were not many significant differences in student outcomes between program participants and the control group for the first cohort of Freshmen First, it is important to follow through with analyzing the results of the second cohort of the program. Should a second year of the program also indicate few significant results, it may not be fiscally prudent to continue to fund the program.

Also, it would be of interest to track the progress of the first cohort for all four years of high school in order to determine if the program had any long term effects. While it would be important to look at all of the same outcome indicators, retention would be of a specific interest in that research indicates that students who have an unsuccessful year are more likely to drop out prior to their fourth year (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008). Thus, by visiting each of the same outcome indicators at the end of the fourth year of the cohort, one could determine if the program had any long term effects on the cohort. It is important to note that Torres (2004) did not find any significant differences regarding retention between the participant and control groups from the first cohort of the program; however, the participants from the second cohort did show a significant difference in retention. Thus, it is possible that any program, including Freshmen

First, could become more effective with each cohort as administrators of the program modify the interventions.

While there are mixed findings about the success of transition programs overall, there is limited research on the use of transition programs to improve achievement as measured by standardized tests. This study adds to the limited base and provides significant findings in the multivariate analyses for differences in test scores; however, clearly there is a need for more research in this area. In that test scores are a central focus of many school districts, it is important for transition programs to have a direct effect on test scores. More research in this area would be very helpful to school administrators attempting to form their own programs.

Also, in that schools are frequently faced with limited funds, many school administrators may not be able to fully fund all the components that go into a freshmen transition program. Running a summer camp, and providing for numerous follow-up activities can be expensive. Thus, there is a great deal of research needed on determining specifically what components of a transition program are most beneficial. This could model the work of Akos and Galassi (2004b), who surveyed students about their concerns with the transition to high school. While there is survey research indicating the concerns of students regarding the transition to high school, there is limited research about what specific components of a transition program help the students progress

successfully through their freshmen year. Such a survey would provide a great deal of insight into what students feel is helping them be successful.

Finally, there is very little qualitative research with students who have participated or are participating in transition programs. Such an approach would provide a great deal of insight into the needs of students dealing with the transition to high school as well as their perspective on what makes the transition to high school easier. While there are clear difficulties with gaining approval to interview minor students, the insight gained through a qualitative study would be quite useful to practitioners as well as researchers. Thus while this study does provide some data toward the effect of transition programs on student success, the area of freshmen transition is still a new area of study that is in need of a great deal more research.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

Research Randomizer Results: 1 Set of 60 Unique Numbers Per Set

# of Students	Random Set 1	
1	10	
2	12	
3	15	
4	19	
5	24	
6	25	
7	26	
8	27	
9	29	
10	34	
11	36	
12	41	
13	42	
14	45	
15	47	
16	48	
17	51	
18	57	
19	59	
20	61	
21	64	
22	67	
23	68	
24	69	
25	72	
26	73	
27	74	
28	76	
29	79	
30	81	
31	82	
32	84	
33	86	
34	89	
35	93	
36	94	
37	95	
38	98	
39	101	
40	104	
41	107	
42	110	
43	112	
44	116	
45	117	
46	119	
47	120	
48	122	
49	125	
50	126	
51	131	
52	134	
53	135	
54	137	
55	140	
56	146	
57	147	
58	151	
59	155	
60	156	

Appendix B

Second Set of Research Randomizer Results: 1 Set of 30 Unique Numbers Per Set

# of Student	Random Set 1
1	9
2	11
3	20
4	25
5	29
6	43
7	44
8	53
9	54
10	60
11	61
12	66
13	73
14	74
15	78
16	80
17	81
18	85
19	88
20	90
21	97
22	101
23	103
24	105
25	111
26	112
27	113
28	116
29	128
30	141

Appendix C

Third Set of Research Randomizer Results: 1 Set of 86 Unique Numbers Per Set

# of Student	Set 1
1	49
2	152
3	9
4	22
5	76
6	66
7	85
8	153
9	119
10	21
11	30
12	28
13	117
14	92
15	136
16	52
17	135
18	139
19	98
20	38
21	63
22	91
23	97
24	126
25	73
26	19
27	80
28	156
29	102
30	134
31	93
32	115
33	67
34	72
35	65
36	144
37	11
38	42
39	75
40	53
41	128
42	18
43	95
44	112
45	36
46	58
47	86
48	57
49	16
50	88
51	130
52	34
53	20
54	123
55	40
56	59
57	71
58	155
59	90
60	99
61	24
62	74
63	101
64	132
65	96
66	105
67	23
68	104
69	124
70	60
71	7
72	147
73	15
74	29
75	84
76	131
77	39
78	120
79	81
80	145
81	87
82	113
83	150
84	118
85	43
86	56

Appendix D

Freshman First: Day 1 Schedule

Activity	**Time**	**Location**	**Group 1 (Ludden)**	**Group 2 (Pomeroy)**	**Group 3 (Duet)**	**Group 4 (Bickerstaff)**
Homeroom	8:00- 8:20 (20 min)	Auditorium	Attendance/ Orientation	Attendance/ Orientation	Attendance/ Orientation	Attendance/ Orientation
Meet the teacher	8:25 – 8:35 (10 min)	Classrooms	101-Teacher Meet and Greet / Give out spirit bags	102-Teacher Meet and Greet Give out spirit bags	103-Teacher Meet and Greet Give out spirit bags	104-Teacher Meet and Greet Give out spirit bags
Class	8:35 – 9:35	Classrooms	101Earth Science	102World Geography	103Algebra Lesson	104English Lesson
Activity	9:40 – 10:15	Gym	Kickball tourney	Kickball tourney	Kickball tourney	Kickball tourney
Class	10:20 – 11:20	Classrooms	102-World Geography	103-Algebra Lesson	104-English Lesson	101-Earth Scienc
Panther Pals	11:25 – 12:05	Classrooms	101-Meet Pals	102-Meet Pals	103-Meet Pals	104-Meet Pals
Lunch	12:10 – 12:40	Commons B	***Have Panther Pals serve lunch***			
Class session	12:45 – 1:45 (60 min)	Classrooms	103-Algebra Lesson	104-English Lesson	101-Earth Science Lesson	102-World Geography Lesson
Class	1:50 – 3:00	Classrooms	104-English Lesson	101-Earth Science Lesson	102-World Geography	103-Algebra Lesson

Appendix E

Freshmen First: Day 2 Schedule

Activity	Time	Location	Group 1 (Ludden)	Group 2 (Pomeroy)	Group 3 (Duet)	Group 4 (Bickerstaff)
Homeroom	8:00- 8:10	Auditorium	Attendance	Attendance	Attendance	Attendance
Activity - Study skills	8:15 – 8:45 (30 min)	Auditorium	Study skills	Study skill	Study skills	Study skills
Field Trip	9:00 – 9:45	Classrooms	Field trip	Field trip to Rock Quarry	103-Algebra Lesson	104-English Lesson
Field Trip / Classroom	9:45 – 10:30 (45 min)	Classrooms	Field trip to Rock Quarry	Field trip to Rock Quarry	104-English Lesson	103-Algebra Lesson
Field Trip / Classroom	10:30- 11:15 45 min)	Classrooms	101- Earth Science	102- World Geography	Field trip to Rock Quarry	Field trip to Rock Quarry
Field Trip /	11:15- 12:05	Classrooms	102 - World Geography	101 - Earth Science	Field trip to Rock Quarry	Field trip to Rock Quarry
Lunch	12:10 –12:40	Commons B				
Class	12:45 – 1:30	Classrooms	103 Algebra Lesson	104English Lesson	101 Earth Science Lesson	102 World Geography
Activity	1:35 – 2:10	Tennis Court	Wiffleball tourney	Wiffleball tourney	Wiffleball tourney	Wiffleball tourney
Class	2:15 – 3:00	Classrooms	104-English Lesson	103-Algebra Lesson	102-World Geography	101-Earth Science Lesson

Appendix F

Freshmen First – Day 3 Schedule

Activity	**Time**	**Location**	**Group 1 (Ludden)**	**Group 2 (Pomeroy)**	**Group 3 (Duet)**	**Group 4 (Bickerstaff)**
Homeroom	8:00- 8:20 (20 min)	Auditorium	Attendance & Marketing Program and Clubs	Attendance & Marketing Program and Clubs	Attendance & Marketing Program and Clubs	Attendance & Marketing Program and Clubs
Class	8:25 – 10:15	Classrooms	101-Earth Science	102-World Geography	103-Algebra Lesson	104-English Lesson
Shopping		School Store	8:30 – 8:50	9:00 – 9:20	9:25 – 9:45	9:50 -10:10
Class	10:20- 11:20	Classrooms	102-World Geography	103-Algebra Lesson	104-English Lesson	101-Earth Science Lesson
Activity	11:25 – 12:05	Gym	Frisbee Golf	Frisbee Golf	Frisbee Golf	Frisbee Golf
Lunch	12:10 – 12:40	Commons B				
Class session	12:45 – 1:45 (60 min)	Classrooms	103-Algebra Lesson	104-English Lesson	101-Earth Science Lesson	102-World Geography Lesson
Class Session/	1:50 – 3:00 (70 min)	Classrooms	104-English Lesson	101-Earth Science Lesson	102-World Geography Lesson	103-Algebra Lesson

Appendix G

Freshmen First – Day 4 Schedule

Activity	**Time**	**Location**	**Group 1 (Ludden)**	**Group 2 (Pomeroy)**	**Group 3 (Duet)**	**Group 4 (Bickerstaff)**
Homeroom	8:00- 8:10	Auditorium	Meet the Principal	Meet the Principal	Meet the Principal	Meet the Principal
Class	8:15- 9:00	Classrooms	101-Earth Science	102-World Geography	103-Algebra Lesson	104-English Lesson: Paint
Class	9:05 – 10:10	Classrooms	102-World Geography	103-Algebra Lesson	104-English Lesson: Paint Ceiling Tile Activity	101-Earth Science Lesson
Class Session	10:15 – 11:10 (55 min)	Classrooms	103-Algebra Lesson	104-English Lesson: Paint Ceiling Tile Activity	101-Earth Science Lesson	102-World Geography Lesson
Class session	11:15 – 2:10 (55 min)	Classrooms	104-English Lesson: Paint Ceiling Tile Activity	101-Earth Science Lesson	102-World Geography Lesson	103-Algebra Lesson
Lunch	12:10 – 12:40	Commons B				
Lockers	12:45 – 1:30	Halls	Panther Pals will show students where lockers are located and how to open them.			
Scavenger hunt	1:35 – 3:00	In / Out school	Students will use GPS units to complete a scavenger hunt. Students will need to finish and be in the commons at 2:30. They will end in the commons for an ice cream social with Panther Pals.			

Appendix H

School Year Activities for Freshmen Participants

Activity	Date	Activity	Pal	Advisor	Admin	Notes
1	9/5/2008	Panther Connection	*			Welcome Letter
2	10/2/2008	M&M		*		Midway Monitor with M&M snack
3	10/23/2008	School Connections	*		*	Plant bulbs in front of school
4	12/16/2008	Lunch in the Library (L&L)	*			Holiday Cheer in the library - Snacks and Punch / Advisors Welcome
5	1/7/2009	M&M		*		Midway Monitor with M&M snack
6	1/17/2009	Panther Connection	*			Letter with Treat
7	1/29/2009	RCR			*	Report Card Rewards for no D's or F's @ first semester (Ice Cream)
8	1/29/2009	Coordinator Intervention	*			Coordinators of the program meet with students who are failing any classes.
9	3/6/2009	M&M		*		Midway Monitor with M&M snack
10	4/9/2009	L&L	*	*	*	Lunch in the Library for Spring Fling
11	5/1/2009	SOL Treat	*			SOL treat bag from senior buddy: Good luck and letter of encouragement included.
12	5/15/2009	M&M		*		Midway Monitor with M&M snack
13	5/28/2009	Panther Connection	*			Goodbye Letter of Encouragement

Appendix I
Letter of Invitation to Freshmen Sample

May 5, 2008

Dear Future Panther:

As this year comes to a close, we want to congratulate you on finishing this important part of your education and let you know that we are already making plans for your arrival next school year. You have been recommended for a ninth grade orientation program that will run for four days during the summer. This program will focus on the specific academic, social, and procedural needs of students transitioning from middle to high school.

Academically, students will receive a head start in the areas of Earth Science, Algebra, and Geography in a combined unit built on the similarities between the three subjects. Students will participate in activities that involve GPS and map reading, graphing and calculator use, as well as environmental issues. There will be a total of three teachers (one from each subject) with whom your student will work.

Procedurally, students will have the opportunity to receive their schedules before any other student. Students will be given their lockers and combinations, and will be able to use them during the transition week. Students will have an orientation of the cafeteria as well as the rest of the building and grounds.

Socially, students will have the opportunity to meet students from other middle schools as well as develop relationships with mentor student at Massaponax. Massaponax has several students who will participate in the summer program as mentors or "Panther Pals" in an effort to help explain some of the social concerns of rising ninth graders. The week will end with an ice cream social in which the Panther Pals, rising ninth grade students, and parents will all be asked to join on the fun.

This program is completely free. Transportation and lunch will be provided, and students will receive free Massaponax paraphernalia. Once students are registered for the program, they will receive an invitation to participate in the Massaponax Buddy Blog in which they will be able to correspond with the Panther Pals on line via the rest of this school year and all summer.
We are only able to offer this program to 60 students this year, so please respond by either faxing a copy of this letter to Massaponax High School or calling to reserve your spot in the program.

The dates and times of the program are:
Monday, July28 – Thursday, July 31: 8:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. (4 days)
The deadline for registration is June 9, 2008.
If you have any questions please call the school and ask for:
Troy Wright or Gary Wintersgill
Phone: 540 710-0419 (ext. 1105 or 1108)
Fax: 540 710-1596

Please send forms to:
Freshmen Transition
Massaponax High School
8201 Jefferson Davis Highway
Fredericksburg, VA 22407

_____	_____	_____
Student Name	Phone Number	Alternate Phone Number
_____	_____	
Address	email	

Appendix J
Letter Confirming Freshmen Participation

June 4, 2008

Dear Future Panther:

We are happy that you have decided to join us this summer for our Freshmen Transition Program, "Freshmen First." This letter is confirming your participation as one of 60 students who will join us from Monday, July 28 – Thursday, July 31, 2008. If for any reason, you will not be able to participate, please notify the school so that we can fill the spot as there is a waiting list for this program.

Although we will not come together until Monday, July 28, 2008, please take some time to go to the school course management system, SCORE, for information about "Freshmen First." Just go to http://score.spotsylvania.k12.va.us and then log in. Once you are logged in, look for "MHS Buddy Blog." If you are logging on to SCORE for the first time, please log on with the information below:

Username: "First initial & last name" **Password: "1234"**

We encourage you to utilize this blog throughout the rest of this school year, throughout the summer, and even next year. Other MHS students will be checking this blog frequently to answer any of your questions and to provide some advice about what to expect from high school. You will be assigned a specific buddy with whom you should address questions; however, there are several discussion forums available for you to interact with any of the 20 Panther Pals who will be maintaining the site. If you have any problems logging in, please contact the school or our Instructional Resource Teacher, Cyndi Pixley, Ph.D. at cpixley@hs.spotsylvania.k12.va.us

The dates and times for the program are Monday, July 28, 2008 – Thursday, July 31, 2008. Each day will be from 8:00 a.m. until -3:00 p.m. We will provide lunch each day. Also, if you would like to ride the bus, you can find out your bus information by calling the school guidance office @ ext. 1111 or 1112.

We are excited about your arrival, and we are working hard to make sure that your four days here will not only provide you important information that will help your ninth grade year be more successful, but we also want to make sure that you have fun. The academic opportunities that we provide will give you the opportunity to get a head start into your freshmen year that will hopefully transfer into a successful ninth grade year. Remember to check out the "Buddy Blog." Have a great summer, and we will see you on Monday, July 28 at MHS.

Cordially,

Troy Wright & Gary Wintersgill

VITA

TROY WRIGHT
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EDUCATION & PROFESSIONAL LISCENSURE:

Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA. Doctorate of Philosophy, Educational Leadership. Dissertation Title: *Freshmen First: An Evaluation of a Ninth Grade Transition Program.* 2010.

Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA. Master of Education. 2001

University of Richmond, Richmond, VA. Bachelor of Arts with a major in English. 1991

Bluefield College, Bluefield, VA. Completed 60 hours. 1987 – 1989.

Postgraduate Professional License to teach or hold positions in Virginia schools in: Administration and Supervision PreK-12 and English.

ADMINISTRATIVE & LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE:

Principal, Riverbend High School, Spotsylvania County Schools, July 1, 2009 – present.

Interim Principal, Spotsylvania High School, March, 18, 2009 – April 21, 2009.

VA Region III, Project Graduation Grant Coordinator, January**,** 2004 – July 2009.

- Assisted in the planning, writing, budgeting, and implementation of two annual grants totaling $225,000 per year that were established as part of the Governor Warner's effort to help students pass the Virginia SOL Tests.
- Organized training sessions for teachers and administrators from over 13 different school divisions within Region III, provided assistance to the divisions regarding the implementation of the remediation and testing sessions, collected data from across the region, reported the results of the grant to the Virginia Department of Education, and was responsible for making sure each division was adequately reimbursed.

Assistant Principal, Massaponax High School, Spotsylvania County, VA. 2001 – March 17, 2009.

- *Supervision of the English Department*: Designed and implemented a remedial English class specifically designed to assist seniors who still

needed to pass either the English: RLR or English: Writing EOC tests. Designed and implemented a literacy program for students in collaborative and self-contained English 9 classes. Implemented an online leaning community in order to encourage collaboration among teachers. Assisted teachers in developing online discussion pages so that learning could be extended from the classroom. Designed and implemented a wiki devoted to the sharing of lesson plans for various works of literature.

- *Coordinator of the Freshmen Transition Program*: Designed and implemented a research-based freshmen transition program to assist students in their transition from middle to high school.
- *Coordinator of the Student Assistant Team:* Designed and implemented an attendance procedure which is currently being used across the division among all five high schools. Worked closely with the school social worker to coordinate meetings focused on improving the attendance of students with truancy issues.
- Supervised custodial, science, p.e., English, and math departments.
- Managed student discipline and special education needs for approximately 400 students.
- Managed various facets of the school: Distribution of the building keys, updating and maintaining the phone, security camera, and bell systems; and distribution and maintenance of student lockers.

Administrative Intern, Massaponax High School, Spotsylvania County, VA. 2000 - 2001

Part-time Administrative Intern, Spotsylvania High School, Spotsylvania County, VA. 1999 – 2000

English Teacher, Spotsylvania High School, Spotsylvania County, VA. 1992 – 2000.

Head Track and Assistant Football Coach, Spotsylvania High School. 1992-2000.

Bio: Troy Nathaniel Wright, born 12-1-1969 in Knoxville, TN is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Educational Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University. He received his M.Ed. from Virginia Commonwealth University in 2001 and his B.A. in English from the University of Richmond in 1991. He is currently the principal of Riverbend High School of Spotsylvania County Schools, VA. Mr. Wright has served Spotsylvania County Schools for eighteen years as a teacher, coach, and school administrator.