IMPLICATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

PARTICIPATING IN TWO NINTH GRADE SUCCES ACADEMIES

DURING THE YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION

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IMPLICATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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Rachael Garrett McDaniel

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Rachael Garrett McDaniel

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VITA

Rachael Elizabeth Garrett McDaniel, daughter of Lawrence William and Sandra Coxwell Garrett, was born June 18, 1970 in Guntersville, Alabama. She attended Jackson High School and graduated in 1988. She completed her undergraduate work in Rehabilitation and Corrections in 1993 at Troy State University. While working as a juvenile probation officer she completed her Masters Degree in Special Education from the University of West Alabama. She taught at Elberta Middle School in Baldwin County for nine years and finished her certification in administration at the University of West Alabama in 2005. She then entered the doctoral program at Auburn University in 2005. While completing her doctorate degree in education at Auburn University, she worked as a teacher at Auburn Junior High School and also as a research and teaching assistant at Auburn University. She served as assistant principal at Oak Mountain High School in Birmingham, Alabama. Most recently she directs a freshman leadership program at Baldwin County High School. Rachael has a daughter, Morgan, and resides in Baldwin County, Alabama.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

IMPLICATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

PARTICIPATING IN TWO NINTH GRADE SUCCESS ACADEMIES

DURING THE YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION

Rachael Garrett McDaniel

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This study presents a comparative case study of two Ninth Grade Success

Academies at two school sites in south Alabama. Ninth Grade Success Academies use a

school within a school model that isolates freshman students from upperclassmen while

teaching them skills for academic and social success (Kerr, 2000). These academies are

structured in a way that attempts to increase school attendance and decrease discipline

problems. This research examined students' and teachers' perceptions about their

involvement in these two academies at both high schools in an effort to determine

strengths and weaknesses of the academies during the first year of implementation as

perceived by the participants.

Data were collected during the first year of implementation of the academies at two comparative high schools (2005-2006). Data collection strategies included focus group interviews with students in the fall of 2005 and in the spring of 2006 and separate interviews were held at each school site with these students. Data collection also included responses to open ended survey questions. The surveys were administered in the spring of 2006 to ninth grade teachers at both school sites.

Transcriptions of interviews and responses to survey questions were analyzed using qualitative software and through a constant comparative method in which themes emerged and then were identified and compared from data collected at each site. Data from students and teachers at the two Ninth Grade Success Academies were compared to identify inter and intra program themes and generalizations, conclusions, and recommendations are presented in Chapter Five.

Recommendations include having one administrator to better promote ninth grade students to aide with equity and consistency in student treatment. Second, programs should be utilized to assist with remediation of students who have reading and math deficits. These programs should be in place to give students additional opportunities to pass courses so that they will not get behind with coursework and possibly drop out of school. Some exposure to upperclassmen may actually assist with a positive transition to high school. Also, adding teams in ninth grade would create fewer feelings of isolation and aid with student feelings of acceptance. Parental involvement programs and programs promoting positive school culture and reward systems for freshman were also recommended based on the research findings. Implications for school leaders and for school improvement are presented.

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To representatives in Baldwin County School district, especially Drs. Pam Henson and Faron Hollinger, I appreciate your willingness to allow me to conduct this research in your schools. Your supportive gifts of your time and resources to conduct this research clearly indicate your dedication to growth and betterment of your schools.

To my parents, thank you for your support and for instilling a work ethic and a level of confidence in me so that I could accomplish this goal. To Marilyn, Amy, Jolie, Stephanie, Chuck, and Rebecca thanks for always being there in so many ways. And special thanks to Jason, who was always there to encourage me through this process.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my daughter, Morgan, who left her family and friends to come with me to Auburn so that I may fulfill this dream. I am so proud of the young woman you have become. You are an inspiration to me.

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I. INTRODUCTION

This research outlines a comparative case study of two Ninth Grade Success Academies put into practice at the beginning of the 2005–2006 school year in two high schools in southern Alabama. Ninth Grade Success Academies (NGSA) were implemented in two of the seven high schools in Baker County, Alabama to assist in combating inflated drop out rates, declining attendance and an influx in discipline problems in these two schools.

Goals of the Ninth Grade Success Academies are to structure the school into smaller learning communities provide a block system which aides in increasing instruction time as well as requires students to take only four courses per semester. Also, the academies organizes curriculum in a way so that all freshman are required to take a Leadership course in which they are instructed in organization and study skills. In this course double dipping in mathematics and reading is also done to assist with missed skill acquisition.

The primary goal of this research was to determine the degree to which students and teachers felt the Ninth Grade Success Academy impacted students' freshman year both socially and academically. A comparison of teachers groups and student groups was also examined to explore similarities and differences in the phenomena.

In this overview, a short review of each of the five general areas of literature is discussed. These areas include: Nature of the Problem, Adolescent Development, Ninth Grade Instruction, Student Voice, and Ninth Grade Success Academies.

A mixture of qualitative methods was employed to the research questions. These methods are briefly discussed in this overview. As these methods were utilized other research questions arose. A summary of the questions concludes this chapter.

Discussion of the Topic

In an age where drop out rates continue to increase and accountability is stronger (NCLB, 2001, school systems must structure themselves to educate students by developing programs in which students stay in school and receive the skills they need to succeed in mandated testing, and more importantly in life after high school. Research (Black, 2004) has shown that ninth grade seems to be the "make it or break it" year for most students. With this knowledge, Ninth Grade Success Academies have been implemented in many high schools in the United States.

This study focused on the implementation of two Ninth Grade Success Academies in two southern Alabama high schools during the 2005–2006 school year. Both of these high schools contained 1100–1200 students. As compared with the other high schools in the nation, state and system, Fairbanks High School and Central High School had considerably higher dropout rates.

Dropout Rates during the 2004-2005 School Year

Nationally	12%
Alabama	15%
Baker County	12%
Fairbanks High School	26%
Central High School	31%

<div align="center">(www.alsde.edu)</div>

With the populations of these schools similar to some of the same schools in the system, school leaders collected data in these two high schools to determine where the problems existed. School system leaders realized that as with many schools around the nation, the problems appeared during the initial year of high school.

The academies implemented in the two high schools changed the structure of the school in several ways. First, the school went to a block schedule in which students only had four classes per semester. Students were given 90 minutes of instruction a day. This varied from the traditional way in which students only had 50 minutes of instruction a day with seven courses. Next, ninth grade students were separated from the rest of the student body both in academics and during social time. Each ninth grade was assigned its own counselor and social worker. Lastly, every freshman was required to take a Leadership class which instructed students on setting goals, as well as teaching them organization and study skills.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions and implications of two Ninth Grade Success Academies utilizing students and teachers involved in each. Cross comparative analysis was used to help determine these perceptions among the two groups of individuals (student and teachers) and also between the two high schools.

Significance of the Study

Literature related to Ninth Grade Success Academies appears to be limited in regard to areas in the southeastern United States. There also exist little qualitative literature observing perceptions of students involved in the academies. Finally, comparison of student perceptions and teacher observation during the same phenomena is lacking in the literature. By gaining a greater understanding of similarities and differences between these two groups, Ninth Grade Success Academies can be better structured to meet the needs of all involved.

Limitations

In considerations of limitations in this study, several items of concern are noted. Among these were subjective concerns, time and concerns with generalizations. I had to be aware of my perceptions because I had been employed in the same school system for nine years prior to doing the study. This awareness was considered prior, during and when reflecting on the interviews. A social history existed because the middle school I had been employed in is a feeder school to Fairbanks High School, one of the schools in the study. I had prior knowledge of perceived strengths and weaknesses of this

school both from teachers and parents of students who attended the school and lived in the community.

Reflective practice was continuously practiced during the interview process and in when analyzing data. My time away from Baker County Schools, which was two years from the time of the study, assisted me in being more unbiased because this time allowed me to distance myself from the school district.

To aid in the subjectiveness of participant, surveys were anonymous among teachers. Students were interviewed in a private room and were assured of anonymity. All materials and intended procedures were approved by Auburn University's Human Subjects Internal Review Board prior to data collection. Triangulation was used to increase the reliability of the data analysis. Several methods including transcripts from student interviews, survey questionnaires of teachers, field notes, and reflection were used to create a more realistic view of the phenomena.

Overview of Related Literature

Nature of the Problem

In 1957 the Russians launched Sputnik. This occurrence, along with the post war baby boom and concerns of an approaching cold war changed the way Americans viewed education in this country (Clark, 2000). Fear began to set in across the country that the rest of the world was progressing much faster in the area of education and technology than in the United States.

In the1960s the political climate changed and there was a feeling that schools should be organized in a way that gave eleven to fifteen year olds attention needed to

encourage and nurture them more than the junior high school model was currently providing. Researchers including Eichorn (1966), Alexander (1968) and Van Til (1967) called for structural changes that provided emotional and social support, as well as classes that assisted students in exploration.

While these strategies were an advantage to students in fifth through eighth grade, ninth grade was pushed up to the high school and by 1986 junior high schools had dropped by 29%. Ninth graders face tremendous problems including transition, pressure from older students, the Carnegie system and lack of organizational skills to succeed. Other issues added to the problems these students faced including indifferent teachers, overcrowded classrooms, and tedious lessons (Wheelock, 1993).

With so many obstacles, it is no wonder that ninth grade is the year in which most students drop out of high school (Belfanz, 2004; Orfield, 2004). One third of Americans fail to complete high school, and with blacks and Hispanics, this number is increased to fifty percent. Job shifts in the United States are requiring a greater amount of literacy and training. Individuals that do not possess these skills will have a more difficult time succeeding in society (A Nation at Risk, 2000).

Several reasons account for early exit from high school. Among these include personal reasons, disengagement (Azzam, 2007; Finn, 1989; Rumberger, 1987; Tinto, 1975), poor academic performance (Erickson, 1956; Woods, 1995), and the achievement gap (Education Trust, 2001; Rothstein, 2004). Each of these reasons is discussed at length in the literature review in the next chapter.

Regardless of the reasons, many researchers agree that ninth grade is the time when structuring curriculum and programs to keep kids in school (Belfanz, 2004; Mizelle

& Irvin, 2004). Attendance, discipline and academic performance in this grade proves to predict success or failure in future years. In constructing these programs it is important to gain knowledge regarding adolescent development at this stage, curriculum that has proven successful, and to listen to the voice of students experiencing this stage in life.

Adolescent Development

Many aspects of development should be considered when understanding an adolescent when he/she is fourteen and fifteen years old. This section of the literature review will look at the student intellectually, socially, emotionally, morally and physically. Each of these areas provide a greater acceptance of the adolescent at this phase of growth.

Intellectually students are in the formal operational stage according to Piaget (1932). Students will begin to reject and rebel against ideas taught by their parents and seek their own belief systems. Realism is lessened, but will increase slowly as individuals have more experiences and time (Piaget, 1932). Eventually these young people will begin to think more concrete operationally (Metz, 1995). Vygotsky (1978) believed that through society and culture adolescent begin to mature cognitively.

Social interaction between peers takes on an extremely important role during this stage of development. These skills learned outside the home aid in independence (Csikszentonlyr, Larson, & Prescott, 1977). Schools become training grounds for social behavior, as students spend most of their waking hours in these institutions. Because of risk taking behaviors, an increase in substance abuse at this age, and an increase in

depression, schools have a responsibility to address these areas (Clark, 1998; Spear, 2002).

Along with intellectual and social changes, students are also changing physically at this age. Physical growth is obvious (Huebner, 2000) but sexual interest and sexual drive also rapidly increase (Resnick, 1997). Adolescents have an increase in the amount of food intake needed (Betts, 1995) and there also is a change in sleep patterns (Hansen, 2005). The teenage brain is not completely developed until late adolescence.

The ability to regulate emotional decisions is increasingly tough at this stage of development (Dahl, 2004). This risk taking behaviors are escalated when peers are present (Steinberg, 1996). Role identity and self doubt exists (Erickson, 1956).

Also during this developmental stage fixed rules are questioned. Binary ways of viewing things exist less (Kohlberg, 1958). Decisions are now more about what effects community and family, and self. Morality becomes more than making simple deals.

Ninth Grade Instruction

Students in this stage of development need to see a connection between their coursework and its relevance (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1996). When students have a choice in what they are learning, a buy in occurs. A choice of material to be learned rarely happens in secondary curriculum (McPartland, Letgers, & Belfanz, 2000).

Differentiated Curriculum is an approach that has worked with students this age (Gardner, 1999; Hall, 2002). Varying lessons so that all learners can be taught, taking into account different learning styles basically defines differentiated curriculum. Because all students do not learn the same, this approach allows for flexibility in delivery and

style. Content, Process, and Product (Tomlinson, 2001) can all be varied to provide pedagogy and assessment that takes into account the learning styles of all students.

Project Based Learning promotes teamwork and works to give meaning to knowledge acquired (Bransford & Stein, 1993). Two components must be considered in project based learning. These include the problem that drives the activity as well as the culminating activity that clarifies the information learned (Brown & Campione, 1994). Real life context, learning tools, and collaboration are all encouraged to promote the use of project based learning (Brown & Campione, 1994).

Parental involvement can not be underestimated at this age. Jackson and Davis (2000) state that the encouragement of family in the single largest predictor of school success. Schools should encourage parental involvement as often as possible. This becomes even more important with immigrants and other at risk groups (Henderson & Berla, 1994). One way to involve parents is through communication. This communication with parents should be ongoing and personal.

Because high schools are usually larger than middle schools, teacher-student relationships are usually less personal. This is unfortunate because this is the time in a student's life when students need additional guidance and support (Echols, 1999). This disconnect can lead to many problems including a lowered sense of self worth in the student's part, alienation, and a neglect of problems being addressed (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). Emotional and social encouragement in the school environment assists in the growth of a student's self confidence (Battistich, 1997).

Student Voice

By employing student voice to research, valuable opinion can be used to the betterment of educational programs, educational policy and reform (Reed, 1997; Smyth, 2006). Young people have a distinctive perspective and by not listening to their voices we are doing students an injustice (Kozol, 1991). Purposes and initiative are better understood and more widely accepted when students are involved in the decision making (Reed, 1997).

Although sometimes intimidating to an organization, by the collective use of student voice in forms other than post hoc evaluation, a "us/them" approach is turned into a "we" approach (Feilding & Ruddick, 2003). Disengagement has been shown to correlate in recent years to policy regimes in which teachers and students have less say in the content. When disengagement occurs, it is usually followed by detachment from the institution (Smyth, 2006). By challenging systems to begin listening to young people and conducting research in which they have a say, a greater perspective is sought.

Ninth Grade Success Academies

Seventy percent of high schools in the United States have more than 1,000 students (www.ed.gov/print/programs/slcp/index/html). The small high schools in America as were once thought of, rarely exist. Because of the increase in school size problems such as autonomy, discipline, attendance, and parental and community involvement exist (Kerr, 2000). Ninth Grade Success Academies, which are in great part attributed to Johns Hopkins University's Center on Education of Students Placed At Rick (CRESPAR) and the work of James McPartland, assist in combating the problems these large schools face.

Dr. McPartland, who had previously worked with at risk students and situations and equity in education, conducted research to find out where the problem lay for students who chose to exit high school early and what could be done to set these students up for success. He solicited the assisting of educators, researches and sociologists to assist in creating a structure for the academies.

Although many forms of Ninth Grade Success Academies exist there are several components that are prevalent in each. These include Small Learning Communities (Kerr, 2000; McPartland, 1998; NCLB, 200; Sergiovanna, 1994); Block Scheduling (McPartland, 1998); Strategic Math and Reading (Letgers & McDill, 1994; Lucas, 199; McPartland, 1998; Oakes, 1985); and Leadership Academy (Darling-Hammond, 1997; McPartland, 1998). By placing students in smaller groups with the same teachers, autonomy is decreased. Block scheduling allows for more instruction time and fewer classes at a time, so that students do not get overwhelmed. Strategic Math and Reading allows assistance for students who may have gaps in skills. Lastly, the Leadership class provides skills at risk and regular students need to set purpose and the skills the students need to attain goals.

Literature Summary and Focus

By looking at the drop out rate and what occurs after school for students exiting without graduating, there is a greater understanding of the need for education and high school completion in the United States. The history and structure of schools assists in understanding why ninth grade is such a critical year for students.

Gaining an understanding of the reasons students exit school and then coupling this with knowledge of the physical, moral, emotional and social changes that are occurring within adolescents entering high school assist in the designing of programs to encourage young people to stay in school.

Ninth Grade Academies seek to structure a student's initiation year in high school in a way that sets him/her up for success (McPartland, 1998). Research has shown that these Ninth Grade Success Academies do assist in achievement, attendance, discipline issues and retention in high school (Kerr, 2002; McPartland, Jordan, Letgers, & Belfanz, 1997).

Research Design

Purpose and Theoretical Approach

The researcher describes the feelings of teacher and student participants of the Ninth Grade Success Academies in this study. Comparisons are made as to similarities and differences in groups and in schools. Based on the desires and the types of inquiry that tool place a phenomenological approach (Crotty, 1998) was utilized.

> Because all knowledge and experience are connected to phenomena, things in consciousness that appear in the surrounding world, inevitably a unity must exist between ourselves as knowers and the things or objects that we come to know and depend on. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 44)

Applying this perspective, the researchers sought to determine if the intended outcomes were perceived by the students and teachers. Did participants feel a greater ownership and less autonomy? Did students have opportunities to learn organizational and study

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skills? Was attendance encouraged and increased because of the academy implementation? Was good behavior encouraged and did discipline referrals decrease as perceived by the participants?

Experiences, perceptions, and feelings were examined to answer these questions? By attendance at faculty meetings, interviewing students, surveying teachers, field notes and through the triangulation of all this data more realistic view of the effect of implementation of the Ninth Grade Success Academies was formed.

General Overview of Methods

A comparative case study was employed in this study (Merrian, 1998). By collecting data at two school sites, themes were identified at each. Each school had unique characteristics, and each approached the academy a bit differently. It was important, because of this to analyze them individually initially.

Overlying themes, academic and social emerged. The findings suggested it would be interesting to examine teachers overall and students overall. Each of these groups were compared and analyzed. Lastly, a comparison was made of all teaches and students collectively to study similarities and differences between teacher perspective and student perspective of the academies as a whole.

Site Descriptions

Baker County School System is located in southern Alabama on the coast. Within the school system exists forty seven schools. There are approximately 25,000 students in

the district. The district is composed of 81% White, 16% Black, and 2% Hispanic students.

Central High School is located in the center of the county. The school was built in 1992. Approximately 1252 students attend Central High School in grades 9–12. The population is 90% White; 7% Black, and 2% Hispanic. Twenty five percent of the students are on free or reduced lunch. Forty six percent of the teachers have bachelor degrees and forty three percent have a master's degree. Six and a half percent have sixth year or doctorate degrees.

Fairbanks High School is located in the south end of the county. The building was built in 1990. Approximately 1400 students attend Fairbanks High School. Demographics are as follows: 79% White, 16% Black; and 4% Hispanic. Thirty two percent of the students at Fairbanks High School are on free or reduced lunch. Forty nine percent of the teachers have a bachelor degree and thirty eight percent have s masters degrees. Six and a half percent have sixth year or doctorate degrees.

Ethical and Political Concerns

When approaching both schools and the participants, I tried to assure that my presence and the knowledge of my research had no effect on the daily school operations. I did not want to influence any stakeholder or create any conflict. My desire was to have an understanding of the implementation of the academies and to describe this to the best of my ability. My attendance, it seemed had a minimal effect.

Each school had policies and procedures that I respected and followed at all times. I was careful to respect the time of all stakeholders. I reflected on what I saw through the

leadership and occurrences that I witnessed but my thoughts never surfaced while the data was being collected.

Confidentiality was a concern. None of the information collected was ever identifiable in any way. Audio tapes were transcribed with no names used. No names or identifiable elements were used in surveys. Names of students and teachers participating were destroyed after analyzed. This confidential approach was stressed to participants and was used so that participants would be forthcoming.

Research Questions

1.   What outcomes have students and teachers observed related to the implementation of the Ninth Grade Success Academies at Fairbanks High School and Central High School?

2.   In what ways do teachers perceive Ninth Grade Success Academy implementation collectively in the two high schools?

3.   In what ways do students perceive Ninth Grade Success Academy implementation collectively in the two high schools?

4.   In what ways are student perception and teacher perception similar and different in the two high schools?

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Transitioning from middle to high school is a crucial time in an adolescent's life. Research has shown that this successful transition during their freshman year will help students form lasting attachments to school and may increase the likelihood that they will eventually graduate from high school (Kerr, 2002). On the other hand, if students are not successful in their first year of high school, high school completion becomes much less likely (McPartland, 1994).

Several factors contribute to a student's successful entrance, transition and ability to be successful and complete high school. Because of the restructuring of K–12 schools in the 1950s and 1960s ninth grade students are most often included in the same building as 10–12 grade students. Often times, these students are not emotionally, intellectually, or socially prepared to meet the demands of interacting with older students. This chapter explores several reasons for implementing Ninth Grade Success Academies and discusses research that has been done to help explain why students are choosing to exit high school early.

More students drop out of high school in ninth grade than any other year (Black, 2004). Disengagement, low achievement and family situations are among the reasons most students choose to leave high school early. Although most students enter the ninth

grade with high aspirations, many quickly lose confidence in them and in the educational system.

By gaining a better understanding of adolescent development, programs can be created to better serve high school freshman. This chapter examines literature on adolescence during this stage of development in the following areas: intellectual, behavioral and social, physical, emotional and cognitive.

Over twenty years ago, the National Association of Secondary School Principals commissioned a study to determine what was occurring in the ninth grade. Lounsbury and Johnson (1985), the authors of this study, found a conflict between school policies and developmental needs of fourteen year olds. They found that most instruction was teacher centered and that instruction consisted mostly of teacher lecture and student note taking. Students were commonly placed in ability groups and students were on a 40–50 minute class schedule. No guidance was provided in the majority of the high schools for assisting with needed change. Even schools that were running smoothly were missing positive teacher-student interactions (Black, 2004). Through observation and discussion of current instructional techniques, many effective examples of pedagogy for educating adolescents are found.

Researchers are beginning to take note of a missing element in educational planning, the opinions and reactions from students themselves (Ancess, 2003; Fireston & Rosenblum, 1988). The recent trend of disengagement, and hostile attitudes among students has even been blamed on policy makers' and educational leaders' shunning of the voice of the individuals most affected by educational programs. This study seeks to measure the attitudes and opinions of the students affected by the implementation of the

Ninth Grade Success at Academies at the two schools studied. This chapter presents a rationale for utilizing student voice in educational research.

Finally, this chapter defines and examines Ninth Grade Success Academies. From the beginning of the concept in Baltimore in the mid 1990s until today the components utilized in the academies have been shown to be effective in increasing attendance and lowering discipline and attrition rates. Smaller learning communities, block scheduling and doubling up on English and mathematics, along with a Freshman Seminar class in which study skills and career exploration are emphasized are the major components of the model developed by James McPartland at Johns Hopkins University in 1994. Each of these areas is discussed in this chapter as well as current research on effects of Ninth Grade Success Academies.

Nature of the Problem

Structure of High Schools

Historically high schools and elementary schools operated with a firm philosophy, vision and direction, but this has not always been the case with middle schools and junior high schools. Prior to the early 1900s, after exiting elementary schools where students were nurtured, many students had little direction. This coupled with the fact that teachers were not specifically trained to handle the demands of this population led to an abundance of students exiting school all together.

In the mid 1910s and 1920s many cities began to experiment with junior high schools. These institutions were composed of seventh through ninth grade students. The

belief was that if students could finish ninth grade, the first year of high school, then they would be less likely to quit school (Clark, 2000).

Problems with the junior high model existed because of requirements for ninth graders and Carnegie Units. Seventh and Eighth grade students were not required to receive Carnegie Units, and because junior high schools only had one grade to serve with these units, often times the number of classes that were offered were limited. The junior high concept, while perhaps best suited for students socially, was inconvenient and impractical for scheduling purposes.

Another disadvantage of the junior high school model was the name itself. Melton (1984) agued that by using the adjective "junior", these schools would become miniature versions of the high schools. This mimicking of high schools would take away the need for the structured programs that encouraged high school completion, as well as the focus for a curriculum set up for this age group.

Regardless of the obstacles, in the 1950s the number of junior high schools jumped in the United States from 2,268 in 1925 to 10,322 by 1947 (Clark, 2000). Post-war baby boom, cold war concerns, and the Russian launching of Sputnik in 1957 changed the way Americans viewed education. With more students to educate, national concerns for peace, and the fear that other countries were becoming far superior in education, especially in the areas of mathematics and science, opinions of what was important in America's schools began to change. The public became more aware of education's impact and society saw restructuring schools as a necessity (Clark, 2000).

Emphasis was redirected from the whole child and placed on knowledge acquisition. Educators were encouraged to focus on a specialized field, especially in the

areas of science and mathematics (Melton, 1984). Students that struggled or were disadvantaged were overlooked Melton, 1984). Federal monies were placed in academic programs and stripped from programs that were considered enrichment. Programs that had been designed to encourage communal feelings in schools and academic exploration were down-sized dramatically.

The political climate was reversed in the 1960s and policy makers realized that students were less likely to receive the attention they needed in this environment. With departmentalization also came autonomy. Students in grades 7–9 were missing teacher ownership that was needed in this stage of their development. Without anyone to encourage and mentor these young students, often times they became discouraged.

In 1966, Eichorn's *The Middle School* was published. This was a direct calling for an answer to restructure the organization of schools for students between the ages of eleven and fifteen (Clark, 2000). Eichorn advocated for the reanalysis of the 6–3–3 grade level configuration in which junior high schools were encouraged. Eichorn proposed the 5–3–4 in which ninth graders would move to high school. Middle schools that housed sixth through eighth grade were encouraged. Eichorn (1966) cited the rapid maturation of students in the mid-twentieth century as the major rationale behind this change.

Organizational changes were proposed by researchers including Alexander (1968, 1989) and Van Til (1967). Interdisciplinary teams, non academic subjects and advisor groups in these middle schools were encouraged to support students emotionally and socially (Clark, 2000). Athletic groups were encouraged to be offered as more casual and less competitive at the middle level (Clark, 2000). Exploratory classes were added. Teaching strategies were extended to include cooperative learning, hands-on lessons,

community involvement and field trips. However, with the trend moving away from junior high schools, fewer and fewer ninth graders were being allowed to experience the benefits of these added programs and changes in the educational structure.

By 1986, the exposure of junior high schools had dropped by 29% (Clark, 2000). Turning Points (1989) offered a sound research adding to the credibility of middle schools. Turning Points (2000) further supported middle schools and offered a comprehensive model for these schools. By many accounts, one can be led to believe that the middle school framework is here to stay.

With research supporting middle schools and the benefits of this model, several questions arise. What about the ninth grade students who were moved in this process? Has the movement from the junior high schools to the high school been beneficial for them? And, what programs have been set in place and proven effective for the high school freshman?

One study done in 1993 summarizes the many problems found for ninth graders using this model. Wheelock (1993) noted "tedious lessons, overcrowded classrooms, and indifferent teachers" were the norm. Students felt their teachers were uncaring. She described ninth grade as "a minefield for destruction for vulnerable students", and this increased for students that became disengaged and discouraged or who failed to create bonds with teachers.

Drop Outs in America

Whereas the percentage of high school dropouts seems to be steady in some areas of the country and even decreasing in some cities, the outlook for the future of those who do exit high school without graduating is extremely bleak. The average annual salary for

an adult high school drop out in 2002 was $18,800. This figure was down about a tenth from 1975 (Orfield, 2004). The industrial work force has also declined by 2.3 million jobs since 1991. High school dropouts are far more likely than graduates to be unemployed, serve prison time, and live in poverty (Orfield, 2004). The U. S. Department of Justice (2004) reports that two-thirds of inmates are high school drop outs. Fifty-two percent of African American males in their early thirties, who did not complete high school, have prison records.

Approximately one-third of all high school students in the United States fail to complete high school. Blacks and Hispanics have only a 50% chance of graduating from high school (Azzam, 2007). Seventy percent of high school drop outs believe that they could have completed high school if they had tried. Among reasons given by the students for non-completion include: they were bored with school, their attendance was so poor that they could not catch up, they were spending time with students not interested in school, they had too much freedom, and that they were failing. These students also stated that they would have worked harder had their teachers demanded more from them (Azzam, 2007).

With the increase in jobs that require more technological training students that lack the appropriate education will have bleak futures. A Nation at Risk (2000) alerted both the general public and the education community of the repercussions of this job shift. Individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era, in the information age, will be "effectively disenfranchised", not simply from the material rewards that accompany capable performance, but also from the chance to contribute fully in our national life. "A high

level of education is necessary to a free, democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture, especially in a country that prides itself on pluralism and individual" (A Nation at Risk, 2000, p. 7).

Personal reasons also play a part in why students decide to quit high school. Some of these reasons include: the need to get a job, becoming a parent, or having to care for family members. Other students feel like early years of schooling had inadequately prepared them for high school.

Researchers have considered a variety of domains when addressing reasons for drop outs. These reasons have been classified in groups including school, family, community, and the student's characteristics (Suh, 2007). Other researchers believe that multiple factors contribute to school drop out. When students are included in more than one at-risk group, the chances rise significantly that the student will not graduate from high school.

Disengagement

Students who do not engage in school activities, either academically or socially are more at risk of dropping out of high school. Researchers (Ancess, 2003; Finn, 1989; Rumberger, 1987) identify disengagement as one reason for poor academic performance. These researchers advocate for high school models that promote "investment" behaviors. In these models students should be encouraged to participate in academics and extra curricular activities. The school can foster an interest and increases personal resources. Emphasis is also placed on rewarding student effort.

Tinto (1975) explained the concept of "push and "pull" to help understand students exiting college without completion. However, Finn (1989) applies this same

theory to younger students, also. Tinto argues that when students do not find a niche in an academic or social nature in college, the student will not develop a level of commitment to the program or to its completion. No ownership for the student's own acquisition of knowledge is developed.

Tinto goes further in comparing this theory to a cost-benefit perspective. "A person will tend to withdraw from college when he perceives that an alternative form of investment of time, energies, and resources will yield greater benefits, relative to costs, over time that will staying in college" (Tinto, 1975, p. 98). This assists in explaining why students that get jobs while in high school and begin making money rationalize that if they worked more hours, they could make more money. Hours spent in school learning material the student feels is irrelevant to his/her future becomes a waste of time. As will be discussed later in this chapter, because of the adolescents stage of development, it becomes more difficult to make a rational decision regarding long term benefits of staying is school and furthering education

Students are dropping out of school because they are not interested in the curriculum being taught and do not feel it is relevant to their lives (Tinto, 1075). Many high school students report that they are not interested in the curriculum and are disengaged from the academic program. In a study done by Steinberg, Brown, and Dornbush (1996), 50% of students reported that their classes were boring, and one third reported that they survived the school day by goofing off with their friends.

Several factors have been shown to influence student engagement. Phenomenological factors, including application to real life is one factor researchers have linked to student engagement. Goodlad (1984) states that students who are challenged

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and find a subject relevant are more likely to feel positive about the course and that disengagement is less likely.

Control over learning activities and emotions also affect engagement (Deci, Nezlek, & Sheinman, 1981; Newman & Lamborn, 1992). Teachers who foster transformational learning and student ownership of skills have been shown to consistently have more success in the classroom (Cothran & Ennis, 2000). Teachers described as communicators, enthusiastic, empathetic, and those who provide opportunities for active learning and care about students are more likely to have successful students (Cothran & Ennis, 2000). One way to increase student ownership and control is to use small groups, verses whole group instruction (Marks, 2000).

As students get older they rely more on peers for advice and to meet their needs. There is less dependency on family and services. Adolescents also become less engaged in school (Yair, 2000). Yair found that after eighth grade engagement in school decreased significantly. Ninth grade teachers and high school principals should be aware of this phenomena when planning lessons and developing teaching strategies. Awareness of the role peers play in engagement and commitment to activities should and can be used as an advantage for educators.

Poor Academic Performance

The strongest educational predictor of dropping out of high school is poor academic performance (Erickson, 1956; Woods, 1995). When students fail one or more grade their chance of dropping out increases drastically. Students who repeat a grade are twice as likely to drop out of high school. Also, if a student repeats more than one grade, they become four times as more likely to exit without completion.

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Early success in school plays a crucial role in detecting future school success. Elementary and middle school years form the basis in which students begin to assess themselves. When a student is told that academically he/she is a failure, the student begins to believe that academic success is hopeless. This belief continues through the rest of his/her school career.

Hansen (1994), along with the assistance of 50 graduate students, followed 117 students from elementary school through high school. During this time several factors were considered about the students' success and failure in high school. The factors considered in the study included achievement levels on tests, family situations and personal characteristics of students. Grade point average in elementary years alone predicted forty-five percent of the later status of these students. This was by far higher than any other indicator measured (Hansen, 1994).

"Early school failure may act as the starting point in a cycle that causes children to question their competence, weaken their attachment to school, and eventually result in their dropping out" (US GAO, 2002). Rumberger (2001) and Woods (1995) found that early academic performance and engagement, along with absenteeism and disciplinary problems in elementary and middle school, were the major indicators of early withdrawal from high school.

The Achievement Gap

Problems associated with academic preparation are compounded in young adolescents who are poor, members of racial/ethnic minorities or are recent immigrants (Rothstein, 2004). This problem increases further because these students are more likely to attend large urban schools that are segregated and offer few higher level courses. In

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these large, urban schools, where 11 million children of all ages in the United States attend, two thirds or more perform below basic levels on performance tests (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

The No Child Left Behind Act, enacted in 2002, has put pressure on states to close the achievement gaps. By looking at sub-groups, including minorities, as well as free and reduced lunch participants, schools now have become challenged to become more responsible for reaching all students. Test scores must be published separately for racial and ethnic groups.

Family situations, socioeconomic status, and parental level of education can not be discounted when looking at evident factors of high school drop outs. Richard Rothstein's book, *Class and Reform Using Social, Economic and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap* (2004) argues that reforms that aim at education alone will not be successful unless they are coupled with economic and social changes outside the classroom. According to Rothstein,

> Children's social and economic backgrounds influence their learning. Children
> from literate homes enter school with greater vocabularies than do children
> unfamiliar with books. Children with less pediatric care are absent more often
> than healthier children. Children of college-graduate parents assume that
> academic excellence is their birthright, while other children struggle to achieve.
> (p. 128)

Education Trust (2001) revealed startling statistics regarding the achievement gap. Among these include: Out of every 100 students:

	High School Graduates	Some College	Bachelors degree
Asian	94	86	49
Black	87	54	16
Latino	62	29	6
Caucasian	91	62	30

The Education Trust (2001) states that four elements are key when discussing lessening the achievement gap. These include: the national drive for excellence in education, equity issues related to disparities in the distribution of educational assets, organizational features of schools related to tracking, remediation, and special education, and the interrelationships among all of these factors and the larger circumstance of a society that continues to be extremely divided by race (Education Trust, 2001).

Awareness of these shifts and structuring to accommodate this shift is necessary to prepare today's high school students for up coming challenges in the job market. Several elements are essential to the success in meeting the challenges of closing the achievement gap. Setting high expectations (Gay, 2000), common standards for all students (Fuhram, 2001), and cultural responsiveness (Williams, 2003) have all been shown to increase successful pedagogy and reduce the achievement gap.

Ninth Grade and Drop Outs

Ninth Grade proves to be a pivotal year in determining high school success. Robert Balfanz, a research scientist with the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University is among a group of researchers picking out constellations of school based predictors to identify early warning signs to head off students quitting

school. He maintains that by the first semester of a student's freshman year we can actually predict who will later drop out. By receiving fewer than five credits or by receiving two consecutive F's the first semester in high school the student automatically moves toward the fast track of dropping out.

These same students were looked at in sixth grade. Factors appeared that also identifying these ninth grade students were already at risk three years prior to entering high school. Belfanz (2004) states that by sixth grade there are three criteria that exist in indicating future drop outs. These factors include; less than 80% attendance, a poor final grade in behavior, and if the student was failing either mathematics or English.

The first year of high schools seems to be the tell-all year for most adolescents when predicting their road map for their remaining years in high school. According to Nancy Mizelle and Judith Irvin (2004), high schools that include grades 9–12 present the biggest percentage of drop outs. Moving from a middle school to a high school creates problems for these ninth grade students, including fast paced requirements, getting lost in large buildings with large groups of people, additional course requirements, and impersonal relationships with teachers.

Attrition rates in schools are not always easy to measure, as in high school students are not retained, they only continue to earn Carnegie units. However, in a national study conducted in 1998, 450 high schools and the middle schools that acted as feeder schools were examined. Twenty five percent of ninth graders nationwide were not being promoted to tenth grade. Some schools failed as many as forty-five percent of these students (Hertzog, 1998). These statistics led Hertzog to call the ninth grade the "holding tank" for high schools.

Walt Haney of Boston College's Center for the Study of Testing, Evaluation and Educational Policy speaks of the Ninth Grade Bulge in which students are retained in the ninth grade and the increasing difficulties with promotion to the tenth grade. "Grade nine is a key value in the education pipeline and is closing for many students, especially minority students" (p. 12).

Haney also accuses high schools of increasingly moving low achieving students out of the educational system to improve test scores (Haney, 1989). The accusations are backed up by startling numbers. According to Haney, in the 1970's attrition rates between ninth and tenth grade were less than five percent. During the 1980's this number began to rise and by the mid 1990s 10% of students in the United States were not passing ninth grade. This means that over 400, 000 students nationwide were becoming part of the Ninth Grade Bulge.

To create and implement programs suitable for combating these issues including disengagement, low academic performance, low literacy, and to assist in strengthening programs to help student in at risk groups, one must first understand adolescent development at this particular stage. By understanding these developmental stages, programs and curriculum can be correctly designed to address the needs of students that are specific to their maturity levels.

Adolescent Development

Understanding the whole child assists teachers and administrators when creating programs to encourage attendance and decrease behavior problems. This knowledge helps to create programs in which curriculum is focused and developed according to

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needs of the student intellectually, socially, emotionally, morally and physically. This section will briefly explore each of these areas of adolescent development in the adolescent.

Intellectual

Although no adolescent develops at the same rate intellectually, there are many characteristics that can be generalized for adolescent intellectual development. Individuals in adolescence are moving from concrete to abstract thinking (Meece, 2007). They develop the ability to be self reflective. Students in this stage prefer active rather than passive learning experiences (Meece, 2007).

Piaget (1932) describes the stage of intellectual development, beginning at around age eleven or twelve, as the formal operational stage. Abstract problems such as negative numbers and proportions are understandable. These adolescents are better able to deal with hypothetical situations and often envision the world differently than it is because of their contrary-to-fact ideas.

Often adolescents in the beginning of the formal operational stage reject parental views and seek alternative belief systems. These adolescents show concern regarding global issues and use much brain energy for worthy causes. Elkind (1984) however, states that adolescents often talk about these issues much more than they actually act upon them. These ideas seem logical but often times are not practical.

Piaget suggests that the reason for this conflict and lack of realism is that adolescents are unable to separate their own logical abstraction from other's perspectives. Through experiences individuals are able to gain realism regarding what is possible with available resources and time.

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Individuals have different levels of prior knowledge and experience even at young ages. This is also the case in adolescence. During the formal operational stage, one can not discount these experiences or lack of them when determining the intellectual development of the child. Junior high and high school students, as well as adults, often apply formal operational thought when they have knowledge and experience of a topic. On the other hand, when an individual has limited knowledge, he/she thinks more "concrete operationally" which is the stage of cognitive development encountered prior to formal operational (Metz, 1995).

Vygotsky (1962, 1978) believed that society and culture promote cognitive growth. Vygotsky felt that adults convey to children through both formal and informal education ways in which their culture interprets and responds to the world. He also felt that as children develop, they begin to use what they learn in social contexts independently.

Educators assist students with making sense of the world through discussions of phenomenon or events they have both experienced (Eacott, 1999). Many theorists believe that joint meaning making decisions, in acquisition of complex ideas, are more beneficial to adolescents. This theory, commonly referred to as social constructivism advocates for pedagogy that involves student interaction. Among strategies encouraged by proponents of social constructivism include peer tutoring, cooperative learning, small groups and project based learning.

Social and Behavioral Development

Social relationships begin to change during adolescence. Emotional distance and conflict between parents and offspring emerge (Steinberg, 1996) with such conflict being

most pronounced in earlier adolescence. Social interaction with peers takes on a particularly important role. Adolescents begin to spend about four times the amount of time with peers than with adults (Csikszentonlyr, Larson, & Prescott, 1977). Social skills developed away from the home allow opportunities for increased independence.

Schools are where students spend the majority of their hours while awake daily. Because of the amount of time spent in school, institutions are training grounds for adolescent socially and behaviorally. During classroom time students not only learn subject matter but also appropriate and inappropriate ways of interacting with peers. In the hallways, cafeteria, and extra curricular events, students are also spending time with peers and experimenting with social and behavioral training.

Adolescents exhibit a disproportionate amount of risk taking and reckless behavior when compared to individuals in other stages of development. Risk taking becomes essentially normal during this period of time. More than fifty percent of adolescents have engaged in drunk driving, sex without contraception, illegal drug use, school misconduct, theft or other criminal activities or fighting (Arnet, 1992). "Although most adolescents exhibit only transient ontogenetic increase in risk taking and manage to escape the lottery from harm associated with their risk- taking behavior", adolescent risk taking behaviors may turn into a deviant lifestyle and criminal behavior may continue into adulthood (Coch, Fisher & Dawson, 2007).

Alcohol use among adolescents is a concern. Johnston, O'Malley, and Bachman (2002) found that among twelfth grade students seventy-eight percent had drank alcohol and forty-seven percent of eighth graders had also tried alcohol. Twenty-nine percent of twelfth graders and twelve percent of eighth graders had had at least five consecutive

drinks within the last two weeks. Fifty-seven percent of twelfth graders had smoked cigarettes, compared with thirty-one percent of eighth graders. Forty-eight percent of seniors had smoked marijuana and nineteen percent of eighth graders also had smoked marijuana at least once.

Concern for this use not only lies with obvious dangers of using alcohol, drugs and smoking cigarettes. Dependency has been shown to be more prevalent in the adolescent years (Tarter & Kirisci, 1998). Although adolescent abuse alcohol more and are more likely to become dependent, the majority of adolescent alcohol and drug use is "adolescent limited" in that the rates of use declines after the individual leaves adolescence (Labouvie, Bates & Pandina., 1997).

Two schools of thought exist as to why teenagers consume large amounts of alcohol frequently, as well as experiment with drugs. The first school of thought is that adolescent find it particularly rewarding (Chambers, 2003). This concept makes intuitive sense; however, others feel that alcohol and drugs compensate for a decline in the sensitivity of reward circuits (Spear, 2002).

Clark (1998) reports that teenagers report feeling less happy than any other individuals. There was a fifty percent decline in ratings of activities that made adolescents feel "very happy" from childhood to adolescence. Interesting enough, they reported feeling less happy than college students or adults.

Realization of these types of social and behavioral changes occurring in adolescence is important to consider when establishing curriculum for high school freshman. Awareness and training programs for teachers is crucial. Programs to

recognize and assist students with coping with these changes are necessary to aid in transition into high school for many teenagers.

Physical

During teenage years individuals experience quick gains in height and weight. For the period of a one-year growth spurt, boys and girls can gain an average of 4.1 inches and 3.5 inches in height respectively. Growth usually occurs two years earlier for girls than boys. Weight gain results from greater than before muscle development in boys, and an increase in body fat in girls (Huebner, 2000).

Sexual interest and sexual drive play an important meaning in the behavior of adolescents. Seventeen percent of seventh and eighth graders and forty-nine percent of ninth through twelfth graders report that they have had sex (Resnick, 1997). Physically changes during adolescence include: growth of pubic hair; first menstrual period for girls or penis growth for boys; voice changes (for boys); growth of underarm hair; facial hair growth (for boys); and increased production of oil, increased sweat gland activity, and the beginning of acne (Huebner, 2000).

An increase in food intake is also seen during adolescence. A boost in metabolic activity along with growth spurts contributes to this food consumption (Betts, 1995). In addition to eating more, adolescents begin to sleep less, preferring to go to bed and wake up later. Hansen, Jansen, Schoff, Zec, and Dubocavich (2005) state that these phase delays may have functional significance in that adolescents perform better later in the day than early morning. With students beginning school as early as 6:30 in the morning, some researchers believe sleep deprivation and mid-day sleepiness can be explained.

Teenagers' brains are not totally developed until late in adolescence. Research suggests that the connections between neurons affecting emotional, physical and mental abilities are unfinished. This could explain why some teens seem to behave contradictory when attempting to control their emotions and judgments.

Emotional

Adolescents often display increased decision making in a classroom or other structured setting but show poorer judgment in more emotional or arousing contexts, especially situations involving peers. Dahl (2004) attributes this to the inability to regulate reactions to emotions. Adaptive decision making in low stress, low emotional situations in which rational thinking "may be subverted by affective reactions emerging in the 'heat' of the moment" (Coch, Fisher, & Dawson, 2007, p. 367).

In a study conducted in which adults and adolescents used a computer to chart the risk taking behaviors each possessed, adults performed similarly when tested alone and with a group of peers. The adolescents, however, took more risks when performing in groups of peers than when they were alone (Steinberg, 1996).

Erickson (1956) calls the stage of emotional development that adolescents are in the Learning Identity Versus Identity Diffusion (fidelity) phase. Throughout this fifth psychosocial predicament the child is discovering how to answer adequately the question of "Who am I?" Still some role identity diffusion will exist. As discussed earlier, this often leads to risk taking behavior as well as rebellion. Most boys and some girls experiment with minor misbehavior; self-doubt is prevalent.

During this stage of moral development self certainty begins to replace self consciousness. The adolescent begins to believe that he/she can achieve and sees a clearer

vision of time perspective. This stage prepares the individual for the next stage of moral development in which lasting relationships and true intimacy form (Erikson, 1956)

Moral Development

Piaget (1932) believed at age eleven adolescents begin to evolve from observing fixed rules that should be obeyed to a more relativistic way of thinking about where rules can be changed if everyone agrees. Kohlberg (1958) took research done by Piaget to expand on the binary way of thinking. Kohlberg took 72 boys ages, 10, 13, and 16 and had them read or read to them a brief story in which a man's wife is dying.

In this passage there is only one drug that can save the man's dying wife. The man, named Heinz, goes to all his friends and used all his life's savings but can only gather half the money needed to save his wife. Heinz asks the pharmacist if he gives him all the money he has, if he will let him have the drug. The druggist tells Heinz that he will not and that because he created the drug, it is his prerogative regarding the amount he charges for it. Heinz breaks into the drug store that night and steals the drug.

After each young person has been given the opportunity to read this passage, Kohlberg asked them if what Heinz did was wrong. He is not as interested in the yes/no answer as in the rationale the individual has for coming up with his answer. Kohlberg asked the individuals and compared answers to establish interrater reliability.

Students entering teenage years are in what Kohlberg refers to as Conventional Morality. These adolescents see morality as more than the making of simple deals. The students also see decisions as having a need to be good and effecting family and community. Students in the phase would look at Heinz's intentions for stealing the drug. These students would also be more likely to see the druggist as selfish and greedy.

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An example of one student's response from the study is as follows:

It was really the druggist's fault, he was unfair, trying to overcharge and

letting someone die. Heinz loved his wife and wanted to save her. I think

anyone would. I don't think they would put him in jail. The judge would

look at all sides, and see that the druggist was charging too much.

(Kohlberg, 1963, p. 25)

In this paragraph, Don, age 13, assumes that the attitude he feels is shared by all members of the community. This is an example of how students have developed morally when they first enter high school. Students have not become fully aware of society as a whole and the impact of their decisions on others; however, decisions are not seen as totally individual pursuits with no bearings on others.

Ninth Grade Instruction

Student Choice/Own Interests

When students see no connection between the coursework and the relevance it has to their life they become disengaged (National Association of School Principals, 1996). When students are afforded opportunities to choose what course to take and to set their own goals a buy in occurs. "Students are rarely given opportunities to consider their own career goals and strengths and to choose a curriculum program that integrates high academic standards with career themes and pathways to match their interests" (Jordan, McPartland, Letgers, & Balfanz, 2000, p. 3).

One problem reported by adolescents is that they have no say in coursework presented to them or the pedagogy. If teachers are not attuned to students' desires and

abilities in the classroom, students may stand still cognitively. Fisher (2003) compares

this to the economic and social "rotting" that took place behind the iron curtain following

World War II.

Choice brings about ownership, responsibility and a sense of empowerment.

Choice assist students in becoming engaged (Fisher, 2003). Ninth Grade Students, as well

as other students, and even adult learners, should be given choices in several aspects of

their schooling including curriculum and delivery choices. Student attitudes are more

frequently positive if the students are given choices of coursework (Rogers, 1972).

Differentiated Curriculum

Students do not all learn the same (Gardner, 1999; Hall, 2002). Because students

do have different modalities of learning that suit him/her best, differentiated instruction is

often successful in reaching most students. Differentiated instruction defined as the

approach to teaching and learning giving students multiple options for taking information

on and for making sense of those ideas.

When using differentiated instruction, teachers must be flexible and often times

adjust curriculum and delivery of instruction. The teacher takes an active role in

modifying the instruction to meet learner needs and does not expect the learner to have to

make the teaching fit their mode of learning (Hall, 2002).

Differentiated instruction uses a combination of teacher led (lecture) style

delivery, as well as smaller group and individual instruction. This teaching approach is

based on the theory that pedagogy should be varied. Hall (2002) state that through

differentiating instruction educators are in essence recognizing a student's "varying

background knowledge, readiness, language, preferences in learning, interests, and to react responsively" (p. 57).

Three elements of the curriculum that can be differentiated: Content, Process, and Products (Tomlinson, 2001). Content includes acts, concepts, generalizations or principles, attitudes, and skills. Concept differentiation refers to when flexible grouping is used and learners are expected to interact and work together as they develop knowledge of new content. Ongoing and varying assessment displays product differentiation.

Curriculum should no longer be defined in conditions of what a teacher will teach but instead in conditions of what a student has learned and will be able to demonstrate he/she has learned. Teachers should be knowledgeable regarding a baseline of where the student is currently and what learning styles the student possesses. Instruction should be given based on what is known about the student as an individual. Teaching should then be individualized to each student and differentiated as much as possible to meet all students' needs (Diamond, 2004; Tomlinson, 2001).

Project Based Learning

Project-based learning is a comprehensive instructional approach to engage students in sustained, cooperative investigation (Bransford & Stein, 1993). Within the framework of project based learning, students work together to give meaning to the lesson and information being taught to them. Project-based instruction is different from inquiry-based learning. The major difference in the two is the element of cooperative learning.

There are two main components to the projects expected in project based learning. First, there lies a problem or question that drives the activity. Also, there exists

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culminating actions including artifacts, communications, and other tasks that address and assist in clarifying a result to the problem or information (Brown & Campione, 1994).

For institutions to facilitate project based learning effectively there are several suggestions given. First, the driving question should have real life context and should be able to be applied to multiple situations. Students must have the opportunity to actively investigate so that they are allowed to understand the new concepts more accurately, apply the new information, and be allowed to display their new knowledge in many different ways. Collaboration is needed and small learning communities are encouraged. Lastly, learning tools including computer labs, telecommunications, video, audio, and graphing applications are suggested (Blumenfeld et al., 1991).

Parental Involvement

One element often left out of junior high education is parental involvement. When schools work together to support learning children tend to succeed in both life and in school (Henderson & Berla, 1994). The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status but the extent that the family is able to create and encourage learning; express high, but realistic goals for achievement and in setting future goals; and the availability of the parents for making themselves available in their child's education and in community involvement (Jackson & Davis, 2000). Henderson and Berla (1994) looked at sixty-six students' relationships between parental behaviors including school involvement to assessment common correlations.

The most accurate predictor of a student's achievement in school is not income or social status but the extent that the family is able to create and encourage learning; express high, but realistic goals for achievement and in setting future goals; and how

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available the parents make themselves in their child's education and in community involvement.

These three overlying assumptions were found in most of the studies examined. Particularly, there was a need for parental involvement in at risk groups. Recent immigrants that have cultural and language barriers are often less likely to be involved in their child's schooling. Often times they are unaware are intimidated by U.S. culture and schools. It is extremely important to reach out to this population because of these disadvantages (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Several factors are affected by increasing parental involvement in schools. Higher grades and test scores generally become apparent (Mapp, 1997). There is an increase in attendance and more homework is turned in completed (Mapp, 1997). Studies have found a correlation between parental involvement and test scores (Snow, Bames, Chandler, Goodman, & Hemphill, 1991). Students have a more positive attitude and behavioral concerns decrease. Last, there is a greater enrollment in post secondary institutions (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

When students reach junior high level, parental involvement generally decreases. Three-fourths of children between the ages of eight and ten report being highly involved in their student's schooling. By the age of sixteen, this number drops to only fifty percent (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1995). Although parents often feel they are doing the right thing by allowing their child to become more independent, during junior high years, parental involvement is important to academic and social success. For these reasons, educators should encourage parental involvement and reach out to parents and the community as much as possible.

Many schools have created action/partnership teams that assess parents and community attitudes, as well as strengths and weaknesses as parent perceive them. These groups take data and create a plan for their individual school in hopes of forming positive relationships and communication with parents and community members (Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Parental contact should be made early in the school year, and even prior to the beginning of the academic year when possible. The contact should begin positive and teachers should not wait until the student is in trouble academically or behaviorally. Communication should be on going and personal. Students should also be allowed to initiate this communication and lead the conferences when appropriate (Cronwell, 1999; Jackson & Davis, 2000).

Student/Teacher Relations

When students enter high school the schools they enter is usually much larger than the middle school in which they are coming from the year prior. As a result, high school teachers typically teach several different groups of students. This makes it difficult for the student to form a close relationship with any school-affiliated adult. This is unfortunate because this is the point in development when there is a great need for guidance and support from non-family adults (Eccles & Midgley, 1989).

Changes in the relationships students have with teachers break down trust and reliance on community. This often leads to a lower sense of worth and an increase in student alienation. Some students, that have experienced this, even have less respect for authority (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). Adding to this problem is the increase in the neglect of student problems being addressed. Teachers who are unfamiliar with students are less

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likely to notice when he/she is having difficulties. At risk students will be more likely to drop out when difficulties are not noticed and addressed. Although adolescent yearn for autonomy and self-focus (Eccles, 1999), they still need safe environments that are intellectually stimulating to assist them (Simmons & Blyth, 1987; Stuhlman, Hamre, & Pianta, 2002).

Research shows that schools would profit from emphasizing the significance of building and maintaining supportive, thoughtful associations between teachers and students. Battistich (1997) states that an emotionally and socially encouraging school environment contributes to the growth of students' self-confidence. School climate also affects teachers' attitudes that they can be successful in their jobs.

Many ways of creating positive student-teacher relationships have been shown to be effective. Among these include: organizing non-academic extracurricular activities for students and teachers to participate in together (Battistich, Solomon,Watson, & Schaps, 1997; Stuhlman, Hamre, & Pianta, 2002), developing advisor/advisee groups (Pinta & Hamre, 2001), modeling caring relationships from the top down (Battistich, Solomon, Watson, & Schaps, 1997), and development of high behavioral expectations (Stuhlman, Hamre, & Pianta, 2002).

Another important component of strengthening student teacher relationships is to target at-risk students (Stuhlman, Hamre, & Pianta, 2002). Teachers should know their own feelings about these students so that they are able to deal with them effectively. These students should be understood and knowledge of these circumstances known, however, standards should still be set for them to give them accountability. Educators should not underestimate the power of one-on-one relationship with these students (Stuhlman, Hamre, & Pianta, 2002).

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By listening and observing students, educators are better able to understand the student's perspective. At risk students are more easily noted and relationships are strengthened. It is for these reasons that currently educators are beginning to see a need to listen to the voices of students while forming relationships with them. Through strong student relationships and respect of the voices of students, educational leaders hope to implement policies and programs that will benefit all stakeholders (Battistich, 1997).

Student Voice

Introduction

Student voice is the individual and collective perspective and actions of young people within the context of learning and education. Studies utilizing student voice have made valuable contributions to educational policy and reform (Kozol, 1991; Reed, 1997; Smyth, 2006). Student voice work basically follows the following assumptions: Individuals have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling; adolescents' insights warrant not only the attention but also the responses of adults; and young people should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education.

Jonathan Kozol writes in his book Savage Inequalities (1991), "We have not been listening much to children in recent years of 'summit conferences' on education, of severe reports, and ominous prescriptions. The voices of children, frankly, have been missing from the whole discussion" (Kozol, 1991, p. 5). Studies have shown repeatedly that when students have a voice in curriculum, rules, policies, and organizational formation achievement and attendance increase and retention, disengagement and discipline decrease. By involving students in initiatives and in dialogue about changes in

restructuring program, the motive for the initiatives is better understood and accepted (Reed, 1997).

Often teachers, administrators, and legislators fear student voice. Student opinions may be seen as challenging and threatening to an organization (Fielding & Rudduck, 2003). Fielding and Ruddock go on to state that because of this fear the strategy of using student voice for decision making and for post hoc evaluation is used primarily in safe places that seem non-threatening including uniforms, meal planning and environmental issues such as wall color. Fielding and Ruddick (2003) state that educators need to make a "radical collegiality" movement in which there is no more us/them but rather a partnership where decisions are made collectively between students, teachers and administrators.

Smyth (2006) states that it is not a coincidence that disengagement by young adolescents has increased at the same time educational policy regimes have become less inviting places for teachers and students. Students feel their lives, desires, aspirations, and experiences do not matter when policies are put into place that effect them but no one asks for their opinion regarding these matters. This trivialization brings about hostility in the student and will cause him/her to detach from the institution.

Policy makers and education leaders are aware of problems facing young people including not buying in and boredom, poor performance in school and on standardized tests and an increase in student attrition in ninth grade. Few educational leaders listen to the voices that are most aware of what is actually occurring in schools and in the lives of these adolescents; the students themselves. The group that is most affected by policies, including No Child Left Behind (2001), have no official voice in educational decisions.

Smyth (2006) argues that these students are exercising their voice through other means. Their opinions are voiced in their reactions to school including:

- 540,000 students drop out of school annually. This number is equivalent to the population of Washington, DC (Frost, 2006).

- The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research states that eighth graders who graduate in five years range from a low in Florida of 55%, to a high in New Jersey of 87% (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004).

Kohl (1994) maintains this is how America's youth are choosing to voice their opinions, since no one is asking them to have an input in their own education.

Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2000) have challenged educational systems to model for other professions' processes in which adolescents' views and opinions are considered when reviewing changing policies and procedures. When we begin to listen to and honor students in their schooling, assistance is given with self confidence, widening of perspectives and increasing empathy for others (Reed, 1997). Institutions of learning will become more informed and have a better chance at moving forward in a positive manner.

Ninth Grade Success Academies

Introduction

Small high schools in the United States are quickly becoming a thing of the past. Approximately 70% of American high school students attend schools that have over 1,000 students (www.ed.gov/print/programs/slcp/index.html). It is difficult to feel a sense of community or oneness with populations this elevated. These large organizations are

detrimental to student and teacher well-being (Gregory & Smith, 1987; Kerr, 2002). Problems resulting from this include autonomy, increased discipline problems, a greater number of absences, higher drop out rates, and less parental involvement.

In 1994 Johns Hopkins University Center on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) began a reform to address high discipline rates, poor school climate, low attendance and elevated drop out rates in Patterson High School in Baltimore, Maryland. James McPartland, who previously worked with James Coleman at Johns Hopkins University, was instrumental in the research and publication of "Equity in Education Report" (1966), also known as The Coleman Report. This report surveyed over 600,000 school age children to determine equity in America's education.

McPartland saw the need for programs aimed at assisting large, urban, high schools with problems including attendance, discipline, and drop out. He began to search the literature to gain knowledge regarding why students choose to exit high school. McPartland then recruited educators and sociologist to invent new practices and models for troubled high schools.

With the success of Dr. McPartland's model, other researchers and educational leaders begin to incorporate elements of these models into their programs. Research is conducted and academies sponsored through CRESPAR, the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk. This organization partners with Johns Hopkins and Howard Universities. CRESPAR conducts research, development, evaluation and dissemination activities to transform schools to promote success for students at risk.

Although many ninth grade academy models exist, there are common elements and components to most of them. These elements include small learning communities,

block scheduling and double dosing/freshman seminar added to the ninth grade curriculum. Through his effort a model for Ninth Grade Success Academies was formed. Whereas many different models of ninth Grade Success Academies exist, there are common elements within the models.

This next section will outlines the components of Ninth Grade Success Academies. Research regarding the outcomes of the implementation of these academies is also highlighted.

Components of Ninth Grade Success Academies

Although ninth grade success academies have variations in specifications of the exact structure, most share common large goals and philosophical make-ups. Three overall components exist in most ninth grade academies. Small learning communities, block scheduling, and freshman seminar with reading and mathematical strategies incorporated in them are usually standard with academies. In this section, each of these three components, as well as the need and affects of each will be discussed.

Small Learning Communities

Many school leaders and officials have explored new ways to successfully plan for ninth grade success. *Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution* (1999) contains 81 recommendations for high schools seeking increased success. This report maintains that high schools should and must divide themselves into groups containing no more than 600 students. It also advocates for varied instructional strategies. Coherency to learn and make sense out of what they learn so that it can be implemented in daily life

outside of school is also a necessity. Teachers should have no more than 90 students per term so that students face a decreased amount of autonomy and relationships are formed.

The most prevalent characteristic of the academies is the separation of the ninth grade from the upper classman and their placement into small learning communities, sometimes referred to as teams. Ninth grade students participating in an academy are given their own wing in the school, a separate administrator and counselor and placed in teams. This allows students and teachers to form personal relationships with each other. The goal is to minimize the sense of autonomy and ensure that students will not get lost in the crowd (Kerr, 2002). In the annual Back to School Address in 1999, the Secretary of Education, Richard Riley stated "

> I've talked to many honest and caring principals, who admit that they just lose students because their school is too big. They couldn't reach the students before they became disconnected or dropped out. I think the big Idea for the future is this … think smaller. (Riley, 1999)

The NCLB Act of 2001 emphasizes the importance of Small Learning Communities. This law assists in defining the structure to discretionary grant status of Small Learning Community Grant Competition. These grants assist large public high schools which include 11th and 12th grades and contain more than 1,000 students.

People have a basic human need to belong to others. Individuals also possess a need to feel part of a group that works toward a common goal. Collectively people will work together toward goals if they are created and shared. Otherwise people feel alienated (Sergiovanna, 1994).

These small learning communities are often referred to as "teams". With the teaming approach used in the academies, four or five teachers are placed in interdisciplinary teams. These groups consist of 150 to 180 students. In the academies, students are placed into smaller, self-contained groups. The goal of this is to make personal connections with the students, encourage small but structured community environments, decrease distractions, and enhance opportunities for students and teachers to interact (McPartland, Jordan, Letgers, & Balfanz, 1997).

It is also important that teachers in these smaller groups share common planning time. This is crucial because of the need for collaboration and to discuss student needs. The academies are housed in their own separate building and are assigned a counselor and administrator that only serve those students in the ninth grade academies. (McPartland, Balfanz, Jordan, & Letgers, 1998). Students feel more of a connection with teachers, ownership of the group and in turn achievement, attendance and behavior increase (McPartland, Jordan , Letgers & Belfanz, 1997; Oxley, 1994). People have a basic human need to belong to others and a need to feel part of a group that works toward a common goal. When goals are created and shared. Otherwise people feel alienated collectively people will work together (Sergiovanna, 1994).

Smaller schools are safer, have a more positive climate, and more productive students because students feel they are part of a community and that they are known and cared for. Patterson High School in Baltimore, Maryland used qualitative data including observations of students and faculty. Pride from students and staff was evident in the hall displays, t-shirts worn, smooth transitions in hallways and open door teaching, Teachers commented with the change in ways including, "I sometimes feel I have died and gone to

teacher's heaven" (McPartland, 1998, p. 347) and, "We have a school now, not like the playground it used to be" (McPartland, 1998, p. 347).

Surveys were given at Patterson High School in Baltimore prior to the Academy implementation afterwards. Faculty and students were asked to rate twelve different items as to whether or not they posed potential serious problems for the school. Significant improvements were found in the following areas: student behavior, student motivation, and in student relationships with teachers (McPartland, 1998). Teachers also felt they have time to know their students and support them (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Gregory, 1992; Stockyard & Mayberry, 1992).

As discussed earlier, poor academic achievement has been shown to be the strongest predictor of students at risk of dropping out (Wood, 1994). Small learning communities have been shown to increase student achievement (Williams, 2003). Students are also more likely to be more engaged in learning. A comprehensive study commissioned by the Government compared small versus large high schools in 1995. Mary Anne Raywid (1999) observed hundreds of studies and found that students attending small schools had either equal or higher achievement as students who attended large schools. Attendance and graduation rates were also higher in the smaller schools. Raywid went on to conclude that the value of small schools was observed with a high confidence level (Raywid, 1999). During the implementation of the Success Academy in Baltimore, there was a 28 point rise in the number of students passing the state mathematics exam.

Decreasing the "size" of schools through communal approaches has shown outcomes of increased attendance rates, fewer disciplinary referrals, higher promotion

rates, increased school loyalty and greater school satisfaction (Klonsky, 1995; McPartland, 1998; Raywid, 1995). Between 1993–94 and 1996–97 Patterson High School in Baltimore increased its attendance rate by 10 points school wide and 15 points for the ninth grade. During the same time period, the attendance rate for other high schools in Baltimore dropped 3 points.

Of the nine high schools in the Baltimore area, Patterson High went from being the school with the highest amount of students missing 20 or more days to being the second lowest. (The school that had less was the smallest and least economically disadvantaged of the schools.) (McFarland, 1998). Promotion rates steadily increased with the implementation of the Ninth Grade Success Academy at Patterson High School between 1993 and 1998 with the number of juniors and senior rising nearly two thirds (McPartland, 1998).

Block Scheduling

Instead of traditional seven period days, freshmen participating in Ninth Grade Academies attend four ninety minute periods. During this ninety minute block, students are given a double dose of English and math so they can focus on remedial work in these areas. During second semester these students begin taking regular English and Algebra. Students on grade level and students working above grade level take regular English and Algebra during the first semester.

Ninth Grade Success Academies focus on curriculum that prepares students for their future with instruction in goal setting and character development. There are also programs and curriculum in place to assist filling gaps in both reading and mathematics. Strategic Reading (SR) gives students reading two or more grade levels below

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opportunity to accelerate their reading scores with their peers that also have the same deficits Talent Development High School offers *The Literacy Initiative* for students that otherwise would just get by all through high school (McPartland, 1998).

Block scheduling also allows time to incorporate learning techniques for adolescent success. Although some teachers report that teaching for ninety minutes is often challenging, professional development workshops can assist students with ideas and lesson plans that will keep these ninth grade students engaged while providing necessary knowledge (McPartland, 1998).

Strategic Math and Reading /Freshman Seminar

An effective ninth grade curriculum must address the fact that many students enter high school with inadequate prior preparation in Math and English. When using the JHU model, Ninth Grade Success Academies implement CRESPAR's *Transition to Advanced Mathematics* and *Strategic Reading* courses to supplement regular Algebra and English courses. These courses provide students with a double dose of instructional math and English. There is also a ninth grade English course to further strengthen reading and writing skills called the integration of *Student Team Literature* (STLit) and *Talent Development Writing*.

In Ninth Grade Success Academies every student participates in Freshman Seminar, which is also referred to as a Leadership Skills Development class (McPartland, 1998). Crucial to the success of the academy are the utilization of innovative and traditional techniques in instruction. Long term projects with collaboration are encouraged. Reflective journal writing is also stressed. Lessons are incorporated to assist students with note taking, time management, social relationships and skills they will need

after leaving high school. Behavioral objectives are also given daily. Assessment through daily quizzes, unit tests, class work daily graded projects, presentations and both pre and post tests are all utilized in the curriculum.

Students enter ninth grade and it is often assumed they have necessary academic and social skills to handle what is expected of them to succeed with high school coursework. Background knowledge in reading and mathematics is a must but equally important are the ability to study, take notes, stay organized and to be able to get along with both peers and subordinates. There is no where built into the traditional high school model when these skills are taught.

Often times in large high schools that contain a majority of students living in lower socio economic situations, lesser level courses are the norm for all students except advanced students that are preparing for college. With the No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation all students are required to meet collective standards and it has become a consensus that high standards courses will benefit most students. There are undeniable gaps that already exist and without focus to extinguish these gaps the students suffering from lack of reading and mathematical knowledge will proceed on a continuous decline (Letgers & McDill, 1994, Lucas, 1999, Oakes, 1985). Student activities that promote higher order thinking, critical reasoning skills, cooperative learning and practical application are missing from the curriculum (Darling-Hammond, 1997). During Freshman Seminar students are taught these skills that will assist in promoting study and work habits into the students' future.

Although many studies have been done assessing the benefits of Ninth Grade Success Academies on the east coast and in California, there have not been many

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evaluative studies done in the southern region of the United States. Because of cultural differences in these groups, it is important to look at all areas of the country to assess strengths and weaknesses of the program.

There are also few studies utilizing student voice as a tool in the evaluation of how well these transitioning programs are meeting the needs of ninth grade students. By interviewing and analyzing student opinions, the academies can be better structured based on all parties involved.

Finally, the literature lacks qualitative data in which students and teachers are both interviewed and in which the responses are not only analyzed but compared to each other. This comparison allows for the understanding of agreements and disconnects between two important stakeholder groups. This study of Ninth Grade Success Academies utilizes student voice, and compares perceptions of students to attitudes and feelings of teachers all involved in the same phenomena. It is hoped that by gaining a better knowledge of these groups' feelings and perceptions, ninth grade academies, as well as ninth grade curriculum will continue to strengthen.

III. METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research questions, research design, the instruments used, and the data collection procedures. A description of participants and procedures is detailed. Data collection began in December 2005 with focus group interviews of students being done in both Fairbanks and Central High Schools. These same participants were again interviewed in the spring of 2006. Teachers participating in the academy were surveyed in May 2006 (see Table 2). All data gathering and events are outlined below.

Research Questions

The primary focus of this research was to determine the extent to which Ninth Grade Transition Academies affected perceptions of students and teachers in the context of the climate of the school and student success. The following questions were used to help explain this overarching investigation

1. What outcomes have students and teachers observed related to the implementation of the Ninth Grade Success Academies at Fairbanks High School and Central High School?

2. In what ways do teachers perceive Ninth Grade Success Academy implementation collectively in the two high schools?

3.   In what ways do students perceive Ninth Grade Success Academy implementation collectively in the two high schools?

4.   In what ways are student perception and teacher perception similar and different in the two high schools?

Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of the implementation of Ninth Grade Success Academies in two large public high schools that were suffering from an increasing drop out rate, poor attendance, and an increase in discipline problems.

A phenomenological approach (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 1997) was used to conduct this research project. Phenomenology refers to knowledge as it appears to the consciousness of the researcher based on prior knowledge coupled with experiences and data collected. Using a phenomenological approach, the researcher is able to use "the science of describing what one perceives, senses and knows on one's immediate awareness and experience" (Moustakas, 1994, pg. 27). Kockelman (1967) implies that this process leads to an unfolding of phenomenal consciousness "through science and philosophy toward the absolute knowledge of the Absolute (pg. 24). Knowledge should be sought in any place there lies doubt (Moustakas, 1994).

The word phenomenon comes from the Greek word *phaenesthai,* which means to shine light or brightness, or to show oneself totally in the light of day. In a larger sense, phenomenonology provides experience to bring about new knowledge (Moustaka, 1994).

By applying perspectives of phenomenology, this research attempts to determine if the outcomes observed were intended by the implementators of the academies. Did the students feel it affected them academically and led to greater success? Did it increase attendance? How were incentives provided for being present daily? Did discipline problems decrease and if so, what were the reasons for this decline? Did teachers feel that these academies facilitated more planning time and collaboration amongst themselves?

Using this phenomenological approach allowed an unearthing of meanings and understanding of the actions and perceptions of students and teachers affected by these academies (Crotty, 1998). As a researcher, I could make no assumptions or adopt any biases about the perceptions of the academies in these two schools. I also could not assume interactions or occurrences were a result of the Ninth Grade Success Academies' implementation. A reality could only be formed of the implementation of the academies through the ideas, words, interactions and responses acquired by the participants in the study. It was crucial as a researcher conducting a phenomenological study to "transcend or suspend past knowledge and experience to understand a phenomenon at a deeper level" (Merleau-Ponty, 1956, p. 18).

Crotty (1988) states that a point of study can not be described apart from the subject. Perceptions of those being studied require concentration with phenomenon that is being observed and assessed. Using this approach, I had to put aside past experiences, and knowledge, and study on the phenomenon.

Many past experiences with the school system being studied along with my personal feelings regarding successful and ineffective strategies for creating ninth grade

success had to be put aside. Noting rich descriptions and making unbiased observations was a key part of the research process at both schools.

Along with data collected during interviews and surveys, I also incorporated the use of field notes and recommendations when analyzing data. The researcher's view of reality makes the study more of a heuristic approach (Patton, 1990). Discovery was made to better understand the phenomenon by sifting through data, approaching it with unbiased and organizing results in a way to better define results of the inclusion of these academies. The researcher's view and recommendations were also used in the final results and interpretations.

In the next section three phenomenological phases are discussed. Each phase is explained including a rationale for data collection, descriptions of subjects selected and the selection process, and procedures involved in the phase.

Role as a Researcher

Several biases of the researcher in this study had to be considered. I had previously taught in this school system for nine years. While no longer employed with this system, I had taught middle school in a feeder school to one of the high schools involved and had many preconceived notions of the schools' strengths and weaknesses. By recognizing these biases, I took steps to begin and complete this research with an open mind.

Journaling prior, during and after interviews assisted me with expressing thoughts and working through biases and feelings related to these issues. This was important in reflection of preconceived notions related to schools, personnel, strengths and

weaknesses of the NGSA (Ninth Grade Success Academies) program itself. I also spoke

with my committee chair and committee members who assisted me with being as realistic

as possible when interpreting data by challenging my initial assumptions and

interpretations.

Relationships with persons involved in the program had already been established

in some cases prior to the study which also presented challenges to the study. Three of

the students I interviewed at Fairbanks High School were former students of mine when

they were in middle school. Although I did not teach one of their academic content areas,

I coached one of the students and had two of them in the group when I sponsored Student

Government Association.

I had knowledge of both principals involved prior to the study. I had no prior

personal or professional relationship with either but did enter the study having

information regarding perceived strengths and weaknesses about each of them from some

of the faculty and community members.

One of the system's school board members was also my daughter's grandfather.

This added a political element to the study. Prior to beginning data collection,

confidentiality was discussed with all parties including the system superintendent and

curriculum supervisor who oversaw the academies. I made it clear to all involved that all

data collected would remain confidential.

Participants

Participants for the study fell into two categories. Students participating were high

school freshman (either 14 or 15 years of age). This was their first time in high school, as

repeating freshman can not participate in the academy. Gender and ethnic makeup is presented below (Table 1).

Table 1

Demographics of Fairbanks High School and Central Students Interviewed

	Hispanic	Caucasian	African American
Female	2	4	3
Male	0	5	2

Other participants were teachers teaching freshman student included in the academy. Subject matter included algebra, English, biology, history, physical education, Business Tech Essentials, and Leadership Seminar. All teachers surveyed were certified to teach in the state of Alabama and held at least a bachelors degree. Experience ranged from 0-21 years.

Collection of Data

Collection of data (see Table 2) spanned one academic school year. Data were collected in three phases. Initially, the researcher attended faculty meetings on the first day of school during the 2005–2006 school year at each school. There I explained the objectives for my research. The researcher was introduced by the principals at each school. Field notes were taken by the researcher at each school during these meeting to document feelings of the group dynamics and interactions of these faculty members.

Table 2

Collection of Data—Fairbanks and Central High Schools

	Students	Faculty
December 2005	Focus Group Interviews I Students	
March 2006	Focus Group Interviews II Students	
May 2006		Open Ended Surveys Teachers

Interview questions with students were designed to provide rich descriptions of student life in this stage of adolescence. Questions probed for answers relating to goals, hopes, fears, and day-to-day life of these students. Some students were very open and spoke freely while others had to be probed using additional questions and made to feel more comfortable before they would respond. Students were encouraged to openly respond by asking open ended questions specifically to certain students and also by expanding on any yes\no responses, nods or other indicators from each of the participants.

In Phase II of the study, in which students were re-interviewed rapport was more easily established because of the prior interactions with the students. Students interviewed initially were the same students interviewed on the second visit. By the second interviews, students had seven additional months to mature and experience high school, as well as the Ninth Grade Academies.

Teacher surveys distributed in Phase III provided a comparative (to student input) measure to assess how teachers perceived the implementation of the academies. Survey

questions were created by the researcher, along with committee member input, to understand how the implementation had affected all stakeholders from the teachers' perspectives. By giving surveys to all teachers participating in the academy, the process became more expeditious and more cost effective than mailing the surveys.

MaxQda Qualitative Software

Analysis was done with MaxQda qualitative software. This text analysis software was designed in Berlin, Germany and has been utilized since 1996. The software allows the researcher to add rich text formatted documents and code the segments according to emerging themes the researcher finds through the project. After completion of segment coding, the software retrieves activated segments of data according to the needs of the researcher. The software also has the capability of making maps to assist in visualization of the researcher's findings. Other functions, such as the inclusion of memo attachments, are available but were not used in the research.

Phenomenological Phase I

Student Interviews

The first phase of the research was conducted in September of 2005. This phase was conducted to gain an overall idea of changes and expectations that had occurred since the implementation of the academies. More importantly, as the researcher I wanted to collect data pertaining to perceptions about how the implementation of the academies might change the high schools. Also, an understanding of the extent of orientation to the academies, as perceived by the students, was hoped to be better understood. Focus group

interviews were held with a group of students from each of the two high schools. Both of these groups were randomly selected.

From a list of student numbers, twenty names at each high school were selected. These students were sent letters inviting them to participate (See Appendix A). Ten students from Central High School and twelve students from Fairbanks High School returned letters. Upon return of the letters with parent signatures, the counselor at each school was informed of that child's participation status. On the day of the interviews the students who had returned permission letters signed by parents were called to the interviewing room.

Prior permission had been sought from principals at each school. Students were allowed to make up work missed due to out of class time. Students were informed that at any time, if they changed their minds regarding participation that they would be allowed to withdraw their name from participation.

Focus group interviews for these discussions followed a protocol (see Appendix B). During these interviews, rapport was easily established and students were asked about overall perceptions of their high school. Students were asked questions regarding how participants felt regarding attendance, discipline, and drop out rates. Moustaka (1994) suggests asking participants two broad research questions, including what participants have experienced in terms of the phenomenon and what contexts or situations influenced or affected their experiences of the phenomenon related to these issues. The interviews at both schools lasted approximately forty-five minutes. Interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed. Field notes and observations were also taken by the researcher to better gain the perspective of unique observations of this group of students.

Notes were recorded by the researcher during and after the interview sessions. Perceptions of the researcher regarding attitudes, group dynamics, body language and degree of openness were all noted. These notes were treated as texts to be analyzed along with interviews.

Phenomenological Phase II

The interviews conducted in the December 2005 were transcribed and coded using MaxQDA Qualitative Software. Based on student responses from Phase I, four overlying categories arose. These categories were central to twelve overlying themes. Among these included: prior school performance, parents, work, friends, discipline, attendance, retention, teacher impact, academic supports, block scheduling, leadership seminar, and autonomy. Guided questions were formed based on these themes and on these findings (Appendix D).

<div align="center">*Student Interviews II*</div>

During March 2006, a second group of student interviews were conducted based on themes that emerged from the initial focus group interview. Utilizing the protocol, students were asked probing questions to elicit more information regarding questions related to the overlying themes. To establish consistency, the same group of students was interviewed. Rapport had already been established with these students, and they seemed excited to share with the researcher what had gone on during their school year.

These two interviews (one at each high school) lasted approximately one hour each. The discussions were audio-taped and later transcribed. After completing these interviews, it became apparent that as researcher I needed teacher input to compare student perceptions with teachers' attitudes.

As with the first set of interviews, comments were recorded by the researcher during and after the interview sessions. Perceptions of the researcher concerning attitudes, group dynamics, body language and degree of openness were all noted. These notes were treated as documents to be analyzed along with interviews.

Phenomenological Phase III

Teacher Surveys

After the second student set of interviews, questions arose that needed to be explained further by teacher input. With the help of my dissertation committee and utilizing literature on transformative processes open-ended surveys were created. Surveys (see Appendix D) were distributed to all teachers participating in the Ninth Grade Success Academies at Fairbanks High School and Central High School. Faculty members were asked to elaborate on how the academies had influenced their high school. Faculty members were also asked to describe ways in which they personally had changed teaching styles or had seen the school change because of the inclusion of these academies. Teachers were asked to discuss strengths and weaknesses of the academies and their particular school's use of them. Individuals were also asked to explain reasons they felt drop out rates, attendance and discipline had been a problem at their particular school in the past and if the components of the academies had assisted, and if so, to what extent with these areas.

Fourteen surveys were returned from Fairbanks High School and nine from Central High School. Teachers returned the surveys in a sealed envelope to the ninth grade counselor at each school and the counselor mailed them to the researcher. The

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surveys were treated as confidential. No names were requested and questions were designed so the researcher had no knowledge about the participants' identity.

The information gained from the surveys was also loaded into the qualitative software (MaxQda) and analyzed in the same manner as the interview data. Results of the surveys were analyzed to make determinations of similarities and differences within the groups as teachers and with the students (Merrian, 1998). Similarities and differences were also analyzed between school sites using intra-case analysis and cross-case analysis.

Responses were categorized and expanded upon in a descriptive manner and then also in exhibits which highlighted the number of times each item was mentioned, the implication the item had on student success, and the academy implication this theme had. This was done through an intra case analysis in the two high schools. Cross case studies were done with students at each of the two high schools as well as teachers at the two high schools. Finally all data from all respondents from both schools were compared and presented both in a descriptive manner and though data exhibit matrixes.

Other Sources of Data

During the research, field notes were recorded by the researcher. A journal was kept noting observations, emerging themes and feelings. These observations included faculty meeting attendance, informal conversations with teachers, counselors, administration, central office personnel and students. These data were also included in the analysis including theories and feelings of the researcher.

Limitations of the Study

This study was done in two high schools (grades 9–12) in southern Alabama. The study was not done with the intent to interview or survey all involved individuals participating in Ninth Grade Success Academy programming. Results of the study may only be generalized to large high schools that have implemented Ninth Grade Success Academies in a similar manner as these two schools. Even then, caution should be used when making any generalizations because consideration should be given to the manner in which these two academies were implemented including but not limited to professional development, personnel, resources including curriculum and building situations.

During my research several limitations existed including Subjectiveness, Resources and Application, Time, and Historical Factors. Each of these areas is discussed below.

Resources and Applications

Several times during the study it became apparent that the two schools involved had not implemented all elements of the academy as suggested by the Johns Hopkins Talent Development High School Model. At Fairbanks High School, students were placed on a separate wing of the school, however, at times, they were included with upperclassmen. Students and counselors both commented that at times personnel issues and building issues warranted freshman having to spend time with sophomores, juniors and seniors. These interactions often occurred at breaks, lunch and between classes.

At Central High School many of the freshmen attended some classes on the same halls as upper classmen. At times in some elective classes, sophomores were in the same

classes. These sophomores were also in some freshman classes if they had not passed the class in the prior academic year.

Professional Development preparing teachers to teach in the academies was also limited. Because the money to fund the academies was put into place at the last minute, there was little time to make sure that teachers, counselors and administrators had been appropriately trained in expectations and in the components and rationale for the academies. All teachers teaching in the academy were sent to a one day workshop before school began, but not all attended.

Experimenter Effect

Because of my years teaching in the school system in which the research was conducted, there existed biases on my part. I also knew many people involved in the schools and the academies including teachers, administration and central office personnel people. By journaling and discussing biases with committee members I was able to minimize these biases as I interpreted data. However, some participants knew me and I had to be aware of prior relationships and not let that affect findings.

Historical Factors

Before making generalizations regarding first year Ninth Grade Success Academy implementation as it pertains to the result of this study, it should be considered that prior to this school year Hurricane Katrina had just hit the Gulf Coast where these two communities are located. Prior to Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Ivan had hit this area of the state. These hurricanes brought devastation to this community and surrounding

communities. The economy and the make-up of the people living in this area changed

dramatically due to these natural disasters.

These factors are important to remember because many transient people moved

into Fairbanks and Central at this time to assist with rebuilding the region. Many people

lost their homes and jobs. Blue collar workers moved into the community to assist with

construction and other efforts to re-establish the communities. The make up of both these

schools, especially Fairbanks High School, was changed. The Hispanic community began

to rise and the school district had to increase the number of English as a Second

Language teachers. Many of these students were from low socioeconomic homes, so

services such as free and reduced lunches, health care, and school supply factors had to

be acknowledged and given. Also, separate of economic status, often prior school

training was limited because of non attendance, transient situations, or poor schools.

Data Analysis

A multi-phase approach was used for data analysis. Using MaxQDA Qualitative

Software and constant comparative method, I initially looked for overlying themes in the

first phase of the data collection (initial student interviews). Transcribed interviews were

coded and although many themes emerged in response to Research Question One, they

all seemed to have either a social or academic component. Data was re-analyzed using

these two over-arching categories.

Initially, I listened to each interview thoroughly to search for answers to my

research questions. After the tapes had been transcribed, I again read them for answers to

the research questions using data presented (Patton, 1998).

Four categories emerged while analyzing initial interviews. Twelve themes were embedded in each. Upon looking at the second interview, these themes, too, were places under these four categories with themes in each added to research notes. Field notes were also added to data entered in qualitative software and these were added to the data. New themes were created and then compared to existing themes (Merriam, 1998).

The four categories included: out of school factors influencing student success, in school factors influencing student success, academic supports, and structural changes from the academy implementation. Embedded in each of these factors emerged themes. These themes included: prior school performance, parents, work, friends, discipline, attendance, retention, teacher impact, academic supports, block scheduling, leadership seminar, and autonomy. These themes and categories are presented in depth in Chapter Four.

Summary

Chapter Three outlined theoretical perspectives and the research methodology used in this study. Chapter Four will demonstrate how this framework was used to analyze the data collected during the three phases of collection. A descriptive analysis emerged through the phenomenological perspective used and findings are presented.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

In analyzing data from Fairbanks High School and Central High School four

categories and twelve themes emerged related to outcomes observed and areas that

impacted Ninth Grade Success Academies (NGSA) and student success or failure during

their freshman year. As the researcher, I continued to be aware of the phenomenological

approach and case study methodology being utilized in this research project.

Rich descriptions of both sites and the Ninth Grade Success Academy approaches

have surfaced themes while using intra and constant comparative cross-case analysis

(Merriam, 1998). Data were first analyzed at each site individually, utilizing input from

teachers and students. At each site, as data were collected, the researcher transcribed

tapes, typed surveys and entered them into rich text format into MaxQda Qualitative

software. Categories and themes were then identified. Additional data were collected, and

eventually four categories and twelve themes emerged (see Figure 1).

Categories and Themes

Out of School Factors
- Prior School Experiences
- Parents
- Work
- Friends

Factors in School
- Discipline
- Attendance
- Retention

Academic Support
- Teachers
- Assistance with Academics

Structural Changes
- Block Schedule
- Leadership Seminar
- Autonomy
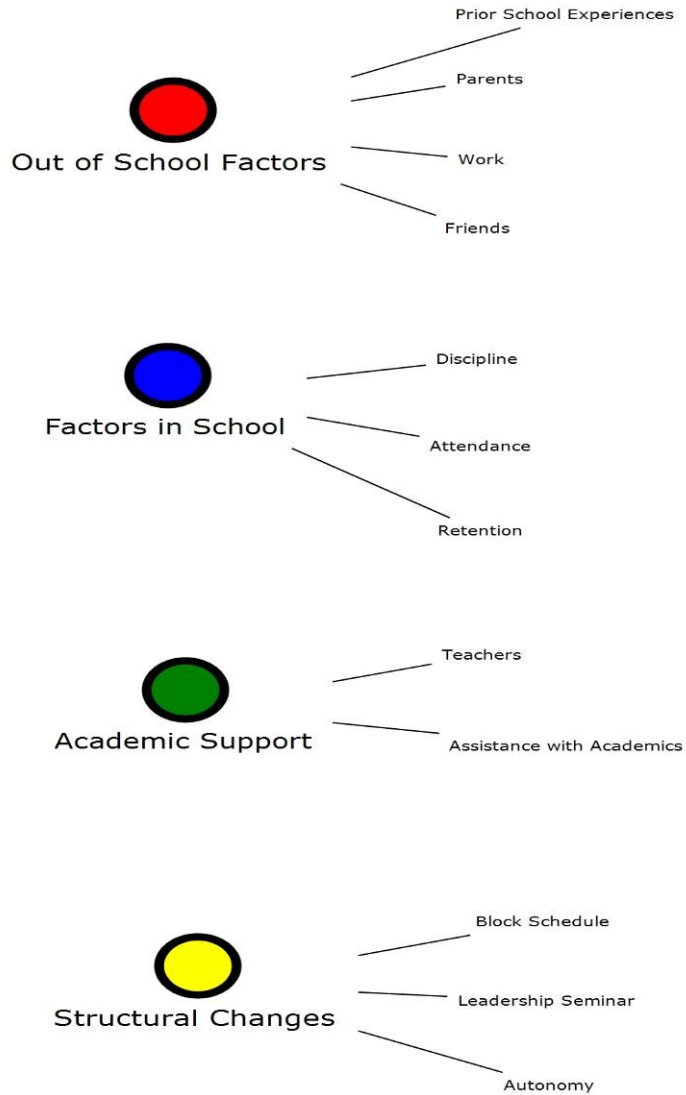
Figure 1. Categories and Themes Emerging from Data Analysis

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Table 3

Collection of Data—Fairbanks High School

	Students	Faculty
December 2005	Focus Group Interviews–Students	
March 2006	Focus Group Interviews–Students	
May 2006		Open Ended Surveys–Teachers

After each site was analyzed individually, the researcher saw a need to compare teacher perceptions within the two sites. Two categories used when analyzing included: teacher perceptions of students at each site and teacher perceptions of the NGSA at each of the two sites.

Afterwards, overall student perception was observed and analyzed including student opinions of teachers and student perceptions of the NGSA implementation. Lastly, a comparison of all teacher and student responses was analyzed in a cross-case analysis.

Chapter Four provides details of the analysis process beginning with individual school sites and concludes with a cross-case analysis of the two sites. Fairbanks High School site is first described and analyzed using categories and themes to clarify the NGSA implementation at this site. Afterwards, the Central High School site is detailed. Selected quotations from both interviews and surveys are included to illustrate categories and themes and to provide answers to research questions. Differences in opinions of individuals involved at each teaching site, as well as differences in perceptions from

teachers and students, are highlighted using intra case and cross-case analysis design. This chapter concludes with an overall comparison of teachers and students at each site.

Purpose of the Study

As stated in Chapter One, the purpose of this study was to investigate perceptions and implications of two Ninth Grade Success Academies in their implementation year by examining thoughts and perceptions of students and teachers involved in each case. First, the researcher considered each site individually. Next, cross-case analysis was used to gain insights of overall teachers' opinions. The utilizing of cross case analysis was used to gain insight and information of overall student perception. Finally, the researcher compared both sites collectively utilizing student interviews and teacher surveys. It is hoped that a greater knowledge is gained of this phenomenon.

Case Study One—Fairbanks High School

History

Fairbanks High School is located in southern Alabama, nine miles north of the Gulf Coast. In the 2004–2005 school year, average daily attendance at Fairbanks High was 1215 students. Forty percent of students at Fairbanks High School were eligible for free or reduced meals. There were seventy-seven teachers, four administrators, and three counselors on staff. The projected four year dropout rate was 12.3 percent which was one percent lower than the state of Alabama's projected dropout rate. Sixty-one percent of students passed the reading portion of the Alabama High School Graduation Exam and sixty-six percent passed the math portion (alsde.edu).

Content

Student interviews were conducted in December of 2005 at Fairbanks High

School and then again in March of 2006 (see Table 3). Nine students participated in the

December interviews and eight of the nine students participated in the follow-up

interviews that took place in March. The student who was absent in March was serving

time in on-campus suspension for a discipline infraction. Protocols (Appendices C and D)

were used as guidelines when conducting the sets of interviews.

Of the nine students participating, five were female and four were male. Of the

male students, three were Caucasian, and one was African American. Two of the female

students two were Caucasian, two were African American and one was Hispanic (see

Table 4).

Table 4

Demographics of Fairbanks High School Students Interviewed

	Caucasian	African American	Hispanic
Female	2	2	1
Male	3 (one absent at follow up)	1	0

Prior to beginning the interview, students were welcomed and the purpose of the

research project was explained. An overview of the consent and procedure was presented.

Students were also reminded of confidentiality issues. Questions asked were related to

overall school perceptions and opinions regarding strengths and weaknesses of the Ninth Grade Success Academy implementation.

During the interviews students were probed to clarify and expand on answers as needed. Often important information and comments developed that had been unforeseen when beginning interviews or planning the protocol. The researcher allowed the students to expand on these ideas. These comments were noted and became part of the research findings.

Teacher surveys (Appendix D) were distributed in May of 2006 to teachers participating in the NGSA. These surveys asked questions directly related to the research questions for this project. Open-ended survey questions allowed teachers to expand on ideas related to the NGSA implementation, as well as other categories which may or may not influence the school and the academy. Eleven surveys were returned and completed by teachers at Fairbanks High School. Categories and themes emerge from these interviews and surveys. This data, along with descriptions of findings and quotations from participating students and teachers are presented in the next section of this chapter.

Out of School Factors

During the course of the interviews and surveys, many comments and opinions arose regarding situations that although took place separate strongly affected the students' ninth grade year both academically and socially. While these events were not necessarily changed because of academy implementation, they should be discussed and described to gain a clear view of what occurs in the lives of freshman and how these events may effect the school life and success their freshman year and in future years.

Two middle schools feed into Fairbanks High School. One of the middle schools, Fairbanks Middle School is a large middle school with 719 students in grades 6–8 (2004–2005). Fairbanks Middle School hosts a diverse population with 27% African American and 13% Hispanic. The remaining 59% are Caucasian. Fairbanks Middle School is an outside campus with most entries to classrooms located in outside breezeways. One student commented that she was not used to being inside all the time and that this was difficult for her to get used to at the high school. Students that had attended Fairbanks Middle School stated who there were actually more fights at their middle school than at the high school.

The other feeder middle, Elberta Middle School, is much smaller. Elberta contained 595 students in grades 4-8 during the 2004-2005 school year. Ninety-two of the students at Elberta Middle School are Caucasian. Seven percent are African American and less than 1% are Hispanic.

Elberta Middle School students felt that there were many more fights and discipline problems in high school. One student from Elberta also commented that in middle school, teachers were nicer and seemed to "know you more" than in high school. These students stated that high school was less "cliquey" than middle school and that in middle schools there were definite groups. In high school these groups were less apparent and more accepting according to the students.

When asked if they felt that middle school prepared them academically for high school the students commented that they felt prepared in all areas except math and science. The middle schools offer tutoring in math, and that both middle school and high

school student are eligible to enroll. Only one student had actually attended this program but the group had positive things to say about the program.

Teachers commented that academic success or failure begins prior to a student entering high school and that by the time the students enter ninth grade, most have decided whether or not school is important to them. One teacher remarked that he/she felt that the strongest indicator of a student being successful in high school was that student's overall achievement in middle school.

Parents

Both students and teachers agree that parents play a tremendous role in academic success. With too little support or too much pressure at home, students often leave high school early. When asked if they had a family member who did not complete high school, one student commented,

> My cousin dropped out of high school because his family pressured him too much about his grades. He got tired of them nagging him. He got in some fights at school, but he mostly made good grades. I think the pressure just got too much for him.

Students stated that they rarely ask parents for help but if they do, sometimes they help them if they are not too busy. Three students agreed that household chores were more important to their parents than school work. Other students stated that they were unsure which was more important. One student stated that schoolwork was definitely a higher priority at her home than chores.

Another teacher stated that he/she thought that parental support was the most important factor in determining high school success. This was echoed by another teacher.

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Still, one teacher stated that student success could be encouraged and increased by the development of program to get parents involved.

Attendance

Attendance has been shown to greatly affect student academic success (Finn, 1989; Kerr, 2001). Students admitted that not only did they know individuals who had skipped school, that they also had not attended school without their parents' knowledge on occasion. When asked why students would miss school, answers given were that they wanted to hang out with boyfriends and girlfriends or that they were "hung-over from partying too much". Another reason given by two students was that students stayed home because their parents needed them to do things for them.

Students stated that incentives would help to increase attendance but that the incentives must be motivating and carefully selected. Examples of incentives suggested were football passes or homework free passes. Students did all agree that they thought attendance probably did affect academic achievement. The students stated that they were not aware of any incentive programs at Fairbanks High School to encourage attendance that they were aware of.

Although many of the students stated that they had missed "three or four days", three students stated that they had missed over ten days. While two students stated that they had been sick for many of those days, one student said she had been in trouble and suspended a couple of times this during the year. The student stated that she had an excuse for many of the days also and that she thought she had missed about thirteen days so far this year. She said, "I am trying to not miss so many days because last year I missed 73 days and had to go to court".

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Teachers felt that attendance strongly affected academic success. One teacher stated that attendance and motivation to succeed were what he/she considered the greatest indicators of academic success. Four teachers felt that that they were unsure about how the NGSA had affected attendance so far. They felt that more time was needed before making a judgment. Two teachers stated that they felt that some improvement had been made in attendance since Academy implementation. Still another stated, "Attendance will always be a problem, as long as there are parents who make it too easy to be absent from school and collaborate with their children so that they can miss school".

Discipline

Two items, fights and dress code, appeared more when discussing discipline than any other — fights and dress code. Students stated that there were a lot of fights at Fairbanks High School. When asked why there were so many fights, many students mentioned individuals talking about other students. One student commented that it was because it was too crowded in the hallways. Another student agreed with him. The fights usually occurred in transition times as classes changed and at breaks according to the students.

All students did agree that most of the time they felt safe at school. Students felt that the discipline was too strict when it came to dress code. One student commented that he knew a boy who quit school because he got tired of being sent to the office for dress code violations.

Two students stated that they had been sent to the office more than once this year. One female student commented that when she had been sent to an administrator, she left feeling positive about the experience. On the other hand, when she had been sent to

another administrator he made her feel bad about herself. She also commented that she would be less likely to get in trouble again when an administrator was kind because when the male administrator was "rude" to her it just made her "not care even more."

Although students did not see any changes that the NGSA had on discipline at their school, teachers felt that there may have been a negative influence. "The freshman did not have much interaction with the upperclassman. This made it difficult for them to understand how upperclassmen acted. Their (ninth graders') behavior was worse because of this."

Other teachers commented that they thought discipline was still a big issue and that they had written many discipline referrals this year. Both teachers and students agreed that discipline was a factor in student success.

Retention

Studies have shown that there are many factors influencing decisions about dropping out of high school (Kerr, 2002; McPartland, 1994). Students spoke of many reasons why they felt classmates and family members had exited high school early. One girl remarked, "Most of them are just lazy".

Most students felt that discipline was highly related to at student's decision about whether to remain in school. Students that were in trouble at school, they felt had an increased risk of leaving school before completion. One male student commented that his cousin dropped out because he continued to get into fights. "He knew if he got into one more fight, he would be expelled. He couldn't handle that pressure, so he went ahead and quit."

Students were asked what the individuals were doing now that they had dropped out of school. One girl commented, "Mostly my brother just stays at home. I mean, he works sometimes but it is not like he has a steady job or anything." She stated that she felt he regretted not staying in school. A male student commented that his cousin was seventeen and took construction jobs. "He brings home a lot of money, and has a brand new truck, so I don't think he regrets it" (dropping out).

Teachers also felt that retention was a problem and that once a child failed one course, the odds of catching up were lowered. One teacher commented that he/she had not seen any difference regarding retention since Academy implementation. This teacher stated that there had been more failures in his/her CP (college preparatory) class than ever before. Other teachers commented that they felt it was too early to tell if the academy would have a long term effect on the drop out rate, but that right now they saw no change. "I had a very high failure rate in the classes I taught", commented one teacher.

Academic Supports

Teachers

Students were very verbal about the differences between "good" teachers and "bad" teachers. "A good teacher knows how to teach," remarked one female student, "They've got to know how to help you understand what you're doing, not just sit there and say-hey, do this". Students stated that while some teachers care if you understand the assignments, other teachers simply hand out work and expect it to be done without explanation. Sometimes, students said, if they do not understand, teachers get frustrated and give up on them.

"I got one teacher that won't go back. She gets mad and says she won't teach it but once." When asked how they responded to this, students said they just did their worksheet and hoped for the best.

Students said that often times teachers become frustrated because students are disrespectful to them. The students said that when this occurs, most teachers send students to the office. But that is not always the case. "It's not like many teachers here don't just shake it off". Students commented that it is well known which teachers will put up with disrespect and which will not.

Students stated that in middle school they felt their teachers cared more and knew them better. One student commented that her teachers in middle school were much "nicer". Many students commented on a particular teacher who taught them in Leadership Seminar. When asked what made him such a good teacher, students had many remarks.

> He's real open. You can talk to him about most anything and he's cool with it. Sometimes if he hears something bad about you, he'll come up and ask you. He doesn't go out in front of the whole class and say something unless you make a big joke and then you're okay with it. He's pretty cool-an awesome teacher.

A question was asked about whether or not teachers make students want to stay in school. All of the students agreed that the good teachers did make them want to stay in school. "Yes, when they are open and they have structure in the classroom." Other students chimed in as to the importance of having structure in the classroom. All students agreed that structure is important.

Students also had opinions regarding characteristics of a bad teacher. "We take notes for the whole day and then she gives us class work and she doesn't give you any time to get help on it but she expects it to be done by the next day. If you don't finish the class work, it's for homework and she just gives you about five minutes to do it."

Teacher opinions were split on the impact they had on whether or not child was successful in school. Most teachers felt that educators had a small influence on whether or not a child stayed in school. Other factors including home life and desire to learn, teachers felt were more influential than the instructor. "I do not feel a teacher can make that much of a difference when a student does not want to succeed." "If a student wants to learn, no one can stop them … if a student does not want to learn, no one can make them". Another teacher felt that the desire to succeed came from home, and that it was a teacher's job to enhance this.

Other teachers felt that educators had a greater influence in student achievement. "Positive attitudes are addictive, but parental involvement is more important." Also, the teacher is the prompter and primary source-the student is the do-er." Whereas many teachers saw their role as important, all thought they were at least secondary to other influences.

Additional Assistance with Academics

Often, support with academics is the edge students need to help them be successful. When systems have supports in place to offer tutoring from adults or peers, students are more likely to retain the knowledge (if indeed they take advantage of the programs). Students were aware of after school tutoring held at the middle school for math for both middle and high school students, but commented that they rarely used it.

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When asked if they would attend Saturday tutoring sessions if they existed, students responded in a negative manner. Students, however, were very receptive to the idea of offering classes at night. Most students stated that this would be beneficial because they could choose to work during the day.

Students agreed additional help with coursework was agreed among students to be needed. Whether the assistance exists in the form of support from teachers or tutoring sessions, students stated that any additional help would be beneficial. One student stated, "They (students) would be able to do what they wanted to during the day — work and not have as many other things to do and make money.

Block Scheduling

Block scheduling is a component of Ninth Grade Success Academies that aids in assisting high school students. By only focusing on four subjects at a time, two of which are usually elective, students are less likely to become overwhelmed. Students stated that they liked only having four courses at a time, but complained that the classes seemed too long.

Teachers felt that block scheduling helped with student success. By having ninety minute classes, teachers commented that they are able to break the class down into three parts with different sessions. One teacher stated, "I teach, break, teach, break … to try and divide the class period."

One teacher commented that with block scheduling he/she got to do visual, oral and written lessons. Many teachers commented that with this schedule they were able to do more group work. Still, one teacher commented that ninety minutes was too long and

that he/she felt students should take an academic subject all year and not just one semester.

Leadership Seminar

All students in Ninth Grade at Fairbanks High School are required to take a course called Leadership Seminar. This semester long course covers Sean Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, as well as *Teen Etiquette* and *Financial Planning Resources*. Course requirements and lesson plans are set county-wide for this course. Teachers are not required to have a certain content degree, but are required to be certified teachers.

While some of the students had not had opportunities to take Leadership Seminar in December, by the March interviews all students had either completed the course or were currently enrolled. Students felt that they were learning skills that they would later use in other courses and beyond high school. Students stated that they learned how to study and take notes. "They teach you to study in a quiet place- not while you are on your cell phone or watching television". Students said they learned about setting goals and how to take steps to ensure these goals come true. "Like if you want to make better grades, you have to study more, do your homework, and pay attention in class." Students also said they learned how to summarize information. "Whenever you take notes, you put it in your own words so you can remember it."

"Double dipping" is a term that refers to students receiving additional instruction in non core subjects. For example, a student may take regular Algebra class but review math concepts in Leadership Seminar or a study skills class. In the Johns Hopkins University model of Talent Development High Schools and Ninth Grade Success

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Academies, students are double dipped in reading and math. Students all agreed that this was not the case in their Leadership Seminar Class. Although they were not reviewing reading and mathematics, students did say they had reading assignments. "We had to read part of a book in there, though. Sometimes we read the book to ourselves and sometimes we read aloud".

Teachers felt that Leadership Seminar was an integral part of NGSA success. "Students are taught (in the class) to develop skills to think before they act out." Teachers also felt the course taught diplomacy skills and coping strategies. Other benefits to the academies as viewed by teachers included organization skills, time management, and budgeting money skills. One teacher listed the following as benefits to freshman taking this course: collaboration and group work exercises, listening skills, and thinking before speaking or acting.

Autonomy

In the Ninth Grade Success Academy model, ninth grade students were isolated from upperclassmen. The rationale for this was so that they could not be influenced by upperclassmen. While at Fairbanks High School, students are not completely isolated. Efforts were being made to minimize association with freshman and upperclassmen. Freshmen have their own hall, but because of resources and building issues, often they share lunch and some courses with older students. While research has shown this to be effective in some cases, some students and teachers at Fairbanks High School felt as if it may be a bad idea overall.

Students stated that they wished they could be with the upperclassmen because they had friends that were in higher grades. Also, teachers felt the lack of influence from

upperclassman was detrimental in terms of providing role models for more mature behavior.

While many ninth grade teachers only instructed ninth grade students, some taught other students. Teaming was not done, but was a plan for the future. It is believed that if ninth grade teachers only taught ninth grade students and a teaming approach was implemented in which the same small group of teachers taught and was familiar with the same students, this aspect of the academy would have more positive results.

Intra Case Study—Fairbanks High School

When looking at the data holistically (see Table 4), it appears that while there are many issues that the Ninth Grade Academy is addressing with its implementation at Fairbanks High School, there still are many areas that are not being addressed that could potentially cause negative consequences for freshman students in the future. Personal reflection throughout this process was present, but the documentation throughout the dialogue is minimal. Discipline appeared to influence achievement and attitudes more than any other theme. It is felt by teachers that the NGSA should address a more proactive stance toward this issue.

Overall student and teacher attitudes seemed positive and participants were open to the NGSA approaches, but training and understanding of the program's goals and objectives, as well as a strategic action plan seemed to be inadequate. It is felt that more planning and professional development for teachers and orientation with students would be beneficial, as confusion existed surrounding the goals and structure of the program.

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Leadership Seminar was respected by both teachers and students and was spoken of in a positive nature by all participants. By the spring of the year, all students had been given the opportunity to take this course. By viewing materials and speaking with the guidance counselor regarding this course, materials and plans had been set into place to set this course up to be a positive experience for freshman.

Teacher impact was a dominant theme. Students seemed to feel that teachers had much more "power" and were much more of a determining factor in student success than teachers felt. Often, teachers felt that they were at the mercy of parents and student desires. Students on the other hand felt that teachers were the ones who in essence held the key to their success or failure.

Areas in needs of improvement included to be in parental involvement, the need for ownership with teacher/student relationships, incentives for school attendance, more options for course offering times (addition of night and afternoon courses), professional development, and a more in-depth student orientation about the program. Table Five provides a summary of the items deemed to have the most effect on student success as well as stated identified areas of importance and implications for the academy.

Table 5

Data Matrix for Fairbanks High School — Intra Case Analysis

Items Having Most Effect on Success	Identified areas of Importance	Academy Implications
Discipline	Fights at school a problem	Hallways less crowded for freshman
Once st. gets in trouble it's more difficult to success		Not mentioned
	Experience from administrator Important Dress code always an issue	One freshman administrator needed/recommended Not mentioned
Teachers	Reteaching Important	90 minute a day in block gives more time to review
	Ownership of students needed	Leadership Seminar teacher provides guidance
		Teachers trained to deal with this age child
		Teaming assists w/bonding
Leadership Seminar	Provides Guidance to Students	Teacher/Curriculum to set Focus/ provide mentorship
Assistance w/ Academics	Reteaching/tutoring needed	Double Dipping recommended Not done at present time
	Structure necessary	All teachers should be on same Format/ familiar with each other (unified approach)

Case Study Two — Central High School

History

Central High School is located in southeast Alabama in the middle of Baker County. It is located 16 miles north of Alabama's Gulf Coast. Average Daily attendance during the 2004-2005 school year was 1295 students. Fifty two percent of students attending were eligible for free or reduced meals. There were seventy one teachers, four administrators, and three counselors on staff. The projected four year dropout rate was twenty three percent for the school, and thirteen percent for the State of Alabama. Seventy percent of students taking the reading portion of the Alabama High School graduation exam passed. On the math portion on this assessment, seventy six percent passed (www.bcbe.org).

Content

Student interviews were conducted on the same days at Central High School as Fairbanks High School (see Table 2). Student interviews were conducted in December of 2005 and then again in March of 2006. Six students participated in December, and the same six students participated in follow up interviews held in March. Protocols were used for the December interviews (Appendix B) and then for interviews held in March (Appendix C).

Of the six students participating at Central High School, two were male and four were female. Of the male students, one was Caucasian, and one was African American. Of the female students, one was African American, two were Caucasian, and one was Hispanic.

Table 6

Demographics of Central High School Students Interviewed

	Caucasian	African American	Hispanic
Female	2	1	1
Male	1	1	0

Prior to the interviews, students were introduced and the purposes of the study were reviewed. Students were also reminded of confidentiality. Questions related to overall school perception, strengths and weaknesses were asked, as well as implications of the Academy implementation. Students often gave answers unforeseen and were allowed to expand on these ideas. The researcher continuously attempted to keep group focused and bring the content back to the subject when conversations began to get off topic.

Teacher surveys were distributed in May of 2006 to teachers teaching ninth grade students and involved in the Academy. The surveys (Appendix D) asked questions directly related to the Academy implementation, as well as questions to gauge impressions of the school and indicators of student success. Questions were open ended so that teachers could expand as much as needed. Nine surveys were returned completed by teachers at Central High School. Below student and teacher comments are relayed according to each theme which emerged during the interviews and within surveys. Following these descriptions, Table 6 illustrates the items felt to have the most effect on

success, identified areas of importance, and whether or not the items was part of the academy implementation.

Prior School Experiences

Extracurricular activities are important in assisting students with motivation to stay in school. While Central High School has a very active athletic program, students felt that when it came to clubs and having other opportunities for involvement, high school was more limited than in middle school. One male student commented, "In middle school we had clubs you could join. Other than athletics, there are not any clubs in high school."

Students did feel like there were many similarities and continuity in middle school and high school. The main difference, they stated, was that there were more people in high school. Student felt that high school teachers were much stricter that middle school teachers.

Parents

Two students stated that they felt parents were the key to whether or not a child stayed in school or decided to leave without completion. The students also said they felt that often parents did not care about whether the student succeeded in school and that this made it difficult for the student to care. One girl commented," Some parents just don't have time for their kids". Even parents that cared sometimes, student felt, could not always motivate their children to stay in school. One student commented that even when parents do care, after a while, if the student does not try, the parent will become frustrated and give up. Other students nodded in agreement at this comment.

One female student commented on her father's attitude toward school now versus when he was in school,

"My dad told me that when they were little their biggest worry in the family and that was, really on his mom's mind was making a living and putting food on the table. And a lot of that has to do with today; it is just not the same … although some people get caught up in work and they figure, things will work out. Some people are rarely wealthy and some of them think they can buy their way in college or maybe they can, they have their own future or whatever, their parents will always be there to take care of them".

Another student stated that they think their parents will just give things to them. They also think if their kids just show up for school, they will pass.

Teachers felt parental involvement was crucial to student success. One teacher commented, "The amount of respect a student shows their parents produces a pattern of overall behavior to adults, peers, and themselves." Teachers felt parents had more influence and a bigger role in student motivation and success than they did.

Work

The majority of students felt that kids who had jobs were more likely to leave school prior to completion. "It's like me, I work and it's hard. I know the people I know think that they can work full time and they can't." Half of the student interviewed worked at least part time while in school. One student stated that sometimes she had to work a double shift and then go to school the next day. She commented that this was the hard and she often wondered if she could handle it.

Another student commented, "I think that kids these days are in too much of a hurry to be on their own. They drop out and say they are going to get their GED (Graduation Equivalent Exam) and it ends up not going good so they end up stuck with whatever they have."

Friends

Most students felt that they were around most of the same students at school every day and all throughout the day. They stated that they would like to be around their older friends at school, but rarely saw them. Teachers commented that they felt social interaction was "crucial" when gauging student success in the classroom.

Factors in School

Discipline

Students felt that discipline was too strict at Central High School. Although they felt the main problems dealing with discipline at Central High School were fighting, skipping class and disrespect towards teachers, they stated that the area in which more kids got in trouble for was not having their shirt tales tucked in. Students commented that if they do not have their shirts tucked in, they get OCS and then miss class and it's hard for them to catch up.

Most teachers, students commented sent students to the office when there was discipline problem in lieu of trying to handle it in the classroom. Students felt that teachers that were inconsistent had the most problems with classroom management. Students also stated that they usually enjoyed these teachers' classes less.

Students stated that continued fights between rivals were a problem. "They think that if they fight once, then it is over and its not. That just makes you hate each other

more. It's like if they actually sat down and talked with everybody about it, some of it wouldn't be avoided in the future"

When asked what they would do to help with behavior problems if they were in charge, one student commented that he would make kids walk in a line because the hallways are where the problems occur. After school detention was said to be a better option by students than in school suspension because instead of missing class, you would have extra time you were required to be at school. Suspension, students felt was like a reward instead of punishment. One girl stated that her parents would act like they were mad if she got suspended but really would not care.

Teachers at Central High School stated that one problem with discipline is that administrators are not all on board. They recommended that one administrator be in charge of all ninth graders so that there was consistence. Teachers did feel the academy had helped to improve discipline. Other teachers reported not many problems with discipline, but stated that they usually had no problems.

Attendance

Students felt that attendance was important for success. Many students commented that it was most important to be present daily in math. Ninth grade students in Baker County are involved in a math program called Algebra for Mastery. If they do not meet the standards required, they have to repeat sections. Students mastering skills move on to the next level. Interviewed students stated that many days three sections are covered and even though you are allowed to make up the work, you are unaware of how to do it because you missed the explanation of how to do the assignments.

Some students stated that teachers give you a zero for participation when you have an unexcused absence. Students felt this was unfair, but this policy did encourage them to be at school. The students stated that the main incentives to come to school were the education and graduation.

Teachers felt that attendance was not much higher since the academy was implemented, however one teacher did feel the NGSA had made a difference in increasing attendance. The only student who had dropped out this academic year in the ninth grade had been a student with continued attendance problems, one teacher commented.

Retention

Many reasons were cited by students as reasons for students dropping out of school. Among these included students were sick of coming to school everyday. Once a student got in any trouble, the students felt that student was in greater jeopardy of not finishing school. Students agreed that many students are resilient but that everyone can only take so much.

> One student I knew dropped out because he had been to alternative school. When he got back, he tried to change and do better but anytime he would do anything even small, the teachers would get on him, and send him to the office. His parents tried to encourage him, but after a while, he just gave up.

Teenagers who are involved in activities are less likely to drop out, the group agreed. If a student is involved in activities, he/she will have other things to encourage him/her to come and to stay in school. The group was split on whether or not they felt drinking and partying contributed to dropping out. Some felt the students who placed so

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much emphasis on drinking were likely to not take school as serious. Other freshman said they knew kids who could party and drink during the week and still maintain their grades.

Dropping out when working was mentioned several times. Students need money to pay bills. "They think just 'cause' they got one big paycheck, one time they think they'll keep getting them like that and they can make it. They drop out so they can work full time. Other reasons given for dropping out included getting too far behind academically and students just not caring about school.

Academic Support

Teachers

Students agreed that different teachers had different expectations, and that this was often difficult to deal with in school. "Some teachers like group projects and others feel we should always do projects on our own." The teachers who believed in teamwork from students, Central students felt, got the most out of them academically. The students felt this helped them problem solve when they worked together.

Equally frustrating to students as when teachers did not let them work with partners or in pairs, was when teachers played favorites to certain students. Students commented that teachers often times liked students that were smart or that "sucked up" to them and that these students were given more privileges including getting away with being tardy or talking in class. Students disagreed with each other on whether or not it was a racial issue. Two students stated that they thought the favoritism was because of race. Other students either stated that they felt race had nothing to with it or were unsure why these students seemed to be preferred by the teacher. Teachers that treat everyone

the same was the most popular answer for the qualities of a good teacher. Equity seemed and was vocalized by all students as being crucial.

Students felt that teachers were inconsistent. "One day they will be nice and help you and the next day they'll be real mean and just ignore you." One female student stated that one day a teacher may try and help you and then the next they will say something like, "Well, if you're not going to sit up here then just go to sleep, you're not going to pass anyway." One male student stated that teachers sometimes let him sleep if he will not disturb the rest of the class.

One student stated that teachers needed to understand that students have bad days just like teachers and that just because you don't do your work one day, it does not mean you will never do it. She said that she felt teachers stereotyped students just because they had not turned something in or been disrespectful in the past.

Having teachers who acted as mentors, all students agreed helped students to want to succeed. One male student commented," I had a teacher that helped me in school and she was not even my teacher. She helped me with work and helped me to care about school. But I don't really have anyone that does that here."

Some teachers felt their roles were extremely important to student success, while others thought they only played a minimal role in student success or failure. A teacher wrote, "Teachers must show students they care and motivate them daily with activities." Another teacher stated, "Our role is very important and we must solicit and motivate students to learn."

Other teachers stated that they played about the same role as parents. One teacher felt that are irrelevant and that a student has to want to learn or a teacher does not make a difference. Also, one teacher felt the biggest role laid with the parents, not the teachers.

Additional Assistance with Academics

Most students were aware of tutoring at the middle school in the afternoons. However, none of the students had attended. The tutoring, they stated was just for math. One male student said that his sister went and that they played math games there. Other that the after school program, students were not aware of any other programs to assist them with schoolwork.

Teachers were asked what programs they provided for students that were struggling. Among answers included work sheets, peer tutoring, and additional time before and after school, one on one attention in class, student conferences and collaborative opportunities.

Structural Changes

Block Scheduling

Students had little to say about block scheduling. Teachers had strong feelings about delivery on a block schedule. Teachers stated that they constantly had to vary strategies. Among the new things the teachers stated that they had tried included exploration games, partner activities, hand on projects and more technology. One teacher stated that he/she changed activities every thirty minutes. Another teacher was not confident about approaches and stated there was not enough variation and that the approaches must improve. Suggestions from teachers to reach students on block scheduling were more hands on projects, group activities, and peer teaching.

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Leadership Seminar

When asked about skills learned in Leadership Seminar, responses varied as to whether theses skills would be utilized in the future. Students remembered "synergy " (one of Steven Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People.* One male student commented that the class was focused on making you become more sensitive and not to be judgmental of others. A female student comments, "The class teaches you that there are two ways to problem solve…a right way and a wrong way." Several students commented that the class was beneficial to some students but not to all. "Some don't care about nothing, and they shouldn't take it."

Students stated that they learned a little about different careers but that no one from the outside had come in to speak to them. The students learned about organization and had notebook checks weekly. Students said they did not learn study skills in this course.

Teachers felt like Leadership Seminar taught the kids organization, time management, budgeting, diplomacy skills, coping skills, study skills, conflict resolution and how to deal with stress. The class teachers felt also taught students ways to deal with bullying, how to set goals, decision making skills, and social skills. Two of the academy teachers said they had no idea what the class taught.

Autonomy

Students are usually more successful when they feel a part of an institution (Tinto, 1979). Feeling like a student is part of the school has proven to increase academic success. Student interviewed at RHS agreed that of students did not fit in; they would be more likely to leave school. "Why stay in a place where you're going to be an outcast."

Students stated that oftentimes students will go to extremes to try and fit in at school. "You have black kids trying to act white and white kid trying to talk black." They stated that many teenagers can not be themselves because they have low self esteem. These students will do anything to fit in and desperately do not want be an outcast according to students.

Uniforms are an attempt to equalize students and decrease stigmas, but students stated that it did not help. Tags and labels on clothes are still seen and students said that you still knew the difference between the haves and the have-nots. "You know who buys their clothes at Wal-Mart."

Students felt that a major problem with students getting along and fitting in was non equity in the way teachers treated students. "If teachers would treat all students the same, people would get along and everyone would feel more accepted."

Students also felt that being isolated from upperclassmen was not a positive thing. "I think if you hang out with older people, that maybe if they're successful, that'll make you want to go up there, like seniors are always talking about how good it feels to be up there." Interviewed students said that often by seventh and eighth grade students have already decided if they were going to care about school. However, they felt like ninth grade was the last shot and the best way to change was to see older people and decide you want to be like them. All students agreed that the upper classmen did not bully them and that you usually only got into altercations with other students when you started it by "running your mouth." The individuals students stated that bullied them were usually in their own grade.

All the students stated that they were not in any classes with upperclassmen except Physical Education. The only exception was in Algebra, they were exposed to upperclassmen that had failed Algebra previously. The only other times they were around them was if they happened to have a locker near sophomores, and when older guys came to the freshman hall because they wanted to date freshman girls.

Within Case Study—Central High School

Both students and teachers felt that there was a lack of parental responsibility and that this led to students' non success in school. Many students even commented that their own parents either did not care nor had little control over their behavior and/or school performance. Students felt their parents did not care and were often too busy. Teachers, for the most part saw their influence over students as much less as the students parents.

Many often students interviewed had part time jobs. Students seemed to feel like jobs often times got in the way of academics and that kids were too anxious to grow up and get out on their own.

Students stated that often they were sent to In-School Suspension for dress code violations and this hurt them academically because they missed class. Students commented that fighting was a big problem at school, especially during class changes. After the students were sent home, often times the fight would break out again when the students got back to school because no one had assisted in resolving the conflict. Teachers mainly felt that if there was one principal for the freshman class, more equity would exist and that was necessary.

Students saw attendance as being important for success, especially in math. Some teachers had seen improvements since the academy was implemented with attendance, others had not.

Table 7

Data Matrix for Central High School — Within Case Analysis

Items Having Most Effect on Success	Identified Areas of Importance	Academy Implications
Discipline	Consistency important	Students felt like teachers had discipline Problems because they were inconsistent
	Dress Code always biggest Referrals	Not mentioned
	Students missing class b/c in trouble	Not mentioned-students mentioned alternative of after school detention Instead of OCS
Leadership Seminar	Provided much help, students And teachers felt to some students	Curriculum/ teachers there for Goal setting/ guidance
		Many teachers were not aware of What was being taught in this course
	Study and social skills	Teachers have materials Teachers lacked training for course
Teachers	Different Expectations Confusing	Systematic approach/unity
	Mentorship	90 minute classes assisted with familiarity Leadership class/ although many students Stated they felt no mentorship with this teacher
	Inconsistence with moods of teachers	Not mentioned
	Favoritism a problem Non equity	Not mentioned

(table continues)

Table 7 (continued)

Items Having Most Effect on Success	Identified Areas of Importance	Academy Implications
Retention	Once student got in trouble He/she felt labeled/ could not Recovered	Not mentioned/9th grade administrator
	Need parental support	Meetings/ Parental Involvement Social Worker
	Work interferes with school	Twilight School Suggested
Autonomy	Exposure to older students/ to Set an example needed	Opposite done in academy Little upper class exposure

Cross-Case Analysis

Teachers

Fairbanks and Central High Schools

After analysis data from of both high schools, the researcher felt it would be beneficial to consider attitudes and perceptions of teachers from both schools to see what factors this group collectively felt impacted student success in high school and also the impacts, if any of the Ninth Grade Success Academy on these factors. Teacher surveys (see Appendix D) asked a series of questions related to how teachers viewed their school, differences between students that were successful versus unsuccessful, and NGSA's impact on attendance, discipline and retention of students. Both group's responses were analyzed and items mentioned the most, or items which teachers felt had been of the most impact are noted below. Examples of responses including quotes, feelings, and perceptions are noted. Table 7 presents data on teacher perceptions. Prior to Table 7 is a discussion of key themes regarding insights of the participants. Findings in both Table 7

and in discussions are presented according to the item mentioned most to least, but all with relevance and felt important by the researcher to present and discuss.

While teachers were not asked for any personal information that could identify them, there is some information available regarding the teachers at these two schools. At Fairbanks High School 6.5% of the teachers have AA or doctorate degrees, 39.8% have a Masters degree, and 49.5 % have Bachelor degrees. Only 2.5% have alternative or emergency certification. At Central High School, 6.3% of teachers had AA or doctorate degrees, 42.5% had master's degrees, 46.3% had a bachelor degree and 2.5 % had emergency certifications.

Additional Assistance with Academics

Teachers from both schools almost immediately mentioned after school tutoring when asked about academic assistance. Tutoring programs are offered at middle schools in each town. Both high school and middle school students are eligible to attend these programs; however, students must obtain their own transportation to these sessions. Certified teachers are available at these tutoring sessions, but his program is not part of the NGSA.

Peer tutors were also mentioned by most teachers as a way in which assistance is provided to students who are struggling. Although a peer tutor program is not part of the academy, block scheduling does allow for partner and group activities and these activities are encouraged.

Conferences with students and parents were mentioned as a tool used to assist students. With a freshman counselor and social worker on hand in the NGSA, conferences are easier to set up and hold. Teachers agreed that at times they had utilized

both the counselor and the social worker at their respective schools. In the Academy weekly meetings with all teachers is encouraged to determine the best course of action for any student that may be struggling academically. Teachers stated that they used these meetings as a time to meet with students and determine if parent meetings were necessary.

One teacher mentioned that he/she reviews objectives taught for the graduation exam. While including math and reading reviews for students during non core class hours has been recommended in some NGSA models (McPartland, 1994). Baker County's two academies have not added this as part of the NGSA curriculum. Another teacher also stated that he/she did basic reading and writing skills with students to assist reviewing students that may have missed essential skills.

Other forms of assistance mentioned included: textbook websites, differentiated instruction, homework, collaborative learning opportunities, one-on-one assistance, extended time, and staying after and arriving before school for additional assistance. Teachers were open to other ways of helping students to be successful. Many admitted that they felt that often time no matter what assistance was offered, students that were not motivated continued to ignore opportunities, and as a result were unsuccessful.

Teachers

"If a student wants to learn, no one can stop him … if a student does not want to learn, no one can make them." This was a comment from one teacher when asked how much impact educators have on student success. Many teachers shared this opinion of their relevance in student success. These teachers felt that they had little to do with how well motivated a student was about their class or school in general. Teachers blamed

problems at home, lack of parent support, and other obligations as reasons why they felt they were fighting a losing battle with many students.

Other teachers were adamant about not only the importance of their role, but felt educators are the single most important resource in the determination of student success in school. They felt their role was, "major" and they were the "prompter and primary source" in an individual's choice to embrace education. Teachers wrote comments like, "Teachers set the tone for learning", and felt that if a student is met where they are; the chances for success are optimal.

Parents

Most teachers agreed on the vital nature parents' roles in motivating a student for success. Many teachers commented that lack of parental involvement at the secondary level is needed in all grades, but especially in ninth grade. An assembly during eighth grade was offered to explain the academy approach as well as credits obtained in high school and requirements. Open house was held (not just as part of the NGSA, but for entire school) to acclimate parents and students to the school. One teacher commented that attendance is always low, as it was this year also at the Open House event for the Academy.

Teachers stated that they saw a correlation between the amount of respect students showed their parents and other adults and how much they respected themselves and their education. They need more parental involvement and education was echoed by other teachers. "No matter how much we try, if there's no parental support, it's almost impossible".

Leadership Seminar

There was an overwhelming support for the Leadership Seminar course among teachers at both schools. The majority of teachers were aware of the skills taught in this course. Of the skills that were seen as most important by teacher that were taught in this class were organization, diplomacy, budgeting, goal setting, and conflict resolution. Teachers seemed to respect this class and felt that because of this course students benefited in other subject areas as well.

A few teachers were unaware of why there was a course of this type. Two teachers commented that they had no idea what was being taught in these classes. There are two leadership teachers at each high school. Prior to the inclusion of the NGSA, these classes were non existent. A teacher must be a certified teacher to teach this course, but no particular content area is required. The county has purchased many materials for this course and the individuals teaching this course commented on how well organized the curriculum was as well as on the abundance of materials and support. These teachers did state that more professional development on the front end would have been extremely helpful, however.

Block Scheduling

NGSA encourages the use of block scheduling. This schedule allows students to only take four courses per semester. These classes last ninety minutes daily. Teachers were asked if they felt the block system was beneficial and what delivery methods they used to reach students since teaching on this schedule. Some teachers followed strict schedules for delivery on the block system. "I introduce with a set up and instruct a quick review, anticipation set up, small group, presentation of work, and closure." Other

teachers stated that they divided the class into 30 minute segments. Two teachers

provided a break half way through class.

Summary

Comments regarding assistance with school work were most prominent among

teachers at both high schools. The teachers agreed that many students fail because they

fall behind academically and that b y assisting them with concepts helps them to gain self

confidence as well as skills to complete high school. Teachers at both schools mentioned

after school tutoring programs, as well as peer tutoring, as important opportunities for

student to receive additional help.

Also of importance teachers felt was parental support and guidance. At both

schools, this was listed as a need. Teachers commented that increased parental

involvement including programs to educate parent and to get them involved were needed.

Teachers agreed that a students relationship and amount of respect that he/she had toward

parents was directly correlated, they felt to school performance.

At both schools, there existed mixed opinions about the importance of a teacher's

role in a student's success. While some teachers saw their roles as crucial, others felt they

played a minimal part in whether a child decided to stay in high school. Teachers also

agreed that better collaboration between parents and teachers was needed to increase

student achievement and performance. The ninth grade counselor and ninth grade social

worker that were both included as a result of the academy were viewed by all teachers as

assisting in this collaboration.

Teachers from Fairbanks and Central High Schools both saw the need for the Leadership Academy that was implemented with the two NGSA's. The skills taught in thee classes included diplomacy, organization, and study skills and were felt to benefit students in other courses as well. Only a few teachers were unaware of this course of why it was being included in the freshman curriculum. Teaches generally agreed that they enjoyed the block scheduling but that differentiating curriculum was necessary with this schedule.

Table 8

Data Matrix for Central and Fairbanks High School Teachers — Cross Case Analysis

Items Having Most Effect on Success	Identified Areas of Importance	Academy Implications
Assistance with Schoolwork	Teachers from both schools mentioned after school tutoring (sts. stated they did not attend)	Not part of academy
	Peer Tutors helpful	Not part of academy
	Parent Involvement for Assistance	Academy encourages Parent conferences and Involvement-more needed
Teachers	Crucial role in Motivation	Teachers trained, teaming helpful Professional Learning Communities
	Parents and teachers Need to collaborate	Not mentioned much in academy
Parents	Parents crucial for success	
	Most teachers agreed parents most influential	Counselor and social worker on hand to assist with this. More programs needed.

Table 8 (continued)

Items Having Most Effect on Success	Identified Areas of Importance	Academy Implications
Leadership Seminar	Ninth graders need training	Classes addresses most skills including budgeting, diplomacy, etc.
	Teachers need training	More professional development Awareness
Block Scheduling	Varied Instruction	90 minutes allows for different approaches

Cross Case Analysis

Students—Fairbanks and Central High Schools

Demographics

Fairbanks High School had approximately 1215 student during the 2005–2006 school year. Of these 76% were Caucasian, 17% were African American and 5% were Hispanic. Forty-two percent of students were eligible for free or reduced lunch. At Central High School there were approximately 1295 students enrolled during the 2005–2006 school year. Of these 90% were Caucasian, 7% were African American, and 2% were Hispanic. Thirty-three percent of students were eligible for free or reduced meals (www.greatschools.net).

Teachers

Teachers were mentioned more than anything else when speaking to students about the Ninth Grade Success Academy and success in school during their freshman year in general. Students at both high schools were very vocal about the differences

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between "good" teachers and "bad" teachers. Most students agreed that teachers that used activities and groups were their favorite. They also stated that most of their teachers teach using activities versus worksheets. Not only was it "fun" for them, but students stated that they learned easier and retained information better with activities and group projects. "Sometimes when I work in a group it's much more intimidating. It makes it easier to be yourself."

Equity with regard to treatment of students was also mentioned at both high schools. Students also stated that sometimes other students are separated and have harsh feelings towards each other because teachers treat them differently. Most students felt that most of the time student preference was not a racial issue, but an achievement issue. Students felt that teachers were more likely to assist students that were "smarter". Also frustrating to students were students that were inconsistent with behavior. "Sometimes she comes in and she's all happy and the next day, she'll just go off for no reason."

Students at both schools spoke of the importance of structure in the classroom. The students found it important to know expectations. Behavior management, or "controlled behavior" was also vocalized as being appreciated with students.

Discipline

Students at both schools stated that they felt safe at their schools. As mentioned earlier, students stated that they preferred classroom in which the teacher had control and where behavior was controlled. Students stated at both schools that they felt discipline was too strict. Administrators at both schools shared ninth grade, although one administrator for freshman is encouraged in the NGSA model.

Fights and dress code violations were mentioned at both schools as being the items that most students got in trouble for at school. Fighting was done usually in the halls and during transition times, students stated. However, students at one school did say that sometimes there were fights in the classrooms. Students stated that usually when an individual got into a fight they were suspended out of school for three days, unless they had gotten in a fight before, and then these days may be increased.

Students were asked how they thought discipline affected a student's decision to drop out of school. At both schools, students overwhelmingly agreed that once a student got into trouble their chance of dropping out of school greatly increased. One reason stated for this was because they was then stereotyped.

"It seems once you get in trouble, teachers just assume you will again. Sometimes kids have bad days too. That doesn't mean they will be like that the next day."

One girl told a story about a cousin that had quit high school. She stated that he had gotten in trouble and been suspended a couple of times. "Even though he tried to get it together, and his parents were pressuring him, he just kept getting picked on a school (by teachers). Finally, it got to be too much, so he just left and got a job."

Students said that many students at their schools get in trouble about dress code. "Mainly kids at my school get in trouble about not tucking their shorts in." Students stated that when kids got in trouble about it, the students has to go to ISS (In-School Suspension). Students said the toughest part about that was that then they missed class. The researcher asked why the students just did not tuck their shirts in so that the problem would be alleviated. Students said sometimes they would just forget or be returning from Physical Education.

Assistance with Academics

Students at one school talked a length about how peer tutors helped them a great deal in school. These students stated that upperclassman were included in their academic classes, were in the class everyday and walked around to assist them. Students at the other high school stated that peer tutors were used, but that these individuals were usually classmates that had already mastered a concept that were also freshman.

Courses that most students agreed they needed the most assistance with were math and science. Students at both schools stated that they felt most unprepared for these two subject areas than any other. Students stated that when a real life connection was made, it made concepts easier to understand. One student stated, "In accounting, our teacher does a lot of things and uses real life examples. This helps me to remember what I have learned."

Teachers that went over material more than once were echoed at both schools as being crucial to learning. Students at both schools gave many examples of teachers they had during their freshman year that were patient and helped them to understand material. "These teachers motivate me to stay in school," one female student stated. Students also gave examples of teachers that inpatient and did not repeat material once he/she had gone over it initially. Students at Fairbanks High all had the same teacher for Leadership Seminar. All these students stated that he had inspired them to stay in school by listening to them and being concerned without being judgmental regarding their school life and personal lives.

Leadership Seminar

Of the two high schools, one school was noticeably more excited and saw more of a necessity for Leadership Seminar. These students stated that the skills they were learning in this class would be utilized, they felt would be used in many other classes. They had spoken about careers and had several speakers. At the other high school no guest speakers had come into the classroom and although students remembered several terms they learned in the class they were unsure about the meanings of these words or how they could be used in everyday life.

Attendance

Students felt that there was a correlation between attendance and success in high school. "In math sometimes we cover like three sections in one day. If you miss a class, you can make up the work, but you have no clue what is going on." Most students had missed about 3-4 days, but one student stated that she had missed 73 days the year before. However, this student stated that she was promoted to the next grade but had to go to court.

Summary

Although many teachers did not feel they were crucial to student success, students were adamant that teachers were very important to their success in high school. Students also agreed across the board that groups, pairs and activities assisted them in learning. These items were not part of the academy format, per say but could certainly be part of a professional development program when training academy teachers to reach freshman students. Teachers should also be aware of the importance of equity and how important it

is to students that all learners are treated equally. Other problems including cliques, jealousy and fights can be triggered by anger fro students that feel they are being stereotyped or not being treated diplomatically.

Table 9 reviews each of the areas deemed important by students participating in this study. Items listed are in order of times mentioned with regard to importance related to student success in high school. Each item is noted, along with the area included within it of importance. Also, whether or not this item is part of the academy approach is also indicated in this table.

Table 9

Data Matrix for Central and Fairbanks High School Students — Cross Case Analysis

Items Having Most Effect on Success	Indicated Areas of Importance	Academy Implications
Teachers	Group/Teams Preferred	Block Scheduling gives Time for groups
	Equity-treating all students the same	Not mentioned
	Consistency with mood and expectations	Not mentioned
	Reteaching when necessary	Double dipping encouraged
Discipline	Teachers with Classroom management are preferred	Administration/organization set to minimize discipline issues
	Fighting during transition	Freshman isolated
	Students stereotyped after mistake	Not mentioned
	Dress code—miss class if violate	Not mentioned

Table 9 (continued)

Items Having Most Effect on Success	Indicated Areas of Importance	Academy Implications
Assistance with Academics	Peer tutors utilized	Not part of academy
	Additional help and Patience needed	Not part of academy
	Struggle with Math and Science	Math review recommended
	Real life connections helpful	Leadership Seminar
Leadership Seminar	One school noticeably more excited	Professional Development for course
	Skills taught can be used in other classes	
Attendance	Needed for success—especially in math	Attendance encouraged recognized

Comparison of All Teachers and Students Collectively

Students and teachers at both high schools had similar and differing opinions

regarding what is important to student success upon entering high school. Table 9

demonstrates these similarities and differences. Areas are broken down into six categories

including discipline, instruction, school structure, attendance, parental involvement, and

teachers. Included beside each category is a narrative highlighted whether this category

had shared or differing view among the teacher and student groups. Also indicated in

Table 9 is whether or not this component was part of changes that took place with the

inclusion of the Ninth Grade Success Academy.

Both groups agreed that discipline effects achievement and can impact retention. Students were adamant about the difficulty students have being stereotyped after the student gets in trouble. Students told antidotes regarding individuals they had known in the past that had eventually exited school early because of a discipline record that continued to "haunt" them. Teachers also agreed that a pattern usually existed among students that were in trouble. Because of missing school as a result of discipline problems, the student became academically disadvantaged.

Teachers and students also agreed on the necessity of continuity with administration administering consequences for discipline infractions. NGSA encourages a freshman administrator to ensure equity and help with transition after a discipline occurrence has transpired. Neither Central High School nor Fairbanks High School had one administrator for freshman because of personnel constraints, but this is a goal for the future at both schools. Both groups agreed that if there was one administrator in their academy, problems would decrease.

With the inclusion of Leadership Seminar as a required course for all ninth grade students, teachers and students felt several skills had been increased that would assist students in future success. While one of the high schools was noticeably more enthusiastic regarding this course, there existed buy-in from students and teachers at both schools on some level. This course helped bridge gaps students had when coming from middle school. Gaps on knowledge believed to exist by students and teachers were in math and science. Although after school tutoring existed at both schools in math, students were in agreement that they did not attend because they had to find transportation and also because at the end of the day they preferred going home over tutoring. Teachers,

however, felt that this tutoring program was an opportunity students should take advantage of and that would aid in success.

Successful delivery methods were agreed upon by most teachers and students. Teachers stated that the use of activities and group work had aided in mastery of skills for students. Students agreed that approached such as groups, pairs, and activities assisted in grasping concepts and in retaining information. The inclusion of the block scheduling, it was felt by teachers, allowed this variation in delivery.

With the inclusion of the academy, freshmen are isolated from the rest of the student body as often as possible. While this is done in an effort to minimize discipline and create a leaning community among ninth grade students and their teachers, many teachers and students commented on negative consequences of this structure. Both groups felt like that with the separation of the freshman from the older students, there was no one to act as a mature role model for these students. Students commented that they never saw seniors, and that is they were allowed to be around them, it would give them someone to see who had actually accomplished and made it to their final year in high school. Teachers echoed this sentiment.

Lack of parental involvement was agreed, by teachers and students to be a problem at both high schools. Both groups felt that by having parents more involved in the school and in with the child's education, that more students would be involved and successful. Only one student commented that she knew a boy that dropped out because his parents were constantly "nagging" him about doing well on school, so he decided to quit. Separate of this comment, all were in agreement that the more active role a parent takes in their student's life, the better chance that student has of high school completion.

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Through freshman orientation meeting and continuous communication with parents, NGSA attempts to educate parents and keep them informed of their child's progress.

Teachers were split on the contribution that had regarding student motivation and success. While more than half felt their job and role was crucial to student success, many also felt that parents and peers had a more influential role in a student's decision about whether or not to graduate from high school. Students agreed with teachers that felt their role was of extreme importance. Students told stories about teachers and administrators that made them want to try their best, and also stories about educators that made them not want to attend class or school. By professional development aimed at instruction techniques for teaching on the block system and also training regarding development of adolescents at this age, NGSA attempts to train teachers in approaches to best reach this age level student.

Both groups also agreed on the importance of school attendance. While students stated that they could get away with missing a few days, in some subjects, especially math, they agreed it was very difficult to catch up. Teachers agreed with this. One teacher states that the only student he/she had had that dropped out that year was a student that attendance became such an issue that the child had no choice, because he would never be able to catch up. NGSA addresses attendance issues with the help of a full time social worker and counselor who visit students at home and call parents for conferences.

Table 10

Summary of Shared and Differing Beliefs among Students and Teachers

Major Categories	Shared Perceptions	Differing Perceptions	Academy Component
Discipline			
1 Non equity 2 Influence on retention 3 Freshman Administrator	2-All felt sts. that in trouble have an Increased chance of Dropping out 3-One administrator Positive for equity and consistency	1- Sts. felt some kids stereotyped 3. Yes	1. No 2. No
Instruction			
1 Leadership Seminar 2 Not prepared academically 3 Assistance w/ Academics 4 Delivery	1-Most felt it was positive and necessary 2-Both felt sts unprepared in math and science 4-Activities, groups and pairs Preferred over traditional methods	1-Three teaches unaware of course's goals 3-Sts did not buy-in to after school tutoring, teachers thought good idea	1. Yes 2. Yes 3. No 4. Yes
School Structure			
1 Isolation 2 Block Schedule	1- Both sts and teachers felt bad idea b/c no upperclassmen present to provide example 2-Both agreed they enjoyed differentiating instruction and having a longer period		1. Yes 2. Yes
Parents			
1 Lack of Involvement	1-Parents often not involved, leads To quitting school		1.Somewhat
Teachers			
1 Key to Success 2 Equity	1-Students and most teachers felt teachers play a crucial role	1-Three teachers felt their role was minor 2-Teachers felt all sts. given equal chance. Students felt teachers had "favorites"	1.No 2. No
Attendance			
1 Relevance to retention	1-All agreed that attendance is important to success		1. Yes

Chapter Five provides a discussion of these findings, their implications, and their relevance. Chapter Five also looks at recommendations for Academy implementation in the future as well as recommendations for future studies. A brief critique of the study is included so that other researchers may consider different approaches for conducting studies similar to this one.

V. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This research examined the perceptions of teachers and students about the process of implementing two Ninth Grade Success Academies in southwest Alabama. A primary research goal was to determine perceived strengths and weaknesses in the implementation process in order to assist in enhance the effectiveness of approaches used when initiating similar academies.

The following guiding questions were used to help address this goal:

1. What outcomes have students and teachers observed related to the implementation of Ninth Grade Success Academies at Fairbanks High School and Central High School?

2. In what ways do teachers perceive Ninth Grade Success Academy implementation collectively in the two high schools?

3. In what ways do students perceive Ninth Grade Success Academy implementation collectively in the two high schools?

4. In what ways are student perceptions and teacher perceptions similar and different?

This chapter briefly reviews findings from the study. Then, each finding is discussed within the context of relevant to theories from the literature to further assist in

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explaining the implications of the findings. Recommendations (see Table 10) are included for future academy implementation, and to strengthen academies already in place, and for areas to consider for further research. Limitations of the study are also presented. Chapter Five concludes with a summary and a discussion about the significance of this research.

Implications of Key Findings

Introduction

As the data were analyzed, there were clear connections to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Literature-based issues discussed in chapter two included high school drop outs, issues relating to the achievement gap, the importance of ninth grade success, and school structure. All of these areas were addressed in the data collection process at these two high schools. Theories related to adolescent development, ninth grade instruction, student voice, and the theories behind the development of Ninth Grade Success Academies all informed the analysis and interpretation of the data. Each of the findings is briefly discussed below in this section along with implications for increasing student success rates.

Discipline

Students with discipline problems are at increased risk of dropping out of high school (McPartland, 1998). At both schools students and teachers alike noted discipline as a pertinent factor that should be addressed both within school structure and with academy formation. Teachers and students preferred classrooms that had structure and organization. Fighting and dress code violations were noted as the highest ranking in

discipline infractions. Areas in which teachers and students felt discipline most affected freshman at these two schools, along with suggestions for improvement are included are discussed in the next section.

Findings Related to Discipline

Students expressed concern about the inconsistencies in how students were treated. Non-equitable treatment among students by teachers and administrators was said to be a cause for student frustration and a reason for discipline problems to occur at both high schools. Students stated that once a student gets in trouble, the student is labeled and has a greater chance of dropping out of school because of this label. Rumberger and Woods (2001) agreed with this claim and found that disciplinary problems even in elementary school and middle school caused a student to have less attachment to school, therefore increasing the risk of early withdrawal.

A cycle of discipline problems appears with some adolescents. Adolescents show poor judgment in situations dealing with emotion, especially when involving peers is involved (Dahl, 2004). Students who are unable to gain control of this cycle are at a greater risk of dropping out. Although there is an increase in risk taking behaviors in adolescence, the majority of individuals are able to break away from this conduct (Coch, Fisher, & Dawson, 2007). Students who do not change these behaviors are prone to not only dropping out early, but also to an increased risk of criminal behavior and deviant lifestyle (Coch, Fisher, & Dawson, 2007).

Teachers and administrators should be aware of this stage of social development in adolescents and trained in ways to deal with these individuals. Including information pertaining to social and moral development in the professional development of personnel

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working with ninth grade students may increase awareness. Also, as recommended by literature related to most Ninth Grade Success Academy models, one administrator and one counselor should be assigned to help ensure greater equity and consistency in treatment of students. Leadership Seminar, as well as other classes, could address the need for incorporating behavioral objectives for students. Communications among teachers, administrators and students could be increased to further understand and increase awareness about students' lives, decrease discipline problems, and possibly increase passing rates of high school freshman.

Instruction

Many students drop out of school because they are not interested in the curriculum that is being taught and see no relevance to real life (Tinto, 1975). Steinberg, Brown and Dornbush (1996) found that 50% of students stated that school was boring. In this section, findings from the literature related to instruction are compared with the findings from this study.

Findings Related to Instruction

Students at both high schools in this study spoke about what made school fun and the teaching methods that inspired them to learn. Students agreed that they are able to better understand content and retain more information when they are taught through projects and group work. Project based learning has been shown to give meaning to information and to promote cooperative learning (Bransford & Stein, 1993).

Active learning, rather than passive learning, has been shown to be preferred during adolescent development during the time individuals are in ninth grade (Meece, 2007). Students in this study agreed that when they were able to take a more proactive

approach to learning, they felt more ownership and were more likely to buy-in to the lesson being taught. Teachers indicated that they preferred teaching when students were active participants. Because students at this level are often unable to separate logical abstraction from other's perspectives (Piaget, 1958) active engagement assists in a student's development of realism and more concrete understanding.

Teachers agreed that since the academy had been implemented and block scheduling had been incorporated they have incorporated varied instructional approached including grouping, pairing, technology, projects and differentiated instruction. Because students do not all learn the same way (Gardner, 1999) differentiated instruction allows teachers to be more flexible, modifying curriculum as needed to meet the needs of individual students. Teachers and students stated that by varying activities throughout the class period they were better able to reach all students as well as remediate when needed for missed skills.

Assistance with academics and remediation of new skills initiated in ninth grade was stated as a need several times by students and teachers. Also the need for skills taught earlier in school that were not mastered was a theme that emerged several times with students and teachers. Students in this study stated that they felt unprepared in mathematics and science when they entered high school. An effective ninth grade curriculum should recognize that some students enter their freshman year inadequately prepared in math, reading and often other areas (McPartland, 1998). If a student struggles in reading, they can not be expected to be successful in most courses. Therefore, plans must be in place to provide remediation in math and reading and build the students' confidence level about being successful in these areas.

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Students stated that after school math tutoring programs were infrequently attended, primarily because of transportation issues and job interference. Johns Hopkins University's *Transition to Advanced Mathematics and Strategic Reading* is one model for tackling this problem. This program provides additional help for students during the academic day which alleviates the need for programs in addition to the regular academic day. Presently, Baker County has implemented reading courses in high schools. However, these courses are usually for tenth and eleventh graders in preparation for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam. There is no program in place for freshman currently to assist with these knowledge gaps in reading.

There is a program in place for assistance with math skills, A Foundations of Algebra course is also offered to ninth grade students. In this course, students are not able to obtain a math credit but spend a semester reviewing skills so that they are better prepared to take Algebra in tenth grade. Students can also worked a varied paces through another math program, Algebra for Mastery,

Leadership Seminar, which all ninth grade students are required to take at Fairbanks and Central High Schools, is one way in which students and teachers alike agree that students are gaining academic skills to become successful. By providing students as organizational skills, note taking, and study skills there is likely an increase in knowledge related to proficiencies needed for achievement. Because ninth grade has been called a "holding tank" (Hertzog, 1998) for students, with retention rates being estimated from 25% to 45% at upper class status, the Leadership Seminar course may prove to be crucial for some students.

School Structure

Ninth grade students are for the first time required to receive Carnegie Units instead of merely passing classes for promotion. This was one rationale for moving ninth grade students away from seventh and eighth graders initially. Academically and logistically makes sense, but often has cause many social problems for ninth grade students (Clark, 2000). With schools becoming larger students felt no ownership in their schools and was dropping out at rapid paces (Finn, 1989). The following section look at the structure of these two high schools and how it was affected by the inclusion of the academy and how these changes were perceived by participants. Suggestions to aide in school structure within the academy are also included.

Findings Related to School Structure

To lessen the sense of isolation and ensure students do not get lost in the crowd, Ninth Grade Success Academies (NGSA) is structured so that ninth graders are kept isolated from the rest of the student body (Kerr, 2002). Teachers and students had concerns related to isolation from older students and felt it may be creating a negative environment because freshman are not exposed to upperclassmen who could and should act as role models for them. Scheduled and controlled times when students are allowed to "hang out" with upperclassmen may assist with this concern by exposing freshman to more mature behaviors. Peer helper and mentor programs initiated by older students that assist with transition into high school, may also be helpful for ninth graders.

Another structural change that is recommended for the ninth grade academy is use of the block schedule system. In this system students take only four classes per semester. These courses last approximately ninety minutes each. While students and teachers

appreciated the flexibility of instruction and delivery, they were vague about how they were utilizing this time for remediation. Extra time in these courses was said by some teachers to be used for one-on-one help. Many students stated that their teachers did help them when they had a problem; however, others said that with some teachers if you do not get it the first time then they will not review the content. By utilizing some of the block scheduling this time to review concepts in reading and math, it is felt that students with gaps in knowledge would have a better chance of obtaining needed skills.

Alexander (1989) and Van Til (1967) proposed organizing schools into interdisciplinary teams to support students emotionally and socially. Although this was recommended for middle schools, many school systems employ this technique for ninth grade students in which a group of teachers all teach the same group of students. This allows team meetings with teachers and parents in which all teachers are familiar with students. It also allows student to be with the same group of students most of the day, decreasing isolation and creating small learning communities within a larger class.

Parents

Research has shown that when schools work together with parents, children tend to succeed in life and school (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Jackson & Davis, 2000). Some studies have even shown that the most accurate predictor of student achievement is the extent to which the family encourages learning and sets realistic goals for the future (Henderson & Berla, 1994; Jackson & Davis, 2000). The next section discusses how parental involvement is perceived at each of these two schools.

Findings Related to Parental Involvement

Both students and parents at each of the two high schools were in agreement about the perception that usually parents are generally not as involved as they should be with a student's academic life. Many teachers felt that parents had a greater influence over students than they could ever have. Students and teachers also agreed that students who have involved are much more likely to be successful in high school and later in life.

During students' eighth grade year a meeting is held with parents explaining ninth grade and the Academy. Students and teachers report there is little other contact with parents unless there is a concern at school with the student. Each Academy has its own counselor and social worker. Students at one high school seemed much more familiar with the ninth grade counselor than students at the other school. Students at this high school stated that they had met with the counselor and that she had come to their school and spoken with their class. At the other high school, students had not met with the counselor and stated that she had not come into their classrooms. Yet, speaking with the counselors at both schools, they told the researcher that they often scheduled parent meetings and were in frequent contact with parents who had students at risk of failure because of attendance or discipline problems.

Based on these findings, this researcher believes programs should be implemented to encourage more parental involvement. This especially holds true for students from under-represented groups with low socio economic status. By reaching out to parents there is an increased chance of awareness about expectations and resources available. There is also a greater feeling of control and collaboration (Rothstein, 2004) that can

ultimately lead to social and economic changes amongst students who would have a greater risk of becoming a high school dropout.

Teachers

In the section perceptions of teachers' roles in student success, as found by data collected are discussed and compared to literature. As a student enters high school there is a great need for guidance and support from non-family members (Echols, 1999). If a student feels a breakdown in trust from teachers it can lead to a feeling of little self worth and alienation and possibly a lessened sense of respect for authority (Eccles & Midgely, 1989).

Findings Related to Teachers' Roles

Students at one high school reported that from middle school to high school they experienced a sense that teachers did not know them as much or take as much of an interest in their lives. At this same school, all students mentioned one particular teacher and spoke at length about what a "good" teacher he was because of his knowledge of students' lives as well as his patience with them.

Many teachers felt their role in students' lives was minor, but many felt that they were crucial to the success of the students that they taught. Delivery of instruction and classroom management was stated by teachers and students as being important, but more than anything, awareness of student need and the relationship between teachers and students was stated as a key to achievement. By encouraging an emotionally and socially balanced school culture, students' self confidence, as well as teacher attitude is increased (Battistich, 1997). Programs including non-academic extracurricular activities for students and teachers to participate in together, advisor/advisee groups, the modeling of

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caring relationships from the top down, and setting high behavioral expectations are recommended to increase a positive school culture (Battistich, Solomon, Watson & Schaps, 1997; Stuhlman, Hamre, & Pianta, 2002).

Indifferent and uncaring teachers may lead to early exit from high school (Wheelock, 1993). Some of the students stated that some teachers did not care if you slept in class as long as you did not disturb other students. Teachers echoed this by stating that "if a student does not want to learn, teachers can not make them." Azzam (2007) found who reasons given by students that had decided to leave high school early included: boredom, attendance, peers, and too much freedom. When asked what would have motivated them to stay in school, these students stated that they would have worked harder if their teachers had demanded more from them.

Attendance

Although attendance was discussed more infrequently than either topics, because of its important role in school success (A Nation at Risk, 2000) data collected from the study are discussed. The following section discussed insight from teachers and students at both high schools as it related to attendance and its importance in school success.

Findings Related to Attendance

Students and teachers at both schools agreed that attendance is important to school success. Students at one high school were adamant that they knew students who could stay out of school partying and still make good grades, but they did admit that this was rare. When asked why students were absent, they stated that often they had jobs and other things that were more important to them than coming to school. Students frequently stated that making money was seen as more important and that was the reason why some

individuals they knew had decided to quit school. As noted by Tinto (1975), when a person perceives an alternative form of investment of time, energies, and resources as a greater benefit than staying in school a person will eventually withdraw from school.

Also, a student is more likely to drop out of school when he/she feels that learning is irrelevant. Because of irrational ideas and thinking during this stage of development, it becomes increasingly difficult for students to see the long term benefits of staying in school. By linking knowledge learned in school with real life applications, ninth grade students are more likely to appreciate the knowledge they gain and have more of an interest in retaining the information.

Each area was mentioned and noted as an area for needed improvement by all four groups participating in this study is narrated below. By examining these eight recommendations it is hoped to improve future academy implementations and to further improve already formed Ninth Grade Success Academies. Each area of suggested improvement is described below, along with a table (see Table 10) illustrating these recommendations.

Recommendations for Future Academy Implementations

One Administrator for the Academy

Based on findings which state that students and teachers would prefer uniformity, the utilization of one administrator for ninth grade would be beneficial in many areas. Consistency and equity regarding would be increased as the administrator would be familiar with the student's history. The administrator would also need to be knowledgeable of adolescent needs during this stage of development. By decreasing

autonomy with an administrator familiar with these students, it is likely that discipline and attendance problems would improve.

Reading Skills Remediation Program

While there is currently a program in ninth grade for math remediation, it is recommended that a reading program be implemented as an elective for freshman with low reading skills based on low scores reported by teachers and struggles in core curriculum areas reported by students. A special education teacher or reading specialist could serve as instructor of this course. This program would assist in future high school success by giving students necessary reading skills that could prove helpful in all courses.

Many current programs are available for reading remediation that encourages high school students read. These programs utilize novels along with vocabulary and strategies. Because these novels are high interest, students become engaged with them and want to read more. Most recently, Jane Green's *Plugged Into Reading* has been widely accepted and used within many institutions.

Failure Not an Option Program

By implementing a program in which students would not be allowed to refuse to complete assignments, sleep in class, or miss school without repercussions students would have little choice but to succeed in high school. Students would be less likely to become frustrated because a structure would be in place to make up missed instruction they may have missed and assignments. Students would also be less likely to be absent if they knew work missed would have to be made up.

Opportunities for Exposure to Upperclassmen

Students and teachers both stated concerns that there was no exposure to upperclassmen. Students stated that it motivated them to see seniors who had actually made it to that level. Teachers said that upperclassman provided a model for more mature behavior. Perhaps by scheduling times in which freshman are included in upper class activities, and having upperclassmen speak and work with freshman, the benefits of class unity and skill preparation exclusive to the freshman class could be coupled with positive exposure to students who had already proven successful.

Ninth Grade Teaming

Many times students get lost in the crowd in high school. Although isolating the ninth grade and appointing one administrator and counselor for that grade level helps to create smaller learning community, teachers often instruct so many students that they have limited knowledge about their students and how they learn. Interdisciplinary teams would allow for a more holistic view of the child. Students would also feel more comfortable because of the smaller learning community that the team would promote.

Programs to Encourage Parental Involvement

Programs to educate and inform parents would be beneficial not only to parents, but also to administrators, teachers, and most importantly — students. These programs are needed for all parents, but especially for under-represented groups and those from lower socio-economic groups who often feel alienated from educational institutions. Through on-going and meaningful collaboration with parents it is believed that positive conduct and attendance would increase.

Programs Promoting School Culture

As mentioned earlier, several programs have been shown to improve school culture in middle and high schools. Among these ideas include activities unrelated to academics and advisor/advisee groups for students and teachers to participate in together that are also suggested is the modeling of respect from teachers, principals, central office staff and support staff. By including these types of programs, school culture may become more upbeat and schools can possibly see a decrease in discipline problems, an increase in attendance, and a motivation for students to succeed. Parents may also feel more comfortable and welcome in this type of school atmosphere.

Reward Positive Behavior

It is recommended that incentives be provided to encourage improved attendance and behavior. Character, attendance, and academic award ceremonies would not only recognize achievement but also give students goals to meet. Based on feedback from students incentives could include but are not limited to extra time at lunch, out of uniform days, free athletic event passes, or homework passes.

More Professional Development

When programs are implemented all stakeholders should be part of the process. It is crucial to train teachers and administrators on program to assure buy in and success. Often times individuals that serve in different roles in schools see things quite differently and these varied opinions are needed to structure a program that meets the needs in which it was designed.

Throughout history educational programs have been put into place without proper training of individuals expected to carry out the mission of the program. Professional

development should be structured and done with teachers, counselors, and administrators

prior to the inclusion of a Ninth Grade Academy.

Table 11

Recommendations for Future Academy Implementations

Recommendation	Area(s) Addressed
One administrator for Ninth Grade	Discipline
	Attendance
Reading Skills Remediation Program	Instruction
	School Structure
Failure not an option programs	Discipline
	Structure
	Instruction
	School Structure
	Attendance
Opportunities for Exposure to Upperclassmen	Discipline
	School Structure
Teaming in Ninth Grade	Discipline
	School Structure
	Teachers
	Attendance

(table continues)

Table 11 (continued)

Recommendation	Area(s) Addressed
More programs to encourage parental involvement	Discipline
	Attendance
	Parents
Programs to increase positive school culture	Discipline
	School Structure
	Teachers
	Parents
Rewarding student behavior	Discipline
	Attendance

Lessons Learned Regarding Program Implementation

Throughout this project I learned many lessons related to program implementation. As earlier mentioned, individuals participating should be trained thoroughly so that they know what is to be expected. Problems that may arise may also be mentioned in these training sessions which will allows these issues to be resolved prior the program's implementation.

Programs that have worked well in other areas may not always be successful in other's. Populations, resources, needs, personnel and willingness for change should all be considered prior to the program's inclusion. By conducting a pilot evaluation there exists data to make determinations about whether this program will work. Also, if the program

does not seem to be working or if certain elements are not working I feel that these can be eliminated are the entire program could be discontinued.

Lastly, I learned that with any program a clear mission and goals should be set for the program. Program evaluation is difficult when there is no mean to measure it. These goals should be communicated prior to implementation and assessed periodically.

Limitations of Study and Suggestions for Future Research

There were several limitations to this study. Potential for researcher subjectivity was an issue because of my past experiences in the county. Through journaling and discussions with committee members about possible biases assisted with being realistic, there still were opinions about policy, personnel, and schools that had could have created preset biases prior to the study. Throughout the study efforts were made to identify had address biases.

Although both schools implemented most components of NGSA's, there were still some elements including having one administrator, total ninth grade isolation, and professional development of teachers that would have strengthened the academy. Because these components were either not included or only partially included, it is difficult to assess how the Academy would have benefited students if these important components were put into place.

Because of the recent hurricanes (Ivan and Katrina) the community was going through economic changes as well as changes regarding the composition of students attending these schools. Many people from Louisiana who had lost their homes in the storms had moved into the area, and others had moved to the area because of the

reconstruction work. It is not known exactly how this affected the results of this study, but it should be noted that the county's demographics had drastically changed as a result of these incidents which occurred in the two years prior to the study.

Another limitation of the study was the limited number of students interviewed. At Fairbanks High School nine students were interviewed, but at Central High School only six were interviewed. Students could not participate in the study without signed permission slips from their parents. Several students were present for the interview but did not have parental signatures, and as a result could not be interviewed. More students' opinions would have added to the findings included in this study.

For future studies, additional rigor is recommended in that more than one year pass before data are collected. Also, a longitudinal study could take place that begins during the implementation year, but follows students as they progress through and beyond high school. This would aid in assessing long term benefits of the academy.

It is also recommended that parents, administrators, and counselors take part in future studies. With the inclusion of these individual's perceptions, a greater understanding of the phenomenon may be reached. Participation of these key people could be included through surveys and/or interviews.

Finally, quantitative data displaying changes in the areas of discipline referrals, attendance, and grades prior to and after academy implementation would greatly add to the understanding of this phenomenon. A mixed methods approach to this type of study is also recommended so that qualitative data could be coupled with quantitative results for a more holistic picture of results. This could be done with the incorporation of data from attendance, discipline referrals and number of drop outs prior to and after academy

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implementation. Data could also incorporate Likert scales from surveys with larger groups of individuals coupled with qualitative findings. Studies showing changes within one academic year, as well as longitudinally, may assist in developing deeper understandings about and improving strategies for NGSA's.

Summary

The implementation of the Ninth Grade Success Academies at Fairbanks High School and Central High School has brought about changes and assisted in accomplishing many of the goals set forth for these two schools' freshman classes. As other schools in the system, state, and country begin developing these academies and changing the structure of their freshman classes, the lessons learned from these implementation efforts may prove beneficial to others. There still are areas for improvement and inquiry within these two academies. By better understanding methods that prove most successful in a student's transition into high school, programs can be created and put into place to create optimal chances for student completion of high school.

NGSA's can act as a tool for promoting student centered structural changes, promotes learning communities and provides instruction geared toward the stages of student development. Although in each stage of development there exists varied needs, ninth grade has been shown to be the most crucial year with regards to deciding whether to complete high school and for identifying goals after high school completion (McPartland, 1998). With increased pressure from NCLB (2001) to improve student achievement and lower drop out rates, NGSA's may serve as one program to assist in meeting these challenges.

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This study provides information that can be utilized when forming new NGSA's or when restructuring academies already in place. The need for a sense of student ownership and feelings of belonging were echoed throughout the literature and in the data collected in this study. Students require individuals in their lives including parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators who consistently provide a nourishing environment with clear expectations and high standards in order to succeed at their optimal potential. Academies assist in providing this by minimizing isolation, encouraging parental support and making large school seem like smaller learning communities.

Active instruction including group activities, peer tutoring, projects, technology and other forms of differentiated instruction are also extremely helpful with motivation of student motivation and with skill acquisition. Teachers are crucial to student achievement. Educators who are passionate about teaching and subject matter are preferred by students and encourage students to attend school because of the positive environment these teachers promote. By providing on-going professional development and opportunities for collaboration to teachers working in ninth grade success academies, achievement and motivation should increase. Students should be viewed by teachers as central to their mission. No child should be allowed to fail and teachers should employ a variety of teaching strategies to reach each student. Students at both high schools said that they prefer teachers with behavior management skills and structure in the classroom because it allows them to concentrate and also students know what to expect daily.

Through on going assessment and collaboration programs assisting with transitioning students from middle school can continue to improve. Although there is

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room for improvement in several areas, it appears that the addition of NGSA's is one avenue for increasing student achievement and raising graduation rates in high schools. When properly implemented NGSA's can provide consistency and a sense of ownership that students need to turn around negative behaviors and attitudes and have a greater success ay high school success thus providing them with greater opportunities after high school completion. Success academies serve as a positive model for transition through assessment, remediation, and collaboration between students, teachers and parents. NGSA's provide all students greater opportunities to be successful in school and later in life. NGSA's, when properly implemented have the potential to aid in increasing graduation rates, student achievement, and lowering the drop out rate in high schools. These academies should be viewed as a powerful strategy to assist and encourage students to succeed in high school.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTRUCTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)

APPROVAL LETTER AND INFORMATION SHEET

AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD for RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

R E S E A R C H   P R O T O C O L   R E V I E W   F O R M

For information or help completing this form, contact: THE OFFICE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH, 307 Samford Hall,
Phone: 334-844-5966   e-mail: hsubjec@auburn.edu   **Web Address:** http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/index.htm

Complete this form using Adobe Acrobat Writer (versions 5.0 and greater).

1. PROPOSED DATES OF STUDY: FROM: _____11/01/2005_____   TO: _____06/01/2006_____

   REVIEW TYPE (Check one):   ☐ FULL BOARD   ☑ EXPEDITED   ☐ EXEMPT

2. PROJECT TITLE: Implications of Ninth Grade Success Academies and Perceptions of Teachers, Students and Parents

3. _____Rachael McDaniel_____   Graduate Student   EDLD   3343193444   mcdanrg@auburn.edu
   PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR   **TITLE**   **DEPT**   **PHONE**   **E-MAIL**
   3297 South College Street C102 Auburn, Alabama 36830
   ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE   **FAX**

4. SOURCE OF FUNDING SUPPORT: ☑ Not Applicable   ☐ Internal   ☐ External (External Agency): _____

5. STATUS OF FUNDING SUPPORT: ☑ Not Applicable   ☐ Approved   ☐ Pending   ☐ Received

6. GENERAL RESEARCH PROJECT CHARACTERISTICS

A. Research Content Area		**B. Research Methodology**		
Please check all descriptors that best apply to this proposed research project.		Please check all descriptors that best apply to the research methodology.		
☐ Anthropology	☐ Anthropometry	Data collection will be: ☑ Prospective ☐ Retrospective ☐ Both		
☐ Biological Sciences	☐ Behavioral Sciences	Data will be recorded so that participants can be directly or indirectly identified: ☑ Yes ☐ No		
☑ Education	☐ English	Data collection will involve the use of:		
☐ History	☐ Journalism	☐ Educational Tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement)		
☐ Medical	☐ Physiology	☐ Surveys / Questionnaires		
☐ Other (Please list:)_____		☐ Private Records / Files		
Please list 3 or 4 keywords to identify this research project: _____		☑ Interview / Observation		
_____		☑ Audiotaping and / or Videotaping		
_____		☐ Physical / Physiologic Measurements or Specimens		

C. Participant Information		**D. Risks to Participants**	
Please check all descriptors that apply to the participant population.		Please identify all risks that may reasonably be expected as a result of participating in this research.	
☑ Males	☑ Females	☑ Breach of Confidentiality	☐ Coercion
Vulnerable Populations		☐ Deception	☐ Physical
☐ Pregnant Women	☐ Children	☐ Psychological	☐ Social
☐ Prisoners	☑ Adolescents	☐ None	☐ Other (please list):
☐ Elderly	☐ Physically Challenged		
☐ Economically Challenged	☐ Mentally Challenged		
Do you plan to recruit Auburn University Students? ☐ Yes ☑ No			
Do you plan to compensate your participants? ☐ Yes ☑ No			

For OHSR Office Use Only	
DATE RECEIVED IN OHSR: _____ by _____	PROTOCOL # _____
DATE OF OHSR CONTENT REVIEW: _____ by _____	DATE ASSIGNED IRB REVIEW: _____ by _____
DATE OF IRB REVIEW: _____ by _____	DATE IRB APPROVAL: _____ by _____
INTERVAL FOR CONTINUING REVIEW: _____	

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7. PROJECT ASSURANCES

PROJECT TITLE: Implications of Ninth Grade Success Academies and Perceptions of Teachers, Students and Parents

A. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR'S ASSSURANCE

1. I certify that all information provided in this application is complete and correct.
2. I understand that, as Principal Investigator, I have ultimate responsibility for the conduct of this study, the ethical performance this project, the protection of the rights and welfare of human subjects, and strict adherence to any stipulations imposed by the Auburn University IRB.
3. I certify that all individuals involved with the conduct of this project are qualified to carry out their specified roles and responsibilities and are in compliance with Auburn University policies regarding the collection and analysis of the research data.
4. I agree to comply with all Auburn policies and procedures, as well as with all applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding the protection of human subjects, including, but not limited to the following:
   a. Conducting the project by qualified personnel according to the approved protocol
   b. Implementing no changes in the approved protocol or consent form without prior approval from the Office of Human Subjects Research (except in an emergency, if necessary to safeguard the well-being of human subjects)
   c. Obtaining the legally effective informed consent from each participant or their legally responsible representative prior to their participation in this project using only the currently approved, stamped consent form
   d. Promptly reporting significant adverse events and/or effects to the Office of Human Subjects Research in writing within 5 working days of the occurrence.
5. If I will be unavailable to direct this research personally, I will arrange for a co-investigator to assume direct responsibility in my absence. This person has been named as co-investigator in this application, or I will advise OHSR, by letter, in advance of such arrangements.
6. I agree to conduct this study only during the period approved by the Auburn University IRB.
7. I will prepare and submit a renewal request and supply all supporting documents to the Office of Human Subjects Research before the approval period has expired if it is necessary to continue the research project beyond the time period approved by the Auburn University IRB.
8. I will prepare and submit a final report upon completion of this research project.

Rachael McDaniel	Rachael McDaniel	10-26-05
Principal Investigator (Please Print)	Principal Investigator's Signature	Date

B. FACULTY SPONSOR'S ASSSURANCE

1. By my signature as sponsor on this research application, I certify that the student or guest investigator is knowledgeable about the regulations and policies governing research with human subjects and has sufficient training and experience to conduct this particular study in accord with the approved protocol.
2. I certify that the project will be performed by qualified personnel according to the approved protocol using conventional or experimental methodology.
3. I agree to meet with the investigator on a regular basis to monitor study progress.
4. Should problems arise during the course of the study, I agree to be available, personally, to supervise the investigator in solving them.
5. I assure that the investigator will promptly report significant adverse events and/or effects to the OHSR in writing within 5 working days of the occurrence.
6. If I will be unavailable, I will arrange for an alternate faculty sponsor to assume responsibility during my absence, and I will advise the OHSR by letter of such arrangements.
7. I have read the protocol submitted for this project for content, clarity, and methodology.

Dr. Cindy Reed	Cynthia J. Reed	10-26-05
Faculty Sponsor (Please Print)	Faculty Sponsor's Signature	Date

C. DEPARTMENT HEAD'S ASSSURANCE

By my signature as department head, I certify that every member of my department involved with the conduct of this research project will abide by all Auburn University policies and procedures, as well as with all applicable federal, state, and local laws regarding the protection and ethical treatment of human participants.

Dr. William Spencer	William Spencer	10-26-05
Department Head (Please Print)	Department Head's Signature	Date

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8. PROJECT ABSTRACT: Prepare an abstract (400-word maximum) that includes: I.) A summary of relevant research findings leading to this research proposal; II.) A concise purpose statement; III.) A brief description of the methodology; IV.) Expected and/or possible outcomes, and V.) A statement regarding the potential significance of this research project. *Please cite relevant sources and include a "Reference List" as Appendix A.*

School drop out is an increasing communal problem. Most researchers agree that students drop out of high school because of both individual and institutional factors. Disengagement is cited a major problem for students (Newmann, 1992, Finn, 1989). This lack of engagement takes on two forms: the academic form which includes engagement in learning and the social engagement, which includes the social dimensions of schooling. (Rumberger & Palardy, 2005).

Investigation of the reasons why students are dropping out of school is important because drop outs have lifelong lower earning potential, greater unemployment, and a greater likelihood of criminal involvement (McNeal, 1997). Schools can do little to help the inputs (students received), but they can organize outputs in the institution through policies, practices and pedagogy. Ninth grade proves a pivotal time for adolescents.

As a response to the needs for institutional changes to assist in dropout rates some school systems have adopted Ninth Grade Success Academies. These academies began in the 1980's as a response to the increasing number of students dropping out in large, urban high schools. The academies operate on four basic assumptions: providing opportunities for success, relevance to community and one's future goals, caring and supportive climate, and assistance with the individual needs of the students (McPartland, 1994). Research has been done showing both a decrease in dropout rate, a decrease in discipline, and a decrease in absences from school (Kemple, 2000, Stern, 2000, McPartland, 1998).

II. The purpose of this study is to explore perceived differences in climate, expectations, and programmatic strengths and weaknesses in the two ninth grade success academies as well as outcomes.

II. Six focus group interviews will be conducted. The groups will consist of teachers, parents, and students from each school. The participants will be grouped according to which group they are a part of (parent, teacher, or student). and from which school that are associated. Follow up interviews will be held from participants for elaboration after the group interviews are conducted. All interviews will be audio taped.

IV. By reflecting as a group and as individuals on the attitudes and perceptions of the schools and the Ninth Grade Success Academies specifically, school leaders may better understand ways of improving the program and ideas for sustainability. Lessons learned from this research may be useful to other school systems in implementing a Ninth Grade Success Academy and the expectations for the first year of implementation.

9. PURPOSE & SIGNIFICANCE.

   a.   Clearly state all of the objectives, goals, or aims of this project.

The pilot phase of this research will be to collect data needed to establish research strategies and need for follow up interviews. The interviews will be conducted to determine attitudes from teachers, students, and parents regarding the current practices regarding the current practices in each of the two schools (Robertsdale High School and Foley High School). Perceptions and expectations towards ninth Grade Success Academies will be assessed within all six groups. Follow up interviews with individuals will be conducted for clarification.

Follow up interviews will assess if the expectations of the academy were met as perceived the groups. Feelings of the strengths and weaknesses from the groups will be observed. This will assist in restructuring, continuation and future planning for the Ninth Grade Success Academies in these two schools, as well as planning for expansion to additional schools.

   b.   How will the results of this project be used? (e.g., Presentation? Publication? Thesis? Dissertation?)

These data will be used as part of a program evaluation for Baldwin County Schools and for dissertation research and possibly publication for presentations or publications.

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10. KEY PERSONNEL INVOLVED WITH DATA COLLECTION. Identify each individual involved with the conduct of this project and describe his or her roles and responsibilities related to this project. Be as specific as possible.

Individual: Rachael McDaniel   Title: Graduate Student   Dept/ Affiliation: EDLD
Roles / Responsibilities:

Conduct Interviews
Analyze Data
Store Data
Consent Participation

Individual: Cindy Reed   Title: Faculty Advisor   Dept/ Affiliation: EDLD
Roles / Responsibilities:

Project Oversight

Individual: Sean Forbes   Title: Faculty Advisor   Dept/ Affiliation: FOUN of Educ
Roles / Responsibilities:

Project Oversight

Individual: Title: Dept/ Affiliation:
Roles / Responsibilities:

Individual: Title: Dept/ Affiliation:
Roles / Responsibilities:

11. LOCATION OF RESEARCH. List all locations where data collection will take place. Be as specific as possible.

Robertsdale High School   Foley High School
PO Box 69   1 Pride Way
1 Golden Bear Drive   Foley, Alabama 36535
Robertsdale, AL 36567

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12. PARTICIPANTS.
   a. Describe the participant population you have chosen for this project.

   Group 1: 5-10 participants maximum each: All will be teachers randomly selected and voluntarily participating. Each teacher will be a teacher in the Ninth Grade Success Academy at that school.

   Group 2: 5-10 participants maximum each: All participants in this group will be Ninth Grade Students randomly selected and voluntarily participating.

   Group 3: 5-10 participant maximum each: All participants will be parents of current Ninth Grade Success Academy Students

   What is the minimum number of participants you need to validate the study?   30

   What is the maximum number of participants you will include in the study?   60

   b. Describe the criteria established for participant selection. (If the participants can be classified as a "vulnerable" population, please describe additional safeguards that you will use to assure the ethical treatment of these individuals.)

   Students will be randomly selected by every 25th name on the list of students participating in the academy.
   Teachers will be selected by choosing every 3rd name of the list of Ninth Grade Success Academy teachers at each school.
   Parents will be selected by choosing the 10th name and then counting every 25th name (to ensure different names than the students). Parents will be selected from the list of parents of Ninth Grade Success Academy participants.

   c. Describe all procedures you will use to recruit participants. *Please include a copy of all flyers, advertisements, and scripts and label as Appendix B.*

   The researcher will send invitations to selected potential participants (selected by the researcher in the manner described above) asking for their participation (see Appendix B). The list and contact information will be provided by the schools. Each person identified as a potential participant will be sent an invitation letter and in addition students will be sent a parental consent/ minor assent inviting then to participate in the study

   What is the maximum number of potential participants you plan to recruit?   120

   d. Describe how you will determine group assignments (e.g., random assignment, independent characteristics, etc.).

   Groups will be assigned in the following manner:
   Focus Group 1: Parents of students attending Robertsdale High School.
   Focus Group 2: Parents of students attending Foley High School.
   Focus Group 3: Teachers from Robertsdale High School.
   Focus Group 4: Teachers from Foley High School.
   Focus Group 5: Students from Robertsdale High School.
   Focus Group 6: Students from Foley High School.

   e. Describe the type and amount and method of compensation for participants.

   Gifts (dinner tickets for adults, movie tickets for students) will be drawn in a lottery style manner for each group. The gifts will be approximately $15 value each.

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13. **PROJECT DESIGN & METHODS.** Describe the procedures you will plan to use in order to address the aims of this study. (NOTE: Use language that would be understandable to a layperson. Without a complete description of all procedures, the Auburn University IRB will not be able to review protocol. If additional space is needed for #13, part b, save the information as a .pdf file and insert after page 6 of this form.)

    a.   Project overview. (Briefly describe the scientific design.)

Six groups will be formed from two high schools to explore the climate, expectations, and overall perceptions of the two high schools. These groups will include 5-10 parents, teachers, and students from each of the two high schools. Small, focus groups will be formed from these participants based on the school the participant is associated with and the category of the participant (teacher, student or parent). Individual interviews will be conducted after group interviews for further clarification.

    b.   Describe all procedures and methods used to address the purpose.

During the first semester of school and then again in the spring semester, interviews will be held with the groups exploring these perceptions. The interviews will last approximately an hour each and will be held after school for parents, during planning time for teachers and during school for students (from 8am until 9am). These interviews will be held at the school the participant is associated.

The researcher will conduct the group and individual interviews. Group protocols will be used to guide interview. The follow up, individual interviews will be directly related to the prompts on the group protocol.

Follow up interviews may be scheduled for participants individually for further clarification after group interviews are conducted (between one and three weeks after group interviews). These too will be conducted at the school associated with the participant. These interviews will be brief (30-45 minutes) and will be held after school.

During group and individual interviews dialect will be recorded on audio tapes and later transcribed.

c. List all instruments used in data collection. (e.g., surveys, questionnaires, educational tests, data collection sheets, outline of interviews, scripts, audio and/or video methods etc.) *Please include a copy of all data collection instruments that will be used in this project and label as Appendix C.*

Focus Group Interview Protocols
(Individual interviews will result directly from questions asked on focus group interviews)

d. Data Analysis: Explain how the data will be analyzed.

An emergent theme (Patton, 1990) will be used to analyze the perceptions and expectations of the groups and individuals. Journal entries and transcribed audio tapes will be coded and analyzed. Data will be clustered and analyzed using Atlas.ti software to observe relevant findings

14. RISKS & DISCOMFORTS: List and describe all of the reasonable risks that participants might encounter if they decide to participate in this research. *If you are using deception in this study, please justify the use of deception and be sure to attach a copy of the debriefing form you plan to use and label as Appendix D.*

Breach of Confidentiality: At the beginning of group interviews the importance of confidentiality will be explained to the groups. School officials will have no knowledge of who participated in the study other than the group's knowledge itself.

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15. PRECAUTIONS. Describe all precautions you have taken to eliminate or reduce risks that were listed in #14.

Participants volunteer and are under no obligation to participate. They are asked to share and discuss opinions. Confidentiality within the group is stressed and will be stated at the beginning of all interviews by the researcher. No names will be used in the findings. All names will be erased prior to completion of data collection. Names will not be used in interviews. More participants will be invited than actually participate so school officials will be unaware of who participated.

16. BENEFITS.
   a.   List all realistic benefits participants can expect by participating in this study.

There will be no direct benefit to participants.

   b.   List all realistic benefits for the general population that may be generated from this study.

Insights gained through this research may be useful for practitioners in other districts who wish to employ strengths for success academies and for researchers and policy makers wishing to learn about this innovative approach.

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17. PROTECTION OF DATA.

a. Will data be collected as anonymous? ☐ Yes ☑ No   *If "YES", go to part "g".*

b. Will data be collected as confidential? ☑ Yes ☐ No

c. If data is collected as confidential, how will the participants' data be coded or linked to identifying information?

Interviews sessions will be audio taped.
Individual interviews will be coded by school and designation.

d. Justify your need to code participants' data or link the data with identifying information.

Data will be coded so that individual and group interviews can be linked to school and designation.

e. Where will code lists be stored?

No code list will be maintained that will link an individual with the data they provide.

f. Will data collected as "confidential" be recorded and analyzed as "anonymous"? ☑ Yes ☐ No

g. Describe how the data will be stored (e.g., hard copy, audio cassette, electronic data, etc.), where the data will be stored, and how the location where data is stored will be secured in your absence.

Data will be stored in the form of audiotapes and transcribed documents. The data will be stored at the researcher's home (see address, page 1) . On the absence of the researcher, the data will be locked in a file cabinet at the researcher's home.

h. Who will have access to participants' data?

Only the researcher and faculty advisors, Dr. Reed and Dr. Forbes.

i. When is the latest date that the data will be retained?

10/2006 or until an IRB to renew is granted.

j. How will the data be destroyed? (NOTE: Data recorded and analyzed as "anonymous" may be retained indefinitely.)

Audio tapes will be erased.
Paper copies will be shredded.
Computer files will be erased from hard drive and disks will be destroyed.

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APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS- DECEMBER

Ninth Grade Success Academy
Teacher First Year Perceptions

1. **What skills have been taught in Leadership Seminar that you feel students can use in the rest of their high school careers and in life after high school?**

2. **When a student has had difficulty in your class this year, what have you done to provide assistance and remediation? What other options do students have to receive extra academic help?**

3. **What instructional delivery options have you incorporated taking into account for block scheduling?**

4. **What do you see as distinguishable differences between students that are successful in ninth grade versus students that are not?**

5. **How significant is the teacher's role in the success or failure? Please elaborate.**

6. **How influential do you feel the implementation of the academy has been in: Please elaborate.**

   Student Achievement-

   Attendance-

   Discipline-

   Retention on grade 9-

APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS-MARCH

Protocol for interviews- March 2006

1. In what ways has NGSA helped with attendance at your school?

2. In what ways has NGSA helped with discipline at your school?

3. What are your main discipline concerns?

4. How much influence do your parents have on your willingness and motivation in school?

5. Do teachers play a big part in your academic success? Explain.

6. What are common characteristics of students that decide to drop out of school?

7. In what ways is it a good idea/ bad idea for you to be separated from upperclassmen?

8. What are your plans after high school?

APPENDIX D

TEACHER SURVEYS

7. **What skills have been taught in Leadership Seminar that you feel students can use in the rest of their high school careers and in life after high school?**

8. **When a student has had difficulty in your class this year, what have you done to provide assistance and remediation? What other options do students have to receive extra academic help?**

9. **What instructional delivery options have you incorporated taking into account for block scheduling?**

10. **What do you see as distinguishable differences between students that are successful in ninth grade versus students that are not?**

11. **How significant is the teacher's role in the success or failure? Please elaborate.**

12. **How influential do you feel the implementation of the academy has been in: Please elaborate.**

    Student Achievement-

    Attendance-

    Discipline-

    Retention on grade 9-