

OBTAINING SUCCESS WITH FRESHMAN TRANSITION PLANS: A STUDY OF
PROGRAMS IN FOUR HIGH SCHOOLS IN VIRGINIA

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education

Liberty University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

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October 2008

Obtaining Success with Freshman Transition Plans: A Study of Programs in Four High
Schools in Virginia

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ABSTRACT

Martin Ringstaff. OBTAINING SUCCESS WITH FRESHMAN TRANSITION PLANS: A STUDY OF PROGRAMS IN FOUR HIGH SCHOOLS IN VIRGINIA. (Under the direction of Dr. Clarence Holland) School of Education, October, 2008.

This study focused on the successes and challenges small school (school population between 300-900 students) administrators and teachers experienced when designing, implementing, and sustaining their ninth-grade transition programs. The purpose of this study was to add valuable insight to the knowledge that currently existed for the development and implementation of freshman transition programs. This study identified common and unique elements in the implementation designs of transition programs in four small high schools in the state of Virginia. Fifty-two teachers were surveyed and the four high school principals completed their questionnaires. Significant differences were noted in the years of teaching experience of teachers in the freshman transition program and the use of a focused study hall during school hours. Results indicated that high school teams developing a freshman transition program should include teachers in the planning process, pre- high-school activities for the incoming freshmen, the availability of catch-up courses, academic interventions, improving communication gaps, using data to monitor student achievement.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply appreciative of my family, especially my wife, Heather, for their continued support in this endeavor. My children, Jayden, Jordan, and Colby, have helped with my focus as I kept in mind that they would one day grow up, and I continued to think of how I would want their freshman year in high school to be.

A special thank you is extended to my dissertation committee chairperson, Dr. “Chick” Holland, who believed in me since the first day I met him. His guidance throughout the entire program at Liberty University and his commitment to my completing this project made the entire process easier.

Dr. Roger Schultz has been an inspiration and mentor since 1990 when I was blessed to have him as a professor at Virginia Intermont College. It is truly an honor for Dr. Schultz to be a part of this process. Dr. Glenn Holzman has added valuable insight and given me his insights when needed most. The committee has provided a wonderful opportunity for me to get closer to these professors and to learn the process along the way.

To my friends, distant family, and coworkers who stood by me in the process and supported my every endeavor, I appreciate their support. Thank you for caring and prayers. Glory be to God overall in this entire process. Without Him, nothing is possible.

As I reflect on the past three years, I realize how much God has blessed me with a grateful family who sacrificed so that I could complete the dream of the doctoral degree.

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1. Introduction to the Study

Freshman transition can be a very stressful time for adolescents. Multiple life events occur within this very short period for freshmen (Felner, Farber, & Primavera, 1983). Adolescents face increased stress when one takes into account the physical, emotional, psychological, and social changes that they go through during this time (Felner, Ginter, & Primavera, 1982).

Small schools have the same challenges as the larger schools when it comes to freshman transitions. The issue of ninth-grade transition developed in the 1960s when the middle school concept was founded (Kerr, 2002b). Many factors have been identified when there is no transition plan in place in schools such as (1) most instruction was teacher-centered with the traditional lecture from teachers and passive learning from students, (2) tracking was rampant, and (3) most of the high schools offered little or no guidance or mentoring to help ninth graders adjust academically and socially (Black, 2004). These types of practices contributed to too many students quitting schools since they felt that school was pointless and endless (2004).

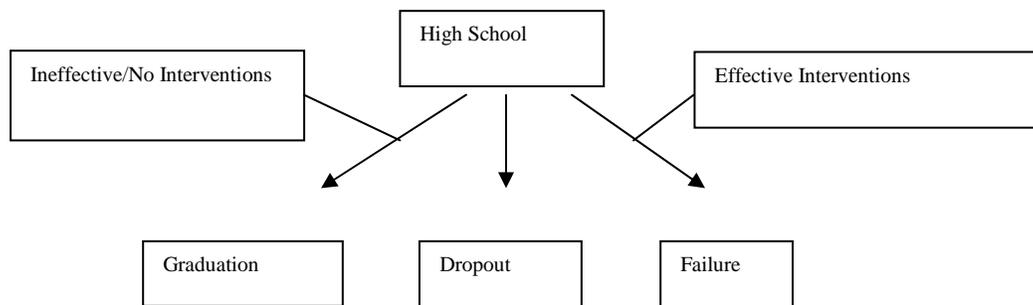
Educators and researchers recommended enrollments from 300 to 900 students as the ideal school size (Irmsher, 1997). Lee and Smith (1996) suggested that students attending high schools of 600 to 900 students show the greatest amount of learning activity. Klonsky and Klonsky (1999) concluded that the size of the school seems to be very important to a student's experience of "belonging." Their research indicated that students needed to feel that they are important and fit in the social structure. These

studies suggest that the small school environment allows students to be more successful. Schools with enrollments of 300 to 900 students still have freshman transition issues. As Clark and Hunley (2007) stated in their study, “Regardless of where they live, incoming freshmen face the same problems nationwide, such as anxiety about entering a new school, social pressure, and increased academic pressure and responsibility” (p. 41).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the Systems Theory. Owens (2004) describes the systems theory as an organization’s being an integrated system of interdependent structures and functions: “An organization is constituted of groups and a group consists of persons who must work in harmony. Each person must know what the other is doing. Each one must be capable of receiving messages and must be sufficiently disciplined to obey...” (Owens, 2004, p. 119). The ninth-grade year is the start of the high school program, which has the ultimate goal of high school graduation. As demonstrated in Figure 1, the outcome of high school is simply completing high school or dropping out (Swanson, 2005).

Figure 1: Final High School Outcomes



To understand what high schools are doing to make the freshman transition experience more successful, it is beneficial to understand how the conceptual framework

of the systems theory breaks down into system-wide thinking, process thinking, and open systems thinking (Senge, 2000).

System-wide thinking is the process of enacting change through an organization in which the entity is working to improve. Evaluation of the system-wide thinking process can occur by descriptions given by the staff, and taking into account how well the staff works together. Open-systems thinking is the process of seeking to understand a system through its inputs, outputs, and boundaries. This process will capture each school's decisions concerning interventions and decisions planned for actions within the organization. Process-systems thinking is a process that realigns the communication structures that will effect change in patterns of behavior within the organization. This process is the basis for true long-term change (Senge, 2000).

In terms of this study of transition programs for ninth graders, the focus was on evaluating programs of interventions and support used to reduce ninth-grade failure. Since ninth grade is a critical year in the high school realm, it is imperative for educators to determine which practices are successful for their students (Gibson, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

This study focused on the successes and challenges small school administrators and teachers experienced when designing, implementing, and sustaining their ninth-grade transition programs. For this study, small schools are defined as those with a population between 300-900 students. Provided is an explanation of each school's experience in a descriptive manner to gain insight into the development of each transition program's design to meet the needs of its school population.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to add valuable insight to the knowledge that currently existed for the development and implementation of freshman transition programs. The author identified similar and contrasting characteristics of freshman transition programs in the four selected high schools. The results of this study provided key themes, commonalities, and critical differences in the development and implementation, program design, inhibitors, and criteria used to determine success of a freshman transition program. The identification of these themes, commonalities, and differences allows other educators to better understand issues that arise during the process of development.

Research Questions

1. How did each of the four selected high schools plan the components that support the initial design of its freshman transition plan?
2. What elements make up the design of the four selected ninth-grade transition plans?
3. What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of the freshman transition plans in the four high schools?
4. What criteria does each of the four high schools use to determine the success of its freshman transition program?

Significance of the Study

Understanding how to keep students in school to avoid dropping out or not being successful has been an issue for public schools. Freshman retention is a strong predictor

of a possible high school dropout. Understanding what could keep students in schools in a small school setting would be significant. The author focused on four successful freshman transition plans as identified by the Virginia Department of Education who had supporting evidence of a successful transition program identified through grants and programs.

Understanding what each school accomplished in designing its freshman transition program can help other school districts with similar issues better understand where their needs may lie. This study can help principals pick out specific strengths and weaknesses identified in the schools studied to fit their possible program and allow them to get a head start on their own program implementation.

Definitions

At-Risk Students – Students who come from impoverished or single-family homes, those who have marked developmental delays, or those who exhibit aggressive or withdrawn behavior (Slavin, 2006)

Freshman Academy - Program for new students providing learning communities and common blocks of class sections (BYU, 2007)

Freshman Graduation Rate – The estimation of the proportion of high-school freshmen who graduate with a regular diploma four years after starting ninth grade (nces.ed.gov, 2008).

Freshman Retention Rate – The percentage of freshmen who were retained in ninth grade, therefore not considered tenth-grade students because of their failure to meet the minimum requirements set by the school board's policy.

Ninth-Grade Transition – A program designed to ease students' transition into high school by implementing targeted programs that address the needs of students and their parents and that facilitate communication between middle school and high school teachers and support staff (Principals' Partnership, 2002).

Small Learning Community – A high school reform effort that uses the premise of "scaling down" a large school into smaller fractions. The smaller atmosphere can more readily provide students with mentors, tutors and advisors; make learning more meaningful by linking it to life-experiences and community; and provide adequate time and support for mastery of knowledge and skills (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2007).

2. Review of the Literature

Freshman Transition

The transition students face when the eighth grade ends and the ninth grade begins is one of their major challenges. Ninth-grade students come to high school, leaving behind the middle school environment that is mostly student-centered, and where teachers are teamed up and work together for the benefit of the individual student (Jordan, 2001). There is little evidence of a transition plan in many school districts for the incoming freshmen. High schools commonly place students into ability groups based solely on their testing instead of developing a nurturing and supporting environment (2001).

Success or failure during the freshman year sets the tone for the student's entire high school career (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). A study conducted by Shazia Miller (2000) suggests that an average student has a 35.9 percent chance of being off track by the end of his/her freshman year. Roderick (1993) discovered an average drop in grades by 18 percent following the transition to high school. This finding corresponded to two letter grades. Roderick and Camburn (1996, 1999) found that most students are at a greater risk of early course failure. In their study, course failure promptly followed the transition to high school, and this failure was not limited to students with low prior academic skills, which suggests that the threat for failure is an issue for all entering ninth graders of all achievement levels.

Students in this transition time also show a decline in attendance (Roderick & Camburn, 1999) and an increase in their feeling of perceived anonymity (Blyth, Simmons, & Crawford, 1983).

Walt Haney provided testimony to New York's Senate Standing Committee in September of 2003. Statistical evidence that attrition rates between grades nine and ten have increased sharply over the past decade while the graduation rates have dropped (Black, 2004). Haney's research showed that 70 to 80 percent of students who do not pass their freshman year will not graduate from high school.

One factor identified that could lead to academic failure is student motivation (Murdock, Anderman, & Hodge, 2000). Murdock, Anderman, and Hodge (2000) investigated the influences of student effort, expectations other have for the students, the perceived value of education, and their future academic plans after high school. The focus of their study was the seventh-, eighth-, and ninth-grade students' perceptions of their personal expectations and values communicated to them via teachers and peers. The findings of this study suggested that peers and teachers could negatively affect students with discipline referrals. Because of these negative thought processes, the students had a difficult time with the transition from middle school to high school. One suggestion Murdock *et al.* provided is that a good student-teacher relationship could help in understanding why students become alienated. Peer and teacher influence also encouraged or discouraged a student's academic success (Murdock, *et al.*, 2000).

The average freshman graduation rate in the state of Virginia for 2003-04 was 79.3 percent (nces.ed.gov, 2008). The calculation of graduation rates varies from state to

state, and a summary is included in Appendix K. A study called “The Education Pipeline in the United States 1970-2000 declared that the four-year graduation rate was a national emergency (Haney, Madeus, Abrams, Wheelock, Miao, & Garcia, 2004). According to Haney *et al.*, the number of ninth-grade students retained tripled in that period. The national graduation average for freshmen promoted to the tenth grade, 75% or less in the academic year of 2000-2001, was lower in the southern United States (Haney, *et al.*). The National Center for Educational Statistics conducted a similar study examining the high school dropout and completion rates from 1972-2001. The study showed that 77% of dropouts were between the ages of 15 and 18 (Kaufman, Alt, & Chapman, 2004).

The freshman year is pivotal in which students either succeed or fall desperately behind (Black, 2004). Vast student dropout rates and freshman retention rates throughout the transitional year from ninth to tenth grade indicate the critical time these students face during the freshman year that has been described as a “holding tank” for high schools (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998). More than one third of the students fail to make the transition from ninth to tenth grade (Patterson, Beltyukova, Berman, & Francis, 2007). A recent report cited by Patterson *et al.* (2007) states that the rate of student loss during the freshman year is more than 40 percent in high poverty areas compared to 27 percent in low-poverty settings. The class sizes for the freshman classes in these districts are double or triple the size of the sophomore, junior, and senior classes, which means that these students become retention students due to the necessity of repeating the ninth grade.

In 1985, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) asked middle-school experts John Lounsbury and J. Howard Johnston to conduct an extensive study on ninth graders in 48 states and the District of Columbia. The study discovered

that a mismatch existed between school policies and practices and 14-year-olds' developmental needs (Black, 2004). The majority of instruction was teacher lecturing and students taking notes and completing assignments. Lounsbury and Johnston discovered that ability grouping and tracking were common practices as was 40- to 50- minute classes. The majority of the high schools did not offer much, if any, guidance to help freshmen adjust academically or socially (2004). The prediction of Lounsbury and Johnston about the ninth grade was that it would "continue to drift and mirror the worst of outmoded high school practices that do little to foster positive learning for all students" (p. 43).

Anne Wheelock performed a study in 1993 of high school reform practices and found similar problems (Black, 2004). The description of the freshman year was "a minefield for the most vulnerable students" (p. 42). Wheelock described that the minefield was worse for students who became disengaged and discouraged because they never developed a strong bond with teachers or their school in general.

Three different facets of the high school environment represented the majority of the challenges for the upcoming freshmen (Kerr, 2002b). The first was that the students were facing a larger, more diverse student population. The second facet was that academic demands increased at the high school level, and the third was that new students encountered a new social structure and dramatic change in their previous social status (2002). Donahoe and Zigmund (1990) also found that ninth graders experienced academic difficulties.

In ninth grade, for the first time, students must earn passing grades in core courses that carry credits required for graduation. The demands placed on ninth graders also include independent study skill development and increased rigor in the classroom.

Some students who are at risk for failure may have advanced through earlier grades due to individual teacher attention and vigilant monitoring that may not be possible or desirable within the larger secondary school culture (1990).

Midgley and Maehr (2000) studied 80 students as they transitioned between the fifth and sixth grades, and then again as they transitioned from the eighth to ninth grade. The study focused on the learning environment as it related to the motivation and achievement of young adolescents. Midgley and Maehr concluded that students' grade point averages declined significantly as they moved through the middle school into the high school. In the teacher interviews Midgley and Maehr conducted, the two authors came to the summation that the teachers felt that they had little impact on the students' academic progress. The authors also documented the findings that teachers had great difficulty making personal connections with the ninth graders.

The stress involved in this transition from middle to high school will be the most the students will have to endure in their entire school career. This stress comes at a time when adolescents are at the critical physical, cognitive, social, and psychological developmental stages (Marnel, 2000). Students spoke about significant anxiety levels during this change (Gonzales, Cause, Friedman, & Mason, 2006). The changes the students faced at school, coupled with the developmental changes and altered peer relationships, led to issues that are new to adolescents. One factor that could alienate the

students is that their sources of past support, teachers and parents, may not be as sensitized to students' transitional issues as they should be (Cotton, 1996). One other challenge they may face is that the upperclassmen may tease and intimidate them, as well as tempt them to become involved with gangs or drugs (Kneisler, 2001). Rumberger lists factors such as family issues, schools the students attend, and communities in which they live as reasons for a tougher transition or a possible dropout (1995).

Kaufman, Alt, and Chapman (2001) reported that more than five percent of all high school students drop out of school each year. Certain groups of students, such as low socio-economic students, have dropout numbers that rise close to 10 percent. Kaufman, *et al.*, also report that if this trend continues, one of every seven students entering high school will not graduate. A study done by Furstenberg, Nield, and Stoney-Eby of the Harvard University's Civil Rights Project in 2003 revealed that there were nine predictors that ninth-grade failures and high school dropouts have in common:

1. Older than age-appropriate students
2. Minority students
3. Children in single-family homes
4. History of in-school behavior problems
5. Infrequent attendance
6. Low grades
7. Low test scores
8. Repeated a grade
9. Parents have relatively little education

Two other relating factors are limited family resources and lack of teachers' experience (Abbott, Hill, Catalano, & Hawkins, 2000; Furstenberg, Nield, and Stoner-Eby, 2003; Rumberger, 1995).

Historical Perspective

The Middle School Movement began in the 1960s (Kerr, 2002a). Prior to that Movement, the most common organizational model in American secondary schools was based on junior high schools that consisted of grades 7-9 and a senior high school that was made up of grades 10-12. Critics argued that this setup of the junior high school was a facsimile of the high school and did little to address the needs of adolescents during a critical time in their lives (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). A refocus on the middle grades occurred in the 1960s and 1970s that led to the creation of the middle school concept, which commonly served grades 6-8. This movement created the ninth grade to be a senior high school grade level, creating the 9-12 grade organization seen in the majority of today's high schools. The decision to move the ninth graders allowed the incoming sixth graders to come into the middle school and eased that transition which also reduced the numbers of students in the elementary schools (Kerr, 2002a).

Creating the middle school organizational model helped students in their transition from childhood to adolescence (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). George and McEwin (1999) explained how the ninth-grade problem arose for educators. When the high schools began with ninth grade, no real planning occurred for their arrival. This lack of planning led to the middle and high school educators' blaming each other for the poor attendance, low grades, tardies, discipline referrals, and dropouts. The freshman classes

have been a part of the high school for three decades, but educators are still questioning whether the high school is the best placement for ninth graders (Alexander & George, 1981).

Many freshmen are very excited about coming to the high school and look forward to this new chapter in their lives (Mizelle, 2005). J. Allen Queen (2002) states that of all the major transitions that adolescents experience during their school careers, the transition from middle to high school could be traumatic, but this transition is one that they need to do as a rite of passage in their educational career. Queen stated that educators have the responsibility to understand that the implementation of ninth grade must include substantial planning and execution on their behalf to provide the support and continued consistency needed in this major process. Each grade level has a responsibility to a prepare students for the next level, including elementary to middle and middle to high school. A transition program would be part of that responsibility for educators.

The Reasoning behind Small School Sizes

Traditional high schools (schools with grades 9-12) present the greatest problems for adolescents. Black (2004) found that many teenagers struggle to navigate larger, more impersonal, and more environments that are competitive. These settings were far different from the more comfortable middle schools from which the students came. Black's research did find many students who made a smooth transition, but the others became overwhelmed by the larger high-school hallways, complex schedules, and more demanding course requirements.

When school systems are discussing ideal school sizes, they should consider research that states that educators and researchers recommend enrollments from 300 to 900 students (Irmsher, 1997). Students who attend high schools of 600 to 900 students show the greatest amount of learning activity (Lee & Smith, 1996). The Carnegie Foundation and the National Association of Secondary School Principals both recommend that high schools should have no more than 600 students (Cushman, 1999).

In a study conducted on urban youth transitioning to the ninth grade, student academic outcomes have greater improvement in small schools (Newman, Loman, Newman, Myers & Smith, 2000). Christman, Cohen, and Macpherson (1997) found more parental involvement and more respect between the students and teachers in small schools. Since the middle school movement in the 1960s, American classrooms continued to get larger (Irmsher, 1997). This growth continued even though data continued to come out during these years stating that larger schools were providing more negative than positive consequences, especially for minority and low-income students (Howley, 1989).

Irmsher (1997) stated in his study that all socio-economic levels of students were more successful when attending a small high school or were part of a small learning community. The students portray a perception of feeling safer, and student involvement in drugs and alcohol decreases (1997). Irmsher found that some students seem to benefit from the intimate school setting more than others, notably females, non-whites, and special-needs students, whether at-risk, gifted, exceptional, or disadvantaged.

Small Learning Communities as a Freshman Transition Model

A small learning community, also known as a professional learning community, is made up of educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve (R. DuFour, R. DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). When a school decides to move to a smaller learning community model, it dedicates itself to embrace high levels of learning for all students as both the reason for the organization and the fundamental purposes for all employees who work in the organization (2006).

Creating a professional learning community is not simple. The process is a “passionate, nonlinear, and persistent endeavor” (DuFour *et al.*, 2006). This process is more successful when it touches on the emotions of the professionals in the building. As Jim Collins (2001) stated, “You absolutely cannot make a series of good decisions without first confronting the brutal facts” (p. 70). When school administrators are making the decision to implement a freshman transition plan, they probably have seen the brutal truth in their data.

Some high schools have investigated and implemented a smaller learning community to address the freshman transition issue. Educators refer to this approach as a school-within-a school (McIntosh & White, 2006). Other names for this type of learning community are a cluster or an academy. In order to downsize the number of students to a manageable student population for teachers and administrators, the school-within-a-school approach is used. Positive impacts of the school-within-a-school approach are

improvements in attendance, student achievement, behavior, attainment, teacher morale, and parental contact (2006).

Research supports the benefits of smaller learning communities, and numerous examples of success exist across the country (Cotton, 2001). The research is consistent in explaining that the success occurs not because the schools are small, but because the small environments provide students with the tools to be successful such as collegiality among teachers, personalized teacher-student relationships, and less differentiation of instruction by ability (2001).

The smaller learning community concept has created environments with many positive impacts such as improvements in attendance, student achievement, behavior, attainment, teacher morale, and parental contact (McIntosh and White, 2006). Kerr (2002b) states that the norms of the smaller learning community are being applied to school organizations in “an attempt to foster more personalized school communities characterized by caring relationships between teachers and students and shared educational goals and experiences” (p. 14). Researchers in the field of school reform have identified practices that encourage the caring relationships and shared experiences that allow students to learn.

The Freshman Academy Concept

In the 1990s, three broad themes emerged from the educational research: (1) early learning is crucial, (2) good teachers make a difference, and (3) small schools counter many of the crippling effects of poverty (Vander Ark, 2002). The academy concept is housed within a school and has a specific theme or focus. Freshman academies are, in

essence, a development of a smaller learning community. The concept is most successful when the freshman class is isolated in a school, separate from the upperclassmen, with a team of teachers dedicated to working with ninth-graders only (Chmelynski, 2004). The goal behind a freshman academy is to help students make a smooth transition from the ninth to tenth grade (Holland & Mazzoli, 2002).

The key element in developing a freshman academy is utilizing a transition committee made up of parents of eighth and ninth graders, teachers, administrators, and students (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). According to Hertzog and Morgan, ninth grade is the critical year. If students make it to tenth grade, they will probably graduate from high school. One attractive aspect of the freshman academy is that its cost of implementation can be minimal (1999). Vander Ark (2002) stated, "Creating schools that work for all students means starting small and staying focused on the students. It means making personalization fundamental to the organizational and instructional design in every school" (p. 10).

In the mid-1990s, most high schools in America were battling attendance issues, student apathy and unruliness, and a high number of academic failures (Black, 2004). Administrators and teachers developed strategies to address these issues by redesigning the freshman year. The educators developed a school-within-a-school approach with interdisciplinary team teaching, block scheduling, and curriculum and instruction focused on core academic subjects (2004).

The academy concept benefits teachers who can concentrate on working with this age group. The schedule allows teachers an increase in the time spent with the freshman

population, and teaming of freshman teachers helps them to monitor student success (McIntosh & White, 2006). The development of these teams of teachers can decrease failures and dropout rates.

Through research and staff development activities, McIntosh and White identified 12 strategies for the development of a freshman academy. The foundation for any freshman academy should include

1. Core teacher classrooms, freshman lockers, principal, and counselor located in the freshman academy.
2. A formation of teams of ninth-grade core teachers (science, math, history, and English) who share the same platoon of students.
3. A common preparation period for each core team to facilitate developing intervention strategies for at-risk students, planning student activities, and developing professional learning communities.
4. A freshman counselor working closely with middle school counselors to ensure proper placement of students into freshman courses.
5. Freshman students and teachers having a common lunch period.
6. Special freshman lunchtime activities.
7. Freshman homerooms.
8. Student council representation from each freshman homeroom.
9. An annual freshman teacher retreat to bond, plan, and energize professional learning opportunities by developing common practices.
10. A freshman principal, counselor, and intervention specialist to work with the freshman class every year instead of moving with that class to that next year.

11. Increased and improved transition activities during the eighth-grade year.

12. A three-hour freshman orientation in August (2006).

Challenges

Regarding the Student

Why would any school explore a freshman transition plan? The freshman year is critical. Studies have shown that ninth graders who have the most discipline incidents and retentions are the most likely to drop out of school (Chmelyski, 2004). The freshman class is usually the largest class in the school building because the ninth graders who fail are retained in the ninth grade (Hughes, Copley & Baker, 2005). The issues that arise when retention in the ninth grade occurs include a decline in grades and grade point averages, a decrease in attendance, and a declining percentage of participation in extra-curricular activities (2005). Lounsbury and Johnston (1985) found that many high schools lacked the level of school counseling provided for ninth-grade students to help them adjust academically and socially.

The freshman transition program is more challenging because mostly inexperienced or uncertified teachers are teaching freshmen (Hughes, Copley, & Baker, 2005). Freshmen often do not have the advantage of an experienced teacher to guide them successfully through this transition. The freshman class needs leadership, but in many cases, these teachers do not have the leadership skills to teach time management or study skills. These teachers usually take a “sink or swim” attitude toward the freshmen (2005).

Because of the concept of high school, the freshman teachers receive a new group of students each year. This circumstance could tax the teachers, especially if they are inexperienced or new themselves. This practice could provide a less stable environment in which the resources available to aid the teachers in their coping efforts could be jeopardized (Felner, Ginter, & Primavera, 1982).

Freshman students complain of tedium, confusing schedules, overly challenging workloads, and uncaring, inhospitable, and indifferent teachers (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). The freshman student also can arrive at the high school with years of ineffective schooling prior to high school (Jordan, 2001). The at-risk student may face numerous issues such as a weak family and community support system and institutionalized racism (2001). The students usually have an inadequate core knowledge base in English and math. The students also lack the fundamental knowledge required to negotiate the transitions of the high school. Mizelle (1995) discovered that many freshmen lost their high aspirations for achievement in ninth grade after receiving their first report card. The students admitted that the high school was more demanding than they believed it would be.

Students who become disengaged, discouraged, or who are unable to develop a strong relationship with teachers or mentors are more vulnerable to failure (Wheelock, 2005). Other factors listed by Wheelock such as tedious lessons, overcrowded classrooms, and indifferent teachers were also contributors to students' being unsuccessful in ninth grade. Once they become disengaged and fail, they are likely to begin questioning their ability to make graduation requirements, to lose interest in school, and consequently to drop out of school (Reinhard, 1997; Wagner, 1989). Catterall (1998)

categorizes the three major reasons for students' dropping out of school as not liking school, not getting along with teachers or peers, and failing.

Regarding Parents

Parents tend to become less involved in their children's education in high school (Chmelyski, 2004). Parent involvement has to be all or nothing, according to Holland and Mazzoli (2001). There is no in-between when it comes to parent support.

Regarding the Academy Concept

There are schools that have not been successful in developing a freshman academy. One of the most common reasons for failure is the lack of fidelity to the small school concept (Irmsher, 1997). Failure of the academy concept was the result of the school personnel not implementing the key elements of an academy as well as was not giving the autonomy and separateness needed to be successful. Another reason for low success was a failure to make physical or cultural changes to the school building and atmosphere (1997).

When administrators choose the teachers to serve in the academy, a situation can arise that causes a conflict. "The divisiveness comes from separating teachers into teams" (McIntosh & White, 2006, p. 41). Experienced teachers have autonomy derived from being in a building for years, and when the academy concept is implemented, their autonomy is challenged. The process provides uncomfortable settings for these teachers, and overcoming these challenges leads to a divisive situation (2006).

Successful Transition Strategies

The strategies of a freshman transition plan that make the plan successful are numerous. In a Midwest high school, Fulk (2003) used a three-phase project designed to address concerns over the academic performance of the ninth-grade class. The three-phase project began with a perception survey of all ninth-grade teachers and students. The results of the survey led to the development of intervention strategies. The areas of greatest concern were “time management, motivation, and homework,” while the students rated themselves the lowest on “study habits, self-regulation, and test anxiety” (Fulk, 2003).

The strategies derived from Fulk’s study included expanded collaboration by middle and high school teachers, shared teaching strategies, bridged collaborations involving upperclassmen hosting eighth graders, and evening orientation for eighth-grade students and their parents (Fulk, 2003). The high school faculty participated in in-service to heighten their awareness of incoming ninth graders’ needs. The sessions included topics such as improving students’ reading, writing and math skills; using differentiated instruction; team teaching; and dealing with student diversity.

Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris identified three key components that they suggested to keep students engaged in the learning environment, thus making it less likely that they would manifest behavior issues. The first component is a student’s involvement in school activities, the second is the student’s emotional relationship with peers, teachers, and the educational environment, and third is the cognitive component,

which includes a student's effort to learn and to improve academic and social skills (2004).

Other strategies include establishing a mentoring system of educators to work with incoming freshmen on study skills, peer interactions, time management and organizational skills, developing a summer orientation program, and reducing student numbers in homeroom. The administration purchased student organizers, developed before- and after-school tutoring, and teachers monitored homework (Fulk, 2003). Hertzog and Morgan (1998) suggest year-long strategies are critical for a lasting impact. They suggest many of the same items listed along with the use of newsletters, e-mail, web sites, a freshman seminar course, a credit recovery program, and a curricular audit of the middle school for rigor and breadth sufficient to bridge students to high school.

The most difficult strategies involved the need for a major change in a school's traditional schedule or grade configuration. Strategies could include a change in the rigor and delivery of curriculum or it may need to include staff training. Cooney and Bottoms (2002) list some of these major strategies such as flexible scheduling, faculty training on adolescence and its stages, higher standards for rigor, isolating ninth graders in a separate facility, and advisory cohorts to promote consistency.

The city of Philadelphia developed Talent Development High Schools that have shown success with student achievement during their freshman year (Black, 2004). These schools have developed Ninth Grade Success Academies in which the students get double doses of reading and math. The majority of the students show "marked improvement in attendance, standardized test scores, course grades, and suspension rates" (p. 43). The

design originated with Johns Hopkins University's model of the Talent Development School. This design takes a comprehensive approach to improving high schools. Components of the model include separate areas of the building for a school-within-a-school approach for freshmen; career academies for grades 10-12; small teams of teachers in all grades; block scheduling with extended periods; remedial opportunities; alternative schools; and on-site subject-area coaches for teachers (2004).

A study conducted on the Talent Development Schools produced results such as the attendance rates improving 15 percent. The number of students with 90 percent or better attendance has doubled. The number of students reaching their eleventh-grade year doubled in the first two years. After one year, over half of the freshmen gained one full year in math, and many gained two years. In reading, one out of five students improved by two years (Black, 2004).

The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) is an organization that provides schools with successful strategies for school improvement plans. One facet of the SREB is High Schools That Work (HSTW). Suggested practices listed by the HSTW (Bottoms, 2002) include

- Integrating curriculum through the use of interdisciplinary approaches to instruction
- Utilizing a flexible schedule within the school structure
- Communicating the truth about the level of effort the school and the student will need to make to meet grade-level standards
- Providing extra time and help to meet academic expectations

- Engaging students in challenging and meaningful assignments
- Setting high expectations for students who are performing below grade level
- Working together to bridge communication gaps between the school mission and what students need to know and be able to do
- Continuous planning with teacher involvement.

Harvard Graduate School of Education developed three key components to keep students in school. The first was a core curriculum of high standards combined with opportunities for students to recover from failure without risk of retention. The second component is a smaller organizational structure such as a small school within a school. The third component is a teacher support system such as professional development and scheduled planning time. Other factors on which Harvard University placed emphasis were performance-based assessment systems, sound organization of school structure, a clearly articulated curriculum, and focused instruction, assessment, and professional development (Orfield, Sanni, & Schwartz, 2001).

North High School, located in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, implemented its freshman transition plan in 2003. Their program started with a “Preview Night” for eighth graders and their parents. The Wisconsin Department of Education approved that their first day of school be for freshman students only as “Freshmen First Day” (O’Brien, 2003). All freshmen have an upperclassman assigned to them as a student advisor. A Freshman Family Picnic adds a very positive dimension to the high school. Each family of a freshman receives a three-ring binder with all the pertinent information for the school

year. The efforts by the school system are to help students start their high school years in a positive way (O'Brien, 2003).

Two high schools in Ohio, Amelia and Glen Este High Schools, implemented freshman transition programs in 2006 to create a safe, structured environment that fosters individual student growth. The faculty monitored student academic and social progress. Tenth-grade teachers received social and academic information on the incoming sophomores. There was no cost for the implementation of the freshman transition program at these two high schools (NSPRA, 2006).

Summary

The transition an eighth grader faces when coming to high school as a freshman can be overwhelming. Success or failure during the freshman year sets the tone for the student's entire high school career. Research supports the statement that the freshman graduation rate is a national emergency (Haney et al, 2004). Understanding how to serve the freshman classes when they arrive in high schools should become a paramount goal for all high schools.

High school administrators understand that many teenagers struggle to navigate larger impersonal and competitive environments, unlike the middle schools from which they came the prior year. Most instruction in high school was teacher-centered with teachers lecturing and students taking notes and completing assignments (Black, 2004). Research supports investigating a small-school approach. Student academic outcomes have greater improvement in small schools (Newman *et al*, 2000). All socio-economic levels of students were more successful when attending a small high school or part of a smaller

learning community (Irmsher, 1997). When a high school decides to move to a smaller learning community, it dedicates itself to embrace high levels of learning for all students (DuFour et al, 2006).

School systems use different techniques to implement and sustain a freshman transition plan. The freshman academy concept is a school-within-a-school approach that creates a smaller learning community within a school (Chmelynski, 2004). Understanding the challenges involved in developing a freshman transition plan makes the implementation easier. Some challenges regarding the student with which school administrators must cope include large freshman classes, declining grades, attendance, and percentage of participation in extra-curricular activities (Hughes et al, 2005). Another challenge is that inexperienced or uncertified teachers often teach freshmen. These issues, coupled with issues from parents and the academy concept itself, can be too great to overcome for some school personnel.

Understanding what successful freshman transition programs have implemented to reach the level of sustainability is crucial for high-school personnel investigating the possibility of developing their own transition plan. Understanding the historical perspective of freshman retention issues and having the knowledge of what successful programs are implementing is beneficial to developing a successful freshman transition program.

3. Methodology

This study focused on the successes and challenges small school (school population between 300-900 students) administrators and teachers experienced when designing, implementing, and sustaining their ninth-grade transition programs. Descriptions of each high school's experience are included in order to provide insight into the development of the transition program's design to meet the needs of its school population.

This section describes the methods utilized to provide the results of the study. This section includes the conceptual framework, research questions, the description of the principal questionnaire, the quantitative analysis of the survey, the basic survey design method, the variables of interest, the samples of the study, the instrumentation, the data collection procedures, the data analysis procedures, the time-line and the resources.

The conceptual framework for this study was the Systems Theory. Owens (2004) describes the systems theory as an organization's being an integrated system of interdependent structures and functions: "An organization is constituted of groups and a group consists of persons who must work in harmony. Each person must know what the other is doing. Each one must be capable of receiving messages and must be sufficiently disciplined to obey..." (Owens, 2004, p. 119). The ninth-grade year is the start of the high school program, which has the ultimate goal of high school graduation.

To understand what high schools are doing to make the freshman transition experience more successful, it is beneficial to understand how the conceptual framework

of the systems theory breaks down into system-wide thinking, process thinking, and open systems thinking (Senge, 2000).

System-wide thinking is the process of enacting change through an organization in which the entity is working to improve. Evaluation of the system-wide thinking process can occur by descriptions given by the staff, and taking into account how well the staff works together. Open-systems thinking is the process of seeking to understand a system through its inputs, outputs, and boundaries. This process will capture each school's decisions concerning interventions and decisions planned for actions within the organization. Process-systems thinking is a process that realigns the communication structures that will effect change in patterns of behavior within the organization. This process is the basis for true long-term change (Senge, 2000).

The systems theory has four internal organizational factors that serve as variables: task, structure, technology, and people. Within any organization, all four variables are highly interactive. Any significant change in one of the variables directly affects the other three, and an adaptation would need to occur to achieve equilibrium again (Owens, 2004). In this study, programs of interventions and support used to improve a school's freshman retention rate were identified in order to increase effectiveness of the transition of students into a high school. Since ninth grade is a component of the traditional high school system, educators in smaller schools must determine which practices serve the needs of their student populations' best.

The Research Questions

1. How did each of the four selected high schools plan the components that support the initial design of its freshman transition plan?
2. What elements make up the design of the four selected ninth-grade transition plans?
3. What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of the freshman transition plans in the four high schools?
4. What criteria does each of the four high schools use to determine the success of its freshman transition program?

Basic Survey/Questionnaire Design Method

The use of a survey is beneficial when collecting data on human characteristics, attitudes, thoughts, and behavior (Doyle, 2008). Conducting a survey is usually the only available option for acquiring the data necessary to answer a research question (2008). Before an author commits to a survey, he must obtain the appropriate background and conduct a thorough literature review of the prior research. The use of a questionnaire is beneficial when collecting information to address the goals of the study. Doyle states, “Constructing valid, reliable, and unbiased questions is necessary but not sufficient for creating a good questionnaire: how the questions are organized and presented also deserves careful consideration” (2008). If a questionnaire is deemed important and easy to read by the person answering, he is more likely to participate. Expressing the goals of the study in a few clear and concise sentences makes the questionnaire design considerably easier to decipher. The overall basic goal is to understand the meaning people make of their own experiences. In this study, each principal will share his high

school's detailed description of the freshman transition plan so that the reader can gain an in-depth understanding of the freshman transition program.

This study will utilize a basic interpretive study of the four individual high schools. An interpretive study is similar to a case study, but is more simplistic in nature (Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Razavieh, A., & Sorensen, C., 2006). The collection of data included interviews, observations, reviews of documents, or focus groups. This study will utilize a descriptive overview of each high school as described by the principal. This description will include the details of the total freshman transition plan.

Quantitative Analysis of the Survey

The author used narrative form to report the survey results. The survey will be a Likert Scale Survey. Coding of the survey results occurred according to themes framed by the research questions. The most important requirement of coding categories is that they must adequately reflect the investigator's research questions (Holsti, 1969).

Correlation of each research question occurred with five survey questions that supported the research question. This prefiguring technique will allow the researcher to maintain consistency from one case to the next (Rallis & Rossman, 2003). Obtaining internal validity occurred by comparing content- analytic data with the meaning constructed and relayed from sources such as documents, people, and communication (Weber, 1990).

All four research questions will be answered by quantitative data gleaned from the teacher surveys. Collection of the quantitative data occurred by utilizing a Likert Scale-

style Survey. Categorization occurred for the data collection instruments to address each of the four research questions.

Variables of Interest

A previous dissertation study on freshman transition provided the variables of interest for the four research questions. Dr. Lynnell Gibson identified the variables of interests for freshman transition programs in her dissertation (see Table 1). These variables are very common practices for ninth-grade transition programs and will be the variables used in this study.

The Variables of Interest

Table 1.

Variables of Interest for Research Question 1 and 2: Planning and Implementation

Block/Flexible Scheduling	Selected students identified as at-risk
Teacher teams	Computer-based instruction
Teams of novice teachers	Preparation for ninth grade
Use of data to monitor achievement	Summer program before ninth grade
Special transition course for freshmen	Integrated curriculum
Parental involvement	Philosophy that all students can learn
Projects and field trips	Separate ninth-grade facility/area
Double doses of math	Academic interventions
Double doses of reading	Vertical teaming with middle school
Catch-up courses	Pre-high-school activities
Initiated new grading practices	Working together to bridge communication gaps
Selecting all ninth graders	Engaging students in meaningful, challenging assignments
Selecting only first-time ninth graders	Allot special funding for program
Student motivation	

The variables of interest in Research Question 3 focused on challenges that were gleaned from the review of literature experienced in ninth-grade transition programs. Refer to Table 2 for the challenges identified as possible inhibitors for Research Question 3.

Table 2:

Challenges Experienced in Ninth-Grade Transition Programs

Novice teaching staff	Dropout rate
Financial constraints	High turnover of personnel
Lack of parent involvement	Lack of buy-in for the program
Ability grouping	Lack of discipline
Attendance issues	Repeat ninth graders

The variables of interest for Research Question 4 focused on information and data provided throughout the study. The program’s overall success was determined as each principal described his level of success in his respective school. Success in a freshman transition program includes lower freshman retention rates, improved communication with parents, a more rigorous curriculum, and an advisory cohort that promotes consistency.

The Sample

The sample for this study was chosen purposely and will consist of four high schools that meet the criteria stated in the review of literature for a small school. They

must have a student population between 300 and 900 students. They must have freshman transition plans currently in place. Each high school transition plan has to be sustainable. The four high schools must have some common traits in their transition plans.

The principals answered a questionnaire that gives the details of the freshman transition plan in their respective high schools. The teachers from each of the four high schools participated in an on-line survey of twenty questions. The subject areas of the freshman teachers are English, mathematics, science, social studies, special education, and physical education.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation used in this study is the *Ninth-Grade Transition Teacher Survey* and the *Principal Interview Questionnaire*. Research questions 1-4 explain each school's context, and the principals' answers to the questionnaire provide the description. For her dissertation, Dr. Lynnell Gibson developed the questions from the survey and the principal's questionnaire. Dr. Gibson's dissertation appendices produced the Teacher Survey and Principal Questionnaire.

Dr. Gibson describes her process to develop and validate the Ninth-Grade Transition-Focused Principal Questionnaire and the Ninth-Grade Transition Teacher Survey in her dissertation. Dr. Gibson had the Teacher Survey and the Principal Questionnaire reviewed by three secondary educators who had experience in developing program initiatives for ninth-grade transition programs. The Teacher Survey and Principal Questionnaire are included as Appendices A and B. Appendix C was used to collect demographic information from each school.

Survey Questions

Dr. Gibson evaluated questions from a large urban public school interim evaluation questionnaire for the Teacher Survey by using her review of the literature to identify ninth-grade transition practices. Categorization of the Survey Questions occurred to address the research questions as shown in Table 3:

Table 3

Categorization of Survey Questions

Research Question 1: Design of Initial Program	1, 2, 3, 4, 19
Research Question 2: Elements of Current Program	6, 10, 12, 14, 18
Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors	5, 7, 13, 16, 17
Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success	8, 9, 11, 15, 20

The reviewers examined the tools and provided suggestions for improvement and close alignment for the purpose of the study. Those who analyzed the instruments submitted the following suggestions for improvement of the survey:

- Reword question 16 to ensure clarity
- Reword question 17 because it fits into at least two categories and explain why the author chose the designated category.

After Dr. Gibson examined question 17, she classified the question in the respective category because of the information in her review of literature. Question 17 explored teacher quality and experience and addressed factors that presented challenges to ninth-

grade transition programs. This rationale was why question 17 was placed in Research Question 3 rather than in Question 4 (Gibson, 2006). The process involved in validating the survey provided content and face validity because of the steps involved by the previous committee evaluations.

Dr. Gibson conducted focused interviews with the principal/coordinator for the transition plan of the respective school. For the purpose of her study and this replicated study, the interview questions were developed to support the research questions, and the survey questions applied to the Research Questions 1 through 4 as depicted in the above chart. Table 4 shows the framework of the Research Questions:

Table 4

Framework of Research Questions

Planning	Research Question 1: Design of Initial Program
Design and Strategies	Research Question 2: Elements of Current Program
Planning, Implementation, Sustainability	Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors
Successes	Research Question 5: Criteria Used to Determine Success

Dr. Gibson submitted the following suggestions for improving the interview questions:

- Add questions for interviewees to share academic strategies that might be or are already modified or newly adopted.

- Consider requesting demographic information regarding the number and percentage of special- and gifted-education students enrolled in ninth-grade programs.
- Consider requesting demographic information regarding the number of honors students enrolled in ninth-grade transition programs.
- Consider that to learn how ninth-grade transition truly impacts the school culture, survey the tenth-grade teachers because they would have an indication of the impact the ninth grade has had on the students (work ethic, goal setting) since these teachers are working with the students one year after they completed the transition program (Gibson, 2006).

The only suggestion that Dr. Gibson did not alter in her instrument was the very last suggestion, as it was not the focus of the study.

The researcher has discussed his topic with Dr. Gibson and has her full approval to use all of her surveys and interview questions. Dr. Gibson has also granted approval for this dissertation design to mirror her dissertation design in order to seek key themes, commonalities and critical differences in the results.

The survey and interview questions submitted by Dr. Gibson are identical to the survey and interview questions the researcher used except for five survey questions and one interview question omitted from the author's dissertation as they did not fit into the four research questions the researcher is investigating in this study. The author altered the rubric system of the teacher survey by replacing the letters with numbers so that the descriptive statistics could easily be deciphered. This change should not affect the

validity of the survey. No other changes occurred in order to protect the validity of the surveys and interview questions. The Teacher Survey results were analyzed using SPSS to produce the Reliability Statistics results for this study. The Cronbach's Alpha model produced a .854. The Cronbach's Alpha models internal consistency based on an average correlation among items (Garson, 2008).

Data Collection Procedures

The author has respectfully contacted each of the four high school superintendents and explained the freshman transition study. The author obtained permission for all schools involved, which allowed the author to submit an on-line survey to the faculty members who teach freshman students. An example of the letter sent to the school division superintendents is included in Appendix K. The timeframe for the survey spanned a four-week period in May and June of 2008. The principals completed their questionnaire in the same period.

Data Analysis

The teacher survey provided data analysis for the study. For each of the four research questions, the findings gave a detailed descriptive analysis based on the interview questions. The author used descriptive statistics to analyze the quantitative data. This procedure allowed the researcher to see the measurements of observed differences in the variables of interest in the research questions. This approach showed which variables of interest were of extreme importance.

One way an author can describe a set of data is to use descriptive statistics. This study will use categorical data based on the results of the teachers who will serve as the population surveyed in the teacher survey. Howell defined categorical data as representing counts or number of observations in each category (2008). The sample in this study is the set of actual observations of the teachers with the topic of the freshman transition plans implemented in their respective high schools. When this sample of observations is complete, the author will compute numerical values, such as averages, that summarize the data in the sample.

The study for the four high schools includes information on the school and the types of transition programs it has implemented and is currently sustaining. The results from the teacher surveys provided the quantitative data for each high school. An independent description of each high school's information is provided.

The discussion section has a summary of data, correlated with each research question, from the four high schools. The data produced key themes for all four high schools, and the themes are included in the discussion section. The study identified commonalities and differences for the four schools. This type of identification pinpoints practices that have worked for all schools. Another significant outcome is that this study identifies practices that a school may have implemented that could benefit other schools of this size. This study provided an understanding of how small-populated schools are implementing, planning, and sustaining freshman transition plans.

Ethical Safeguards

The author focused on four successful freshman transition plans as identified by the Virginia Department of Education. The author chose not to divulge names and locations of the four high schools. Instead, the author refers to the high schools as High School A, B, C, and D. There were no assignments given to the individual teachers or principals participating in this survey. All data collected will remain anonymous to all readers.

Chapter 4

Findings

This study focused on the successes and challenges small school (school population between 300-900 students) administrators and teachers experienced when designing, implementing, and sustaining their ninth-grade transition programs. Principal interviews and teacher surveys were used to capture each school's experience in the freshman transition program's development and implementation. Four high schools in Virginia were the subject of this study. The schools are School A, B, C, and D in order to keep the anonymity. The discussion section includes principals' personal responses.

Findings for School A

Background of School A

The administration, faculty, and staff began developing their freshman transition program in 2003-2004 and implemented the program in the fall of 2004. The committee consisted of two English teachers, one math teacher, and one reading teacher, the freshman transition coordinator from the central office, the middle school assistant principal, and the high school principal. The middle school provided data that showed contributing factors that led to the lack of success of the student. Data included Stanford 9 scores, attendance records, disciplinary records, Algebra Readiness test scores and discipline records.

School A had a total enrollment of 667 students. One hundred eighty-two students made up the first-time ninth graders. School A had a freshman retention rate of 26% when the program began. The following year the retention rate increased to 38%. The current freshman retention rate is 7.6%. Eleven teachers made up the original freshman transition faculty. Eighteen teachers currently teach in the freshman transition program.

The data representing School A were the result of the teacher survey and the principal interview. Each research question summary contains the data from the teacher survey. Findings from the principal interview exist within each study as thematic categories that emerged as recurrent or important are included within the summary.

Survey Findings for School A

The freshman transition program consists of twelve teachers who teach only freshmen students and six teachers who periodically teach freshmen during the school day, totaling eighteen freshman transition teachers. All eighteen teachers took part in the survey accounting for a 100% response rate. The survey statements correlate with the research questions. A Likert scale was used to rate responses as strongly agree (5), agree (4), disagree (3), strongly disagree (2), and not applicable (1).

School A Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

Research Question 1 consists of survey statements 1, 2, 3, 4, and 19: How did each of the four selected high schools plan the components that support the initial designs of the freshman transition plan?

When asked if teachers had a voice in planning and implementing the school's freshman transition program, 17% strongly agreed, 72% agreed, 5.5% strongly disagreed and 5.5% disagreed. When asked if incorporation occurred of effective school dropout measures into the school's freshman transition program, 28% strongly agreed, 61% agreed, and 11% disagreed. When asked if the freshman transition program increased parental involvement, 67% agreed and 16.5 % disagreed. When asked if pre-high-school activities addressed student needs, 28% strongly agreed, 33% agreed, 28% disagreed, 5.5% strongly disagreed, and 5.5% responded that the question was not applicable. When asked if the freshman transition students benefitted from the program, 11.5% of the teachers strongly agreed, 83% agreed, and 5.5% disagreed. Refer to Appendix F, Table F1 for the Teacher Survey results of the design and implementation for School A.

School A Research Question 2: Program Design

Research Question 2 consists of survey statements 6, 10, 12, 14, and 18: What elements make up the designs of the four selected transition programs?

When asked if teachers agreed that student progress is consistently monitored using data, 22% strongly agreed, 67% agreed, and 11% disagreed. When asked if study skills and remediation opportunities exist for freshmen who need additional academic support, 50% strongly agreed and 50% agreed. When asked if students who experienced academic difficulties received needed support, 16.5% strongly agreed, 72% agreed, and 11.5% disagreed. When asked if students are able to "catch up" and stay on course for graduation, 16.5% strongly agreed, 67% agreed, and 16.5% disagreed. When asked about the enhancement benefits of the structured study hall on the freshman transition program

11% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, 22% disagreed, 6% strongly disagreed and 11% felt that the statement was not an applicable item. Refer to Appendix F, Table F2 for the Teacher Survey results of the program design for School A.

School A Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Research Question 3 consists of survey statements 5, 7, 13, 16, and 17: What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four selected high schools?

When asked if grouping students by ability existed, 11% strongly agreed, 72% agreed, 11% disagreed, and 6% strongly disagreed. When asked if the adequate funding existed for the freshman transition program, 6% strongly agreed, 72% agreed, and 22% disagreed. When asked if special funding exists for the freshman transition program, 6% strongly agreed, 88% agreed, and 6% replied as not applicable. When asked if class size was reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of the student, 16.5% strongly agreed, 78% agreed and 5.5% percent disagreed. When asked if teachers who work with ninth graders were the most experienced teachers in the school, 41.5% agreed, 44% disagreed, 6% strongly disagreed and 11% answered as not applicable. Refer to Appendix F, Table F3 for the Teacher Survey results of inhibitors for School A.

School A Research Question 4: Criteria for Success

Research Question 4 consists of survey statements 8, 9, 11, 15, and 20: What criteria does each of the four high schools use to determine the success of its transition program?

When asked if projects and field trips enhance the students' ninth grade experience, 22% strongly agreed, 55% agreed, 17% disagreed and 6% replied as not applicable. When asked if double-dosing of academic subjects has resulted in improved student achievement, 72% agreed, 22.5% disagreed and 5.5% replied as not applicable. When asked if all stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps, 5.5% strongly agreed, 78% agreed, 11% disagreed, and 5.5% replied as not applicable. When asked if parent involvement has resulted in improved student achievement, 78% agreed and 22% disagreed. When asked if the freshman transition plan produced improved promotion rates, 78% agreed, 16.5% disagreed and 5.5% replied as not applicable. Refer to Appendix F, Table F4 for the Teacher Survey results of criteria used to determine success for School A.

School A Findings from the Principal Questionnaire

The conceptual framework of the Research Questions produced emerging themes. The Principal Questionnaire lists the questions under each Research Question as well as the correlating questions from the Teacher Survey.

School A Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation.

School A's freshman transition program is in its fifth year. The freshman transition committee consisted of seven individuals: two English teachers, one math teacher, one reading teacher, a central office member, a middle school assistant principal, and a high school principal. The middle school provided data that showed contributing factors that led to the lack of success at the ninth-grade level. This data included Stanford 9 test scores, attendance records, discipline records, and Algebra Readiness test scores.

The middle school identified the at-risk eighth-graders during the spring of the eighth-grade year and provided these students the opportunity to attend a summer enrichment/remediation camp for one week. The camp focused on hands-on activities and enrichment field trips. Scheduling for the students included meetings each six weeks during their ninth-grade year. These meetings included sessions and activities on conflict resolution, study skills, and challenges that they may encounter as freshmen.

The team worked together to set up goals for the program. Teacher satisfaction was both an objective and a concern for the team. During the first year, the teachers selected were willing and eager to help establish the program. The math teacher was in the position two years before retiring. The English teacher and study skills teachers have changed each year.

School A Research Question 2: Program Design

School A's freshman transition program is very complex because the committee felt it should address as many variables as possible to see quick success. Implementation included selective scheduling, a four-period block for English, math, study skills, and reading during the seven-period days, and a low pupil-teacher ratio (12 to 1). A computer-based reading program, character education, direct counseling, and mandatory tutorials for core subjects were additional characteristics of their program.

The academic needs of the freshmen in School A included reading and math remediation. The committee also identified major deficiencies in the students' organizational and time management skills. To address these needs, the lesson plans in

these classes called for more hands-on instruction, more time-on-task instruction and authentic assessments to simplify the assessment process.

The committee attempted to determine the learning styles of the students and to plan lessons to accommodate these varying learning styles. The committee planned lessons that focused on the students' strengths while addressing the areas of weakness. One example shared was that many of the students had computer skills and enjoyed using the computer; therefore, a reading program was implemented that was computer-centered, and students improved their reading skills and enjoyed the program while doing so because of the computer-based program.

Implementing the freshman transition program involved the help of the State Department of Education, which awarded the school system a grant specifically for reducing the freshman retention rate. Another step the committee at School A took was approaching the school board to ask for two additional teaching positions to reduce the pupil/teacher ratio. The school board made the positions available for School A. The administration chose only teachers who were interested in the program. The middle school teachers identified the students who should be in the program.

School A Strategies for Specific Academic Areas

Mathematics: The students were pretested at the end of eighth grade. The selected students attended a summer camp with hands-on activities as the focus. Remediation and enrichment were the overall outcomes for the summer camp. Students took a posttest at the conclusion of the freshman year.

English: The committee determined reading levels by using the results of Stanford 9 (and 10) tests. Implementation of a computer-based reading program benefited students greatly. The school developed a program for oral and silent reading for fun to improve reading skills.

Science: Smaller classes were the common goal for the ninth-grade science courses. The high school faculty placed an emphasis on more hands-on laboratory experiments. The opportunity existed for students struggling in science to attend after-school tutoring.

History: Teachers also felt that smaller classes were essential to success. Students had the opportunity to attend tutorials after school and during electives.

Physical Education: A district-wide health plan was implemented that stressed lifelong physical activities. Each freshman developed a personal fitness plan including a good night's sleep. A healthy eating plan was also strongly encouraged.

Electives: All electives implemented writing assignments to strengthen writing skills. Strong reading skills became a priority. All elective courses focused on leadership and organizational skills.

School A Social Needs

The belief was that the freshmen in School A should have cultural and social experiences along with their academic experiences. The students needed to experience field trips, eating out in family settings and experience visits to museums and plays. The students began taking part in outdoor skills courses and team-building activities.

When the committee was determining which social strategies would meet the needs of their students, they realized there was a broad range of student needs. The freshman transition teachers surveyed the freshmen to see what their interests were. In addition, the survey allowed the committee to determine what the students' life experiences had been. The school team endeavored to introduce them to activities and programs that other students who were more successful had experienced at an earlier age.

The school staff implemented daily monitoring of the social development of the freshman class. Character education traits and manners became a teaching priority. All teachers were aware of the importance of the social development of the students. Inappropriate student behavior led to lessons on manners, respect, etc., and the development of social strategies needed to meet specific situations.

School A Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Inhibiting factors arose and continue to arise for the freshman transition program. Many of the issues are consistent with research as to why students struggle in their freshman year. Two such issues are excessive student absences and lack of student discipline.

Other inhibiting factors include working out common planning time in a small school for all freshman transition teachers as well as parental involvement supporting completion of homework assignments and students' arriving at school on time prepared for the school day.

School A Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success

School A focused on the promotion rate from ninth grade to tenth grade as well as individual course grades. Pass rates on the state standardized performance tests were also used. School A tracked improvement in reading and math levels, as well as discipline referrals and absence data.

Summary of Findings of School A

The freshman transition program at School A focused on at-risk students identified at the end of eighth grade. A coordinator oversees the eighteen teachers to make sure that freshman promotion rates remain the primary focus. The program is sustainable as it is in its sixth year with five successful years completed. The freshman retention rate has dropped from 26% to 7.6% indicating a very successful program. The response rate for the Teacher Survey was 100%. Eighteen teachers participated in the survey. The principal of School A was thorough in the Principal Questionnaire.

School A Summary of Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

Strong correlations exist for teachers having a voice in planning and implementing the freshman transition program. Two English teachers, one math teacher, and one reading teacher were on the initial design committee. Sixteen of the eighteen teachers (89%) agree that teachers should have a voice in planning and implementing the program. Since the program has existed for five years, the belief is that the program was developed and implemented with the help of teachers. Seventeen of eighteen (94%) believe that ninth graders have benefited from the freshman transition program.

The one area of concern from the teacher survey was the pre-high-school activities addressing students' academic and social needs. Five teachers (28%) disagreed that these pre-high-school activities existed. Although not a majority, a perception existed that this issue needs more attention, even though the principal of the high school spoke of the summer enrichment/remediation camp. Students attend the camp on a voluntary basis.

School A Summary of Research Question 2: Program Design

The teachers believe that the program design was, and continues to be, a success for the high school. The only area of concern in the survey results was how the structured study hall enhances the transition program as 39% of the teachers disagreed or found it not applicable. The interesting factor to this question is that School A does not have a study hall implemented in the freshman transition program; therefore, all 18 teachers should have responded with "not applicable." When the principal replied to the survey question about the enhancement experience of the study hall, he felt that the 11 teachers who agreed that the study hall enhanced the student experience as a freshman misconstrued the question as the school has a study skills class, and that was possibly what they were referring to in the survey.

The study skills survey question (10) was the only one that received a 100% response rate for "Strongly Agree" or "Agree." The principal focused on the study skills and remediation program, and the correlation is undeniable by the Teacher Survey and Principal Questionnaire.

The Principal Questionnaire and the Teacher Survey indicated that students received additional support in the academic areas of math, reading, science, history,

physical education, and the electives. Sixteen of eighteen (89%) agreed that students receive extra help and needed support when they fall behind or struggle in a course.

School A Summary of Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

One inhibiting factor identified by the principal in the interview questionnaire was the constant turnover of teachers as the English teacher and study skills teacher have changed each year. The Teacher Survey results showed eight of 18 (44%) said that the teachers who work with freshmen are not the most experienced teachers. This inexperience could lead to frustration, possibly causing constant teacher turnover. The Teacher Survey supported that the program had adequate funding, and the ability grouping was not an issue.

The Principal Questionnaire identified that the pupil/teacher ratio was targeted at 12 pupils to one teacher. The school board even allocated more teacher positions to keep the ratio down. The Teacher Survey supported this statement as 17 of 18 (94%) teachers felt that the class sizes were beneficial to student success in the freshman transition program.

School A Summary of Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success

The Principal Questionnaire identified promotion rates of ninth graders to the tenth grade as an indicator for success. The overall freshman retention rate went from 38% five years ago to just 7.6% in the last year calculated. These statistics show great improvement, but the Teacher Survey listed four teachers who did not feel that the freshman transition plan helped improve promotion rates.

The five questions from the Teacher Survey had a recurring statistic of at least three teachers disagreeing to each question posed. Question 8 had four teachers who did not believe that projects and field trips enhanced the freshman experience. Question 9 had five teachers who did not believe that double-dosing of academic subjects had resulted in improved student achievement. Question 11 had three teachers who did not believe that all stakeholders worked together to bridge communication gaps. Question 15 had four teachers who felt that parental involvement did not help freshman student achievement. Question 20 revealed four teachers believe that the freshman transition program did not help the freshman promotion rate in spite of knowing the severe drop in the freshman retention rate to 7.6% in five years.

Findings for School B

Background of School B

An administrative team began developing the freshman transition program for School B in 2004-2005 and implemented the program in the fall of 2005. The committee consisted of the high school principal, a high school counselor, a central office supervisor, and a lead teacher. The committee attended a conference on Freshman Transition Programs and brought back ideas to their faculty for discussion and brainstorming. The teachers played a major role in addressing the issues their students were facing. The initial plan was to address tutoring, bullying, literacy, time management, and better study skills.

Survey Findings for School B

School B had a total student enrollment of 323 students. Seventy-seven students made up the first-time ninth graders. School B had a freshman retention rate of 18.5% when the program began. The current freshman retention rate is 5%. Twelve teachers participated in the freshman transition program. The survey participation was eleven out of twelve teachers (92%).

School B Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

Research Question 1 consists of survey statements 1, 2, 3, 4, and 19: How did each of the four selected high schools plan the components that support the initial designs of the freshman transition plan?

When asked if teachers had a voice in planning and implementation of the school's freshman transition program, 36% strongly agreed, 55% agreed, and 9% disagreed. When asked if incorporation of effective school dropout measures into the school's freshman transition program exists, 27% strongly agreed and 73% agreed. When asked if the freshman transition program increased parental involvement, 9% strongly agreed, 82% agreed and 9% strongly disagreed. When asked if pre-high-school activities addressed student needs, 9% strongly agreed, 82% agreed, and 9% disagreed. When asked if the freshman transition students benefited from the program, 18% of the teachers strongly agreed, 73% agreed, and 9% replied as not applicable. Refer to Appendix G, Table G1 for the Teacher Survey results of the design and implementation for School B.

School B Research Question 2: Program Design

Research Question 2 consists of survey statements 6, 10, 12, 14, and 18: What elements make up the designs of the four selected transition programs?

When asked if teachers agreed that student progress is consistently monitored using data, 36% strongly agreed, 55% agreed, and 9% disagreed. When asked if study skills and remediation opportunities exist for freshmen who need additional academic support, 27% strongly agreed, 64% agreed, and 9% disagreed. When asked if students who experienced academic difficulties received needed support, 27% strongly agreed, 64% agreed, and 9% disagreed. When asked if students are able to “catch up” and stay on course for graduation, 91% agreed, but 9% disagreed. When asked about the enhancement benefits of the structured study hall on the freshman transition program, 9% strongly agreed, 26% agreed, and 55% disagreed. Refer to Appendix G, Table G2 for the Teacher Survey results of the program design for School B.

School B Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Research Question 3 consists of survey statements 5, 7, 13, 16, and 17: What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four selected high schools?

When asked if grouping students by ability existed, 18% strongly agreed, 46% agreed, and 36% disagreed. When asked if adequate funding existed for the freshman transition plan, 18% strongly agreed, 55% agreed, 18% disagreed and 9% replied as not applicable. When asked if special funding exists for the freshman transition program, 64% agreed and 36% disagreed. When asked if class size was reasonable in respect to the

subject and needs of the student, 36% strongly agreed, 55% agreed and 9% strongly disagreed. When asked if teachers who work with ninth graders were the most experienced teachers in the school, 18% strongly agreed, 73% agreed, and 9% disagreed. Refer to Appendix G, Table G3 for the Teacher Survey results of inhibitors for School B.

School B Research Question 4: Criteria for Success

Research Question 4 consists of survey statements 8, 9, 11, 15, and 20: What criteria does each of the four high schools use to determine the success of its transition program?

When asked if projects and field trips enhance the students' ninth-grade experience, 9% strongly agreed, 55% agreed, 18% disagreed, 9% strongly disagreed and 9% replied as not applicable. When asked if double-dosing of academic subjects has resulted in improved student achievement, 9% strongly agreed, 55% agreed, 9% disagreed, 9% strongly disagreed and 18% replied as not applicable. When asked if all stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps, 27% strongly agreed, 55% agreed, 9% disagreed, and 9% strongly disagreed. When asked if parent involvement has resulted in improved student achievement, 73% agreed, 18% disagreed, and 9% strongly disagreed. When asked if the freshman transition plan produced improved promotion rates, 18% strongly agreed, 64% agreed, and 18% disagreed. Refer to Appendix G, Table G4 for the Teacher Survey results of the criteria used to determine success for School B.

School B Findings from the Principal Questionnaire

The conceptual framework of the Research Questions produced emerging themes. The Principal Questionnaire lists the questions under each Research Question as well as the correlating questions from the Teacher Survey.

School B Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

School B's freshman transition plan is in its fourth year. The early planning stages for the freshman transition plan included developing the transition team. The high school principal, school counselor, a central office supervisor, and a lead teacher made up the initial transition team. The freshman transition team attended a focused conference on transition plans and brought back the information to present to the faculty for discussion and brainstorming sessions.

The faculty and staff set four goals for the transition program. The first goal focused on tutoring for all core areas. The second goal addressed time management and study skills. The third goal addressed literacy, and the fourth goal addressed bullying.

The goals were the result of teachers working together to address all the issues of the high school. Departments first broke into groups and worked together to develop a plan that would work for them and for their students. The administration provided the resources, support, and time for the teachers to do whatever they deemed necessary. The freshman transition program became the priority for all faculty meetings and professional development time. The students had input in the development by voicing their opinion as

to when tutoring would work best for them. The students also chose the incentives given for participation in tutoring.

Teachers bought into the program because they felt that it would help the students and improve their state standardized scores. The faculty continuously reached consensus as to the general direction the staff should take, and departments readily agreed on how to implement the plan at their respective levels. Teacher turnover was not a major issue in the continuance of the program. The freshman transition program has become a successful part of the school culture.

One goal set by the freshman transition team was the elimination of bullying. Discipline records provided documentation for the bullying offenses reported to the administration. Teachers focused on bullying as a focal topic. Character education became part of the school culture.

School B Research Question 2: Program Design

The program design addressed tutoring, time management, study skills, literacy, and bullying. The faculty agreed that tutoring and bullying were the primary issues of their ninth-grade students. The freshman transition team targeted summer school as a way to reach struggling freshmen. The entire faculty also implemented the use of student planners. Study skills and character education became part of the computer lab assignments. Teachers attended professional development to become aware of the initial changes. Students received incentives to attend tutoring sessions. Teachers received incentives for a 100% pass rate on the state standardized tests in their classes.

Many students in School B were reading below grade level. The students also struggled in algebra. These two academic needs, coupled with a general lack of parental support to do well in school, led to the challenges in School B.

To address the academic concerns, the faculty started assessing the reading level of every student. Every teacher in the building focused on improving the reading level of every student. Tutoring occurred before and after school. The students who came to tutoring received incentives. Teachers began focusing on personalizing instruction. Each student received a planner to help with his or her organizational skills. A beginning-of-school kick-off campaign focused on bullying with posters placed throughout the school. When a student failed, summer school became an option to catch up.

The district school board office provided the support of the freshman transition plan. Each department developed its tutoring plans under the guidelines provided by the administration and submitted them to the instructional leader. The principal and instructional leader worked to fit each department's plan into the larger school plan for implementation. The freshman transition program focused on the four core areas.

School B Strategies for Specific Academic Areas

Mathematics: Pre-assessments for all mathematics students became mandatory. Weaker mathematics students took a developmental math course to focus on learning the basic rules of algebra. Each student received a graphing calculator. Teachers utilized technology in their classrooms. Before-and after-school tutoring became mandatory for students showing academic difficulties. All students who failed went to summer school to catch up.

English: Each student took a literacy assessment. All teachers required supplemental reading in their classrooms. Teachers utilized technology in their classrooms. Before and after school tutoring became mandatory for students showing academic difficulties. All students who failed went to summer school to catch up.

Science: A hands-on approach became the focus of science courses. Laboratory experiences became more relevant with the use of improved technology (SMART Boards, probes, etc...). Each student received a scientific calculator. Teachers attended professional development in Inquiry-Based Science. The school system replaced all classroom desks with scientific laboratory tables. Before- and after-school tutoring became mandatory for students showing academic difficulties. All students who failed went to summer school to catch up.

History: All history teachers implemented reading assignments for all students. Teachers utilized technology in their classrooms. Before- and after-school tutoring became mandatory for students showing academic difficulties. All students who failed went to summer school to catch up.

School B Strategies to Address Social Needs

The administration, faculty and staff believed that their students needed to fit into a group in high school. Their students needed and wanted to feel safe while at school. The threat of bullying lingered daily in the high school. The counseling department developed the plan to eliminate bullying in the high school. The school administration monitors the social wellbeing of the students, but with only 323 students, the focus of the transition program was on academics.

School B Research Question 3: Inhibiting factors

The administration, faculty, and staff felt that the inhibiting factors came from the financial constraints. Small grants were available, but the school staff struggled to acquire money to buy planners. Another inhibiting factor was the lack of support from some levels. A major challenge is parental support. The school board office supports the program in theory, but gives no financial support for it.

School B Research Question 4: Criteria Used for Determining Success

The faculty and staff use the state standardized test results for determining success within the classroom. The school administration uses the calculation of the freshman retention rates and four-year graduation rate. The administration charts discipline records as well.

Summary of Findings for School B

School B had a total student enrollment of 323 students. Seventy-seven students made up the first-time ninth graders. When the freshman transition program started, School B had a freshman retention rate of 11%. The current freshman retention rate is 5%. The administration, faculty and staff believe that the freshman transition program is entrenched into the culture of the school. Twelve teachers participated in the freshman transition program. The survey participation was eleven of twelve teachers.

School B Summary of Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

The survey results for School B reflect positively on the planning and implementation of the freshman transition program. Only one survey participant

answered four of the five questions with a disagreeing response. Ninety-one percent of the teachers agreed that they had a voice in planning the freshman transition program. The principal concurred that the teachers within their departments developed their own plans, and then he worked with an instructional specialist to implement the plan.

Although the principal never mentioned dropout prevention in his Principal Questionnaire, every teacher surveyed agreed that effective dropout prevention measures were included in the plan.

Ninety-one percent of the faculty agreed that students had shown improvement because of parental involvement. This statistic was interesting in that the principal felt that parental involvement was practically non-existent. One teacher replied that he/she strongly disagreed with improvement of the freshman year due to parental involvement. The principal's reply to this statement does not match what the teachers felt as a majority.

Ninety-one percent of the faculty also agreed that pre-high-school activities addressed the students' academic and social needs. The school did offer summer school recovery for students, and this approach seemed favorable to the teachers.

When asked if students benefited from the transition program, 91% of the teachers agreed that they did. The principal confirmed that the freshman transition plan has become part of the school culture due to its success. All students have benefited from reading across the curriculum.

One teacher made up the 9% disagreeing response on four of the five questions. The author would question whether this person ought to be in the freshman transition

program with the tendency toward negative responses. Due to the nature of the survey, the teacher will always remain anonymous, but it is apparent that this teacher should not be part of the transition program.

School B Summary of Research Question 2: Program Design

The teachers in School B had positive responses (91%) in four of the five Teacher Survey statements. The one statement that brought a disagreeing response involved the structured study hall. When asked if the structured study hall enhanced the transition program, 54% of the teachers surveyed responded that they disagreed with this statement. School B offered a structured study session for the students, but the perception of the teachers was that it did not enhance the transition experience.

School B focused on literacy rates and bullying while developing their freshman transition program. The faculty and the principal agreed that the use of data to monitor student success occurred. Teachers agreed (91%) that study skills and remediation opportunities existed for freshmen who needed academic support. The same teachers agreed (91%) that students who had trouble received the support for academics from their teachers. This percentage remained the same for teachers who believed that failing students were able to catch up and stay on course for promotion.

School B Summary of Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Data generated by the survey revealed many factors that inhibited the process of the development of the transition program. Teachers surveyed disagreed (36%) that

ability grouping occurred. However, 64% of the teachers agreed with the statement that ability grouping occurred.

The principal identified funding as an inhibitor to the freshman transition program. Seventy-two percent of the teachers (8 of 11) did not feel that funding was an issue. The eight teachers responded that adequate funding existed for the ninth-grade transition. When surveyed about special funding allotted directly to the freshman transition program, 36% of the teachers disagreed, however. The principal and the faculty had similar responses on funding. One reason teachers' answers may vary is that the teacher is not always aware of the development of the budget for the freshman transition program.

When surveyed about whether class sizes were reasonable, the majority of teachers surveyed (91%) felt that they were. The teachers surveyed provided a positive response when asked if teachers who work with ninth graders are the most experienced teachers in the building. The principal and staff agreed that placing the right teacher with the struggling freshmen could make a difference to the student. Respondents who strongly agreed were 18% and agreeing were 73%. Only one individual continued to disagree with most survey statements.

School B Summary of Research Question 4: Criteria Used for Determining Success

Projects and field trips are excellent techniques to enhance students' enjoyment of their ninth-grade experience. However, only 64% of the teachers agreed with this statement. The remaining 36% disagreed or felt that the statement was not applicable. This percentage matched the survey results given for the idea of double-dosing the

academic subjects for the students. Thirty-six percent of the teachers felt that this practice was not effective. The majority of the teachers (82%) agreed that the stakeholders worked together to bridge communication gaps. The principal identified in the questionnaire that the parental communication gap still existed, however. This perception matched the 18% of respondents who disagreed that all stakeholders were working together. When surveyed about whether parental support resulted in improved student achievement, 73% of the faculty agreed. The other 27% of the faculty disagreed, matching the principal's perspective of a major lack of parental support. Eighteen percent of the teachers surveyed strongly agreed that the ninth-grade transition program has resulted in improved promotion rates. This figure, coupled with 64% agreeing, left only 18% disagreeing with this statement. The principal and the data support the statement of the improvement of the promotion rate of freshmen their ninth-grade year. The retention rate dropped from 11% when the program started to the current rate of 5%.

Findings for School C

Background of School C

An administrative team began developing the freshman transition program for School C in 2005-2006 and implemented the program in the fall of 2006. The committee consisted of the high school teachers who taught freshman classes, a high school counselor and the high school principal. The committee attended two conferences on Freshman Transition Programs and began to develop its plan. The initial plan was to implement a mentoring program, identify at-risk students more quickly, give them the support they need, and track them each grading period.

Survey Findings for School C

School C had a total student enrollment of 673 students. Two hundred three students made up the first-time ninth graders. School C had a freshman retention rate of 11% when the program began, but they had a retention rate of 31% the year before they began to investigate a transition program. The current freshman retention rate is 16%. Twelve teachers participated in the freshman transition program. The survey participation was twelve of twelve teachers (100%).

School C Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

Research Question 1 consists of survey statements 1, 2, 3, 4, and 19: How did each of the four selected high schools plan the components that support the initial designs of the freshman transition plan?

When asked if teachers had a voice in planning and implementation of the school's freshman transition program, 17% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, and 33% disagreed. When asked if incorporation occurred of effective school dropout measures in the school's freshman transition program, 83% agreed and 17% disagreed. When asked if the freshman transition program increased parental involvement, 17% strongly agreed, 33% agreed and 50% disagreed. When asked if pre-high-school activities addressed student needs, 33% strongly agreed, 33% agreed, and 33% disagreed. When asked if the freshman transition students benefited from the program, 17% of the teachers strongly agreed and 83% agreed. Refer to Appendix H, Table H1 for the Teacher Survey results of the design and implementation for School C.

School C Research Question 2: Program Design

Research Question 2 consists of survey statements 6, 10, 12, 14, and 18: What elements make up the designs of the four selected transition programs?

When asked if teachers agreed that student progress is consistently monitored using data, 33% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, and 17% disagreed. When asked if study skills and remediation opportunities exist for freshmen who need additional academic support, 66% agreed and 33% disagreed. When asked if students who experienced academic difficulties received needed support, 100% agreed. When asked if students are able to “catch up” and stay on course for graduation, 17% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, 17% disagreed and 17% responded as not applicable. When asked whether the structured study hall benefited the freshman transition program, 17% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, 17% disagreed and 17% replied as not applicable. Refer to Appendix H, Table H2 for the Teacher Survey results of the program design for School C.

School C Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Research Question 3 consists of survey statements 5, 7, 13, 16, and 17: What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four selected high schools?

When asked if grouping students by ability existed, 17% strongly agreed, 66% agreed, and 17% strongly disagreed. When asked if adequate funding existed for the freshman transition plan, 66% agreed, 17% disagreed and 17% replied as not applicable. When asked if special funding existed for the freshman transition program, 100% agreed. When asked if class size was reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of the student,

50% strongly agreed, 33% agreed and 17% strongly disagreed. When asked if teachers who work with ninth graders were the most experienced teachers in the school, 17% strongly agreed, 17% agreed, 50% disagreed and 17% replied as not applicable. Refer to Appendix H, Table H3 for the Teacher Survey results of inhibitors for School C.

School C Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success

Research Question 4 consists of survey statements 8, 9, 11, 15, and 20: What criteria does each of the four high schools use to determine the success of its transition program?

When asked whether projects and field trips enhance the students' ninth-grade experience, 17% strongly agreed, 50% agreed and 33% replied as not applicable. When asked if double-dosing of academic subjects has resulted in improved student achievement, 50% agreed, 33% disagreed and 17% replied as not applicable. When asked if all stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps, 66% agreed and 33% disagreed. When asked if parent involvement has resulted in improved student achievement, 17% strongly agreed, 50% agreed and 33% disagreed. When asked if the freshman transition plan produced improved promotion rates, 83% agreed and 17% disagreed. Refer to Appendix H, Table H4 for the Teacher Survey results of criteria used to determine success for School C.

School C Findings from Principal Questionnaire

The conceptual framework of the Research Questions produced emerging themes. The Principal Questionnaire lists the questions under each Research Question as well as the correlating questions from the Teacher Survey.

School C Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

The administration developed a freshman transition team made up of the Secondary Education Director from the central office, the high school principal, two lead teachers, and a career and technical education teacher. The team attended two conferences on freshman transition plans. The team brought back literature and ideas from the each conference and met with the faculty to develop the key goals for the high school freshman transition plan.

School C began the transition program with a freshman retention rate of 11%, but had a 31% retention rate the year before. The team believed that the problem with their retained students was their lack of preparedness for high school. The high school freshman transition team met with administrators and teachers from the middle school that provided their eighth graders. The students of eighth and ninth grade were surveyed to find what the students believed were their primary needs. Surveying of the teachers also occurred in both schools. The surveys led the administrators and freshman transition team to believe that mentoring and tutoring would address their issues.

Together, the middle and high school teams developed a mentoring program. Implementation of the mentoring program would occur during the seventh- and eighth-

grade years and carry through the students' senior year. The program would cover study skills, time management, organization, character education, bullying, and other topics. The program would also be grade-specific so that the seniors would work on college applications; juniors would focus on the standardized testing, etc.

Team cohesiveness was a challenge for School C. Some teachers placed in predominant roles in the development of the freshman transition plan did not work to their potential. The principal chose these individuals thinking it would give those teachers ownership in the program and that they would want to be part of the program. However, teachers involved never supported the program, and the development of the program suffered. The program design improved drastically when new teachers took over and achieved the goals of the program development. This is the third year of the freshman transition program.

School C Research Question 2: Program Design

The design of the program for School C includes a mentoring program, identification of at-risk students early in the grading period, intense, mandatory tutoring for the at-risk students, and tracking these students throughout the school year. The students in School C struggle in English and math. One major area of concern is the test results of the students with disabilities.

The special education department of School C scheduled professional development in developing, writing, and implementing Individual Educational Programs (IEP's) for students. The freshman transition committee identified a weakness when the students with disabilities came from the middle school to the high school. The

communication of the special education teachers from the middle school and high school started coming together to bridge the communication gap.

School C's administration worked closely with the middle school to identify possible at-risk students and placed them in math and English courses together with stronger teachers, who provided the students with the best chance of survival in high school. The administration made the decision to accept first-year freshmen in the program. Students who were repeaters were not included when the program began. Manipulation of the master schedule occurred to make sure the right teachers were available to teach the at-risk students.

School C Academic Interventions by Subject Area

The freshman transition team worked closely with each core department to implement procedures for the academic interventions. All four core areas implemented the same procedures. The students came before and after school for tutoring if assigned. A student recommended for remediation would report to a study hall for tutoring. One problematic situation continued to occur with this placement. The teacher covering the study hall held an endorsement for one subject area, but that might not be the subject area of need for the student. However, the administration at School C felt that this situation was better than no remediation at all.

School C Social Needs

Single parents raise most students in School C, a situation that creates a lack of male role models. The students are unprepared and lack structure in their lives. Teenage

pregnancy, although not prevalent, is still an issue. The socio-economic status of students at School C leans toward the lower middle-class.

The majority of the students identified as at-risk fit into the categories listed above. Individualized attention and education on how to deal with social issues became part of the lesson plans during the mentoring sessions. Teachers continued to observe the students to look for possible dangerous situations or negative behaviors. The mentor teachers reached out to the families and made connections. The mentors served as go-betweens for the parent and the school. The projected outcome was better communication, but the school personnel did not feel that communication improved. The freshman transition team continues to look for better methods of communication with parents.

School C Research Question 3: Inhibitors

The administration of School C believed that the timing of implementation was a major inhibitor for them. The freshman transition team rushed through the first wave of changes and the process became overwhelming. After the realization that this would be a time-consuming project, the team refocused and brought it back stronger.

Another issue the team identified involved having the wrong teachers in the process. Developing and implementing a freshman transition program takes dedication and effort. The team targeted teachers, who were skeptical about the program to help lead certain areas in the hope that the teachers would eventually see the need for the program. This belief did not occur and the teachers chosen did not help, but rather hindered the design and implementation.

School C Research Question 4: Criteria Used for Determining Success

The administrators of School C relied on the total number of students promoted to the tenth grade to judge success for the overall program. Teachers observed identified at-risk students to document progress. The mentors continued to keep up with the progress of most aspects of a student's school life including grades, discipline records, tardies, possible dangers, and tutoring schedules. Although communication with certain families improved, the freshman transition team felt that this area still needed improvement.

Summary of Findings for School C

School C had a total student enrollment of 673 students. School C had a freshman retention rate of 15% when the program began. The current freshman retention rate is 16%. Fluctuation of the retention rate had a two-year period of 11% and 12.5 % respectfully. Twelve teachers participated in the freshman transition program. The survey participation was twelve of twelve teachers (100%). The teachers surveyed in School C did not overwhelmingly agree to all statements in the survey.

School C Summary of Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

When asked if teachers had a voice in planning and implementing the school's program, 66% of the teachers agreed or strongly agreed. One-third of the teachers who teach freshmen disagreed that teachers had any voice in planning or implementing the school's program. The administration continued to speak of the freshman transition team and the administration making the decisions and developing the plan. The teachers

involved in making the plan could be the teachers answering in agreement with the statement.

The majority of the teachers (83%) answered in agreement that effective dropout prevention measures existed in their program design. This high percentage was rare on the survey results.

When asked if ninth graders had shown improvement because of parental involvement, 50% responded that they disagreed with this statement. The principal also identified lack of parental involvement as a major inhibitor. An interesting statistic developed when teachers responded to the statement of pre-high school activities addressing students' academic and social needs. The teachers who strongly agreed totaled 33%, agreed 33%, and disagreed 33%. These percentages could be the result of a communication issue as four of the twelve teachers disagreed. All twelve teachers responded in agreement that all students benefitted from the freshman transition program.

School C Summary of Research Question 2: Program Design

The teachers responded positively (83%) about student progress consistently being monitored using data. The teachers and administration also tracked the at-risk students through data. The mentoring teachers used data to track attendance, discipline, and tardies. The principal identified these issues as well.

Freshmen received study skills and remediation opportunities according to 100% of the teachers surveyed. Freshmen received their study skills during the study hall and tutoring sessions held before and after school. The entire faculty surveyed also agreed

that when students were experiencing academic difficulties, they received the needed support. The area of study skills and remediation was a priority in School C.

When asked if failing students were able to “catch up” and stay on course for promotion, 66% of the teachers agreed, 17% disagreed, and 17% responded that it was not applicable. The principal responded that students reported to a study hall to catch up on assignments and for remediation. The 33% of teachers who answered in disagreement or as not applicable must not have known of the study hall or believed that the study hall is not serving its purpose. When the teachers responded to the structured study hall’s enhancement of the freshman transition program, 66% agreed, 17% disagreed, and 17% answered not applicable. These findings are interesting in that the study hall exists for this purpose.

School C Summary of Research Question 3: Inhibitors

Funding for the freshman transition program did not seem to be an inhibitor as 66% of the teachers agreed that adequate funding existed but only 17% disagreed. The other 15% of the teachers replied that it was not applicable. The principal never referred to funding as an issue. The teachers agreed (83%) that class size was reasonable for the subjects and the needs of the students. One area of concern in the program design revealed in the survey results was that the teachers responded negatively (66%) about the statement of the teachers being the most experienced teachers in the school. The principal responded that teachers had roles on predominant development committees but did not do their jobs. These teachers no longer served on the committees; new teachers filled their

slots, and the development proceeded. The replacement of new teachers could have led to the more experienced teachers' not wanting to be part of this program.

School C Summary of Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success

Survey responses for Research Question 4 yield a wide array of responses. Projects and field trips do enhance the freshman student experience according to 66% of the teachers; the other 33% replied as not applicable. The double-dosing of academic subjects led to a 50/50 split with the faculty. School C does not utilize double-dosing of academic subjects.

A communication gap exists between the school personnel and families. When asked, 33% of the teachers responded that not all stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps. The principal responded that the development of the mentoring program targeted communication with the parents. Professional development may help teachers better communicate with parents before the mentoring teacher attempts to bridge that gap. Parental involvement has not helped in student achievement according to 33% of the teachers. The principal concurred with this finding.

When asked if the freshman transition program has resulted in improved promotion rates, 83% of the teachers responded in agreement. Two (17%) disagreed with the statement. The retention rate has been as high as 31% and as low as 11%. Communication of these statistics could improve the perception of the freshman transition program in School C.

Findings for School D

Background of School D

An administrative team began developing the freshman transition program for School D in 2005-2006 and implemented the program in the fall of 2006. The committee consisted of the high school principal, a high school counselor, two central office supervisors, and three lead teachers. The committee attended a conference on Freshman Transition Programs, brought back ideas, and presented the ideas to the entire faculty. The committee brainstormed and implemented a program that involved the entire ninth-grade population. The initial plan was to improve the students' study skills, attendance rates, and number of disciplinary referrals. The program focused on direct tutoring, literacy, and writing across the curriculum.

Survey Findings from School D

School D had a total student enrollment of 467 students. One hundred thirty-two students made up the first-time ninth graders. School D had a freshman retention rate of 6% when the program began, but had a 23% retention rate the previous year causing the immediate concern. The current freshman retention rate is 19%. During the previous school year before the 19% retention rate, the school had a 1% freshman retention rate. Eleven teachers make up the freshman transition program in School D. The survey participation was ten of eleven teachers (91%).

School D Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

Research Question 1 consists of survey statements 1, 2, 3, 4, and 19: How did each of the four selected high schools plan the components that support the initial designs of the freshman transition plan?

When asked if teachers had a voice in planning and implementation of the school's freshman transition program, 10% strongly agreed, 50% agreed, 20% disagreed, and 20% strongly disagreed. When asked if incorporation of effective school dropout measures occurred in the school's freshman transition program, 10% strongly agreed, 30% agreed, 50% disagreed, and 10% strongly disagreed. When asked if the freshman transition program increased parental involvement, 40% agreed, 40% disagreed, 10% strongly disagreed, and 10% replied as not applicable. When asked if pre-high-school activities addressed student needs, 70% agreed, 10% disagreed, and 20% strongly disagreed. When asked if the freshman transition students benefited from the program, 10% of the teachers strongly agreed, 60% agreed, and 30% disagreed. Refer to Appendix I, Table I1 for the Teacher Survey results of the design and implementation for School D.

School D Research Question 2: Program Design

Research Question 2 consists of survey statements 6, 10, 12, 14, and 18: What elements make up the designs of the four selected transition programs?

When asked if teachers agreed that student progress is consistently monitored using data, 10% strongly agreed, 60% agreed, and 30% disagreed. When asked if study skills and remediation opportunities existed for freshmen who needed additional

academic support, 80% agreed and 20% disagreed. When asked if students who experienced academic difficulties received needed support, 60% agreed and 40% disagreed. When asked if students are able to “catch up” and stay on course for graduation, 60% agreed and 40% disagreed. When asked about the enhancement benefits of the structured study hall on the freshman transition program, 100% replied as not applicable. Refer to Appendix I, Table I2 for the Teacher Survey results of the program design for School D.

School D Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Research Question 3 consists of survey statements 5, 7, 13, 16, and 17: What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four selected high schools?

When asked if grouping students by ability existed, 20% agreed, 20% disagreed and 60% strongly disagreed. When asked if adequate funding existed for the freshman transition plan, 90% agreed and 10% disagreed. When asked if special funding existed for the freshman transition program, 80% agreed, 10% disagreed and 10% replied as not applicable. When asked if class size was reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of the students, 40% agreed, 20% disagreed and 40% strongly disagreed. When asked if teachers who work with ninth graders were the most experienced teachers in the school, 30% agreed, 40% disagreed, and 30% strongly disagreed. Refer to Appendix I, Table I3 for the Teacher Survey results of inhibitors for School D.

School D Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success

Research Question 4 consists of survey statements 8, 9, 11, 15, and 20: What criteria does each of the four high schools use to determine the success of its transition program?

When asked if projects and field trips enhance the students' ninth-grade experience, 60% agreed, 20% disagreed and 10% replied as not applicable. When asked if double-dosing of academic subjects has resulted in improved student achievement, 50% agreed and 50% disagreed. When asked if all stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps, 70% agreed and 30% disagreed. When asked if parent involvement had resulted in improved student achievement, 40% agreed, 40% disagreed, and 20% replied as not applicable. When asked if the freshman transition plan produced improved promotion rates, 80% agreed, 10% disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed. Refer to Appendix I, Table I4 for the Teacher Survey results of criteria used to determine success for School D.

School D Findings from Principal Questionnaire

The conceptual framework of the Research Questions produced emerging themes. The Principal Questionnaire lists the questions under each Research Question as well as the correlating questions from the Teacher Survey.

School D Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

The transition development team in School D consisted of the principal, two central office coordinators, and three teachers. The team traveled to a conference to understand freshman transition and brought back ideas to discuss with the faculty to develop a strategic plan. The entire faculty believed in the future of the program. The faculty and staff developed the plan over a three-month period. Once the team finalized the completed proposal, they presented it to the central office staff, the school board, the parents of the eighth and ninth graders, and the students. All groups gave suggestions and comments.

The teachers researched successful programs and developed the strategies that met their high school culture the best. The administrators served on transition teams and helped in the development of goals. Student and parent representatives also served on the committees and provided great input.

Areas of concern for School D included the freshman retention rate, attendance, discipline, and the dropout rate. The teachers were not aware of the 23% retention rate for freshmen. Once the faculty and staff understood the data, the plan quickly developed with great enthusiasm. The entire faculty took part in the development process. The decision to include all freshmen, not just the students believed to be at-risk, involved the consensus of the entire faculty and administration. The faculty and staff did not want to single out the at-risk students. A summer bridge program became a part of the culture to help incoming freshmen adapt to the new environment.

The program is in its third year. The first year provided quick and impressive results. The freshman retention rate dropped from 23% to 6% at the time of the introduction of the program. The first year of the program saw a continued improvement in the freshman retention rate to 1%. The final year of data showed a sharp increase from 1% back to 19%. The increase in the retention rate could be the result of the low number of students involved, and new, inexperienced teachers teaching the freshmen students. The attendance improved while the overall number of disciplinary referrals declined. The dropout rate saw a small decline as well. All data measured supported the perception that the freshman transition plan worked for the students in School D.

However, team cohesiveness and teacher turnover became a major issue over the three years. The program began with highly enthusiastic teachers. However, due to teacher turnover, reluctant teachers replaced enthusiastic teachers in the freshman transition program. Although the data continued to show an improvement from the first to the second year, the morale and teacher buy-in began to suffer.

School D Research Question 2: Program Design

The freshman transition team decided to designate a complete hallway of the school the “freshman hallway.” This area became the location of the freshman lockers and the majority of their classrooms. The development of a program of team teaching started. The science and math teachers formed a team as did the English and social studies teachers. Pairing of courses in these groups became the common practice for the freshmen. Honors students stayed on the Honors track, and they did have classes outside

the freshman hallway in certain math subjects that they shared with upperclassmen (i.e. Algebra II).

Teachers who taught the freshmen in core areas had a common planning time. One of the three lunch periods became the freshman lunch period. All teachers developed a common set of expectations for freshmen. A study skills program became a part of the English curriculum. Tutoring occurred differently for the freshman class; it was conducted on Mondays for social studies, Tuesdays for math, Wednesdays for English, and Thursdays for science. Each core area increased reading requirements to help improve literacy.

The team developed a summer bridge program for incoming freshmen, who would attend on a voluntary basis. The program lasted five days the first summer and then was reduced to three days the second summer. The decision to drop two days occurred because the staff noticed a loss of interest over the fourth and fifth days the first summer. The summer program focused on the students' understanding the building layout, meeting the teachers, having fun, eating, and learning the culture of the school environment. All of the clubs and sports provided representatives to give a brief description of their respective programs, and the freshmen had opportunities to ask any question that they could think of before they arrived at school.

Academic Needs for School D

The academic needs for the students in School D centered on reading skills and study skills. The majority of the students did not read at grade level. The teachers

identified test-taking and note-taking skill deficiencies. The students came to the ninth grade unprepared for the high school experience.

The English department began a study-skills lesson once a week that addressed different topics. The teachers of all core subjects identified novels that fit the curriculum of their respective subjects and began assigning reading and writing lessons. These exercises helped strengthen the students' reading and writing skills. Test-taking and note-taking skills became a priority for all core area teachers. These strategies worked at other schools with successful transition programs that the team members of School D investigated.

Academic Strategies per Subject Area for School D

All four subject areas developed the same basic goals for their courses. All core-area classes began reading novels, and the students had writing assignments based on the novels read. Each core area implemented the weekly study skill into its lesson plan. All teachers focused on test-taking skills and note-taking skills. Incentives became commonplace for good attendance and lack of disciplinary issues. Students could attend tutoring, depending on the weekday.

Social Needs for School D

Only 12% of the students in School D come from a lower socio-economic background. Many of the students do come from single-family homes or homes in which one or both parents travel daily or weekly for work. Students need a mentor to give them an avenue of release and another person with whom to trust their endeavors. The senior

faculty has a great understanding of the culture from which the students come to school. Some of the newer faculty did not grow up in the area; therefore, they are having a harder time understanding the culture.

School D Research Question 3: Inhibitors

The principal identified lack of dedication by members of the faculty and lack of communication over time as inhibitors of the freshman transition program. The excitement and faculty buy-in existed when the program began. Strong supportive teachers who helped develop and teach in the program left over the first two years, and finding suitable replacements became a challenge. The new freshman transition teachers did not help plan and implement the program, and do not enjoy teaching freshmen as much.

Lack of communication became an inhibitor as time went on. The program began with great communication and people who liked to share their results and ideas. However, when these individuals left the program, the new teachers did not carry on the tradition of sharing information. The freshman transition program has become a little isolated. Although the data have shown wonderful increases in all areas identified by the initial design, the excitement and ideas for new strategies have diminished.

School D Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success

The administrators at School D became very concerned when they found out their retention rate was 23%. This was the focal point of a need for improvement. Other

criteria the administration measured were the attendance rates and disciplinary referrals. The team focused on the state standardized test results.

The school system made great strides in the freshman transition rate over the first two years. Students responded well to the team-teaching approach for science and math as well as English and social studies. Teachers felt that literacy improved although there was no official measurement. Teachers implemented the reading of novels across the curriculum, and the students had writing assignments.

The freshman retention rate dropped to 1% before the recent increase up to 19%. The attendance rates went up 3% over the past two years. The freshman disciplinary referral rate declined significantly, due in part to the implementation of an in-school-suspension program that gave an alternative to out-of-school suspension. The implementation of the in-school-suspension program occurred at the same time as the freshman transition program, but the two had no relationship.

Summary of Findings for School D

School D had a total student enrollment of 467 students. One hundred thirty-two students made up the first-time ninth graders. Eleven teachers make up the freshman transition program in School D. The survey participation was ten of eleven teachers (91%).

School D Summary of Research Question 1: Implementation and Planning

The faculty and staff, as an entire group, initially developed the freshman transition. When surveyed, 10% of the teachers strongly agreed and 50% agreed that they

had a voice in the development and implementation of the program's design. The other 40% of the teachers disagreed that they had a voice in designing and implementing the program. The principal did mention dropout rates as one of the indicators, but only 40% of the faculty surveyed believed that dropout prevention measures were included in the transition program. The majority of teachers (60%) did not agree that the parent involvement helped create an improvement in the freshman transition program. The freshman transition team did include a parent representative, and the parents saw a presentation on the program annually. Forty percent of the faculty believed that parental involvement helped the freshmen improve.

The summer bridge program helped students' transition from the middle school to the high school. The majority of the teachers surveyed (70%) agreed that the pre-high-school activities helped address the students' academic and social needs. Of the remaining 30% of the teachers surveyed, 10% disagreed and 20% strongly disagreed. When asked if students benefited from the freshman transition program, 10% strongly agreed, 60% agreed, and 30% disagreed. The data showed an improvement in freshman retention rates, disciplinary referral rates, attendance rates, and dropout rates over the two-year period.

School D Summary of Research Question 2: Program Design

The administration of School D placed the freshmen in their own section of the school with their lockers, core course classrooms and teachers. Every freshman student became part of the freshman transition program. The teaming of core area teachers became the practice as did specialized tutoring days for each subject. Study skills

programs, as well as test-taking and note-taking skills, became part of the curriculum. A summer bridge program became part of the normal school transition program. Monitoring student achievement through data became a practice for every adult in the high school.

When surveyed, however, only 70% of the teachers agreed that student progress is consistently monitored using data. Thirty percent of the teachers did not agree with this statement. The implementation of study skills in the curriculum became common practice for the school, but 20% of the teachers surveyed disagreed that study skills and remediation opportunities were offered to the freshmen. When surveyed about students who are experiencing academic difficulties receiving needed support, 40% disagreed, although focused tutoring by subject occurs weekly for all core areas, providing this needed support. A structured study hall does not exist at School D, leading to a 100% not applicable reply to that survey statement.

School D Summary of Research Question 3: Inhibitors

The administration, faculty and staff, when developing the freshman transition program for School D, decided to include all freshmen in the program instead of the at-risk students alone. This decision led to the 80% reply in disagreement with Survey Question 5 asking about grouping students according to their ability. Adequate funding existed for the freshman transition according to 90% of the teachers. When surveyed about class sizes, the majority of the teachers disagreed (60%) that the class sizes are reasonable in respect to the subject.

The principal identified a large turnover in teachers and the culture that has arisen because of that turnover. The newer teachers are not as enthusiastic as the previous

teacher that left over the past two years. When surveyed, the majority of the teachers (70%) did not believe that teachers who work with freshmen are the most experienced teachers in the building.

School D Summary of Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success

Although the principal did not mention projects and field trips enhancing the ninth-grade experience, 60% of the faculty surveyed believed that projects and field trips did enhance the experience. Survey Statement 9 was “Double-doses of academic subjects have resulted in improved student achievement.” School D’s program did have team teaching in science and math, as well as English and social studies. When surveyed, however, only 50% of the teachers agreed that double-dosing helps student achievement, while 50% of the teachers disagreed.

The principal mentioned in the questionnaire that the new teachers did not carry on the tradition of sharing information, and lack of communication became an inhibitor over time. The majority of the teachers (70%) believed that all stakeholders worked together to bridge communication gaps. When teachers answered the survey statement on parental involvement resulting in improved student achievement, 40% of the teachers agreed, 40% disagreed and 20% replied as not applicable. The initial design team included a parent, and the parents of the eighth and ninth graders came to an assembly about the program.

School D’s data show a drop in the freshman retention rate from 23% to 1% over a two-year period. A sharp increase did occur in the next year to 19% ending a three-year downward trend. When surveyed, 80% of the teachers recognized and agreed with the

program's results on the freshman retention rate. Ten percent disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed that the freshman transition program has resulted in an improvement of the promotion rate.

Comparative Analysis of the Four Schools

The author analyzed the four high schools for similarities, differences, and unique elements. The plans range in sustainment age from two years to four years. All programs addressed the development process, the program design, and the inhibitors the designers faced. All four programs used the same basic criteria to determine success of the program. All programs have successfully sustained at least two years. Please refer to Table 5 for sustainability of each freshman transition program.

Table 5

Transition Program Existence

School	Number of Years of Existence
A	5
B	4
C	2
D	2

A comparative analysis of the schools' program implementation, design, inhibitors, and criteria for success are presented within the context of each research question.

Comparative Analysis of the Four Schools for Planning and Implementation

Each school’s enrollment met the criteria defined in the study of populations between 300 and 900 students. The retention rates of each high school improved over the period the freshman transition program has been in place. Refer to Table 6 for current enrollment of each high school.

Table 6

Current Enrollment

School	Current Enrollment
A	667
B	323
C	673
D	467

All four schools began their transition programs with a development team and planned the implementation during the prior school year before implementing. The development team for School A had the high school principal, middle school assistant principal, a central office staff member, and four teachers on it. The composition of the development team for School B was the high school principal, a guidance counselor, a central office staff member, and one teacher. The composition for School C was the high school principal, a guidance counselor and an unidentified number of teachers. The

composition for School D’s development team was the high school principal, a guidance counselor, two central office staff, and three teachers. Refer to Table 7 for the initial teams of each high school.

Table 7

Freshman Transition Initial Teams

School A	School B	School C	School D
High School	High School	High School	High School
Principal	Principal	Principal	Principal
Central Office	Central Office	Central Office	Two Central Office
Supervisor	Supervisor	Supervisor	Supervisors
Middle School	School Counselor	Two Lead Teachers	Three Teachers
Assistant Principal			
Two English Teachers	One Teacher	Career and Technical Teacher	
One Math Teacher			
One Reading Teacher			

School A, School B, and School D developed a set of goals to follow during the implementation stage. School B and School C identified bullying as a major concern and addressed the issue in the transition program. All four high schools identified poor study skills and time management as major weaknesses for freshmen. School A and School C

worked closely with the middle school staff in the development of their program. School A and School D developed a summer program to address issues of freshman transition.

The majority of the teachers in all four schools agreed that teachers had a voice in planning their respective freshman transition program. Teachers in all schools except School D agreed that dropout prevention measures existed in their respective programs. The majority of the teachers in School A and School B agreed that improvement occurred for the freshman students because of parental involvement. The teachers in School C agreed at 50% and the teachers in School D disagreed at 60%. The majority of the teachers in all four schools agreed that pre-high-school activities helped prepare students for their first year in high school. All four high school groups also agreed that freshmen benefited from the freshman transition programs in their schools. Refer to Table 8 for a comparison of the four schools for implementation and design.

Table 8

Comparative Analysis of the Four Schools for Implementation and Design

	School	School	School	School
Common Elements	A	B	C	D
Clear, defined set of goals and expectations	X	X		X
Teacher voice in planning and implementation	X	X	X	X
Selected all freshmen		X		X
Selected only first-time freshmen	X	X		
Separate freshman facility/area	X			X
Effective dropout prevention methods	X	X	X	
Parental involvement	X	X	X	
Pre-high-school activities	X	X	X	X
Common planning for teachers				X
Middle school involvement in development	X		X	
Study skills addressed in development	X	X	X	X
Bullying addressed in development		X	X	
Summer program designed	X			X
Freshmen benefited from program	X	X	X	X

Comparative Analysis of the Four Schools for Program Design

Each of the four high schools focused on the four core areas (math, English, science, and social studies) while developing the program design. School B assessed its students' reading levels while School A assessed the students' learning styles. School B used academic planners for the students as an organizational aid, while School C implemented an entire mentoring program. All four high school transition development teams attended staff development on freshman transition programs to find guidance in their respective design procedures. All four high schools used data to monitor student progress. Students at School B, School C, and School D attended tutoring for remediation. School B offered incentives for students to attend the tutoring sessions. Literacy and Character Education became a focus in School A's and School B's design processes.

The majority of the teachers surveyed in the four high schools agreed that student progress is charted using data. The majority also agreed in all cases that study skills and remediation programs are available for the students, as well as availability of support for all students when needed. Only School B and School C teachers had a majority agreement that the structured study hall is an enhancement for the freshmen. School A teachers agreed only in the 36 percentile, and School D had 100% disagreement. Refer to Table 9 for a comparison of the four schools for program design.

Table 9

Comparative Analysis of the Four Schools for Program Design

	School	School	School	School
Common Elements	A	B	C	D
Freshman tutoring program offered		X	X	X
Literacy addressed in program	X	X		
Focus on four core areas	X	X	X	X
Incentives offered		X		
Character education addressed in program	X	X		
Professional development for teachers	X	X	X	X
Student progress monitored by data	X	X	X	X
Study skills/remediation offered	X	X	X	X
Support offered to students in need	X	X	X	X
Failing students can catch up	X	X	X	X
Structured study hall utilized for freshmen		X	X	

Comparative Analysis of Four Schools for Inhibitors

Respondents from School A, School B and School C agreed with grouping the freshman students by their ability level, but such grouping does not occur, according to the teachers, in School D. Adequate funding is available for all four high schools, and a special allocation exists for all programs. The teachers in School A, School B, and School

C agreed that class size was reasonable for the transition program, while the majority of the teachers in School D (60%) disagreed with the statement. Only School B agreed that the most experienced teachers in the school taught the freshman students. School A (59%), School C (66%), and School D (70%) disagreed that the teachers teaching the freshman courses were the most experienced in the school.

School C and School D identified undedicated teachers as an inhibitor to their programs. School A identified student absences, a lack of common planning time, a lack of parental involvement, and continued discipline issues as inhibitors for their freshman transition program. Respondents for School C identified the timing of the implementation as an inhibitor. Respondents for School D cited communication issues as an inhibitor for their school. Table 10 lists a summary of comparisons of the four schools.

Table 10

Comparative Analysis of the Four Schools for Inhibiting Factors

	School	School	School	School
Common Elements	A	B	C	D
Ability grouping	X	X	X	
Class size	X	X	X	
Inexperienced teachers	X		X	X
Undedicated teachers			X	X
Lack of parental involvement	X			
Lack of common planning time	X			
Communication issues				X
Attendance issues	X			
Discipline issues	X			
Implementation timeline			X	

Comparative Analysis of the Four Schools for Criteria Used to Determine Success

The majority of teachers in all four schools agreed that field trips and projects enhance the freshman experience. School A and School B respondents agreed that double-dosing of academic subjects benefits the freshmen while School C and School D were split (50% agreeing and 50% disagreeing) with this statement. The majority of the

respondents in the four schools agreed that all stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps. The respondents in School A, School B, and School C agreed that parental involvement resulted in improved student achievement. The majority of the teachers in all four schools agreed that promotion rates have improved because of the freshman transition programs.

All four high schools used promotion rates as one criterion for success. School A and School C used individual course pass rates and tracking of the at-risk freshmen. School A and School D identified the results on state standardized tests as a criterion. School A, School C, and School D identified the reduction in disciplinary referrals and increased attendance rates as criteria for success. Table 11 lists a comparison of the four schools.

Table 11

Comparative Analysis of the Four Schools for Criteria Used to Determine Success

	School	School	School	School
Common Elements	A	B	C	D
Promotion rates	X	X	X	X
State standardized test rates	X			X
Pass rates for individual courses	X		X	
Projects and field trips	X			
Working together to bridge communication gaps	X	X	X	X
Discipline	X		X	X
Student attendance	X		X	X
Tracking at-risk students	X		X	
Parental involvement	X	X	X	

Chapter 5

Summary and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to add valuable insight to the knowledge that currently existed for the development and implementation of freshman transition programs. This chapter focused on the findings of each research question. The purpose of the study is reviewed and then followed by a summary of findings research-question-by-research-question. This chapter will also present a discussion of the results as they are framed around key themes, commonalities and critical differences. Findings in the study were compared to practices identified in the review of literature for successful freshman transition programs. Recommendations for educators and suggestions for future research are presented.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to add valuable insight to the knowledge that currently existed for the development and implementation of freshman transition programs. The author identified similar and contrasting characteristics of freshman transition programs in the four selected high schools. The results of this study provided key themes, commonalities, and critical differences in the development and implementation, program design, inhibitors, and criteria used to determine success of a freshman transition program. The identification of these themes, commonalities, and differences allows other educators to better understand issues that arise during the process of development.

This study focused on the successes and challenges small school administrators and teachers experienced when designing, implementing, and sustaining their ninth-grade transition programs. For this study, four high schools in the state of Virginia with populations between 300-900 students were analyzed. The four high schools have implemented and sustained successful freshman transition programs. The author identified characteristics of each high school that were similar or contrasting in nature. The study focused on identifying the planning and implementation strategies of each high school, as well as identifying the program design and inhibiting factors. The criteria that the four high schools used to measure success of their freshman transition programs are presented.

Summary of Findings

Commonalities and unique elements are identified for the four high schools as a whole by each research question. The first paragraph in the section summarizes the findings of the teacher surveys. Fifty-one teachers completed the survey out of a possible 53 teachers who taught freshmen in the four selected high schools for a response rate of 96%. The remaining paragraphs in the section will summarize the Principal Questionnaire. Summary tables for all four high schools are included in Appendix .

Summary of Findings for Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

The majority of the survey results for planning and implementation were positive. Seventy-eight and one-half percent of the teachers in all four schools agreed that they did have a voice in the planning of the program. Teachers agreed in the 80.5 percentile that dropout procedures were included in their program, and 74.5% agreed that parental

involvement helped improve student achievement. The implementation of a pre-high-school program helped freshman transition according to 70.5% of the teachers surveyed. Ninety percent of the teachers agreed that students in the four high schools benefited from the freshman transition programs.

All four high schools utilized their faculty to help develop the initial design of the program. All four schools identified their respective issues and set their goals to target improvement in their areas of concern. School A and School D started summer programs for incoming freshmen. School B, School C, and School D included all first-time freshmen, while School A targeted at-risk students. Study skills were targeted in Schools A, B, and D. School C targeted tutoring and mentoring as the emphasis of its design. School A and School C implemented conflict resolution and bullying prevention in their program.

All four high school faculties bought into the initial program, but dedication to the program has suffered in School D due to high teacher turnover. School C identified team cohesiveness as a problem as some teachers in the program design phase never believed in the program, therefore possibly hurting the implementation process.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 2: Program Design

The teachers surveyed gave positive responses to the program's design for each high school's freshman transition plan. Eighty-four percent of the teachers surveyed agreed that data are used to monitor student progress. Study skills and remediation for the students are available in the transition program design according to 86 percent of the teachers. In addition, 86% of the teachers agreed that students receive extra support

during their freshman year of high school. Eighty percent agree that catch-up opportunities exist for freshmen. Only 47% of the teachers surveyed agreed that a structured study hall enhances the freshman transition program. School D gave a 100% not applicable answer, and the other three high school surveys produced inconsistent results.

The four high school transition teams all determined the weaknesses of their students and designed a plan to address these weaknesses. School A determined students' learning styles and planned lessons to accommodate the students. School A and School C implemented mandatory tutoring for students who fall behind in their academic studies. School B gave incentives to students attending tutoring and was the only school that designed its plan for prevention of bullying as one of its two main concerns. School D allocated one area of the building for the freshman transition program. School B and School D focused on reading levels and literacy.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 3: Inhibitors

Eighty-six percent of the teachers agreed that special funding was allocated for the freshman transition program, leading to 76.5% of the teachers agreeing that the program was adequately funded. Sixty-seven percent of the teachers agreed that ability grouping occurred in their schools. Eighty percent of the teachers agreed that reasonable class sizes for the freshman transition programs existed in their schools. Only 49% of the teachers surveyed agreed that the most experienced teachers taught freshman students.

School A listed excessive student absences and excessive discipline issues as inhibitors. School A and School B had issues with the lack of parental involvement.

School C and School D identified teachers' lack of investment in the program as a possible inhibitor. School C believed that negative teachers were in leadership positions in the development phase. School D believed that supportive teachers were replaced with new, inexperienced teachers who struggled with teaching freshmen. School C identified that the timing of the implementation caused issues for its program and realigned its timeline for a more successful implementation.

Summary of Findings for Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success

The answers from the teacher survey for this research question were all positive, but not as overwhelmingly positive as the first three research question results. Seventy-one percent of the teachers surveyed agreed that projects and field trips enhanced the freshman year for students. Of the teachers surveyed, only 61% agreed that double-dosing of the academic subjects helped the students in achievement. The majority of the teachers agreed (76%) that all stakeholders were working to bridge communication gaps. Sixty-seven percent of the teachers agreed that parental involvement helped students have better results during their freshman year. Eighty percent of the teachers agreed that the freshman transition programs in their schools have helped the promotion rate of freshmen to their sophomore year.

The four schools identified only quantitative methods for determining success. The promotion rate was the major factor used to determine success in School A, School B, School C, and School D. Pass rates on the state standardized tests were a criterion identified in School A, School B, and School D as well as student absences and students'

disciplinary data. School C utilized its mentors to chart the progress of freshmen including grades, discipline records, and tutoring schedules.

See Appendix D for a summary of the Teacher Survey results for all four Schools and Appendix E for a summary of common elements for all four schools.

Summary of the Results

This section will identify key themes, commonalities, and critical differences of the four high schools' freshman transition plans in relation to each research question. The focus of this study was on evaluating freshman transition programs for implementation, planning, program design, inhibitors, and criteria for success. As each research question is discussed, key themes, commonalities, and critical differences will be discussed within the conceptual framework of systems thinking and within the comparisons of practices within the Literature Review.

Six practices consistently occurred in the four high schools studied, and the same six practices were identified in the Literature Review. The six practices were (1) Teachers had a voice in the planning stages of the program, (2) Pre-high-school activities were offered, (3) Catch-up opportunities were offered, (4) Academic interventions were offered, (5) Bridging communication gaps became a priority, and (6) The schools all used data to monitor student achievement. High schools that are struggling with their freshmen populations should include these six practices in their own programs as the research and this study support these practices as useful.

Since ninth grade is a critical year in the high school realm, it is imperative for educators to determine which practices are successful for their students (Gibson, 2006).

School leaders understand the importance of the freshman year. Understanding key themes, commonalities, and critical differences of the four high schools in this study can help school leaders overcome many of the challenges they could encounter in developing their freshman transition programs.

Key Themes

Key Themes from Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

Three key themes were identified in the planning and implementation research question results. The first key theme was that all four schools used their entire faculty to develop the initial program. The strengths of all the teachers helped in the development process. Allowing only teachers who currently teach freshmen to develop the program could have led to quick failure of the program. The evidence in the surveys and questionnaires led the author to believe that inexperienced teachers are teaching many freshmen; therefore, utilizing the entire faculty in the development process provided better experience and a cross-curricular view to the freshman transition program planning. The second key theme identified is all four schools focused on study skills and organizational skills in their programs. Eighty-six percent of the teachers agreed that study skills were present in their respective programs. The importance of the presence of a study skills program seems essential. The third key theme in the planning and implementation stage is the overall importance of the reasoning behind developing a program for the freshman classes. Ninety percent of the teachers surveyed agreed that the freshman transition program directly benefited their students. Eighty percent of the

teachers agreed that the freshman transition program directly helped their schools in freshman promotion rates. The data support the teachers' survey results.

When comparing the study skills findings above to the literature review, Fulk (2003) identified areas of greatest concern for freshmen. They were time management, motivation, and homework. The students rated themselves the lowest on "study habits, self-regulation, and test anxiety" (Fulk, 2003). One of Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris' three components to keep students engaged in the learning environment is the cognitive component, which includes a student's effort to learn and to improve academic and social skills.

Key Themes from Research Question 2: Program Design

Three key themes were identified in the data collected for Research Question 2. The first key theme was that pre-high-school activities were very beneficial to the students. The majority of the teachers (70.5%) agreed that pre-high-school activities benefited the freshmen. School A and School D offered a summer program for the targeted freshmen. Another key theme identified was the implementation of the study skills program. This theme is redundant with research Question 1, but was strongly identified in both groups of results. The third key theme was the teacher responses to the structured study hall. Only 47% of the teachers agreed that a structured study hall benefited the students. Ironically, 61% of School A agreed with this statement, but School A did not offer a structured study hall. School D also did not offer a structured study hall, but all ten of the teachers surveyed responded as not applicable.

When comparing the findings to the literature review, Fulk (2003) identified the summer bridge program as a tool to help improve the transition process of a student going into his or her freshman year. The Southern Regional Education Board suggests that schools provide extra time and help to meet students' academic needs (Bottoms, 2002).

Key Themes from Research Question 3: Inhibitors

Lack of parental support and faculty commitment and lack of experience of the teachers emerged as themes that inhibited the planning and implementation of the freshman transition program. School A and School B principals identified lack of parental support as an issue. Lack of faculty commitment was identified as an issue in School C as teachers placed in leadership positions during the design process did not have the necessary commitment level. School D began with very dedicated teachers, but as those teachers retired or left, the newer inexperienced teachers did not carry on the same commitment level or have the experience to do the job at the prior level. Only 49% of the teachers surveyed agreed that the most experienced teachers taught freshmen students. School A had a 58% disagreement rate, School C had a 67% disagreement rate, and School D had a 70% disagreement rate.

When comparing the findings above concerning inexperienced teachers to the literature review, Hughes, Copley, and Baker (2005) said that the freshman transition is more challenging because mostly inexperienced or uncertified teachers are teaching freshmen. The freshman students often do not have the advantage of an experienced teacher to guide them successfully through this transition. Inexperienced teachers usually

take a “sink or swim” attitude toward the freshmen (2005). The freshman class needs leadership, and in many cases, these teachers do not have the training to teach time management or study skills.

Key Themes from Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success.

Freshman promotion rate was the major theme that emerged in the Teacher Survey Response and the Principal Questionnaire. All four schools identified promotion rates as the major indicator for success. An additional theme is the use of other pertinent quantitative data such as scores on state standardized tests, attendance rates, and disciplinary records.

Commonalities

Commonalities from Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

All four schools composed an initial team to attend professional development seminars to learn the basics of a freshman transition program. All the teams came back and shared the information with each of their respective faculties. Teachers in all four schools had a voice in the implementation process and implemented pre-high-school activities in their program. School A, School B, and School D did have a clear, defined set of goals and expectations. School A, School B, and School C implemented effective dropout procedures in their programs. All four schools agreed that their freshman students benefited from the transition program. The findings that teachers believed that students benefited from the program were inconsistent with the review of literature research. Midgley and Maehr (2000) came to the summation that the teachers felt that

they had little impact on the students' academic progress. If teachers in these four schools had little impact on the students, the teachers would not agree that their freshman students benefited from the program.

Commonalities from Research Question 2: Program Design

All four schools in this study shared the following commonalities:

- Heavy emphasis was placed on the importance of implementing a study skills program in the freshman transition program.
- The focus included all four core areas.
- Professional development was provided for all teachers in the four schools.
- Student progress was monitored by data in all schools.
- Remediation was offered in all schools.
- Support was offered to students in need.
- Failing students were allowed to catch up.

Commonalities from Research Question 3: Inhibitors

There were no commonalities of inhibitors that included all four schools. Lack of parental concern was identified in School A and School B. Only School B utilized experienced teachers to teach freshmen, which meant School A, School C, and School D had inexperienced teachers teaching freshmen. The issue of inexperienced teachers was an inhibitor in those three schools. Undedicated teachers were identified as inhibitors in Schools C and D.

Commonalities from Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success

All four schools shared the commonality of using the freshman promotion rate as their primary criterion for success. Promotion to the tenth grade gave students a better chance to graduate in four years. According to Hertzog and Morgan (1999), ninth grade is the critical year. If students make it to tenth grade, they will probably graduate from high school. School A, School C, and School D used disciplinary data and student attendance rates as a basis for criteria.

Critical Differences

Critical Differences for Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

The planning and implementation stages of the high school transition development process produced many critical differences in the study. The number of years the programs have been in existence was one difference. School A began its program five years ago; School B began four years ago, while Schools C and D began two years ago. School B and School D included all freshmen in their program, while School A and School C targeted the at-risk students. During the development process, only Schools A and C worked closely with the middle school.

When the freshman transition teams were deciding what to include in their programs, Schools B and C identified a need to address bullying in their schools. Schools A and D did not address bullying. Schools A and B addressed literacy in their planning of the program while School D implemented across-the-curriculum reading, but School C did not mention literacy. Only School B decided to offer incentives for students to attend tutoring.

Critical Differences for Research Question 2: Program Design

The four high schools had vast differences in their program design. One significant difference was the separation of the freshmen from the remaining students in the school, which occurred in School A and School D. Another difference noted was that School D allowed its teachers to have common planning time. The other three schools' studies did not offer a common planning time for their teachers. Although all four schools offered pre-high-school activities, School A and School D offered a summer program, whereas School B and School C did not. Another critical difference is that School A and School C only scheduled their at-risk students in the freshman transition program, whereas School B and School D included all students in all levels of classes.

School B and School C offered a structured study hall, while School A and School D did not. School A and School C made tutoring mandatory for all students in need, whereas School B and School D offered tutoring on a voluntary basis. In addition to voluntary tutoring, School B offered the students who came to tutoring incentives for participation.

Critical Differences for Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

The four high schools had distinct differences with identified inhibitors. School C and School D had problems with teacher dedication to the freshman transition program. School C identified the issue of having some of the wrong people in the design process and School D identified highly successful teachers being replaced with newer inexperienced teachers as the issue. School A and School B did not identify teacher dedication as an inhibitor. In the teacher survey, School D identified communication as

an issue. School C identified the implementation timeline as an inhibitor during the process, but the issue was alleviated with better planning.

Critical Differences for Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success

All schools utilized the freshman promotion rate as their prioritized criterion. The critical differences came with the other data used for criteria. School A and School D used the students' pass results on the state standardized tests. School A and School C used the individual course pass rates for freshmen. School B did not use attendance or disciplinary records as an indicator. All of the criteria identified for the four schools were quantitative information.

Comparisons of Findings for Each School to Literature Review

The review of literature emphasized numerous variables for each research question. One emphasis was the importance of providing extra time and help to meet academic expectations (Bottoms, 2002). All four schools provided extra time and help for all freshmen to help them achieve the school's academic expectations. Another common trait among the four high schools was the utilization of monitoring the student progress using data. Orfield and others (2001) placed a high emphasis on using performance-based assessment systems. Dr. Lynnell Gibson identified the variables of interest for freshman transition programs in her dissertation and is listed on page 34.

Comparison of Findings for Each School to Literature Review

Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation

Twelve criteria identified in the literature review and listed in Appendix J, Table J1 were linked to research Question 1. They were

1. Block/flexible scheduling
2. Well-defined goals and objectives
3. Teacher voice in planning and implementation
4. Teacher teams
5. Include all freshmen
6. Include only first-time freshmen
7. Separate ninth-grade facility/area
8. Effective dropout prevention methods
9. Parental involvement
10. Pre-high-school activities
11. Common planning time for teachers
12. Students identified as at-risk

School A

School A adapted nine of the suggested practices in its planning and implementation listed in Appendix J. School A developed a well-defined set of goals and objectives. The teachers had input in the planning and implementation process and were teamed by subject area in their transition program. The freshman transition program enrolled only first-time freshmen. The program was set up in a different part of the building, isolating students for their academic courses. The counselors of the school met with the parents and encouraged their involvement. Pre-high-school activities were

developed to help the transition program. The at-risk students were identified with the help of the middle school teachers.

School B

School B adapted seven of the suggested practices listed in Appendix J. The teachers and administrators of School B developed well-defined goals and objectives. The teachers did have a voice in the planning and implementation of the program. Their program included all freshmen, and they only allowed first-time freshmen in the program. School B's program included effective dropout prevention methods, and parents were involved. The program included the development of pre-high-school activities.

School C

School C adapted only five of the suggested practices listed in Appendix J. The teachers of School C had a voice in planning and implementation of the freshman transition program. The school personnel included effective dropout procedures. Parents were involved in the planning and implementation process. Pre-high-school activities were present in the program. School C identified and tracked at-risk students.

School D

School D adapted eight of the suggested practices in its planning and implementation. School D was the only high school surveyed that utilized block scheduling. The school personnel developed well-defined goals and objectives, and its teachers had a voice in the planning and implementation process. Teacher teams were set

up pairing English with social studies and math with science teachers. All freshmen were included in their program. A separate ninth-grade area was designated in the building for the core-level courses. Pre-high-school activities were included in the program. School D scheduled common planning time for teachers.

Summary of Comparison of Findings to Literature Review for Planning and Implementation

All four schools shared characteristics such as their teachers having a voice in the planning and implementation stage, and pre-high-school activities were developed for all schools. School C did not identify the development of well-defined goals and objectives. School A and School D used the teacher-team format. School A and School C chose only at-risk freshmen to be in their program, while School B and School D included all freshmen. School A and School B included only first-time freshmen. School A and School D isolated their programs from the general student body. School D did not identify effective dropout prevention methods in its program. School D also did not identify parental involvement in its planning and implementation process. School D, however, was the only school that scheduled common planning time for teachers and used the block-scheduling format.

Research Question 2: Program Design

There were five suggested practices identified in the literature review (refer to Appendix J, Table J2) that corresponded with Research Question 2:

1. Use of data to monitor achievement

2. A special transition course for freshmen
3. Catch-up courses
4. Initiating new grading practices
5. Academic interventions.

School A

School A adapted four of the five suggested practices identified in the literature review. Student achievement was monitored with the use of data. A special transition course, which included study skills, was developed for its program. Catch-up courses were offered for students in need, and academic interventions were put into place to address remediation concerns before a student feel too far behind in his/her coursework.

School B, School C, and School D

The three high schools A, B, and D are grouped together in this section because they shared the same three suggested practices for their program design. All three schools used data to monitor student achievement. The three schools all offered catch-up courses for their students as well as academic interventions for remediation purposes.

Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors

Lack of student motivation and inexperienced teachers were two inhibiting factors that continued to stand out during comparison with the review of literature (refer to Appendix J, Table J3). School A, School C, and School D all identified inexperienced teachers as an inhibitor. These same three schools identified student motivation (i. e. attendance issues) as another inhibitor. Communication issues were identified in the

teacher survey as an inhibitor. Not all four high schools, however, felt that lack of funding was an inhibitor.

Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success

Three suggested practices emerged from the review of literature (refer to Appendix J, Table J4) to help determine success of a freshman transition program. The first was all parties working together to bridge communication gaps. The second was the use of projects and field trips to enhance the freshman experience. The third practice was the use of data to monitor student achievement.

All four schools used data to monitor student achievement and used data such as freshman promotion rate to judge the overall success of the entire program. All four schools also identified that all parties involved were working together to improve the communication gaps. School A identified the use of projects and field trips to enhance the freshman experience.

Summary of Comparisons of Findings from the Literature Review

Of the 22 indicators identified in the above comparisons, six of them were implemented by all four high schools. These suggested practices have helped guide other school systems according to the research. The six suggested practices that all four schools implemented were

1. Use of data to monitor student achievement (Program Design and Criteria for Success)
2. Bridging communication gaps to improve communication

3. Academic interventions for remediation purposes
4. Offering catch-up courses
5. Pre-high-school activities
6. Teacher voice in planning and implementation process.

All six of these suggested practices are critical to the process of implementing a freshman transition program. The data provide solid evidence of the program's results. Improving communication among all parties involved (i. e. parents, students, teachers, administrators) helps stop confusion. Offering remediation and catch-up opportunities prevents a student from falling behind and beginning his or her freshman year failing. Pre-high-school activities allow the students to familiarize themselves with the high school atmosphere and programs available.

Implications for Practice

The purpose of this study was to add valuable insight to the knowledge that exists for freshman transition programs. Each of the four high schools realized that problems existed and chose to investigate different strategies for improvement. Freshman retention rates were high; as a result, schools investigated ways to increase their promotion rates to the tenth grade. Issues existed with communication, lack of study skills, and lack of remediation. The high schools not only focused on instructional strategies, but they also developed teams to address bullying, attendance issues, dropout prevention, pre-high-school activities and which criteria would be used to judge success of their programs.

Results from the four high schools in this study yielded successful results in the freshman promotion rates of the schools. A listing of each school's retention rates for the last five years is provided in Table 12.

Table 12

Five-Year Comparison of Retention Rates for All Four Schools

School	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
School A	26%	38%	17.50%	10%	7.60%
School B	18.50%	11%	11%	14%	5%
School C	15%	31%	11%	12.50%	16%
School D	10.50%	23%	6%	1%	19%

School A started its transition program five years ago. The freshman retention rate actually increased to 38% after the first year. Then the effects of the transition program were noticed as the retention rate dropped 20.5% the third year, another 7.5% the fourth year and 2.4% the fifth year. This retention rate in the last year calculated was 7.6%.

School B started with a 11% retention rate when the program was implemented. Success occurred slowly as the retention rate actually rose to 14.5% before dropping to 5%.

School C produced a trend of a fluctuating retention rate. School C's program began two years ago, and its retention rate was as high as 31% before, and currently stands at 16%.

School D also has a very unstable retention rate. In 2004-05, School D had a retention rate of 23%. The next year it dropped to 6%, then to 1% in 2006-07. This past year, the retention rate increased to 19%. Recently School D has identified personnel issues with

newer inexperienced teachers not buying into the program, and this increase could be the result of this phenomenon.

Implications for Practice for Planning and Implementation

When a high school administrative team decides to move toward a freshman transition program, there is usually a reason backed by data for the decision. Improving promotion rates of freshmen is the major motive identified for the move toward the implementation of the program. Educators should strive to understand what successful programs have done to ensure success for the implementation process. Teachers want to and should have a voice in the process. The four high schools used an initial investigative team including administrators from the school and central office levels, teachers and counselors. Support for the programs came from all levels of the school system. Parents were not included on any of the investigative teams, but school systems should consider including parents in the process. Another focus that came from this study is the importance of the implementation of study skills in the freshman transition program.

Implications for Practice for Program Design

The design of any freshman transition program should include key components. Study skills are one identified in this study. Another component is pre-high-school activities. All four high schools in this study had pre-high-school activities, and two implemented a summer bridge program for their incoming students. Each program design in this study addressed issues specific to each high school. The overall theme that other

school personnel could glean from this study is to address the issues specific to the high school they serve.

Implications for Practice concerning Inhibiting Factors

The purpose of this study was to add valuable insight to the knowledge that exists for freshman transition programs. Proactive school personnel should consider factors that could inhibit the process of developing and implementing a program. Understanding what other high school teams have experienced in the process of implementing a successful transition program could save future freshman transition investigative teams' time and resources. One suggested practice identified was including parents in the development and planning stages. Lack of parental support was an issue identified in this study. Another inhibitor was the poor faculty commitment level. Placing the right teachers in the program could be the difference for student success. Inexperienced teachers teaching freshmen were also identified as an inhibitor. More seasoned teachers have better classroom management, and this skill is needed with students who are struggling with the transition period.

Implications for Practice concerning Criteria Used to Determine Success

High schools continue to look for ways to improve attendance and graduation rates as they strive to meet the No Child Left Behind mandates. All four high schools in this study identified promotion rates as their priority to implement a freshman transition program. When students are promoted to the tenth grade, their chance of succeeding

increases. This rationale is why it is important for high schools to solve the freshman transition dilemma. Results from this study can help other high school personnel understand the process of a freshman transition program and the importance of limiting class size and school size.

Limitations of the Study

This study focused on school population sizes of 300-900 students. School divisions seeking transition methods for larger high schools may not benefit from this study. This study did not take into account the socio-economic situation of the community the high school served. Another limitation is that high schools of this size have a smaller percentage of teachers who directly teach freshmen.

Major Assumptions

The author accounted for five major assumptions while developing this study:

1. Each of the four high schools evaluated in this study has freshman transition plans.
2. The freshman transition plan has been sustainable.
3. Each high school developed a unique freshman transition plan internally.
4. Each high school has unique elements within its plan.
5. The freshman transition plans evaluated share common traits.

Recommendations for Further Study

1. A study that focuses on the success of at-risk students in relation to transition programs.
2. A study that would examine effects of four similar schools (student population) implementing the same transitional program with the same variables to see whether promotion rates are consistent.
3. A study on freshman retention rates and how retention rates affect the four-year graduation rate of a high school.
4. A comparison study on freshman transition programs using inexperienced teachers and a freshman transition program using experienced teachers in relation to student success.
5. A comparison study of the different study skills programs implemented in freshman transition programs on effectiveness for student achievement.

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Appendix A

Freshman Transition Teacher Survey

Please answer each question below by circling the number that represents your level of agreement.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Applicable
	5	4	3	2	1
1. Teachers have a voice in planning and in implementing my schools program	5	4	3	2	1
2. Effective dropout prevention measures are incorporated into the transition program	5	4	3	2	1
3. Ninth graders have shown improvement as a result of parent involvement	5	4	3	2	1
4. Pre-high-school activities address students' academic and social needs	5	4	3	2	1
5. Students are grouped according to their ability.	5	4	3	2	1
6. Student progress is consistently monitored through use of data.	5	4	3	2	1
7. The ninth-grade transition program is adequately funded.	5	4	3	2	1
8. Projects and field trips enhance students' ninth-grade experiences	5	4	3	2	1
9. Double doses of academic subjects have resulted in improved student achievement	5	4	3	2	1
10. Study skills and remediation opportunities are offered to ninth graders who need academic support	5	4	3	2	1
11. All stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps.	5	4	3	2	1
12. Students who experience academic difficulties receive needed support	5	4	3	2	1
13. Special funding is allotted for the transition program.	5	4	3	2	1
14. Failing students are able to "catch up" and stay on course for promotion	5	4	3	2	1
15. Parent involvement has resulted in improved student achievement	5	4	3	2	1
16. Class size is reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of students	5	4	3	2	1
17. Teachers who work with ninth graders are the most experienced teachers in the school	5	4	3	2	1
18. A structured study hall enhances the transition program.	5	4	3	2	1

19. Ninth graders have benefited from the ninth-grade transition program	5	4	3	2	1
20. The ninth- grade transition program in this school has resulted in improved promotion rates	5	4	3	2	1

Appendix B

Freshman Transition-Focused Principal Questionnaire

Research Question 1

- How did your high school plan the components that support the initial designs of its transition program?
- What was your school's initial plan for designing a ninth-grade transition program?
- What roles did teachers, administrators, students, parents, etc. have in developing your program?
- Discuss the dynamics of team cohesiveness and how teacher turnover may or may not affect program design:
- How long has your program existed?

This question correlates with the following Teacher Survey Questions:

1 – teacher voice in planning and implementing the design

2 – dropout prevention measures

3 – student improvement from parental involvement

4 – pre-high-school activities

19 – student benefit from the program.

Research Question 2

- What elements make up the designs of the transition program?

- What are your students' academic needs?
- What strategies did your school adapt to address the academic needs of your ninth-grade students?
- How did you determine which strategies your school would use to address the academic needs of your ninth graders?
- How did you plan for implementing these academic strategies?
- What strategies have you used to address the academic needs of students in the following subjects?
 - Math
 - English
 - Science
 - History
 - Physical Education
 - Electives
- What are your students' social needs?
- How did you determine which social strategies would meet the needs of your students?
- To what extent have you been able to monitor the social development of students in your school's transition program?
- To what extent will social strategies be modified or newly adopted?

This question correlates with the following Teacher Survey Questions:

6 – monitoring of student progress

10 – study skills, remediation given as needed

12 – students receive needed support

14 – catch-up opportunities offered

18 – structured study hall enhances program

Research Question 3

- What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of the ninth-grade transition program in your school?

Inhibiting Factors

- a. Planning
- b. Implementing
- c. Sustaining

This question correlates with the following Teacher Survey Questions:

5 – ability grouping

7 – adequate funding

13 – special funding

16 – class size

17 – description of teachers who work with program.

Research Question 4

- What criteria does your school use to determine the success of its transition program?

This question correlates with the following Teacher Survey Questions:

8 – projects and activities enhance ninth-grade experience

9 – double doses of subjects

11 – stakeholders work together

15 – parent involvement

20 – improved promotion rates

Appendix C

Survey: General Demographics of Each High School

General Information – Each principal provided this information as part of the Principal Questionnaire.

Please describe your school and its student population. Include the following:

- a. total enrollment
- b. Number of ninth graders
- c. Number of first-time tenth graders
- d. Socioeconomic, gender, and ethnic make-up of student population
- e. Socioeconomic, gender, and ethnic count of students who make up the freshman transition program
- f. Surrounding community in which the school is located
- g. Total number and percentage of special-education students
- h. Total number and percentage of honors students
- i. Total number and percentage of gifted-education students

Appendix D

Summary of Survey Results for all Four Schools

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, NA = Not Applicable

Statements	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
1. Teacher voice in planning	10	19.5	30	59	8	15.5	3	6		
2. Dropout prevention	9	17.5	32	63	9	17.5	1	2		
3. Student improvement from parental involvement	6	12	29	57	13	25	2	4	1	2
4. Pre-high-school activities	10	19.5	26	51	11	21.5	3	6	1	2
19. Student benefit from program	7	14	39	76	4	8			1	2
6. Monitoring of student progress	13	25	30	59	8	16				
10. Study skills and remediation available	12	23	32	63	7	14				
12. Students receive needed support	6	12	38	74	7	14				
14. Catch-up opportunities offered	5	10	34	66	10	20			2	4
18. Structured study hall enhances program	5	10	19	37	12	24	1	2	14	27
5. Ability grouping	6	12	28	55	8	15.5	9	17.5		
7. Program adequately funded	3	6	36	70.5	9	17.5			3	6
13. Special funding allotted	1	2	43	84	5	10			2	4
16. Reasonable class sizes	13	25	28	55	3	6	7	14		
17. Most experienced teachers teaching freshmen	4	8	21	41	18	35	4	8	4	8
8. Projects and field trips enhance freshman year	7	14	29	57	7	14	1	2	7	14
9. Double-doses of academic subjects	1	2	30	59	14	27	1	2	5	10
11. Stakeholders bridge communication gaps	4	8	35	68	10	20	1	2	1	2
15. Parental involvement	2	4	32	63	14	27	1	2	2	4
20. Improved promotion rates	2	4	39	76	8	16	1	2	1	2

Appendix E

Summary of Common Elements of All Four Schools

Common Elements	School A	School B	School C	School D
Clear, defined set of goals and expectations	X	X		X
Teacher voice in planning and implementation	X	X	X	X
Selected all freshmen		X		X
Selected only first-time freshmen	X	X		
Separate freshman facility/area	X			X
Effective dropout prevention methods	X	X	X	
Parental involvement	X	X	X	
Pre-high-school activities	X	X	X	X
Common planning for teachers				X
Middle-school involvement in development	X		X	
Study skills addressed in development	X	X	X	X
Bullying addressed in development		X	X	
Summer program designed	X			X
Freshmen benefited from program	X	X	X	X
Freshman tutoring program offered		X	X	X
Literacy addressed in program	X	X		
Focus on four core areas	X	X	X	X

Common Elements	School A	School B	School C	School D
Incentives offered		X		
Character education addressed in program	X	X		
Professional development for teachers	X	X	X	X
Student progress monitored by data	X	X	X	X
Study skills/remediation offered	X	X	X	X
Support offered to students in need	X	X	X	X
Failing students can catch up	X	X	X	X
Structured study hall utilized for freshmen		X	X	
Ability grouping	X	X	X	
Class size	X	X	X	
Inexperienced teachers	X		X	X
Undedicated teachers			X	X
Lack of parental involvement	X	X		
Lack of common planning time	X			
Communication issues				X
Attendance issues	X		X	X
Discipline issues	X		X	X
Implementation timeline			X	
Promotion rates	X	X	X	X
State standardized test rates	X			X
Pass rates for individual courses	X		X	

Common Elements	School A	School B	School C	School D
Projects and field trips	X			
Freshman transition course developed	X			
Teacher teams	X			X
Common planning for teachers				X
Block scheduling				X
Working together to bridge communication gaps	X	X	X	X
Discipline	X		X	X
Student attendance	X		X	X
Tracking at-risk students	X		X	

Appendix F

Teacher Survey Results Tables for School A

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D + Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, NA = Not
Applicable

Table F1

Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation of Program in School A

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Teachers have a voice in planning and in implementing the school program	3	17	13	72	1	5.5	1	5.5	0	0
Effective dropout prevention measures are incorporated into the transition program	5	28	11	61	2	11	0	0	0	0
Freshmen have shown improvement as a result of parental involvement	3	16.5	12	67	3	16.5	0	0	0	0
Pre-high school activities address students' academic and social needs	5	28	6	33	5	28	1	5.5	1	5.5
Ninth graders have benefited from participating in a freshman transition program	2	11.5	15	83	1	5.5	0	0	0	0

Table F2

Research Question 2: Program Design in School A

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Student progress is consistently monitored through use of data	4	22	12	67	2	11	0	0	0	0
Study skills and remediation opportunities are offered to freshmen who need additional academic support	9	50	9	50	0	0	0	0	0	0
Students who experience academic difficulties receive needed support	3	16.5	13	72	2	11.5	0	0	0	0
Failing students are able to “catch up” and stay on course for promotion	3	16.5	12	67	3	16.5	0	0	0	0
The structured study hall enhances the transition program	2	11	9	50	4	22	1	6	2	11

Table F3

Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors in School A

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Students are grouped according to their ability	2	11	13	72	2	11	1	6	0	0
The ninth grade transition program is adequately funded	1	6	13	72	4	22	0	0	0	0
Special funding is allotted for the transition program	1	6	16	88	0	0	0	0	1	6
Class size is reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of students	3	16.5	14	78	1	5.5	0	0	0	0
Teachers who work with ninth graders are the most experienced teachers in the school	0	0	8	44	7	41.5	1	6	2	11

Table F4

Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success in School A

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Projects and field trips enhance students' ninth-grade experience	4	22	10	55	3	17	0	0	1	6
Double-doses of academic subjects have resulted in improved student achievement	0	0	13	72	4	22.5	0	0	1	5.5
All stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps	1	5.5	14	78	2	11	0	0	1	5.5
Parent involvement has resulted in improved student achievement	0	0	14	78	4	22	0	0	0	0
The freshman transition program in this school has resulted in improved promotion rates	0	0	14	78	3	16.5	0	0	1	5.5

Appendix G

Teacher Survey Results Tables for School B

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, NA = Not
Applicable

Table G1

Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation of Program in School B

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Teachers have a voice in planning and in implementing the school program	4	36	6	55	1	9	0	0	0	0
Effective dropout prevention measures are incorporated into the transition program	3	27	8	73	0	0	0	0	0	0
Freshmen have shown improvement as a result of parental involvement	1	9	9	82	0	0	1	9	0	0
Pre-high school activities address students' academic and social needs	1	9	9	82	1	9	0	0	0	0
Ninth graders have benefited from participating in a freshman transition program	2	18	8	73	0	0	0	0	1	9

Table G2

Research Question 2: Program Design in School B

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Student progress is consistently monitored through use of data	4	36	6	55	1	9	0	0	0	0
Study skills and remediation opportunities are offered to freshmen who need additional academic support	3	27	7	64	1	9	0	0	0	0
Students who experience academic difficulties receive needed support	3	27	7	64	1	9	0	0	0	0
Failing students are able to “catch up” and stay on course for promotion	0	0	10	91	1	9	0	0	0	0
The structured study hall enhances the transition program	1	9	4	26	6	55	0	0	0	0

Table G3

Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors in School B

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Students are grouped according to their ability	2	18	5	46	4	36	0	0	0	0
The ninth-grade transition program is adequately funded	2	18	6	55	2	18	0	0	1	9
Special funding is allotted for the transition program	0	0	7	64	4	36	0	0	0	0
Class size is reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of students	4	36	6	55	0	0	1	9	0	0
Teachers who work with ninth graders are the most experienced teachers in the school	2	18	8	73	1	9	0	0	0	0

Table G4

Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success in School B

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Projects and field trips enhance students' ninth grade experience	1	9	6	55	2	18	1	9	1	9
Double-doses of academic subjects have resulted in improved student achievement	1	9	6	55	1	9	1	9	2	18
All stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps	3	27	6	55	1	9	1	9	0	0
Parent involvement has resulted in improved student achievement	0	0	8	73	2	18	1	9	0	0
The freshman transition program in this school has resulted in improved promotion rates	2	18	7	64	2	18	0	0	0	0

Appendix H

Teacher Survey Results Tables for School C

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, NA = Not Applicable

Table H1

Research Question 1: Planning and Implementation of Program in School C

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Teachers have a voice in planning and in implementing the school program	2	17	6	50	4	33	0	0	0	0
Effective dropout prevention measures are incorporated into the transition program	0	0	10	83	2	17	0	0	0	0
Freshmen have shown improvement as a result of parental involvement	2	17	4	33	6	50	0	0	0	0
Pre-high school activities address students' academic and social needs	4	33	4	33	4	33	0	0	0	0
Ninth graders have benefited from participating in a freshman transition program	2	17	10	83	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table H2

Research Question 2: Program Design in School C

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Student progress is consistently monitored through use of data	4	33	6	50	2	17	0	0	0	0
Study skills and remediation opportunities are offered to freshmen who need additional academic support	0	0	8	66	4	33	0	0	0	0
Students who experience academic difficulties receive needed support	0	0	12	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
Failing students are able to “catch up” and stay on course for promotion	2	17	6	50	2	17	0	0	2	17
The structured study hall enhances the transition program	2	17	6	50	2	17	0	0	2	17

Table H3

Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors in School C

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Students are grouped according to their ability	2	17	8	66	0	0	2	17	0	0
The ninth-grade transition program is adequately funded	0	0	8	66	2	17	0	0	2	17
Special funding is allotted for the transition program	0	0	12	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
Class size is reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of students	6	50	4	33	0	0	2	17	0	0
Teachers who work with ninth graders are the most experienced teachers in the school	2	17	2	17	6	50	0	0	2	17

Table H4

Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success in School C

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Projects and field trips enhance students' ninth grade experience	2	17	6	50	0	0	0	0	4	33
Double-doses of academic subjects have resulted in improved student achievement	0	0	6	50	4	33	0	0	2	17
All stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps	0	0	8	66	4	33	0	0	0	0
Parent involvement has resulted in improved student achievement	2	17	6	50	4	33	0	0	0	0
The freshman transition program in this school has resulted in improved promotion rates	0	0	10	83	2	17	0	0	0	0

Appendix I

Teacher Survey Results Tables for School D

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree, NA = Not Applicable

Table II

Planning and Implementation of Program in School D

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Teachers have a voice in planning and in implementing the school program	1	10	5	50	2	20	2	20	0	0
Effective dropout prevention measures are incorporated into the transition program	1	10	3	30	5	50	1	10	0	0
Freshmen have shown improvement as a result of parental involvement	0	0	4	40	4	40	1	10	1	10
Pre-high school activities address students' academic and social needs	0	0	7	70	1	10	2	20	0	0
Ninth graders have benefited from participating in a freshman transition program	1	10	6	60	3	30	0	0	0	0

Table I2

Research Question 2: Program Design in School D

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Student progress is consistently monitored through use of data	1	10	6	60	3	30	0	0	0	0
Study skills and remediation opportunities are offered to freshmen who need additional academic support	0	0	8	80	2	20	0	0	0	0
Students who experience academic difficulties receive needed support	0	0	6	60	4	40	0	0	0	0
Failing students are able to “catch up” and stay on course for promotion	0	0	6	60	4	40	0	0	0	0
The structured study hall enhances the transition program	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	100

Table I3

Research Question 3: Inhibiting Factors in School D

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Students are grouped according to their ability	0	0	2	20	2	20	6	60	0	0
The ninth-grade transition program is adequately funded	0	0	9	90	1	10	0	0	0	0
Special funding is allotted for the transition program	0	0	8	80	1	10	0	0	1	10
Class size is reasonable in respect to the subject and needs of students	0	0	4	40	2	20	4	40	0	0
Teachers who work with ninth graders are the most experienced teachers in the school	0	0	3	30	4	40	3	30	0	0

Table I4

Research Question 4: Criteria Used to Determine Success in School D

Survey Statement	SA		A		D		SD		NA	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Projects and field trips enhance students' ninth-grade experience	0	0	6	60	2	20	0	0	1	10
Double-doses of academic subjects have resulted in improved student achievement	0	0	5	50	5	50	0	0	0	0
All stakeholders work together to bridge communication gaps	0	0	7	70	3	30	0	0	0	0
Parent involvement has resulted in improved student achievement	0	0	4	40	4	40	0	0	2	20
The freshman transition program in this school has resulted in improved promotion rates	0	0	8	80	1	10	1	10	0	0

Appendix J

Summary of Comparisons of Findings to Suggested Practices from the Literature Review

Table J1

*Summary of Comparison of Findings to Suggested Practices from the Literature Review
for Planning and Implementation*

Practices Implemented from Review of Literature	School A	School B	School C	School D
Block/flexible scheduling				X
Well-defined goals and objectives	X	X		X
Teacher voice in planning and implementation	X	X	X	X
Teacher teams	X			X
Include all freshmen		X		X
Include only first-time freshmen	X	X		
Separate ninth-grade facility/area	X			X
Effective dropout prevention methods	X	X	X	
Parental involvement	X	X	X	
Pre-high-school activities	X	X	X	X
Common planning time for teachers				X
Students identified as at-risk	X		X	

Table J2

Summary of Comparison of Findings for Suggested Practices from the Literature Review for Program Design

Practices Implemented from Review of Literature	School A	School B	School C	School D
Use of data to monitor student achievement	X	X	X	X
Special transition course for freshmen	X			
Catch-up courses	X	X	X	X
New grading practices				
Academic interventions	X	X	X	X

Table J3

Summary of Comparison of Findings for Suggested Practices from the Literature Review for Inhibiting Factors

Practices Implemented from Review of Literature	School A	School B	School C	School D
Inexperienced teachers	X		X	X
Funding allotments				
Student motivation	X		X	X

Table J4

Summary of Comparisons of Findings for Suggested Practices from the Literature

Review for Criteria Used to Determine Success

Practices Implemented from Review of Literature	School A	School B	School C	School D
Bridging communication gaps	X	X	X	X
Projects and field trips	X			
Use of data to monitor student achievement	X	X	X	X

Appendix K

Defining Graduation Rates

Before 2005, all fifty states had the freedom to report the high school graduation rate with their own self-imposed formula. The situation created confusion as different states calculated the rates with different formulas. Some states included modified standard diplomas while others did not. Some states included the General Education Development (GED) tests while others did not.

In 2005, all fifty state governors made an unprecedented commitment to implement a common formula for calculating their state's high school graduation rate (Neugent, 2006). The governors named the document the National Governors Association (NGA) Graduation Counts Compact. The Compact contained four key commitments: to use a common, four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate formula; to build state data collection and reporting capacity; to develop additional student outcome indicators; and to report annually on their progress toward meeting these commitments (2006).

The Compact formula the 50 governors agreed on is

Graduation Rate = [students graduating within four years with a diploma] ÷ [(first-time entering ninth graders four years earlier)]

Sixteen states now report that they use the Compact formula to calculate their high school graduation rate. Five more plan to do a report later in 2008 (including

Virginia), eight more in 2009 and nine more in 2010. Six states plan to implement the Compact formula in 2001, and one plans to do so in 2012. Five states are still uncertain about their plans to use the formula. Following is the year in which each of the United States has identified that it will use the Compact formula to compute its four-year graduation rate:

1996 – Texas

2004 – New York

2005 – Arizona

2006 – Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Vermont

2007 – Delaware, Massachusetts, Minnesota, South Carolina

2008 – Alaska, Colorado, Iowa, Michigan, Rhode Island, Utah, Virginia

2009- Alabama, Georgia, Kansas, New Mexico, Oregon, South Dakota, Washington,
Wisconsin

2010 – California, Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Nevada,
Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee

2011 – Kentucky, Maryland, Missouri, Nebraska, Ohio, Wyoming

2012 – West Virginia

Uncertain – Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Montana, North Dakota

A consistently used graduation rate formula is needed. As of now, five different graduation rates are reported for the state of Virginia. They are

1. Virginia On-Time Graduation Rate – Published for the first time in Fall 2008 on the School Report Card and available on the Virginia Department of Education’s web site

(Actual Rate)

Formula:

On-Time Diploma Graduates in Year X

[(# of 1st time entering ninth graders in Year X-4) + (Transfers in) – (Transfers out and deceased)]

2. Virginia Unadjusted Graduation Rate – Published in Table 5 of the Superintendent’s Annual Report (Estimated Rate)

Formula:

All Diploma Graduates in Year X

Ninth Grade Membership in Year X – four

3. Virginia No Child Left Behind Graduation Rate – Published in the School Report Card and used for AYP (Estimated Rate)

Formula:

Standard and Advanced Studies Diploma Graduates in Year X

*All Diploma Graduates and Completers in Year X + (12th-grade Dropouts for Year X)
+ (11th-grade Dropouts for Year X-1) + (10th-grade Dropouts for Year X-2) + (9th-
grade Dropouts for Year X-3)*

4. Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate – Calculated by the National Center for Educational Statistics (Estimated Rate)

Formula:

All Diploma Graduates in Year X

*[(8th-grade Membership in Year X – 5) + (9th-grade Membership in Year X – 4) +
(10th-grade Membership in Year X – 3)] ÷ 3*

5. Cumulative Promotion Index – Published by Education Week in its annual Diploma Counts report (Estimated Rate)

Formula:

$$\frac{10^{\text{th}} \text{ Graders Year } X}{9^{\text{th}} \text{ Graders Year } X - 1} \times \frac{11^{\text{th}} \text{ Graders Year } X}{10^{\text{th}} \text{ Graders Year } X - 1} \times \frac{12^{\text{th}} \text{ Graders Year } X}{11^{\text{th}} \text{ Graders Year } X - 1} \\ \times \frac{\text{Spring Graduates Year } X}{12^{\text{th}} \text{ Grade Fall Membership Year } X}$$

Appendix L

Sample Letter to the Superintendent of Each of the Four School Systems Seeking Permission to Survey His Faculty and Principal

Dr. *(name)*
Superintendent, *(School System)*
Address
Address

Dear *(name)*:

I am an Ed. D. candidate at Liberty University, and I am seeking permission to conduct an on-line survey to the teachers and principal of Liberty High School. My dissertation topic is *Obtaining Success with Freshman Transition Plans: A Study of Programs in Four High Schools in Virginia*: I have spoken with *(principal's name)* about the survey and the use of his faculty in this process.

As a current principal, I am aware of the time constraints of the faculty and principal. The survey will be twenty questions formatted in a rubric style that will take approximately thirty minutes. I am also asking the principal of the school to give a detailed description of its freshman transition plan. The proposed survey technique is an on-line method, such as Survey Monkey, which will be e-mailed directly to the teachers.

If you approve this request, please type a brief letter of approval on your school division letterhead. I have enclosed a self-addressed, stamped envelope for your convenience. Upon approval, I will work with the principal on the dissemination of the survey to the faculty.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Martin Ringstaff
Ed. D. Candidate, Liberty University