

THE EFFECT OF GEORGIA NINTH GRADE ACADEMIES
ON END OF COURSE TEST SCORES,
GRADUATION RATE, AND
ATTENDANCE

by

Andrea S. Irvin

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

April, 2013

THE EFFECT OF GEORGIA NINTH GRADE ACADEMIES
ON END OF COURSE TEST SCORES,
GRADUATION RATE, AND
ATTENDANCE

by

Andrea S. Irvin

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

April, 2013

APPROVED BY:

Gary Kuhne, D. Ed., Committee Chair

Jared Bigham, Ed.D, Committee Member

Wayne Lovell, Ph. D, Committee Member

Scott B. Watson PhD, Associate Dean, Advanced Programs

ABSTRACT

Andrea Stewart Irvin. THE EFFECT OF GEORGIA NINTH GRADE ACADEMIES ON END OF COURSE TEST SCORES, GRADUATION RATE, AND ATTENDANCE (under the direction of Dr. Gary Kuhne) School of Education, Liberty University, April, 2013.

The purpose of this quantitative causal-comparative study was to explore the effect of Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities as an approach to further student success in comparison to Traditional Comprehensive High School structures in the state of Georgia. This study sought to determine if students who attended a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community during their freshman year had a higher rate of attendance, increased student achievement as measured by the Georgia End of Course Test scores in Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I, and a higher Graduation Rate in comparison to students who did not attend a Ninth Grade Academy, but rather a Traditional Comprehensive High School configuration during the school year of 2007-2008. For all dependent variables that were used to measure achievement for the research questions: Graduation Rate, attendance, and End of Course Tests in Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I, there was a significant statistical difference between the two groups. For all research questions, the results indicated the Traditional Comprehensive High Schools measured higher percentages in Graduation Rate, End of Course Tests, and attendance than the Ninth Grade Academies.

DEDICATION

Throughout this journey, my prayer line to God has kept me going. I find the verses of The Beatitudes to be especially important reminders of our human weaknesses and how with His strength anything is possible. The Beatitudes justly define the rewards waiting on us in heaven if we suffer the trials of this life. It is with modest grace that I am able to attain this goal. Matthew 5:3 reminds me, “Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”. As I accept this degree, I am humbled; I understand that all things are done through Him and this accomplishment is owed to the strength He provides.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I want to praise my husband for following me throughout this journey. Mark, you have been the one that told me if I wanted to do it, I could and I would. I could not ask for more of a personal coach than you. From late night proofreading sessions, to your diligence in measuring the margins on my manuscript, you have been my solid support. I will always rest assured that if anyone does, you believe in me!

Secondly, I want to commend Liberty University and all of their wonderful faculty and staff. I have not only grown as an educator, but I have grown as a Christian throughout my studies

To Dr. Kuhne, you have tolerated formatting problems, hyperventilating emails, and above all you remained a supporter and encourager. I appreciate all of your time, energy, and prayers toward helping me meet this goal.

To Dr. Bigham and Dr. Lovell, sheer words of gratitude are not enough to offer such wonderful advisors. Wayne, you have inspired me to no end with your support as an advisor, fellow educator, and as a principal. I will forever be in debt.

Dr. Watson must have a place in this acknowledgement, for he is also responsible for my perseverance- and helped me become a published author long before this manuscript was completed. I admire you, respect you as a fellow educator, and will always hold you in high esteem.

To my dear friends who also helped me along. From crying over statistics at midnight (on a school night) to celebrating passing the comprehensive exam on three-way phone calls, you guys are the best! We will forever be bonded by this experience.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	ii
List of Tables	vii
List of Figures	viii
List of Abbreviations	ix
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Background	2
Problem Statement	3
Purpose of the Study	4
Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	6
Definitions.....	8
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	10
Ninth Grade Transition Year.....	10
High School Reform.....	16
Theoretical Framework	20
Historical Background.....	25
Traditional Comprehensive High Schools	26
Ninth Grade Academies	27
Small Learning Communities	29
Graduation Rate.....	31
High School Dropouts.....	34
Attendance.....	38
End of Course Tests	41
Georgia’s Report Card	43
Summary	44
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	45
Research Design.....	46
Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	49
Participants	50
Setting.....	52
Instrumentation.....	52

Procedure.....	57
Data Analysis	59
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS.....	61
Participants	61
Sample Descriptive Statistics	62
Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	65
Summary	72
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION.....	74
Restatement of the Problem	74
Review of the Methodology.....	75
Summary of Results	77
Discussion	79
Limitations	83
Implications.....	87
Recommendations for Future Research	90
Conclusion.....	92
REFERENCES	94
Appendix A: IRB Approval.....	107
Appendix B: Central Office Personnel Survey.....	108
Appendix C: List of Public High Schools in the State of Georgia	109
Appendix D: Data Collection Spreadsheet Categories	126

List of Tables

Table 1. Frequencies & Percents for Traditional Comprehensive High Schools.....	64
Table 2. Frequencies & Percents for Ninth Grade Academies.....	64
Table 3. Mean Graduation Rate by School Group.....	67
Table 4. Test Statistics for Research Question 1.....	67
Table 5. Mean Rank of Literature Pass Rate by School Group.....	69
Table 6. Test Statistics for Research Question 2.....	69
Table 7. Mean Rank of Algebra Pass Rate by School Group.....	70
Table 8. Test Statistics for Research Question 3.....	70
Table 9. Mean Rank of Attendance Rate by School Group.....	71
Table 10. Test Statistics for Research Question 4.....	72

List of Figures

Figure 1. Distribution of Traditional Comprehensive High School Graduation Rate.....	66
Figure 2. Distribution of Ninth Grade Academy Graduation Rate.....	66

List of Abbreviations

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

American Educational Research Association (AERA)

American Psychological Association (APA)

End of Course Test (EOCT)

Georgia Department of Education (GDOE)

Georgia Performance Standards (GPS)

Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Local Education Agency (LEA)

National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME)

Ninth Grade Academy (NGA)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Race to the Top (RT3)

Small Learning Community (SLC)

Socio Economic Status (SES)

Standard Error of Measurement (SEM)

Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

It is no secret that America's schools have had dramatic changes implemented in them over the last decade due to the federal mandate of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). Educators have been persistently trying first one improvement plan, then another to create learning environments that produce results, results that will lead to schools achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). America's high schools are no exception to this type of pressure to achieve AYP. It is clear that American high schools are becoming stronger; however, the argument over how to further strengthen them still remains (Jerald, 2007). According to McCallumore & Sparapari (2010), the transition into high school is the first of many difficulties students face in today's secondary education programs. They state, "Transition difficulties coupled with increased state graduation requirements are only a few of the hurdles that ninth-grade students in particular have to overcome" (p. 455). Bottoms (2011) implies that schools and communities must work together to reduce the failure rate of America's ninth graders, suggesting that ninth grade failure is a "powerful" predictor of dropping out of high school.

Knowing that the ninth grade year is a determining factor for future success in high school, statistics show trends for high school graduates on the downfall. The National Center for Education Statistics (2010) projects that "the total number of high school graduates increased 32 percent between 1995–96 and 2007–08, a period of 12 years; and is projected to decrease 3 percent between 2007–08 and 2020–21, a period of 13 years"(p. 22). Coupled with transition difficulties, many ninth grade students' needs cannot be met in a larger, traditional comprehensive nine through twelve high school.

Lack of personal connectedness to faculty, lack of guidance in general, and lack of a feeling of belonging to the school community are all contributors to the overwhelming need for reform in our high schools for ninth grade students (Hall, 2006).

Background

Transition programs have been put into place to aid students in the bridge for what many researchers consider one of the most pivotal points in a student's education—the transition from middle school to high school. Rouse & Kemple (2009) state, “The difficulty of high school for many students in the United States begins the day they first set foot through its doors in ninth grade” (p. 10). Current research suggests that due to the rigorous demands often made on high school students that are not present at the middle school level, ninth graders suffer more academic losses, failures, and retentions, than any other grade level (Alspaugh, 1998). Accordingly, there is no one-size-fits-all model that can be followed when a new high school makes a decision on how many grades to include. It is, however, in the best interest of ninth grade students to certainly consider models of different learning communities for the specific needs of the learners (Steverson, 2007).

Bandura's theory of self-efficacy (1989), the idea that success initiates further success, and that failure is perceived as an inadequate ability to learn, provided a basis for this study. During the transition into high school, freshmen have many psychological, social, and physical changes which become challenges. These challenges historically prove to have academic losses for ninth grade students. These academic losses can result in a decrease in the Graduation Rate, End of Course Test scores, as well as attendance. Many researchers suggest that Ninth Grade Academies, as Small Learning Communities,

may provide more opportunities for student success (Reents, 2002; McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010); consequently, the result could potentially improve self-efficacy in ninth grade students (Bandura, et al., 2003). Research suggests that students who successfully complete ninth grade are more likely to graduate than those who have difficulties in ninth grade (Hall, 2006). Bandura's theory of self-efficacy has been linked extensively to transition eras in adolescents' lives and its influence on future successes (Bandura, et al., 2003).

Problem Statement

The dilemma school officials face is that the literature and the research has not confirmed the benefits of Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities and more research needs to be conducted in order to formulate educated decisions pertaining to grade configurations during the high school years. Current high school students are our nation's future workers; they are the future citizens, voters, and leaders of our country. They are our future American society. Unfortunately, the current educational system may be failing these students. Furthermore, the American Psychological Association (2010) reported that each year over 1.3 million of our nation's youth drop out of high school.

Even more disturbing news is the fact that many of these students will dropout based upon the success or failure of their ninth grade year (Bottoms, 2011). To aid in the drop-out problem, transition programs that are designed to boost academic success during the critical year of ninth grade are being sought. Due to the low graduation rate of Georgia's students, with only a 67.5% of students graduating, (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2012) Georgia is also trying strategies to aid in the problem of the

high drop-out rate. One of the most popular transition programs in Georgia's public school is the shift from Traditional Comprehensive High Schools, to high schools that place ninth grade students into a Ninth Grade Academy. These Small Learning Communities provide more personalization, a small school environment, and allow students a smoother transition into high school. The problem is that research has not confirmed the benefits of emerging Ninth Grade Academies in Georgia. This study serves as additional research in the field of education about Small Learning Communities and the ninth grade transition year. Moreover, this study contributes to the body of knowledge available about Georgia's Ninth Grade Academies and their effectiveness.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this causal comparative study was to test the theory of whether or not a Small Learning Community transition program into high school, such as a Ninth Grade Academy, affects Graduation Rate, student achievement of ninth grade students based on data from the Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Tests in Ninth Grade Algebra I and Ninth Grade Literature, and attendance. Additionally, the study sought to compare significant differences, if any, among students who attended a Small Learning Community, such as a Ninth Grade Academy, in comparison to those students who attended ninth grade in a Traditional Comprehensive High School setting consisting of grades nine through twelve. This study examined significant differences, if any, in Graduation Rate, Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Tests for ninth grade students in the core subjects of Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I.

Moreover, the study analyzed attendance trends among freshmen in Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities as well as freshmen students who attended

Traditional Comprehensive High Schools in Georgia. The participants of the study included public high schools within the state of Georgia. The two independent variables were public high schools in Georgia categorized according to structure; either as having a Ninth Grade Academy for attending freshmen or having a Traditional Comprehensive High School setting for attending freshmen during the school year of 2007-2008.

The choice school year of 2007-2008 was due to Georgia's uniform calculation of the Graduation Rate beginning with the graduating class of 2011. Prior to the graduating class of 2011, Georgia's school systems did not calculate the Graduation Rate uniformly; therefore, the first year that Graduation Rate can be compared from one school in Georgia to another school in Georgia accurately is the year of 2011. Hence, the freshmen that attended their first year of high school during 2007-2008 are the graduating class of 2011.

From this sample, the schools were the participants and were grouped into the category of either operating a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community or operating a ninth grade in a Traditional Comprehensive High School setting. The participants were categorized based upon a documented phone call to personnel in the district office of each high school's county district; for the purpose of this study, the definition of a Traditional Comprehensive High School is one where grades nine through twelve are in one building and no special considerations are made for the attending freshmen; whereas, the definition of a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community is one where attending freshmen are separated, either on a hall or in another building in order to aid in the transition from middle school to high school.

A causal-comparative study (ex-post facto) was utilized to highlight relationships

between ninth grade students who were grouped together in a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community and ninth grade students who were grouped with other grade levels in a Traditional Comprehensive High School setting. Public high schools in Georgia served as the sample population in the study. Public high schools in the state of Georgia that have Ninth Grade Academies as a part of their high school and high schools that are traditionally grouped as a Traditional Comprehensive High School with grades nine through twelve were the two independent variables in the study.

Analyses of the differences, if any, between the configuration of Traditional Comprehensive High School and a configuration of a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community in the high school setting, of Graduation Rate, Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Tests in Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I, and attendance had the probability to reveal intersects and overlaps in the data. Descriptive statistics, including demographics, were used for data analyses. This study provides a necessary perception of the transition programs of Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities to educational policy makers, administrators, and teachers of the impact that such transition programs have on student success. In addition to contributing to the existing body of knowledge in the field, this study provides the framework for future studies that involve Ninth Grade Academies as transition programs and Small Learning Communities and their effectiveness in regards to student achievement.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This research study was designed to answer the following research questions:

Research Question #1: Is there a difference in Graduation Rate among students who

attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #1: There is no difference in Graduation Rate among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

Research Question #2: Is there a difference in the Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Test scores for Ninth Grade Literature among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #2: There is no difference in Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Test scores for Ninth Grade Literature among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

Research Question #3: Is there a difference in the Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Test scores for Ninth Grade Algebra I among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #3: There is no difference in the Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Test scores for Ninth Grade Algebra I among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

Research Question #4: Is there a difference in attendance among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who

attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #4: There is no difference in attendance among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

Definitions

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)- Adequate Yearly Progress is a federally mandated program in which schools are held accountable for academic achievement (United States Dept. of Education, 2012).

Comprehensive Traditional High School- A high school comprised of grades nine through twelve housed in one building. Traditionally, comprehensive high schools have a large student population of 1,000 or more students (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008).

End of Course Tests- Standards based criterion-referenced tests that are aligned with state high school courses in the content specific areas. End of Course Tests are state mandated in many high school courses, including Ninth Grade Literature and Algebra I in ninth grade (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

Georgia Performance Standards- Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) are content standards that guide teachers and students as to what concepts must be mastered within a specific grade level and discipline (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

Graduation Rate- Students who successfully graduate from high school upon completing and passing the set number of courses and the specific requirements for graduation within four years are calculated into a required formula for each state (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2008).

Ninth Grade Academy- A transition program designed to develop a Small

Learning Community housing the ninth grade students in a separate environmental setting, such as on a different hall or in a different building (Steverson, 2007).

Race to the Top Initiative (RT3)- A four billion dollar investment in school reform from The Obama Administration that challenged states to reform their failing schools. The challenge was issued to states by the Obama Administration in July 2009 as a way to initiate reform in state schools (The White House Press Office, 2009).

Self-Efficacy- Self-efficacy is defined as the theory that success initiates further success and that if students can initially experience success; they are more likely to be successful in the future (Bandura, 1989).

Small Learning Community- Small Learning Communities (SLC's) are designed when a larger comprehensive school breaks one or more grades away from the other grades traditionally housed together (Weathers, 2006).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The researcher provides relevant research in this chapter pertaining to the transition from middle school to high school, more specifically, the ninth grade year. The chapter also includes pertinent information on the theoretical framework of Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. Additionally, the researcher briefly provides some background information about the history of high school structures and then expands on the concept of a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community. The chapter concludes with current research on the Graduation Rate, high school attendance and student achievement as measured by state normed-referenced tests such as exit exams as End of Course Tests in Georgia.

Ninth Grade Transition Year

Historically, the transition from middle school to high school is one of the most difficult academic periods in a student's career. In a recent study on relationships of school climates, Pilar (2007) determined that educational reform's primary purpose is to personalize the school environment for all of America's students, allowing a transformation in our students from a passive to an active learner through the process of interaction with their environments. Reform for America's high schools has been on the agenda since the implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Darling-Hammond (2006) cites a multitude of possible reforms that could potentially achieve the goals of *NCLB* as well as create reform that will work. Darling-Hammond states,

A number of studies have found that schools have higher rates of graduation and levels of academic achievement-especially if they serve traditionally low-performing students when they create smaller, more personalized units in which

students have fewer teachers for longer periods of time and teachers work with smaller cohorts of students (p. 644).

The answer to easing the transition into high school could be a smaller more personalized environment such as a Ninth Grade Academy (Hall, 2006).

One such way of personalizing the school environment is through Small Learning Communities. In Georgia, many high schools have implemented a Ninth Grade Academy transition program in which the ninth grade students are separated from the remaining high school as their own Small Learning Community to aid students in the transition year, thus creating opportunities for initial success in the beginning of student's high school careers. This allows for a smoother transition into high school. Rouse & Kemple (2009) state, "The difficulty of high school for many students in the United States begins the day they first set foot through its doors in ninth grade" (p. 10).

Further research suggests that success during the ninth grade year leads to a higher graduation rate (Blankstein, 2004). These Small Learning Communities were put into place as part of school reform with the idea that a smaller school could provide more personalization; therefore, creating an environment of success for the ninth graders attending these Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities. During the transition from middle to high school, freshmen have many psychological, social, and physical changes that become challenges. These challenges, coupled with the transitional challenges faced in school, historically amount to academic losses (Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2009). Since research points to the ninth grade as the pivotal point for student success at the beginning of the ninth grade year, it is only fitting that educators and all stakeholders in the future of America execute every intervention deemed necessary to

curtail this number.

Transition programs have been put into place to aid students in the move for what many researchers consider one of the most pivotal points in a student's education, the transition from middle school to high school. Current research suggests that due to the rigorous demands often made on high school students that are not present at the middle school level, ninth graders suffer more academic losses, failures, and retentions, which leads to higher dropout rates, than any other grade level (Alspaugh, 1998). Moreover, there is not a one-size-fits-all model that can be followed when a new high school makes a decision on how many grades to include, or whether or not the high school will include grades seven through twelve, ten through twelve, or nine through twelve. It is, however, in the best interest of ninth grade students for educators to certainly consider models of different learning communities for the specific needs of the learners (Steverson, 2007).

A study conducted by Worrell and Hale (2001), concluded risk factors for high school dropouts fell into five categories: academic, behavioral, familial-demographic, social-emotional, and school or more specifically, school climate. Worrell & Hale's research validates the actions of educators striving to affect every categorical group through the implementation of Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities. Small Learning Communities can ease the transition from middle school to high school through more personal relations with school faculty, a heightened sense of belonging, and self-efficacy (Worrell & Hale, 2001).

In Mizelle & Irvin's (2000) article, *Transitioning from Middle School into High School*, the urgency for educators to help ease the transition from middle school to high school is made clear by several factors that students have difficulty with during that first

year in high school. They claim that students are overwhelmed by a greater diversity in teachers and peers, a more impersonal environment that is more competitive and grade oriented than that of middle school, as well as students experiencing pubertal shifts that lead to a more negative view of themselves (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Coupled with all of those problems for ninth grade students is low attendance. According to some research, attendance may decline due to the transitional changes, pubertal changes, and complicatedness of the ninth grade year (Black, 2004). Unfortunately, when student attendance is poor, academic achievement is also poor (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2010; Dynarski, et. al, 2008).

In the article, *Examining the Long-Term Impact of Achievement Loss During the Transition to High School*, Smith (2006) maintains that all students will face some type of transition difficulty. In Smith's study, the loss during transition was analyzed to determine the impact of those losses to future educational endeavors. Specifically, Smith examined the achievement loss associated with the transition from middle school to high school. The data revealed a significant relationship between high achieving middle school students and the losses suffered during the transition to ninth grade as a potential risk factor for attrition during the first year of college. The analysis of the data from the research found a statistical significance in those students that they were also more likely to experience attrition during their first year of college (Smith, 2006).

However, in a more recent article, *The Impact of Alternative Grade Configurations on Student outcomes through Middle and High School*, Schwerdt & West (2011) conducted a study of statewide administrative data from the state of Florida, and found that achievement losses are greater among students transitioning to middle school

than those transitioning to high school, but found that middle school transitions led to a higher rate of absences that consequently impacted those students' future high school success. Schwerdt & West (2011) state, "We also find that middle school entry increases student absences and is associated with high grade 10 dropout rates. Transitions to high school in grade nine cause a smaller one-time drop in achievement but do not alter students' performance trajectories" (p. 1). The implications for practice derived from Smith's (2006) research suggests that even for high achieving students that experience academic losses during the transition from middle school to high school, those losses can create struggles during their future educational experiences. Smith states,

Additional support systems are needed to assist students during these important transitions. The challenge for high schools and institutions of higher education is to identify the high-achieving students and to provide the appropriate resources to assist in their transition to college (p. 218).

As mentioned by Smith (2006) and Schwerdt & West (2011), it is imperative that schools provide students with quality transition programs at the middle school and high school level.

Featherston III (2010) concludes that one of the contributing factors of students dropping out of high school is due to failing grades and truancy. Absenteeism, suspension, and truancy lead to students missing concepts presented in class; consequently, it is not surprising that research shows academic failure is one of the greatest influences on a student's decision to drop out of high school (Bottoms & Young, 2008).

For the past decade in Georgia, redesigning and reforming the high school

experience included the restructuring of Traditional Comprehensive High schools into Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities. This type of reform was designed to curtail high school dropouts and provide a strategy for success for ninth graders in the hopes that if the ninth grade year for these students could be successful, the subsequent high school years could be successful as well (Sommers, et al., 2009). Unfortunately, some researchers believe reform came before the research. In fact, Ready, Lee, & Welner (2004) state, “Although we support the move toward smaller high schools, we offer a caution about the research base on this topic: The focus should be on empirically grounded studies, and there should be attention devoted to possible negative consequences” (p .2).

Additionally, in a study of Small Learning Communities (such as Ninth Grade Academies) conducted by Weathers (2006), it was revealed that additional resources are required when Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities are part of a school system’s operating budget. Countless dollars have been spent on turning the larger comprehensive schools into Small Learning Communities. In fact, Oxley & Kassissieh (2008) state, “The US Department of Education under the Clinton Administration funded multi-million dollar projects to develop and scale up school reform models with small unit size as a required feature” (p. 199). With the current state of the economy and the budget crisis hitting school systems harder each year, it is imperative that further research is conducted. Hence, Levine (2010) states, “We don’t yet know whether or how high SLC’s can lift students’ standardized test scores and other valued outcomes. Given the significant investment...it would be a shame if we didn’t find out” (p. 288).

High School Reform

All stakeholders in American education have opinions on how to create better learning outcomes for our emerging society. From bureaucratic agencies to parents on school advisory boards, reform for high school students has been a hot topic (Samel, et al., 2011). From the United States federal government, state and local government agencies, governors, superintendents, teachers, and parents to the general public, in rural and urban areas alike, everyone is alarmed by the high dropout rates, low performance of students and the nation's educational ranking among other democratic countries (Noll, 2011).

Of course, when reform is mentioned, the landmark *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, (NCLB) must be mentioned as well. Due to the accountability measures placed on teachers, students, and schools in regard to meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), reforms such as Common Core State Standards and other new initiatives are becoming more common. In many states, including Georgia, support for a new initiative called *Race to the Top*, (RT3) is gaining ground (Raudonis, 2012).

Due to the demands of the *NCLB* requirements of states to meet AYP by the year of 2014, and a grim outlook of the vast number of schools that potentially would not meet AYP by the deadline, a waiver could be granted if a state adopted the RT3 initiative. States that implemented RT3 could potentially be granted a waiver that would take *NCLB* sanctions away. However, there are rules that apply to the waiver being granted (Ga. Dept. of Education, 2012). The RT3 federal program was awarded to ten states and the District of Columbia to participate in the RT3 program which is part of the Obama Administration's proposal for school reform. It is a historic 4 billion dollar programs that

is driving the reform; the reform would give millions of federal dollars to each state for implementation of reforms (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2012). The key focus of RT3 is the adoption of standards that are benchmarked across the nation. Along with the benchmarked standards is the recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining of principals and teachers that are most effective, as well as helping the lowest performing schools attain achievement and building an effective system to compile data so that students' strengths and weaknesses will help inform school leaders and teachers on how to improve their instruction (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2012). According to an interview with President Barack Obama in July of 2009 at the unveiling of the *Race to the Top Initiative*, President Obama said,

This competition will not be based on politics, ideology, or the preferences of a particular interest group. Instead, it will be based on a simple principle—whether a state is ready to do what works. We will use the best data available to determine whether a state can meet a few key benchmarks for reform—and states that outperform the rest will be rewarded with a grant. Not every state will win and not every school district will be happy with the results. But America's children, America's economy, and America itself will be better for it (U.S. Dept. of Education, Archived Interview, 2009).

The *Race to the Top Initiative* certainly creates competitive reform across the nation in our public schools.

In another article, *Department of Education Awards \$200 Million to Seven States to Advance k-12 Reform*, from the United States Department of Education (2012) details of what the RT3 initiative is all about, suggest that only states in the nation that have

plans for comprehensive reform in their schools will receive the federal dollars. The article states, “Race to the Top winners will help trail-blaze effective reforms and provide examples for states and local school districts throughout the country to follow as they too are hard at work on reforms that can transform our schools for decades to come” (para. 3). The need for reform is clearly an issue, what to do about it is an entirely different matter. The secondary education pipeline, which are the years of school between 7th and 12th grades, deal with many conflicts, some internal, others external, that either promote progress or hamper educational goals (Wills, 2008).

Even in the late 1990’s, advocates of school reform began the discussion of how to change the current educational system and refine it toward a more democratic system through smaller schools (Glickman, 1998). In *Revolutionizing America’s Schools* (1998), Glickman declares that the issue of school size is a necessary condition for creating a democratic school. He states,

Schools should be small enough for their faculty to sit together around the same table and make plans for and with their students. By talking directly with one another, they can determine teaching schedules and materials; set proper scope and sequence of curricula; plan student projects, student contracts, and student demonstrations; and arrange collaborations with parents and the other community. This can be done in several ways- by breaking large schools into smaller schools with the same physical site, by not allowing already small schools to grow beyond a maximum size of two to four hundred students, or by allowing faculty to create their own schools (p. 41).

Glickman continues to make the case for smaller school structures through reminders of

the flexibility educators have within a smaller school. He maintains that educators have more flexibility in time, space, attention to educational goals of students, and students' individual needs. Furthermore, he contends that small schools with autonomy can provide education that goes beyond its four walls, and flows toward the larger community (Glickman, 1998).

School environments may be the reform that is needed during the transition years to curtail some of the problems high school students face (Plank, et al., 2008). Samel, et al. (2011) conducted a study in which a cohort of students from three urban areas was tracked from 7th grade through their senior year of high school. The collection and examination of the longitudinal data from this study determined that indicators for drop-out risks were present long before students entered the 12th grade. Plank, et al. (2008) made the same observation stating, "Leaving high school before receiving a diploma often represents a culminating event in a long-term process of disengagement from formal education"(p. 345).

The study conducted by Samel, et al. (2011) also documented that with multiple interventions dealing with attendance, discipline, teacher expectations, and options for earning credit for courses that are needed for graduation, students could overcome obstacles and earn their high school diploma on time. Throughout this study, the terms resilience and resistance were used as terms for which students would react to obstacles in the way of educational goals. Resilience was defined as the ability of young people to forgo progress in the face of obstacles and conditions that may hinder it; and resistance was defined as life environments, either conditions or structures, that from a student's actions in response to them obstruct student progress and attainment of goals. These two

traits were used to define the student's choices during their four year trek through high school. The authors of the study maintain that educational reform in the way of school structure, environments, and reciprocal relationships is the key to graduating many of our American students on time (Samel, et al., 2011).

Accordingly, due to the high dropout rate and the low college completion rate, the nation suffers economic losses as well. As reported by the National Governor's Association (2012), a recent documentary declared,

America is faced by the challenge of a high school dropout crisis. At least one in five student drops out of school and nearly 5 million 18- to 24-year-olds lack a high school diploma. Annually, dropouts cost the United States more than \$300 billion in lost wages and increased public-sector expenses. Furthermore, with the nation ranking 20 out of 28 among industrialized democracies on high school graduation rates, the dropout problem is a substantial drag on the nation's economic competitiveness (para. 1).

Without a doubt, there is room for improvement in our nation's schools and especially graduating our students on-time. The literature indicates that most students who drop out of school will do so within their first two years of high school. Therefore the ninth grade is an important year for our students and educators should focus more effort toward this transition year than any other time (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2011).

Theoretical Framework

The underlying guidance for any study is the theoretical framework. Using a

framework based upon Bandura's work in Social Learning Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and the Theory of Self-efficacy, the themes and concepts in this study can be interconnected and organized into meaningful, logical relationships as they pertain to students in transition during the first year of high school.

Social Learning Theory. One theory as to why students need a successful ninth grade year is that of Social Learning Theory and The Social Cognitive Theory, a concept created by Albert Bandura which was introduced in the 1960s (Bandura & Bussey, 2004). Social Learning theory focuses on cognitive processes of learning, which includes how children and adults function cognitively with their social experiences. According to many social learning theorists, the focus of socialization, "...proposed that there are important learned drives, such as aggression and dependency..." (Miller, 2011, p. 233). It also looks at these specific cognitions and how they influence behavior and development. According to Miller (2011), Bandura and Walters (1963) carried the modeling concept one step further by demonstrating that a new behavior can be acquired by watching models of other individuals that are reinforced, with either negative behavior or positive behavior. He began the theory with the idea of modeling as an outline of social learning. Later, he added another important idea, self-efficacy to the theory (Miller 2011).

The theory is important to this study in that students who are removed from successful models by way of a Small Learning Community may not have opportunities to vicariously witness the success or failure of others. Moreover, Usher & Pajares, (2005) claim that the construct of self-efficacy has become an interesting concept for the educational community. They state, "The beliefs that students hold about their abilities to perform academic tasks or succeed in academic activities powerfully influence their

academic performances” (p. 126). In fact, Usher & Pajares (2005) cite numerous studies where students’ self-efficacy beliefs have been linked to important academic areas such as reading, writing, mathematics, and science as well as their college and career choices after high school.

Theory of Self-efficacy. Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy (1989), the idea that success initiates further success and that failure is perceived as an inadequate ability to learn, lends insight to the importance of success in the ninth grade year. Due to the nature that a Small Learning Community strategy can provide, a Ninth Grade Academy could potentially increase opportunities for students to succeed; therefore advancing a student’s perceived self-efficacy. Consequently, research suggests that students who successfully complete ninth grade are more likely to graduate than those who have difficulties in ninth grade (Hall, 2006).

Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy has also been linked to multiple transition eras in adolescents’ lives and its influence on further successes (Bandura, et. al, 2003). Bandura & Adams (1977) suggest that perceived self-efficacy affects a variety of a person’s behavioral actions. Those behavioral actions are related to cognitive processes that are derived from defensive behavior. Therefore, in relationship to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) a person’s self-efficacy is controlled through obstacles and the coping mechanisms the person make use of while dealing with obstacles. According to Bandura & Adams (1977),

It is postulated that psychological procedures, whatever their format, serve as ways of creating and strengthening expectation of personal effectiveness.

Perceived self-efficacy affects people’s choice of activities and behavioral

settings, how much effort they expend, and how long they will persist in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences (p. 288).

Therefore, those individuals with a heightened sense of perceived self-efficacy will maintain more effort in coping whereas those with a lower sense of perceived self-efficacy will engage in avoidance behavior or corrective experiences. Through this theory, self-efficacy can be directly related to students' engagement in academics as a positive influence on future successes or failures in the school environment.

Furthermore, Bandura, et al. (1996) states,

Among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs in their capabilities to exercise control over their level of functioning and environmental demands. Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to act (p. 1206).

Thus, students in an environment conducive to positivity may potentially have more academic success.

Among Bandura, other theorists, such as Salomon have concluded the importance of self-efficacy in a learner's habits of cognitive effort. According to this theory, the self-efficacy of a learner is directly related to the amount of cognitive effort a learner is willing to invest in such a task (Bandura, 1982). If the learner believes in his abilities and has little self-doubt, a better performance will be made for the task at hand. Conversely, if a learner has had many failing attempts, and is plagued with self-doubt, the task at hand will include little effort on the part of the learner or even worse; the learner will give up on the task at hand.

Additionally, self-efficacy was identified as an indicator for success. In a recent

longitudinal study, Fortin, et al. (2009) clearly defines three main identifiers to keeping at risk students on track in school: first, a social support network of teachers, friends, and psychologists; second, the presence of positive self-efficacy and self-esteem; third, the social support network becoming a problem solving strategy for these students. Fortin, et al. (2009) documented students' resiliency through longitudinal research and according to the findings,

Confirmed in this study was the presence of positive self-esteem and self-efficacy in resilient students. Students clearly stated that they knew they could do it. When faced with difficulties in school, they expressed their thoughts about trying harder, about believing in their abilities. They knew how to get help and keep on the right track (p. 27)

According to Bandura (1977), threatening tasks in compilation with a reduced sense of self-efficacy leads to defensive behavior concerning the task. This theory applies to the ninth grade learner in that high school demands are academically challenging and the first year of the ninth grade can either build a student's perceived self-efficacy or destroy it. This can either direct the student toward future success or future failures in high school.

In more recent research stemmed from Bandura's self-efficacy theory, Zimmerman (2000) found that one underlying aspect of a student's academic motivation was that of self-efficacy. In the article, *Self-Efficacy: An Essential Motive to Learn*, Zimmerman relays that academic motivation is influenced in areas such as: choices of activities, amount of effort dedicated to a task, persistence in completing a task, and the emotional reactions of students to academic work. Also according to Zimmerman (2000), the two measures of a student's efforts in relation to self-efficacy beliefs are "the

rate of performance and the expenditure of energy” (p. 86) on a given task. Accordingly, research validates the concept of a student’s self-efficacy and their anxiety levels when performing tasks where there was low self-efficacy. Zimmerman (2000) states, “...only self-efficacy was predictive of mathematics performance when compared in a joint path analysis. There is also evidence that students’ performance in academically threatening situations depends more on efficacy beliefs than on anxiety arousal” (p. 87). The strength to which self-efficacy beliefs affect students’ academic performance is unclear; however, there is clear evidence that self-efficacy is a predictor for success in some areas.

Historical Background

Today, a public school looks very different than it did years ago when the school was the same building as the church and the meeting house (Serber, 2008). Public education in the United States has evolved from the one room schoolhouse into large facilities that house multiple grades and sometimes even thousands of students each day. Serber (2008) states,

Classroom teaching has also been transformed by changes in educational theory and school structure. As the twentieth century dawned, the theories of Frederick Taylor dominated the structural design of large organizations including education systems. Thus, concepts such as specialization, centralized control, and top down supervision were considered the keys to educational improvement (p. 1).

Reform, not just current, but also historical has been a central part of the educational arena. The definition of what a good education should look like has been unsettled with stakeholders debating what the relationship between political parties, society, and educators should constitute. Noll (2011) states, “Concern about the quality of education

has been expressed by philosophers, politicians, and parents for centuries” (p. xvii).

Nonetheless, in an article by Fredrick Hess (2004) *What is a ‘Public School’? Principles for a New Century*, he systematically defines what public schooling should teach our youth; he believes that they are the same concepts that were taught centuries ago. Hess states,

Public schools should teach children the essential skills and knowledge that make for productive citizens, teach them to respect our constitutional order, and instruct them in the framework of rights and obligations that secure our democracy and protect our liberty; any school that does so should be regarded as serving public purposes (p. 435).

Therefore, in the face of such radical reform movements in education, it is important to remember Hess’ definition for the historical and modern purposes of the public school crusade.

Traditional Comprehensive High Schools

Traditionally, high schools have been organized by grades nine through twelve, sometimes called Comprehensive High Schools (Copa & Pease, 1992). Some schools still arrange for a junior high school which consists of grades seven through nine. Grade nine contains the freshmen, or the youngest of the high school students. The twelfth grade consists of the seniors, or the eldest of the high school students. Most high schools are in separate buildings from the middle and elementary grades (Howley, 2002). There are studies that show comprehensive high schools are not serving students well in the aspect of creating a caring community (Cushman, 2006). According to Ellerbrock &

Kiefer (2010) other research indicates that comprehensive high schools are not organized to promote relationships between faculty and students. They state, “Investigations on how comprehensive high schools attempt to promote a supportive community for students found that many high schools are organized in ways that are counterproductive to promoting caring relationships and a deep sense of belonging” (p. 393). Since a sense of belonging fosters success in a student’s educational career, a productive community that supports students is needed in every school in America.

Ninth Grade Academies

Recently, due to the concepts about transitions from adolescents to adulthood, a multitude of tactics have been generated to ease this difficult process in educational settings. One such strategy aimed toward the transition from middle school to high school is that of a Ninth Grade Academy, or Small Learning Community. These Ninth Grade Academies have been put into place to initiate a transition program where ninth grade students can experience success. According to Bottoms (2008), the Ninth Grade Academy concept comes with unique benefits to teachers and students. Consequently, Ninth Grade Academies also have a larger operating price tag than the traditional high school model. High schools that function with Ninth Grade Academies typically have increased expenditures due to personnel, building costs, and administrative costs (Weathers, 2006).

In Gene Bottoms’ report, *Redesigning the Ninth Grade Experience*, The Southern Regional Education Board reports on findings from case studies across the nation about high schools that are making a difference with students in the ninth grade. Bottoms (2008) introduces the research by stating that ninth grade is a “make or break” (p. 1) year

for many students. Examining the connection to statistics that show failure in the ninth grade is a key ingredient for reducing the high school dropout rate (Bottoms, 2008). The report's primary focus is to identify various programs, incentives, and interventions that improve academic achievement and success in the ninth grade. Of course, added expenses are included in the initial improvements, but Bottoms (2008) states that each high school dropout costs a state from \$3,000 to \$5,000 dollars; therefore, the extra expenditures could potentially be worth it. Furthermore, the report includes an ideal redesign process for a ninth grade academy: early orientation and preparation in the middle grades, a Ninth Grade Academy concept, specialized ninth grade courses, guidance support, and a policy that does not allow a grade of a zero.

Moreover, in a recent study conducted by Patterson (2007), findings from an urban Ohio high school relay the problem of overcrowded freshmen classes in America's high schools due to the large number of students failing the ninth grade stating that, "Nationally, more than one third of students lost from the national pipeline fail to make the transition from 9th to 10th grade" (p. 124-125). Patterson furthers the dilemma by concluding that the "freshman bulge" accounts for more danger of the likelihood of these students at a high risk for not graduating. Through Patterson's research of a pilot program of a Ninth Grade Academy concept model structured from the principles of Small Learning Communities, conclusive evidence supported optimistic findings in all areas of the study. The improved performance and attitudes of freshmen in a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community stretched across the areas of attendance, discipline, achievement, and feelings of affiliation and belonging. Patterson (2007) states,

Across all categories, responses were positive for students, teachers, and parents. In all categories where there was data available, parent and teacher feedback corroborated student responses. In all cases where criteria were not discussed among students, teachers, and parents alike, quantitative data corroborated a positive finding for that criterion (p. 141).

More evidence bound in research is needed to substantiate claims of these recent studies.

Small Learning Communities

One transition program being utilized across the nation today is that of a Ninth Grade Academy concept. This concept rebuilds the Traditional High School and transforms it into a Small Learning Community, or, as it was termed, an SLC. A Small Learning Community is when a larger comprehensive school decides to break one grade, usually the transition grade, sixth or ninth grades, away from the other grades in the school. The one grade environment can be construed of a separate building or even a separate hallway. The Small Learning Community becomes a strategy to aid in the transition process for these students (Levine, 2010). Typically, interventions within the school such as mentors, freshman focus classes, study halls, and common team teachers are used in such Small Learning Communities. The idea driving the Ninth Grade Academy concept is that students are able to be placed on “teams” within the grade level. This allows a group of teachers to have common students and more often than not, common planning time to consult with one another about those students (Fields, 2005).

Another key feature of Ninth Grade Academies is that as a Smaller Learning Community, they are physically separated from the upper classmen, either on a different hall or in a different building. Other organization strategies of a Ninth Grade Academy

could include, but are not limited to: a freshman focus class that is similar to a study hall, a designated mentor program, at risk identification and other interventions (Fields, 2005). This model isolates ninth graders either on one hall or in one building and schedules students with a group of teachers that become the students' team of teachers. There are a variety of models and other intervention programs that high schools have the option to implement due to the scheduling flexibility that comes with having the ninth grade isolated (Shear, et al., 2008); however, one focus seems to be prevalent in all SLC's, a focus on relationships.

A research study conducted by Ellerbrock & Kiefer (2010) depicts a qualitative case study where a Ninth Grade Academy Small Learning Community was studied to answer the question, "How does Westshore High School create a community of care for its ninth-grade students?" This particular study focused on the data collected from one site of a multisite study. This site used purposive sampling in that only the students in one teacher's Freshman Focus class were selected. This teacher is known for the relationships she builds with her students and for the support and understanding she maintains for Freshman Focus classes. The results of this within-site study revealed three types of caring relationships vital for a community of care: teacher-to-program relationships, teacher-to-student relationships, and program-to-student relationships. The concept that relationships can further a student's success within a Ninth Grade Academy is emergent at best; moreover, it is proposed that involvement is a necessity, and the school, in and of itself, should mock the concept of community. Ellerbrock & Kiefer (2010) state, "...studies have involved investigations on how schools that took on the persona of a personalized caring learning community positively influenced students'

development needs and educational practices” (p. 394).

Additional research on the nature of a school, its climate or ecology, and how it affects students has led to conclusions that lean toward students who have a higher school connectedness, have greater academic achievement (Waters, et al., 2010). The definition of a school’s ecology is indicated as the school environment or school climate and how an individual interacts with that environment in order to gratify their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Waters, et al., 2010). In the research article, *Does the nature of schools matter? An exploration of selected school ecology factors on adolescent perceptions of school connectedness*, Waters, et al., (2010) states that, “Connectedness to school is a significant predictor of adolescent health and academic outcomes” (p. 381). Furthermore, the data from the research study maintains that schools must provide strategies during critical years, such as those transition years, in order to address students’ individual characteristics and the school’s functional features as they relate to connectedness with school (Waters, et al., 2010).

Graduation Rate

Since the implementation of the *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001 and the demands made on school systems to meet Adequate Yearly Progress, states are required to calculate and report the Graduation Rate uniformly (Swanson, 2003). The graduation rate has been a popular statistic to measure a school’s performance as well as whether or not that school has met Adequate Yearly Progress (National School Boards Association, n.d.). For compliance with *No Child Left Behind*, Georgia defines a graduate as a student who earns a regular diploma, not including a certificate of attendance or a special education diploma, within a four year period of time. Graduates, as defined by the state

of Georgia, must meet specific coursework criteria, more specifically earning 22 Carnegie units in the high school program of study and must have passed the graduation tests in four subjects (mathematics, English, social studies, science) as well as the Georgia High School Graduation Writing Test. The calculation of the Graduation Rate for each school in the state of Georgia was historically obtained by a Leaver Rate which is determined by the number of students who graduate high school within four years, not including special education and attendance diplomas (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2008).

However, guidelines for more accurate calculations of the Graduation Rate were adopted in January 2012 by the National Governor's Association to comply with new mandates for AYP reporting (National Governor's Association, 2012). Beginning with graduates of spring 2011, for compliance with *No Child Left Behind*, the new Cohort rate will replace the Lever rate in accordance with federal law and will allow a uniform calculation for all 50 states. According to John Barge, Georgia's state school superintendent, "This is a better method to calculate numbers, and I think it will be a better indicator of progress in our schools" (Lewis, 2012, para. 2). The cohort rate will be in place for the graduates of 2012 and will replace the Lever Rate for calculation of the graduation rate. Additionally, the graduation rate for the class of 2011 in Georgia will be recalculated and recorded on the state's report card website, The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). According to Downy (2012), the Georgia Department of Education will release the new figures for Georgia's Graduation Rate in April of 2012 due to a requirement which requires states to have a uniform method so that Graduation Rates can be compared from state to state

consistently. In an article from the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, Downy (2012) states,

The U.S. Department of Education is requiring all states to begin publicly reporting comparable high school graduation rates using its new four-year adjusted cohort rate calculation method. In October 2008, a regulation by the U.S. Department of Education [section 1111(h) of ESEA] was amended, which included a requirement for all states and local educational agencies (LEAs) receiving Title I funds (money for schools with a certain percentage of low-income students) to begin calculating and reporting the more uniform rate beginning with 2010-2011 data. Historically, states have calculated graduation rates using varying methods, creating inconsistent data from one state to the next. The transition to a uniform high school graduation rate requires all states to report the percentage of freshmen students who graduate in four years with a regular high school diploma. This rate will reflect a uniform method for reliable comparisons among states (para. 6).

Again, the reporting of the uniform graduation rate, with both the lever and the cohort rate being published for the graduates of 2011, will display more accurate information for the true number Georgia's graduates.

A statewide longitudinal data system for all students in the state of Georgia was put into place during the year of 2012. The student longitudinal data system, which the Governor's Office of Student Achievement maintains will track progress of individual students, whereas prior to this year, many states, including Georgia, did not have data on individual students to track individual progress. This new system will allow individual

students to be tracked and accounted for upon entering and exiting high schools within the state of Georgia (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2012).

Levine (2010) contends that one such strategy to improving America's Graduation Rates and preventing the high number of dropouts in our country is that of dismantling larger comprehensive high schools and creating Small Learning Communities. Through the use of empirical research and reviewing research that compares Small Learning Communities to comprehensive high schools on a assortment of measures, Levine (2010) maintains that SLC's at the secondary level are unique in that the Small Learning Community is not usually created from a stand-alone small school building, but rather "are created when existing comprehensive high schools decide to break themselves into either autonomous smaller high school or other kinds of less autonomous units, such as houses or academies" (p. 276).

In fact, due to the crisis for dropout prevention in America, the move to convert larger comprehensive high schools to smaller ones is on the rise and copious amounts of human resources and United States Federal dollars have been consumed in order to create these Small Learning Communities (Levine, 2010). Some scholars report SLC's have become the *new* reform in America's high schools over the past decade. Miner (2005) states, SLC's as one of the "biggest and hottest reforms in education today (p. 21).

High School Dropouts

In 2008, The National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, published a report in which six recommendations were made for dropout prevention strategies (Dynarski, 2008). The guide, *Dropout Prevention*, lists the strategies based on the level of evidence from the researcher analysis

of various programs implemented across the country that meet What Works Clearinghouse standards of measure for reform. Dynarski, et al. (2008) reports that, “Each year more than half a million young people drop out of high school, and the rate at which they drop out has remained about the same for the last 30 years, even as spending on education has increased significantly” (p. 4). The research panel viewed student engagement as an area that is critical to prevent these high numbers of dropouts with students’ engagement being both behavioral and psychological components. These components are listed as: attendance, class participation, effort in doing schoolwork, and avoidance of disciplinary action, school belonging, and engagement with the school (Dynarski, 2008).

Moreover, the six strategies listed for individual schools to implement in the report are: utilizing data systems to identify students of high risk for dropping out, assigning adult mentors to these students, providing academic support in the classroom, and implement programs to improve classroom behavior and social skills. Two strategies were listed as school wide interventions. They were personalizing the learning environment and instructional process so that it fosters a sense of belonging and creates a school environment where teachers and students can build relationships. The second school wide intervention was to provide rigorous and relevant instruction to engage students in the curriculum in order to be successful after they complete high school. Of the six strategies that are recommended for educators around the nation, the level of found effectiveness through their research is stated as low, moderate, or high. There were no strategies researched that could be placed in the high effectiveness category. The personalization of the learning environment was reviewed to be of a moderate level

effectiveness through the research (Dynarski, 2008).

Accordingly, the high school drop-out rate has been on the rise over the past several decades and even though a decline is expected, the reduction will be a narrow one (Planty, et al., 2009). Recent studies have shown that the number of students attending high school who are at risk for dropping out before making graduation a reality could be as high as 40% (Fortin, et al., 2009; Lessard, et al., 2004). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) projects that “the total number of high school graduates increased 32 percent between 1995–96 and 2007–08, a period of 12 years; and is projected to decrease 3 percent between 2007–08 and 2020–21, a period of 13 years” (2010, p. 22). Coupled with transition difficulties, many ninth grade students’ needs cannot be met in a larger, traditional nine through twelve grades high school. According to Werblow & Duesbery (2009), there is certainly an association between the size of the high school and the drop-out rate. Hence, the research suggests the larger the population of the high school, the higher the percentage of drop-outs.

Other studies show one of the causes for students to drop out of high school is due to poor academic performance. According to Featherston (2010), “Studies show that academic failure has the greatest impact on a student’s decision to drop out of school” (p. 70). Other contributing factors such as a lack of feeling of belonging to the school community, lack of personal connectedness to faculty, and lack of guidance in general are all areas of reform that must be addressed in our high schools for ninth grade students (Hall, 2006).

In an article from the National High School Center (2011), it was reported that “ninth grade students make up the highest percentage of the overall high school

population because students in disproportionate numbers are failing to be promoted out of ninth grade” (para. 2). The report also maintains the troubles of ninth grade dropouts are stemmed from disengagement, and less experienced and less qualified teachers.

Moreover, Black (2004) supports this claim by citing the *State of Learning* report from the New York Department of Education which states, “ The proportion of ninth-grade students who repeat the grade...can be an important indicator of future dropout rates” (p. 44).

In the article, *What Research Tell Us About the Impact and Challenges of Smaller Learning Communities*, Levine (2010) claims research does support the association between a high school’s size, namely a larger student population, and a higher dropout rate. He states, “Extant research does, however, suggest that Small Learning Communities can improve student attendance, graduation rates, and students’ sense of high school as supportive environments” (p. 277).

In addition to Levine’s (2010) research, some research suggests strategies in the ninth grade, specifically the model of a Ninth Grade Academy help to reduce the dropout rate and provide students with a firmer foundation for future success in high school (Walker, 2009).

In the state of Georgia, the school system’s dropout reporting guidelines are now uniform throughout the state. According to the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (2012), “the dropout rate calculations and reporting guidelines are established by the National Center for Education Statistics and the reporting of such dropouts is reliant singularly on the student record collections from each school for student withdrawal codes” (GOSA, 2012, para. 72). Accordingly, the Governor’s Office

of Student Achievement (2012) website states,

The National Center for Education Statistics requires that states report a 7-12 grade dropout rate and a 9-12 grade dropout rate. Students are reported as dropouts if they leave school for one of the following reasons: Marriage, Expelled, Financial Hardship/Job, Incarcerated/Under Jurisdiction of Juvenile or Criminal Justice Authority, Low Grades/School Failure, Military, Adult Education/Postsecondary, Pregnant/Parent, Removed for Lack of Attendance, Serious Illness/Accident, and Unknown. The dropout rate calculation is the number of students with a withdrawal code corresponding to a dropout divided by the number of students that attended the school. The number of students that attended the school is based on any student reported in the Student Record and excludes no-shows (GOSA, 2012, para. 73).

Therefore, the system to report the dropout rates for Georgia's students coincides with the dropout rates reported for each school system.

The importance of curtailing the number of students who drop out of high school can also be explained by the cost associated with not earning a diploma. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2011), everyone reaps the benefits of increased graduation rates. In fact, the research shows that, "...if the students who dropped out of the Class of 2011 had graduated, the nation's economy would likely benefit from nearly \$154 billion in additional income over the course of their lifetimes" (p. 1).

Attendance

Of all indicators for success in school, attendance should be an apparent concept for most. Historically attendance has been found to be a key to success in school

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). If students do not attend school, then learning cannot occur. Relationships between absenteeism and poor grades have been established throughout the years (Finn, Fish, & Scott, 2008; Hickman, et al., 2008).

Additionally, in a recent report on dropout prevention, Burzichelli, Mackey, & Bausmith (2011) verified that a student having an attendance rate of any less than 80% is a powerful identified risk factor for dropping out. Another report on absenteeism, *The Importance of Being in School: A Report on Absenteeism in the Nation's Public Schools*, Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) studied data on absenteeism from six schools: Georgia, Florida, Maryland, Nebraska, Oregon and Rhode Island and found direct links to academic success and attendance. The data analysis from Georgia's reported school attendance found that "In Georgia, for example, only 53 percent of students miss five or fewer days of school... (p. 7). The data shows an astonishing percentage for chronic absenteeism in Georgia stating, "The number of students missing more than 15 days is a staggering 8.8 percent" (p. 20).

In fact, in a recent study conducted by the Georgia Department of Education, it was reported by Governor John Barge that,

The Georgia State Department of Education found a strong relationship between attendance in the eighth, ninth and tenth grades and graduation rates, controlling for student demographics. It found that moving from missing up to 5 days to missing 6 to 10 days was associated with 7 to 10 percentage-point drops in graduation rates. Moving from missing 6 to 10 days to missing 11 to 14 days resulted in 11 to 14 point declines in graduation rates. Finally, there was as much as a 50 percentage-point difference in the graduation rates of students who missed

0 to 5 days of school compared to those who were absent 15 or more days (Balfanz, & Byrnes, 2012, p. 25).

Furthermore, links between attendance and achievement have been associated with success or failure in high school and attendance has proven to affect standardized test scores, dropout rates, and graduation rates (Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Balfanz, Byrnes, 2012).

Moreover, in Balfanz's & Byrnes' (2012) study, they report that Georgia's schools must improve stating, "In Georgia, 164,000 students are missing more than three weeks of school..." (p. 10). Clearly, Georgia is a state in which improvements can and should be made in the area of attendance (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012).

One key focus of a Small Learning Community is improved communication between the students and teachers (Daugherty, 2008). Therefore, when students are absent, teachers are more likely to notice and are more likely to communicate their concern and arrange for the student to complete missed assignments (Daugherty, 2008). Other research suggests that Small Learning Communities create environments where students' attendance is improved because of the type of environment that is created within the Small Learning Community; with improved attendance, students can draw nearer to academic gains in all areas of their educational experience (DeSocio & VanCura, 2007).

Additionally, Allensworth & Easton (2007) found through an analysis of data from Chicago schools that students' attendance was a powerful predictor of course performance. In the study, they found that students with high test scores who had missed more than two weeks of school were more liable to failure in the course than students

who had low test scores and missed one week or less of school.

Balfanz & Byrnes (2012) also studied data from the state of Florida and the results

...show a linear relationship where each missed day is associated with a further decline in test scores, at least through the first 20 days missed. For math, this association continues through missing two months of school, which is associated with a 40-point decline in test scores (p. 26).

Furthermore, the data confirmed that math performance in the ninth grade was more sensitive to missed days of school than the reading test scores even though reading test scores did suffer a decline as well (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012). Unmistakably, absenteeism has detrimental effects on the achievement of our nation's high school students.

End of Course Tests

According to the Georgia Department of Education, End of Course Tests are an important process of accountability due to *NCLB* and the report card of individual school's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as required by the federal government. Also, many schools increase accountability and student learning outcomes through the use of end of course exams. In Georgia, these end of course exams are given in core subjects beginning in the ninth grade and continuing through the twelfth grade. The Georgia Department of Education defines End of Course Tests as part of The A+ Educational Reform Act of 2000, O.C.G.A. §20-2-281. The Georgia Department of Education document cites,

The A+ Education Reform Act of 2000 mandates that the State Board of

Education adopt end-of-course assessments in grades nine through twelve for core subjects to be determined by the State Board of Education. With educator input, and State Board approval, the End-of-Course Assessment program is therefore comprised of the following 11 content area assessments: **Mathematics:** Mathematics I- Algebra/Geometry/Statistics; Mathematics II- Geometry/Algebra II/Statistics GPS Algebra, GPS Geometry, Coordinate Algebra. **Social Studies:** United States History, Economics/Business/Free Enterprise. **Science:** Biology, Physical Science. **English Language Arts:** Ninth Grade Literature and Composition, American Literature and Composition (Georgia Department of Education, 2012, para. 1).

Furthermore, the End of Course Tests not only provide accountability measures, but allow educators and students to evaluate strengths and areas of weaknesses and use this data to improve instruction at the school level for improved performance of student learning.

End of Course Test (EOCT's) are administered in two core areas in the ninth grade: Ninth Grade Literature and Algebra I. Beginning with the graduates of 2011, students could substitute their passing of an End of Course Test in that specific core subject and the End of Course Test in that subject area would replace the traditional state required graduation test for that subject. Consequently, the End of Course Tests will phase out the traditional Georgia High School Graduation Tests in all subjects except writing (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). The passing of the Georgia High School Graduation Writing Test (GHSGWT) will remain as a requirement for graduation in the state of Georgia (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

Balfanz (2009) reported that by the year of 2012, two-thirds of high school students will be required take and pass these exit exams in order to meet the graduation requirements for a high school diploma. Many supporters of exit exams contend that expectations must remain high and exit exams are one way to achieve this. Warren & Grodsky (2009), maintain that exit exams will increase student achievement as well as improve curriculum standards.

Clearly, with changes to the graduation requirements in the state of Georgia, and the new rule that the EOCT test can replace the graduation test for that subject area (Georgia Department of Education, 2012), there is more at stake for the students taking these exams than ever before.

Georgia's Report Card

The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) maintains accountability for all of Georgia's schools beginning with pre-kindergarten programs through postsecondary level schools. The intention of the accountability provided is to improve the quality of education in the state of Georgia (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2012). The accountability "Report Card" that is provided is submitted to state and federal agencies and is in full compliance with both state and federal *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* laws in regards to Report Card reporting requirements. The Report Card data collection is partnered with the Georgia Department of Education and GOSA along with external entities "to provide a comprehensive view of the schools, systems, and the state" (GOSA, 2012, para. 3).

Additionally, the data collection and reporting system "supports Georgia's Single Statewide Accountability System (SSAS) for K-12 public schools that merges federal law

with state law” (GOSA, 2012, para. 4). The annual Report Card includes seven sections on school, system, and state level reports. Those seven sections are: Accountability, Georgia Tests, National Tests, Indicators, Student and School Demographics, Personnel and Fiscal, and Comparisons. When it is possible to disaggregate data into subgroups, the data is disaggregated. These groupings are based on race/ethnicity, gender, disability, English proficiency, economic and migrant status as required by the *A Plus Education Reform Act of 2000*, which is a state law, and the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, which is a federal law (GOSA, 2012, para. 5).

Summary

It is no secret that America’s schools have had dramatic changes implemented in them over the last decade due to the federal mandate of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB). Educators have been trying first one thing, then another to create learning environments that produce results, results that will lead to schools achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). America’s high schools are no exception to this hustle and according to Cohen & Smerdon, (2009), “Standardized test scores and ninth grade dropout rates have suggested, and researchers have confirmed, that the middle to high school transition is a key point in the academic, social, and emotional trajectory of students across the country” (182). Moreover, studies have shown that Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities during the transition year of middle school students to high school can have positive effects on achievement; however, thorough comprehensive studies such as those that compare these Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities should be conducted to further the body of literature for education stakeholders everywhere.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The landmark legislative act *No Child Left Behind* (2001) mandates that all schools will achieve Adequate Yearly Progress in academics through high quality instruction, content specialized teachers, and an increased accountability for schools and their districts within every state by 2013-2014. *NCLB* of 2001 also provided more flexibility for Local Education Agencies (LEA's) to spend the incoming federal dollars states receive on educating students. In an effort to increase the Graduation Rate and test scores on mandated tests, such as the End of Course Tests (EOCT) by which schools are measured as having made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), many of Georgia's high schools have begun to implement a Ninth Grade Academy (NGA) transition program in their high schools. This Ninth Grade Academy separates the ninth graders from the remaining high school into their own Small Learning Community (SLC).

Research concludes that the high school dropout rate is a problem. In a recent study, published November, 2011, The Alliance for Excellent Education (2011) reported that "Every day, nearly 7,000 students become dropouts" (p. 1). Additionally, this research study summarizes the high cost our nation will pay for this disparity between graduates and non-graduates.

In the face of all this research, Georgia schools have begun to turn their attention toward the ninth grade transition year; focusing on students who have typically been at risk for dropping out. The outcome of this focus was creating Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities (SLCs) in many high schools across the state. Unfortunately, the cost associated with redesigning Georgia's high schools is not cheap. Ninth Grade Academies have a larger operating price tag than the traditional high school

model with more dollars going toward operation rather than student services. According to Weathers (2006), high schools that function with Ninth Grade Academies typically have increased expenditures due to personnel, building costs, and administrative costs. As more and more high schools spend large amounts of money to convert their high schools and separate their ninth grades into Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities, the question still remains as to whether or not the benefits to students that attend these Ninth Grade Academies as SLC's is worth the additional costs and efforts being made to implement them.

There is little research published that attempts to decipher the effect of a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community on Graduation Rate, student achievement and attendance. The purpose of the proposed quantitative study was to determine whether or not a statistical significant difference exists in students who attended a Ninth Grade Academy during their ninth grade year in comparison to those students who attended a traditional high school setting, or more specifically, a Traditional Comprehensive High School, during their ninth grade year according to the Graduation Rate, attendance, and the End of Course Test (EOCT) scores for Algebra I and Ninth Grade Literature. This chapter's purpose is to explain the overview of the problem along with the purpose of the study. Additionally, the chapter identifies the participants; describes the research design, the methodology, instrumentation, sampling procedures, and data analysis procedures.

Research Design

This research study was a causal-comparative study. The design of a causal-comparative study is acceptable due to the non-experimental nature of the study. Gall et

causations were analyzed from the standpoint of either the independent variable being present or absent, Traditional Comprehensive High School setting, or Ninth Grade Academy, and then establishing whether or not the groups have a statistical significant difference on the dependent variables: Graduation Rate, EOCT scores in Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I, and attendance. The independent variables were confined to two comparison groups within the current number of 470 Georgia public high schools (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). The specific number of public high schools in the state of Georgia during the school year of 2007-2008 was the target population sample the researcher followed to analyze data for the Graduation Rate. Thus, within the two groups, one group was the Traditional Comprehensive High School group sample; the other group was the Ninth Grade Academy sample; the dependent variables pertained to the Graduation Rate and End of Course Test scores in the courses of Algebra I and Ninth Grade Literature, as well as overall attendance of ninth grade students during the school year 2007-2008. In collecting the data for each independent variable, for both groups, Traditional Comprehensive High School and Ninth Grade Academies, the researcher collected data as to which community organization the school was located: urban, suburban, or rural. Additionally, if the independent variable of a Ninth Grade Academy was present, the researcher further discovered whether the NGA was in operation on-campus or off-campus from the other grade levels.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not a Small Learning Community transition program into high school, such as a Ninth Grade Academy, effects student achievement of ninth grade students. This achievement was based on data from the Graduation Rate, as it reflects the completion rate and the dropout rate for those

students who attended a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community and those students who attended a Traditional Comprehensive High School which contained grades nine through twelve. Moreover, data pertaining to achievement based on the Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Tests in Algebra I and Ninth Grade Literature were analyzed to determine statistical significances, if any, between the two groups. Additionally, the study examined the attendance trends of ninth grade students within the two comparison groups. All public high schools within the state of Georgia were the sample population.

The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (gosa.org) archives public accessible records of data for each high school in the state of Georgia pertaining to Graduation Rate, attendance, and Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Tests in all subject areas. The data for EOCT test scores in 9th Grade Literature and Algebra I are listed as percentages broken down into three categories: fail, pass, and pass plus. Attendance data is listed as percentages broken down into three categories as well: students who miss 5 or fewer days of school, students who miss 6-15 days of school, and students who miss more than 15 days of school. Data for the Graduation Rate for the graduating class of 2011 is calculated on the Cohort Rate for all schools in the state of Georgia and is archived as the percentage of students that graduated during that school year. Each data set for each component is further broken down into demographic subgroups of: race/ethnicity, gender, students with disabilities, students without disabilities, limited English proficient, economically disadvantaged, not economically disadvantaged, and migrant populations (as percentages). The researcher utilized this public domain website to collect data for Graduation Rate, attendance, and End of Course

Tests in Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I as well as demographic information for all of the Georgia public high schools in the study. For each independent variable, Traditional Comprehensive High School, and Ninth Grade Academy as well as the dependent variables, the data collection spreadsheet categories are listed in Appendix D.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

This research study is designed to answer the following research questions:

Research Question #1: Is there a difference in Graduation Rate among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #1: There is no difference in Graduation Rate among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

Research Question #2: Is there a difference in the Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Test scores for Ninth Grade Literature among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #2: There is no difference in Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Test scores for Ninth Grade Literature among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

Research Question #3: Is there a difference in the Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Test scores for Ninth Grade Algebra I among students who attend a Ninth

Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #3: There is no difference in the Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Test scores for Ninth Grade Algebra I among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

Research Question #4: Is there a difference in attendance among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #4: There is no difference in attendance among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

Participants

The researcher obtained data from all public high schools in the state of Georgia. According to Gall, Gall, & Borg (2007), “Studies based on a narrow accessible population are, of course, less generalizable than those based on broader populations” (p. 168). Therefore, this larger more general sample served a well defined base for the population validity of this sample population for the study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). A public domain website, The Governor’s Office of Student Achievement, (gosa.org) archives data for each reporting high school in the state of Georgia with data pertaining to Graduation Rate, attendance, and End of Course Tests for all tested subject areas. Demographic data is also available on the website for each reporting school. This website was utilized to collect data for the attendance, End of Course Tests in Ninth

Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I during the school year of 2007-2008, as well as the Graduation Rate for the school year of 2011. A telephone survey was also used for data collection (Appendix B). As Gall, Gall, & Borg (2007) state, “Virtually any type of measuring instrument can be used in causal-comparative research” (p. 314). The documented telephone survey involved a phone call to central office personnel of all public school districts within the state of Georgia to determine whether the district assigned the ninth grade students for the school year 2007-2008 to the group of a Traditional Comprehensive High School as defined in the survey as consisting of grades nine through twelve in a comprehensive high school setting, or a Ninth Grade Academy, in which the definition was a separation of the ninth graders into their own Small Learning Community, either within the same building, or a separate building. The researcher also asked the question of which category of community, either urban, suburban, or rural, the school was considered. If the independent variable of a Ninth Grade Academy was present, the research asked the question whether or not the NGA was on-campus or off-campus.

The intention of this study was to establish possible causes for any significant differences found between the two groups as independent variables, Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities or Traditional Comprehensive High schools and the dependent variables in the study: student achievement as measured by Graduation Rate and the Georgia Performance End of Course Test scores in the courses of Algebra I and Ninth Grade Literature, as well as attendance trends of ninth graders within the two comparison groups.

Setting

This study will include data collected from all public high schools within the state of Georgia. The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) publishes data from each high school for each school year; this data is public domain. Data were collected from all public high schools. Since the researcher used the target population of Georgia public high schools, the sampling frame was the published list of high schools in the state of Georgia from The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (Appendix C). The procedure for the sampling included permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University (Appendix A) and the district office personnel's participation of the telephone survey (Appendix B) of the public Georgia high schools called in the study. After proper permission was granted by all involved parties, the researcher began to collect the data from the GOSA website. The data were analyzed through specific statistical testing utilizing the computer program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS); the researcher then began to draw some conclusions from data sets and began to identify the effects between the variables in the study.

Instrumentation

The data used within this study was considered ex-post facto. Gall, et al., (2007) defines causal-comparative research an ex-post facto design "...because in these types of investigation, causes are studied after they presumably have exerted their effect on the variable of interest" (p. 639). Demographic statistics for all schools in the study were reported using descriptive statistics. A documented telephone survey was used in which district office personnel of Georgia's public high schools identified the ninth grade students of their high school in the school year of 2007-2008 as either in a Traditional

Comprehensive High School setting, or a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community. This survey served as the criteria for determining the two comparison groups. Central office personnel of public high schools in Georgia that were not able to confirm the structure of the ninth grade during the 2007-2008 school year were not included in the study. Moreover, high schools that did not meet the criteria for either a Traditional High School or a Ninth Grade Academy configuration as set forth in the survey definitions for this specific research study were also excluded from the sample.

This study's validity and reliability is heightened due to the sample size of the study being rather large; because of this, a reduction in the threat of generalization validity will occur. Gall, Gall, & Borg (2010) state, "The general rule in quantitative research is to use the largest sample possible. The larger the sample, the more likely the research participant's scores on the measured variable will be representative of population scores" (p. 176). Variables that were not under the analysis of the study, such as variation in instruction, intervention programs, such as mentors or freshmen focus classes, resources and professional development for teachers, as well as school leadership practices, possibly pose a threat to the validity of the findings in this study. Additionally, the research was conducted using schools with a wide range of demographics; some schools within the study could be considered more urbanized than others. This factor could represent a misleading representation of the sample population.

The Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Tests are criterion-referenced tests aligned with state high school courses in the content specific areas. End of Course Tests are state mandated in many high school courses, including Ninth Grade Literature and Algebra I in ninth grade. The EOCT provides a suitable measurement for the

academic achievement of the content courses in Ninth Grade Literature and Algebra I in ninth grade. The EOCT is administered at the closure of the course for which it is designed. Each course that includes a state mandated EOCT as part of the final grade requires that the EOCT is calculated as fifteen percent of the student's final grade. (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

Reliability of End of Course Tests in Georgia is regulated by The Georgia Department of Education due to state-mandated testing procedures. This includes the End of Course Tests in the ninth grades. According to the Georgia Department of Education (2011), rigorous guidelines have been established by the American Psychological Association (APA), The American Educational Research Association (AERA), and the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME). The reliability of this study conforms to the compilation of data from standardized tests, the End of Course Tests for Ninth Grade Literature and Algebra I in the ninth grade. The End of Course Test for all courses is based upon the Georgia Performance Standards. End of Course tests are designed to meet the requirements of reliability with little error for interpretation of the results.

The Georgia Department of Education (2011) maintains that the development of Georgia's End of Course Tests "...adheres to the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing..." (p. 1). Evidence of validity is validated through rigorous content and curricular test item development, in addition to alignment with the Georgia curricular strands of Georgia Performance Standards in specific content of knowledge and skills. Once validity of End of Course Test assessment was established, the Georgia Department of Education established two reliability indices. The first index was

Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient. As reported by the Georgia Department of Education, "internal consistency index alpha values are in the range of 0.85 to 0.93" (p. 7) which implies the range is within the values for industry standards on criterion-referenced tests such as the End of Course Tests. This range suggests adequate reliability for the End of Course Test. The second index, the use of Standard Error of Measurement (SEM), was used to quantify a test on the basis for which scores were reported. The SEM value ranges were reported as: 3.38 to 3.81 for summer 2010 administration, 3.26 to 3.25 for winter administration, and 3.25 to 3.67 for spring administration. Indications from the reported SEM ranges suggest a reasonably high reliability across various End of Course Test administrations for the school year 2010-2011 (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).

Regulatory guidelines for calculation of Graduation Rate are mandated by federal guidelines for calculation of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as set forth by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. A uniform calculation of Georgia's Graduation Rate is required beginning with the graduates of the year 2011. Since the implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* and the demands made on school systems to meet Adequate Yearly Progress, states are required to calculate the Graduation Rate uniformly (Swanson, 2003). Since 2002, the calculation was obtained by a "Leaver Rate" which was determined by the number of students who graduate high school within four years, not including special education and attendance diplomas. This method was acceptable due to the lack of a statewide individual tracking program that could not track individual students throughout all four years of high school. Therefore, the Lever Rate is a proxy calculation and only tracks students who entered ninth grade and graduated on time four

years later (The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2008).

Beginning with graduates of 2012, for compliance with *No Child Left Behind*, the new Cohort rate will replace the Lever rate in accordance with federal law and will allow a uniform type of calculation for all 50 states. According to John Barge, Georgia's state school superintendent, "This is a better method to calculate numbers, and I think it will be a better indicator of progress in our schools" (Lewis, 2012, para. 6). Since Georgia was a Race to the Top state winner, the Cohort rate was calculated using the data from the 2011 graduating class. This will allow individual students to be tracked and accounted for upon entering and exiting high schools within the state of Georgia (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2012).

For the purpose of this study, since the graduating class of 2011 was the data analyzed for the Graduation Rate, the Cohort rate was the calculation used for the study. The End of Course Test data was collected from the school year 2007-2008 to maintain the same cohort group of students and data collected synchronized with students who graduated during 2011 and who attended the ninth grade during 2007-2008.

A central office personnel survey served as the means by which each school was placed into one of the two comparison groups, either Traditional Comprehensive High School, or Ninth Grade Academy. Each central office of a public high school in the state of Georgia was called and surveyed. The survey asked one question that pertained to the grade configuration of the high school, one question about the community category, (urban, suburban, or rural), and if a Ninth Grade Academy was present, one question as to whether the NGA was on-campus or off-campus. The survey transcript (Appendix B) is as follows: "I am conducting a causal-comparative research study of the effects of

Graduation Rate, End of Course Test scores, and attendance in freshmen at Ninth Grade Academies as compared to freshmen at Traditional Comprehensive High Schools in Georgia for the school year 2007-2008. The study will provide valuable information as to whether or not the implementation of a transition program, a Ninth Grade Academy, provides positive strategies for increased student achievement. The definition of a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community for the purpose of this study is when ninth grade students are separated, either on a hall or other location like a separate building from the remaining high school grades as a transition strategy." Then, "Did your high school(s) operate a freshmen Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community during the school year of 2007-2008?" The answer was documented. If the answer was yes, a further question was asked: "Was the Ninth Grade Academy on campus or off campus?" The answer was documented. "What demographic best describes the high school in question: urban, suburban, or rural?" The answer was documented. The name of the contact personnel from the District Office was documented; however, this information was only for the researcher's purposes and was non-identifiable otherwise.

From the survey, the researcher determined in which independent variable group the high school was included: either a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community or Traditional Comprehensive High School and whether or not the NGA, if present, was on-campus or off-campus, as well as the community category the school considered itself, either urban, suburban, or rural.

Procedure

First and foremost, Liberty University's Institutional Review Board approved the

study (Appendix A). After gaining approval from IRB, the telephone survey (Appendix B) to central office personnel in Georgia's public high schools was conducted and the researcher began to call to survey districts of the 470 Georgia public high schools. The telephone survey gathered the necessary information about that school system's ninth grade configuration; more specifically, whether the ninth grade students for the school year 2007-2008 in their system attended a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community or a Traditional Comprehensive High School setting. After the survey responses were recorded and analyzed, the participants (high schools) were divided into two comparison groups and the second data collection procedures began. The data collection for Graduation Rate, attendance, and End of Course Tests was gathered from the public domain website, The Governor's Office of Student Achievement, (gosa.org). The website, The Governor's Office of Student Achievement was utilized to gather data on the schools in the study for attendance, End of Course Tests in Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I for the school year of 2007-2008 as well as the Graduation Rate for the school year of 2011 which was the cohort group of freshmen's graduating class.

Data collection included information on descriptive statistics on the sample population as well as statistical testing that analyzed assumption testing such as normal distribution, sample size, and any outliers that could have constituted validity and reliability errors. The data was disaggregated to reflect the two comparison groups' data analysis of attendance, Graduation Rate, and End of Course Test scores in Ninth Grade Literature and Algebra I. Proper statistical testing using a Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program aided the researcher's analyses with tables,

charts, and figures. The results of the data are interpreted in Chapter Four.

Data Analysis

The data were entered into SPSS for analysis. The analyses proceeded in two stages. First, descriptive statistics were calculated on all research variables. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for ordinal and nominal scaled variables, and means and standard deviations were calculated for all continuous variables. In the second stage of the data processing, the researcher utilized inferential statistics to address the study's research questions. All inferential tests were conducted at $\alpha = .05$.

For *Research Question 1*, an independent samples t-test was conducted to address the question "Is there a difference in Graduation Rate among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?" The independent samples t-test was appropriate when comparing two independent groups on a continuous dependent variable (Howell, 2011). The dependent variable (Graduation Rate) for research question 1 is continuous, and the independent variable (school type) is a dichotomous nominal scale. The data were screened for outliers by group. A participant was considered an outlier when $|\text{standardized score}|$ was greater than 3. Histograms were displayed for each group to assess the normality assumption. Levene's test was used to assess the homogeneity of variances assumption. The degrees of freedom were adjusted to compensate for potential unequal variances. A t-test table and a table of descriptive statistics is also displayed.

For *Research Questions 2 and 3*, "Is there a difference in the Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Test scores for Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning

Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?” the dependent variables are ordinal scaled (Ninth Grade Literature End of Course Tests scores and Ninth Grade Algebra I End of Course Test Scores) and the independent variable is a dichotomous nominal scale, a Mann-Whitney test for the hypotheses for Research Question 2 and Research Question 3 was conducted. The Mann-Whitney test is the non-parametric equivalent of the independent samples t-test. It is appropriate when comparing two independent groups on an ordinal scaled dependent variable (Howell, 2011). A table of test statistics and descriptive statistics are displayed for each analysis for Research Questions 2 and 3.

For *Research Question 4*, “Is there a difference in attendance among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?” The dependent variable is ordinal scaled with attendance data organized in three ordinal percentages for each school. The percentages are reported for each high school as follows: the percentage of students absent five or less days, percentage of students absent from six to fifteen days, and percentage of students absent more than fifteen days during the school year. The independent variable is a dichotomous nominal scale, Ninth Grade Academy or Traditional Comprehensive High School. Thus, a Mann-Whitney test for the hypothesis for Research Question 4 was performed to address Research Question 4. A table of test statistics and descriptive statistics are displayed for the analysis of Research Question 4.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to determine the differences, if any, that school configuration during the high school years has on student achievement. More specifically, this study analyzed public high schools in Georgia that operated as a Traditional Comprehensive High School (TCHS) with grades nine through twelve in one building as compared to public high schools in Georgia that operated a Ninth Grade Academy (NGA), either on campus or off campus as a Small Learning Community (SLC) as part of the school's grade configuration. All public high schools in the state of Georgia were potential participants in this study.

Participants

All reporting public high schools in the state of Georgia that were in operation during the 2007-2008 school year and were concurrently still in operation during the 2011 school year were included as participants in the study. The first aspect of the study included the researcher collecting data from the district office of each public high school as to whether or not their school operated a Ninth Grade Academy for the school year of 2007-2008; additionally, the researcher categorized the high schools into high schools that did not operate a Ninth Grade Academy, or more specifically, Traditional Comprehensive High Schools and high schools that operated a NGA as an SLC, they were then asked to identify if the NGA was operational as either on-campus or off-campus. Moreover, all schools were asked to identify their school as either in an urban, suburban, or rural location.

In the second aspect of the study, the researcher utilized a public domain website, The Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), <http://www.gosa.org>, to collect

demographic data, attendance data, and End of Course Test data for the school year of 2007-2008 for each reporting public high school in Georgia; moreover, Graduation Rate data was collected for the school year of 2011 for those same reporting public high schools. The school year of 2007-2008 included the freshmen in attendance at the public high school and thus the graduation class of 2011 was the cohort group of freshmen under study. The data was analyzed to determine the impact, if any, that Ninth Grade Academies (NGAs) in Georgia's public high schools had on student achievement as measured by attendance, and End of Course Tests for the school year of 2007-2008 and additionally to seek if there was an impact on the Graduation Rate of this cohort of freshmen for the graduating year of 2011.

Sample Descriptive Statistics

In the school year of 2007-2008, a total of approximately 470 public high schools were in operation in the state of Georgia. After collecting data for all of the public high schools in the state for the school year of 2007-2008 for attendance, and End of Course Tests (EOCTs) in Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I, as well as Graduation Rate for the 2010-2011 school year, 103 public high schools were excluded from the study due to unavoidable factors. For a school to be determined as an excluded school, some or parts of the data that were pertinent to this study were lacking; therefore, the school was not included. The specifics for an exclusion is as follows: too few students to report data to GOSA ($N < 30$), ninth graders were housed in a junior high setting (grades 7-12) during the school year of 2007-2008, the high school was in operation in 2007-2008, but the school closed before the freshman class graduated in 2011, one or more elements of the data required of the study, either Graduation Rate,

attendance, or EOCT scores were not reported to or were missing from the GOSA website. Of the 470 Georgia public schools in operation in 2007-2008 and still in operation during the school year of 2010-2011, 106 public high schools were excluded from the study.

The data collection began with the researcher determining the standpoint of either the independent variable, Ninth Grade Academy, being present or absent. Schools were categorized into two independent variable groups, Traditional Comprehensive High Schools or high schools that operated Ninth Grade Academies (NGAs). Moreover, during the data collection the researcher collected data on whether or not the high school was considered urban, suburban, or rural and if the independent variable was discovered to be present, the researcher established whether or not the Ninth Grade Academy was on-campus or off-campus. The dependent variables: Graduation Rate, EOCT scores in Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I, and attendance were the achievement indicators in this study.

A total of 365 public high schools in Georgia were the participants in this study of academic outcomes at Ninth Grade Academies and Traditional Comprehensive High Schools. Among the participating schools were 260 (71.2%) Traditional Comprehensive High Schools and 105 (28.8%) Ninth Grade Academies. The descriptive statistics for the Traditional Comprehensive High Schools and Ninth Grade Academies are listed in Tables 1 and 2, respectively. Approximately half (128, 49.2%) the Traditional Comprehensive High Schools were located in a rural location. Seventy-six (29.2%) schools reported from a suburban location, and 56 (21.5%) schools reported from an urban location. Approximately half (51, 48.6%) the Ninth Grade Academies were in a

rural location, which is similar to the proportion for the Traditional Comprehensive High Schools. However, the Ninth Grade Academies' differed from the Traditional Comprehensive High Schools in the proportion of suburban and urban locations. Forty-four (41.9%) Ninth Grade Academies reported from a suburban location, and only 10 (9.5%) reported from an urban location. A majority (91, 86.7%) of the Ninth Grade Academies were on-campus.

Table 1. Frequencies & Percentages for Traditional Comprehensive High Schools

Variable	N	%
Location		
Rural	128	49.2
Suburban	76	29.2
Urban	56	21.5

Table 2. Frequencies & Percentages for Ninth Grade Academies

Variable	N	%
Location		
Rural	51	48.6
Suburban	44	41.9
Urban	10	9.5
Campus Type		
Off-Campus	14	13.3
On-Campus	91	86.7

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question #1: Is there a difference in Graduation Rate among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #1: There is no difference in Graduation Rate among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

An independent samples t-test (Howell, 2010) was conducted to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between Graduation Rate from Ninth Grade Academies and Graduation Rate from Traditional Comprehensive High Schools on reporting schools data. The data was reported in a ratio scale using percentages for each independent group, TCHS or NGA. Institution (traditional vs. academy) was the between-subjects independent variable, and Graduation Rate was the dependent variable. Confounding variables such as size of school, location of school, parental involvement, class size, leadership style, etc. were not controlled for as a part of this research study. Further discussion of confounding variables is investigated in Chapter Five.

The data were screened for outliers. The participating schools' dependent variable scores were standardized by group using z-scores, and schools were removed if $|\text{standardized score}|$ was greater than 3. This process revealed 5 outliers in the data. After removing the outliers, histograms were created in the software Statistical Procedures for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for each group. The histograms revealed a symmetrical, bell-shaped curve, thus indicating tenability of the assumption. That is, normality can be assumed. The distributions of Graduation Rates for the Traditional

Comprehensive High Schools and Ninth Grade Academies are presented in Figures 1 and 2, respectively. Both histograms revealed sample Graduation Rates that were normally distributed. Levene's Test for Equality of Variance was not significant at a level larger than .05, indicating the schools had similar error variances. The histograms are presented below.

Figure 1. Distribution of Traditional Comprehensive High School Graduation Rate

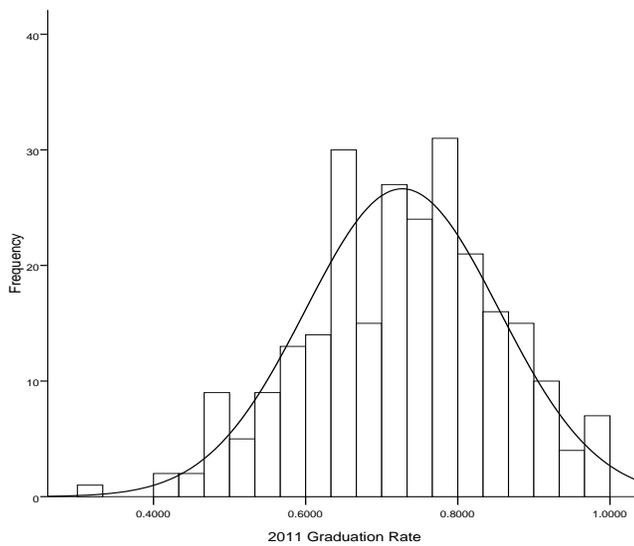
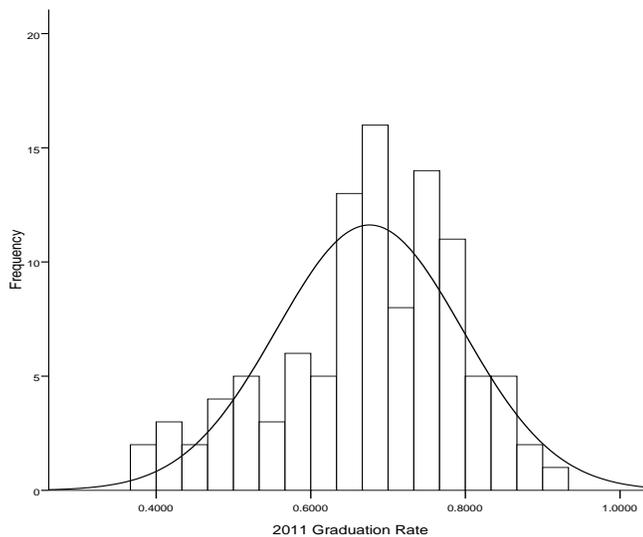


Figure 2. Distribution of Ninth Grade Academy Graduation Rate



The means and standard deviations are listed in Table 3. The t-test (Table 4) revealed a significant difference between the Traditional Comprehensive High Schools and the Ninth Grade Academies on 2011 Graduation Rate, $t(358) = 3.52$, $d = .37$, $p = .000$. The effect size (d) indicated that the difference between the means was moderate. The Traditional Comprehensive High School ($M = 72.71$, $SD = 12.73$) had a significantly higher 2011 Graduation Rate than the Ninth Grade Academy ($M = 67.60$, $SD = 12.01$). Thus, the researcher rejects null hypothesis 1.

Table 3. Mean Graduation Rate by School Group

School Group	N	M	SD
Traditional Comprehensive High School	255	72.71	12.73
Ninth Grade Academy	105	67.60	12.01

Table 4. Test Statistics for Research Question 1-Graduation Rate

T	Df	Sig.	Mean Difference	SE Difference	95% CI of the Difference	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
3.52	358	.000	5.11	1.45	2.25	7.96

Research Question #2: Is there a difference in the Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Test scores for Ninth Grade Literature among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students

who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #2: There is no difference in Georgia Performance Standards End of Test scores for Ninth Grade Literature among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

A Mann-Whitney test (Howell, 2010) was conducted to address research question 2. The Mann-Whitney test is the non-parametric equivalent of the independent samples t-test. It was utilized in this case because the proportions of dependent variable Ninth Grade Literature End of Course Test scores were originally derived from an ordinal scale (i.e., fail, pass, pass plus). Confounding variables such as size of school, location of school, parental involvement, class size, leadership style, etc. were not controlled for as a part of this research study. Further discussion of confounding variables is investigated in Chapter Five.

The descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney test statistics are listed in Tables 5 and 6, respectively. The Mann-Whitney test revealed a significant difference in Ninth Grade Literature End of Course Tests pass rates between the Traditional Comprehensive High Schools and the Ninth Grade Academies, $U = 10,739.00$, $p = .001$. The Traditional Comprehensive High Schools (mean rank 194.20) reported significantly higher Ninth Grade Literature End of Course Test pass rates than the Ninth Grade Academies (mean rank 155.28). Thus, the researcher rejects null hypothesis 2. The mean literature pass rate organized by school appears below in Table 5. The test statistics for research question 2, the Mann Whitney U appears in Table 6 with Z score and the significance level of .01 reported.

Table 5. Mean Rank of Literature Pass Rate by School Group

School Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Traditional High School	260	194.20	50,491.00
Ninth Grade Academy	105	155.28	16,304.00

Table 6. Test Statistics for Research Question 2

Mann-Whitney U	Z	Sig.
10,739.00	-3.19	.001

Research Question #3: Is there a difference in the Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Test scores for Ninth Grade Algebra I among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #3: There is no difference in the Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Test scores for Ninth Grade Algebra I among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

Research Question 3 was also tested with the Mann-Whitney U, which is the non-parametric equivalent of the independent samples t-test. It was utilized in this case because the proportions of dependent variable Ninth Grade Algebra I End of Course Test scores were originally derived from an ordinal scale (i.e., fail, pass, pass plus). The dependent variable for this test was Algebra I pass rates for the reporting schools.

Confounding variables such as size of school, location of school, parental involvement, class size, leadership style, etc. were not controlled for as a part of this research study. Further discussion of confounding variables is investigated in Chapter Five. The descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney test statistics are listed in Tables 7 and 8, respectively. The Mann-Whitney test revealed a significant difference in Ninth Grade Algebra I pass rates between the Traditional Comprehensive High Schools and the Ninth Grade Academies, $U = 10,442.00$, $p = .000$. The Traditional Comprehensive High Schools (mean rank 195.34) reported significantly higher Ninth Grade Algebra I pass rates than the Ninth Grade Academies (mean rank 152.45). Thus, the researcher rejects null hypothesis 3.

Table 7. Mean Rank of Algebra Pass Rate by School Group

School Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Traditional Comprehensive High School	260	195.34	50,788.00
Ninth Grade Academy	105	152.45	16,007.00

Table 8. Test Statistics for Research Question 3

Mann-Whitney U	Z	Sig.
10,442.00	-3.52	.000

Research Question #4: Is there a difference in attendance among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students

who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #4: There is no difference in attendance among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

Lastly, a Mann-Whitney test was used to assess research question 4. A Mann-Whitney test (Howell, 2010) was conducted to address research question 4 because the Mann-Whitney test is the non-parametric equivalent of the independent samples t-test. It was utilized in this case because the proportions of dependent variable attendance were originally derived from an ordinal scale (i.e., absences of 0-5 days, 6-15 days, and >15 days). The dependent variable for this test was attendance rates for the reporting schools. Confounding variables such as size of school, location of school, parental involvement, class size, leadership style, etc. were not controlled for as a part of this research study. Further discussion of confounding variables is investigated in Chapter Five. The descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney test statistics are listed in Tables 9 and 10, respectively. The Mann-Whitney test revealed a significant difference in attendance rates between the Traditional Comprehensive High Schools and the Ninth Grade Academies, $U = 10,407.00$, $p = .000$. The Traditional Comprehensive High Schools (mean rank 195.47) reported significantly higher attendance rates than the Ninth Grade Academies (mean rank 152.11). Thus, the researcher rejects null hypothesis 4.

Table 9. Mean Rank of Attendance Rate by School Group

School Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Traditional Comprehensive High School	260	195.47	50,823.00
Ninth Grade Academy	105	152.11	15,972.00

Table 10. Test Statistics for Research Question 4

Mann-Whitney U	Z	Sig.
10,407.00	-3.55	.000

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the differences between high schools that had implemented Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities that were in operation during the school year of 2007-2008 in the state of Georgia and high schools that operated as a Traditional Comprehensive High School including grades 9-12 as the grade configuration. Data collected from 365 public high schools in Georgia were used to analyze the four research questions of the study. For research question one, an independent samples t-test was used discover statistical significance between Graduation Rates for the school year of 2011 in public Traditional Comprehensive High Schools and public high schools operating a Ninth Grade Academy in the state of Georgia; there was a significant statistical difference between the two comparison groups. For Graduation Rate, the t-test revealed Traditional Comprehensive High Schools had a higher Graduation Rate; therefore, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis for research question one.

For research questions two and three, End of Course Tests for Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I, a Mann-Whitney test was utilized for both of these indicators of academic achievement. For both End of Course Tests, Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I, a significant statistical difference was found

between the two comparison groups of TCHS and NGAs. For both questions, the Mann-Whitney test reported higher test scores in Traditional Comprehensive High Schools in comparison to high schools that had implemented and operated a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community; thus, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis for research questions two and three.

The fourth research question compared attendance data between the two comparison groups. A Mann-Whitney test showed significant statistical differences between the Traditional Comprehensive High Schools and high schools operating a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community. The Traditional Comprehensive High Schools reported higher attendance rates than the high schools that operated a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community during the school year of 2007-2008 in the state of Georgia; additionally, for research question four, the null hypothesis was rejected by the researcher.

In Chapter Five, the results are discussed further. Moreover, implications related to the findings of this study will be reviewed and further conclusions will be drawn as well.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The researcher examined whether or not the implementation of a Ninth Grade Academy (NGA) as a Small Learning Community (SLC) had an effect on student achievement as measured by Graduation Rate, End of Course Tests (EOCTs) in Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I, as well as attendance in comparison to high schools that operate without Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities, but rather as a Traditional Comprehensive High School (TCHS). As an aid to the reader, this final chapter of the dissertation is to restate the problem and review the methods of the study. Additionally, the chapter will summarize the results, provide a discussion about the findings, and provide insight into the limitations of the study. Finally, the implications of the methodological and practical areas of this study will conclude this chapter.

Restatement of the Problem

The American Psychological Association (2010) reported that every year more than 1.3 million high school students decide to drop out of high school and not earn a high school diploma. Even more important, the impact of students who drop out of high school is that of billions of dollars lost in potential wages; furthermore, the cost to our nation paid in the form of benefits is immense (The Alliance of Excellent Education, 2010). For educators and school officials everywhere, the dilemma over the low graduation rate has become a topic of the need for reform in our high schools. In Georgia, the substandard 67.5% graduation rate (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2012) has led to a trend of school districts redesigning high schools in an unconventional grade configuration. Many high schools in Georgia have opted to

separate the freshmen from the upper classmen into Small Learning Communities as Ninth Grade Academies. The added expenses to the districts that implement Ninth Grade Academies is significant.

Unfortunately, research and current literature in the field has not confirmed the benefits of Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities and more research is needed so that educators can make informed decisions as high schools configure the grades for each school. For the sake of our nation's future, the educational community must use funds to educate our students wisely. Moreover, the future society of America depends on our students leaving high school with a diploma which will prepare them for their future, and ultimately, America's future. Another disturbing fact is that many of the students that quit high school will have done so based upon the success or failure of their ninth grade year (Bottoms, 2011). This creates an even more urgent need to improve our high schools.

The problem is that research has not confirmed the benefits of new emerging grade configurations of Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities in Georgia. This study serves as additional research in the field of education about Small Learning Communities and the ninth grade transition year. Moreover, this study contributes to the body of knowledge available about Georgia's Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities as compared to Traditional Comprehensive High Schools and their effectiveness for student achievement.

Review of the Methodology

A causal-comparative study was utilized to determine if, from the standpoint of either the independent variable being present or absent, Traditional Comprehensive High

School setting, or Ninth Grade Academy, has a statistical significant differences on the dependent variables: Graduation Rate, EOCT scores in Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I, and attendance. The following research questions and null hypotheses were used in this study:

Research Question #1: Is there a difference in Graduation Rate among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #1: There is no difference in Graduation Rate among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

Research Question #2: Is there a difference in the Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Test scores for Ninth Grade Literature among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #2: There is no difference in Georgia Performance Standards End of Test scores for Ninth Grade Literature among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

Research Question #3: Is there a difference in the Georgia Performance Standards End of Course Test scores for Ninth Grade Algebra I among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #3: There is no difference in the Georgia Performance Standards End

of Course Test scores for Ninth Grade Algebra I among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

Research Question #4: Is there a difference in attendance among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School?

Null Hypothesis #4: There is no difference in attendance among students who attend a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community as opposed to students who attend a Traditional Comprehensive High School.

Summary of Results

For the first research question, the data were screened for outliers. The participating schools' dependent variable scores were standardized by group using z scores, and schools were removed if $|\text{standardized score}|$ was greater than 3. This process revealed 5 outliers in the data. After removing the outliers, histograms were created for each group. The distributions for both groups revealed sample Graduation Rates that were normally distributed in Figure 1 and 2. Levene's test was not significant, indicating the schools had equal error variances. The t-test, listed in Table 4, revealed a significant difference between the Traditional Comprehensive High Schools and the Ninth Grade Academies on 2011 Graduation Rate, $t(358) = 3.52$, $d = .37$, $p = .000$. The effect size (d) indicated that the difference between the means was moderate. The Traditional Comprehensive High School ($M = 72.71$, $SD = 12.73$) had a significantly higher 2011 Graduation Rate than the Ninth Grade Academies ($M = 67.60$, $SD = 12.01$). Therefore, the researcher rejected null hypothesis 1.

A Mann-Whitney test (Howell, 2010) was conducted to address research question 2. The Mann-Whitney test is the non-parametric equivalent of the independent samples t-test. It was utilized in this case because the proportions of dependent variable Ninth Grade Literature End of Course Test scores were originally derived from an ordinal scale (fail, pass, and pass plus). The descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney test statistics were listed in Tables 5 and 6. The results of the Mann-Whitney test revealed a significant difference in Ninth Grade Literature End of Course Tests pass rates between the Traditional Comprehensive High Schools and the Ninth Grade Academies, $U = 10,739.00$, $p = .001$. The Traditional Comprehensive High Schools (mean rank 194.20) reported significantly higher Ninth Grade Literature End of Course Test pass rates than the Ninth Grade Academies (mean rank 155.28). Thus, the researcher rejected null hypothesis 2.

For Research Question 3, the Mann-Whitney was utilized for the same reasons as for Research Question 2. It was utilized in this case because the proportions of dependent variable Ninth Grade Algebra I End of Course Test scores were originally derived from an ordinal scale wherein the reporting percentages were reported as the percentage of students who failed, passed, and exceeded the test. The dependent variable for this test was Ninth Grade Algebra I pass rates for the reporting schools. The descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney test statistics were listed in Tables 7 and 8, respectively. The Mann-Whitney test revealed a significant difference in Ninth Grade Algebra I pass rates between the Traditional Comprehensive High Schools and the Ninth Grade Academies, $U = 10,442.00$, $p = .000$. Again for this End of Course Test in Ninth Grade Algebra I, the Traditional Comprehensive High Schools (mean rank 195.34) reported significantly

higher Ninth Grade Algebra I pass rates than the Ninth Grade Academies (mean rank 152.45). Thus, the researcher rejected null hypothesis 3.

Lastly, for Research Question 4, a Mann-Whitney test was used to assess the dependent variable of attendance rates for the reporting schools. The descriptive statistics and Mann-Whitney test statistics were listed in Tables 9 and 10. The Mann-Whitney test revealed a significant difference in attendance rates between the Traditional Comprehensive High Schools and the Ninth Grade Academies, $U = 10,407.00$, $p = .000$. The Traditional Comprehensive High Schools (mean rank 195.47) reported significantly higher attendance rates than the Ninth Grade Academies (mean rank 152.11). Thus, the researcher rejected null hypothesis 4.

For all research questions in this study as measures of student achievement, Graduation Rate, End of Course Tests in Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I, and attendance, the null hypotheses were rejected and data analyses of the results revealed significant differences between the two comparison groups with Traditional Comprehensive High Schools having higher scores in student achievement as measured by Graduation Rate, End of Course Tests, and attendance than Ninth Grade Academies configured as Small Learning Communities.

Discussion

Literature reviewed in Chapter Two had mixed results when comparing Small Learning Communities to schools with traditional grade configuration structures. The gap in the literature review suggested that statewide studies of Small Learning Communities, especially in the transition year of Ninth Grade had not been conducted. However, there was a multitude of research literature in the field of education that points

to the ninth grade year as a pivotal year, where students are more likely to fail, more likely to be truant, and more likely to have discipline referrals than any other grade (Bottoms, 2011; Levine, 2010). More importantly, the ninth grade year is the year when students form opinions about their future success or failure of school (McCallumore & Sparapari, 2010; NCES, 2010; Rouse & Kemple, 2009; Alspaugh, 1998). This study attempted to make inferences about Small Learning Communities (SLCs) as they related to the Ninth Grade Academy (NGA) concept in the state of Georgia. From the data analyses, all indicators for student achievement as they pertained to this study were statistically significant with Traditional Comprehensive High Schools (TCHS) having higher percentages in every category: Graduation Rate, attendance, End of Course Tests in Ninth Grade Literature and End of Course Tests in Ninth Grade Algebra I. The results of this study, based upon the student achievement measures utilized, implied that Traditional Comprehensive High Schools do impact student performance in a more positive way.

Since this study could only focus on the Graduation Rate year of 2011, the first year there was a uniform calculation in Georgia, it could be suggested that the higher percentages for Traditional Comprehensive High Schools is due to reverse causality. Therefore, it is postulated that districts operating a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community may have implemented the grade configuration due to historical low performance of their high school. The researcher suggests school districts that already operate a NGA as a SLC to examine the reasons for their implementation of a Ninth Grade Academy and conduct longitudinal data analyses to determine if academic achievement has increased since their implementation. Moreover, public high schools in

the state of Georgia that are considering the formation of a NGA as a SLC as a reconfiguration of their TCHS structure should closely examine the current predictor variables of student achievement to determine whether or not the implementation of a NGA as a SLC could positively affect student achievement in their high school.

Steverson (2007) contends that models of different learning communities must be designed with specific needs of learners be taken into consideration. This suggests that school districts in high poverty areas with low performing high schools could have reconfigured the TCHS into a NGA as a SLC previously as a means to boost academic achievement, and potentially could have since increased student achievement since the reconfiguration to an NGA than when the high school was previously a TCHS. In fact, Worrell & Hale's (2011) study of SLC's and self-efficacy concluded that a direct correlation exists for students in high poverty areas for school climate and school completion. Worrell & Hale (2011) maintain that Small Learning Communities are a feasible way to improve school climate for schools with preexisting risk factors.

Because of the way the school districts are required to report data to the Governor's Office of Student Achievement, all data are reported with percentages for each category: Graduation Rate, attendance, End of Course Tests, and demographic information. Demographic information is reported for percentages of race/ethnicity as follows: Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native American, White, and Multiracial. For other subgroups, the percentages are reported as follows: Limited English Proficient, Eligible for Free or Reduced Lunch, and Migrant Students. These types of reporting requirements did not allow the researcher to utilize the race/ethnicity and other subgroups categories as part of the data analyses due to the specific design of this study. This also represented

why the data collected in some areas was ordinal scale data. For example, End of Course Test data for Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I were reported as the percentage of students that had failed, passed, and exceeded. The other ordinal scaled data was reported on attendance. Each school district reported the attendance data as the percentage of students that were absent five or less days, six to fifteen days, and the percentage of students that were absent more than fifteen days. This ordinal data represented the need for the researcher to conduct the non-parametric tests of the Mann Whitney rather than the parametric tests for this data set. Unfortunately, this did not allow this research study to specifically address Race/Ethnicity and Other Subgroups as variable on a school level which could have possibly influenced the outcome of the results.

One area that should be examined by the educational community is why Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities were originally formed and configured for each district in the first place. Since the majority of high schools in the state of Georgia do not operate a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community, it is postulated that school districts must analyze performance data for their high school before implementing such grade configurations. Additionally, schools with Ninth Grade Academies already in place should be closely examined through a longitudinal data collection process to discover if, in fact, the NGA is creating the optimum learning environment. With additional resources required of Small Learning Communities, (Oxley & Kessissieh, 2008) and with a budget crisis in today's economy, it is more important than ever to further investigate SLC's as a mode of discourse used to boost academic achievement in our public high schools (Levine 2010).

Limitations

There were several factors that could have potentially influenced the results of this study. They are as follows: Ninth Grade Academies and Traditional Comprehensive High Schools were not matched demographically, intervention strategies, such as mentors, study halls, freshmen focus classes at both NGAs and TCHS were not part of the study. Additionally, the leadership of the school was not explored, teacher effectiveness and teaching styles were not evaluated as part of the study. Moreover, for schools that were not in operation between the school years of 2007-2008 and the school year of 2010-2011, those schools were not included in the study. In fact, through the data collection process, the researcher investigated several school districts that had closed their Ninth Grade Academies prior to the 2010-2011 school year due to budget cuts and lack of funds to operate them. This could have potentially impacted the results of this study.

Moreover, since this study included all public high schools in operation in the state of Georgia during the school year of 2007-2008, the sample population was rather large. Even though this larger more general sample served an adequate base for the population validity of this sample population for the study (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007) and therefore can be generalized more readily to other population groups, it also was in some ways a limitation to the study. The large sample size limited the research design in that a matching technique could not be utilized. According to Gall, Gall, & Borg (2007), “Matching procedures often create more problems than they solve. You cannot be certain that you have selected the most important variable or variables on which to match subjects” (p. 313). For this research study, a matching participant selection would not

have been feasible due to inconsistent reporting procedures from school to school.

Furthermore, the demographics for each of the independent variables, Traditional Comprehensive High Schools and Ninth Grade Academies were not used as part of the statistical procedure in the study. Even though the demographic data were collected for each high school in the study, in order to match each of the independent variables for this factor, a different design and methodology would have needed to be utilized. This causal-comparative study could not have used the demographics in that capacity due to the participants being all public high schools in the state. A smaller population sample size where districts of comparison at the school level are examined could potentially compare schools in both comparison groups that are demographically matched. This was a limitation in this study due to the research that suggests schools with a high population of students in the economically disadvantaged subgroups typically have academic performances that are lower in comparison than schools with a lower percentage of economically disadvantaged students (Jenson, 2009). Therefore, it is important to understand that schools with a numerous population of students in low Socio Economic Status (SES) that are not equally matched in comparison groups could potentially be a limitation in this study.

According to Jenson (2009) poverty is a risk factor for many physical, social, and cognitive deficiencies and "...poor children often feel isolated and unloved, feelings that kick off a downward spiral of unhappy life events, including poor academic performance, behavioral problems, dropping out of school, and drug abuse" (p. 9). In fact, students who have a low Socio Economic Status are twice as likely to drop out of high school as students from middle income and more than six times more likely to drop out as students

from higher income homes (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2001).

Consequently, since this factor was not an indicator for the dependent variables in the study, this could be potentially seen as a limitation of the study. The application of this limitation is that the phrase “correlation does not imply causation” could be a factor in that the study could imply reverse causation. Therefore, it is possible that high schools in Georgia created Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities in these types of high poverty schools in order to reduce number of high school drop-outs and poor attendance trends, as well as increase student achievement on state mandated standardized tests.

Equally important to the confounding variable of SES, it is important to note that other confounding variables such as size of school, location of school, parental involvement, class size, leadership style, teaching styles, bell schedules, curriculum offerings, and a multitude of other variables that could potentially be called confounding, were not controlled for as a part of this research study. Further discussion of confounding variables is investigated in Chapter Five.

Due to the uncertainty of which came first, the NGA as an SLC or low student achievement, reverse causality must be explored with the results of this study. Reverse causality is exactly as the word implies; instead of cause and effect, it is the exact reverse. Reverse causality is when the probability of the outcome occurring is related to the exposure being studied. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2000) in *Research Methods in Education*, in the case of reverse causation with causal-comparative research, no single factor can be identified as the cause, or if even the cause has been identified; as

such, even "...when a relationship has been discovered, there is a problem of deciding which is the cause and which is the effect; the possibility of reverse causation has to be considered" (p. 208).

Equally important, the factor of reverse causation could have initiated school districts to implement Ninth Grade Academies earlier than the school year under study, 2007-2008, in an attempt to increase student achievement in already low performing schools; for example, if the Graduation Rate was low to begin with, prior to the year of 2007-2008, and the school was a school with a higher number of the student population in low SES situations, the district could have implemented a NGA as an SLC as a strategy for school improvement and increased student achievement. In this case, reverse causality could be implied. It is also probable that Traditional Comprehensive High Schools could have more student populations that are not in low SES situations and/or are in more affluent urban areas. This unmatched situation for both TCHS and NGAs could potentially mislead the reader of the results.

For example, it is possible that Graduation Rate, attendance, and End of Course Tests for NGAs has indeed improved, but the results on the comparison of TCHS that do not have NGAs cannot validate this by geographic location (urban, suburban, or rural) and/or Socio Economic Status; therefore, those Traditional Comprehensive High Schools may not have had a low SES population to begin with and did not need to implement a strategy such as a NGA in a strategy to increase student achievement. Moreover, due to this limitation in the study, it may appear that Ninth Grade Academies are not effective in improving student achievement; however, in fact, they potentially could be.

Implications

There are several steps the state of Georgia could take to ensure that taxpayer money is being spent wisely to aid in the retention rate of our high school students and help curtail the high school dropout problem in Georgia. Certainly, according to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, the cognitive processes of how children and adults apply meaning to the social environment around them is a guiding factor for how the transition year of ninth grade should be configured for optimum success.

Environmental variables such as school climate, social situations and experiences in school certainly play an important role in a student's success or failure in school. School climate is one factor in what many educators call the hidden curriculum (Jerald, 2006). This concept directly implies to a student's self-efficacy which is tied to a student "...building their self-efficacy beliefs through the vicarious experience of observing the actions of others" (Usher & Pajares, 2005, p. 126). In fact, according to Usher & Pajares (2005), students who hold the belief that they can succeed also show more interest in their academic studies and tasks, tend to set higher goals, put forth more effort, and have more resilience when obstacles in learning are present. The ideal of building self-efficacy through Small Learning Communities during the difficult transition year of ninth grade surely should be explored more in depth (Jerald, 2006).

Equally important, as related to the implications of this study, there are many important inferences for state, district, and local school policy makers and administrators to consider. Moreover, there are many factors that contribute to defining the success and/or effectiveness of a school. Typically, studies that are concerned with defining or measuring a school's effectiveness examine a school's Graduation Rate, attendance rate,

and performance on specific standardized tests such the End of Course Tests as this study did. However, at present, it can be difficult to quantify variables due to a lack of consistency as to how these variables are defined. For example, in Georgia the Graduation Rate has been officially defined differently over the past several years. Some schools in Georgia have been calculating the Graduation Rate with a Lever Rate, while other schools have calculated it with a Cohort Rate, this was not uniformly defined by Adequate Yearly Progress mandates, but has since changed, beginning with the year of 2011. Now, all schools in the state must calculate the Graduation Rate uniformly using the Cohort Rate.

Again, due to numerous changes in the educational community in recent years, from the former curriculum in Georgia, the Quality Core Curriculum to the Georgia Performance Standards (pertinent to this study) then the current school year (2012-2013), the curriculum changed again to the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, it has been a undulating task to stay current with national and state curriculum changes as well as federal accountability changes. Therefore, an important implication to this study is related to determining what defines academic achievement and ultimate effectiveness for a school improvement plan.

One factor to consider is that had this study been a longitudinal study, data could have been collected over several years for each school that began a Ninth Grade Academy and at the district level, the researcher could potentially identify if gains were made due to the implementation of a Ninth Grade Academy as Small Learning Community. Unfortunately, due to the inconsistencies of data reporting from one district to another and curriculum changes, at current, a longitudinal study was not possible. For

the 2012-2013 school year, since calculations of Graduation Rate are uniform, and all schools have since implemented the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards, a longitudinal study could be conducted from that year forward with schools across the state and compared on prior achievement and present achievement. Beginning with the school year of 2012-2013, all schools across the state should report uniform data; therefore, comparison groups will be easier to match.

Additionally another implication of this study is that if a school district is considering implementing a Small Learning Community concept or a transition program concept such as a Ninth Grade Academy, there are many factors to be considered. In the case of this study, the effectiveness of the schools was defined very specifically. However, it is important that in committing to redesign a Traditional Comprehensive High School setting or to implement a transition program such as a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community one should consider the goals and purpose in doing so.

In an effort to support these considerations, educational communities and stakeholders should examine and identify the meaning of effectiveness and school success. According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) when a causal comparative study is conducted it is equally important to develop alternate hypotheses for research design and measurement. Measures of school success and effectiveness could vary depending upon stated goals and purposes for each school district. Specific examples of measures could extend beyond traditional AYP indicators and include such factors as: the number of students meeting promotion requirements for the next grade level, impact on course completions throughout the students' tenure in high school, impact on discipline referrals

during the ninth grade year and throughout their high school years, impact on pregnancy rate, impact on number of students participating in advanced, honors or Advanced Placement courses, the impact on the school climate, and the percent of students who enroll in the ninth grade that are in the 12th grade three years later. Of course, one can see the difficulty of conducting a study considering the limitations identified earlier with inconsistency and change in attempting to examine these specific factors beyond a district level; therefore a statewide study such as this one would not identify many of these components of student achievement.

Finally, it is essential for policy makers to consider the results of this study and to utilize the resources that are at hand to ensure that their schools are providing effective access for all students to be successful. School redesign and school improvement measures for the transition year of ninth grade must be evaluated on many different levels to include cost effectiveness, efficacy, and eventually the success of student achievement. Regardless of the implementation or program it is important to note what Gene Bottoms (2011) of the Southern Regional Education Board has stated; he said, "...going through a redesign process in name only will not change student achievement. Rather, schools must commit time, resources, and effort to improve the quality of instruction and provide the support that students need to succeed" (p. 2).

Recommendations for Future Research

To discover more causal-comparative effects between the two independent variables, and even possibly correlations, this study should be replicated as a longitudinal study to examine all schools in the state that currently operate a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community. The longitudinal study could potentially answer questions

as to whether or not the schools that began a Ninth Grade Academy have indeed improved since the new grade configuration. It is important to note this study could not have been conducted as a longitudinal study due to inconsistent indicators of achievement for reporting requirements in Georgia prior to the year of 2011 for Graduation Rate.

More specifically, the first year that conditions would be appropriate for a longitudinal study to be conducted would be for the school year of 2012-2013 and forward; however, it is important to note that at the time of this study, the school year of 2011-2012 data still had not been archived in the database of The Governor's Office of Student Achievement. In light of this research study, the question also remains as to whether or not the type of geographic location, whether in an urban, a suburban, or a rural location has an impact on the performance of ninth grade students as it pertains to grade configuration in the ninth grades. This study found that only ten (9.5%) of Ninth Grade Academies were classified as urban during the operating year of 2007-2008 in the state of Georgia. The fact that such a small percentage of NGAs operating in an urban setting is somewhat confounding and should also be explored.

According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), causal-comparative research results can lead researchers to question alternative hypotheses. They state, "This is a common occurrence because complex behaviors, such as student learning, are determined by a variety of factors" (p. 311). Therefore, due to the design of this study, it would be feasible to replicate this study with a design that allowed the variables of Race/Ethnicity as well as Other Subgroups such as percentage of students who were limited English proficient, students receiving free or reduced lunch, migrant students, and students with disabilities to be examined as dependent variables as they pertain to the two comparison

groups.

Another significant factor pertaining to Small Learning Communities is the concept that the SLC can provide stronger relationships with students (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008). Moreover, Jenson (2009) in his book *Teaching with Poverty in Mind: What Being Poor Does to Kids' Brains and What Schools Can Do About It*, maintains that poor students, or students coming to school from poverty, necessitate stronger relationships with their school and teachers. He states, "...students were less likely to drop out and more likely to graduate when they felt a positive bond with teachers and others at school" (p. 87). Since the demographics of the schools were not analyzed through statistical measures in this research design, again, this would warrant further research that examines high poverty schools as Small Learning Communities and discover, if indeed, the school had made academic gains since implementing a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community in the district.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicated that Traditional Comprehensive High Schools configured as grades nine through twelve showed a statistically significant difference, rather, higher student achievement, based on Graduation Rate, attendance, and End of Course Tests in Ninth Grade Literature and Ninth Grade Algebra I. The Graduation Rate calculations for 2011 were based upon the group of cohort freshmen enrolled in ninth grade during 2007-2008 for attendance and End Of Course Test scores from their ninth grade year either in a Traditional Comprehensive High School or a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community in a public high school in the state of Georgia.

Consequently, this study suggests that the comparison group of Ninth Grade

Academies as Small Learning Communities did not have higher student achievement based upon the variables indicated in this study. As with any causal-comparative study, it is important to remember the concept of reverse causality in which the dependent variables under investigation in the study were already being sought to be improved upon by school districts; therefore, it is imperative that future studies are conducted and the idea of Small Learning Communities are examined further to test alternate hypotheses concerning Ninth Grade Academies as Small Learning Communities.

REFERENCES

- Akos, P. & Galassi, J. P. (2004). Middle and high school transitions as viewed by students, parents, and teachers. *Professional School Counseling, 7*(4), 212-221.
- Allensworth, E. M. and J. Q. Easton (2005). *The On-Track Indicator as a Predictor of High School Graduation*. Chicago, IL: Consortium on Chicago School Research.
- Alliance for Excellent Education. (2011). Editorial projects in education, Diplomas Count 2011: Beyond high school, before baccalaureate. *Education Week, 30*(34), 23-25.
- Alliance for Excellent Education. (2010). *High school dropouts in America*. Retrieved from <http://www.all4ed.org/>
- Alspaugh, J. (1998). Achievement loss associated with the transition middle school and high school. *Journal of Educational Research, 92*(1), 20.
- Alspaugh, J. (2000). The effect of transition grade to high school, gender, and grade level upon dropout rates. *American Secondary Education, 29*(1), 2-9.
- American Psychological Association. (2010). *Facing the school dropout dilemma*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from: <http://www.apa.org/pi/families/resources/school-dropout-prevention.aspx>
- Balfanz, R. & Byrnes, V. (2012). *The importance of being in school: A report on absenteeism in the nation's public schools*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Center for Social Organization of Schools.
- Balfanz, R. (2009). Can the American high school become an avenue of advancement for all? *Future of Children, 19*(1), 17-36.
- Bandura, A. & Adams, N. (1977). *Analysis of self-efficacy theory of behavioral change*.

- Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 1(4), 287-310.
- Bandura, A. (1982). Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. *American Psychologist*, 37(2), 122-147.
- Bandura, A. (1989). Regulation of cognitive processes through perceived self-efficacy. *Developmental Psychology*, 25(5), 729-735.
- Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G., & Pastorelli, C. (1996). Multifaceted impact of self-efficacy beliefs on academic functioning. *Child Development*, 67(3), 1206-1222.
- Bandura, A., & Bussey, K. (2004). On broadening the cognitive, motivational, and sociostructural scope of theorizing about gender development and functioning: Comment on Martin, Ruble, and Szkrybalo. *Psychological Bulletin*, 130(5), 691-701. Retrieved from EBSCO.
- Bandura, A., et al. (2003). Role of affective self-regulatory efficacy in diverse spheres of psychosocial functioning. *Child Development*, 74(3), 769-781.
- Black, S. (2004). The Pivotal Year. *American School Board Journal*, 191(2), 42-45.
- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. (2003). *High schools for the new millennium*: Seattle, WA. V. 206.709.3100. Retrieved from www.gatesfoundation.org
- Blankstein, A. M. (2004). *Failure is not an option*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Bost, L. W. (2007). *Building effective dropout prevention programs: Some practical strategies from research and practice*. Clemson, SC: National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities. Retrieved from <http://www.ndpc-sd.org>
- Bottoms, G. (2011). *Redesigning the ninth grade experience*. Research Brief: Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board, 2011.

- Bottoms, G. & Young, M. (2008). *Lost in transition: Building a better path from school to college and careers*. Research Brief: Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board, 2008.
- Burzichelli, C., Mackey, P., Bausmith, J. (2011). *Dropout prevention programs in nine mid-Atlantic region school districts: Additions to a dropout prevention database. Issues & Answers*. (REL 2011-No. 103). Regional Educational Laboratory Mid.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L. Morrison, K. (2000). *Research Methods in Education* (5th ed). London: Routledge Falmer. Atlantic.
- Cohen, J. & Smerdon, B. (2009). Tightening the dropout tourniquet: Easing the transition from middle to high school. *Preventing School Failure*, 53(3), 177-184.
- Cook, C., Fowler, H., & Harris, T. (2008). *Easing the transition to high school*. Department of Public Instruction: Public Schools of North Carolina
- Cooney, S. & Bottoms, G. (2003). *Middle grades to high school: mending a weak link*. Southern Regional Education Board. Retrieved from:
www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED479785.pdf
- Copa, G. & Pease, V. (1992). *The comprehensive high school: an historical perspective*. National Center for Research in Vocational Education. University of California-Berkely. Retrieved from: <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED352520.pdf>
- Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publication, Inc.
- Cushman, K. (2006). Help us make the ninth grade transition. *Educational Leadership*, 63(7), 47-52.

- Darling-Hammond, L. (2006). *No child behind and high school reform*. Harvard Educational Review, 76, 642-667.
- Daugherty, M. (2008). *Attendance and other factors that influence student achievement in a Delaware public school district*. Ed.D. dissertation, Wilmington University. Wilmington, DE.
- DeSocio, J., VanCura, M., Nelson, L. (2007). Engaging truant adolescents: results from a multifaceted intervention pilot. *Preventing School Failure*, 51(3), 3-9.
- Downy, M. (2012). Get schooled. *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, Apr. 9th, 2012. Retrieved from <http://blogs.ajc.com/get-schooled-blog/2012/04/09/doe-will-release-newly-configured-grad-rate-tuesday-here-is-a-primer/>
- Dynarski, M., Clarke, L., Cobb, B., Finn, J., Rumberger, R., & Smink, J. (2008). *Dropout prevention: A practice guide* (NCEE 2008-4025). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc>.
- Editorial Projects in Education (2011). Diplomas count 2011: Beyond high school, before baccalaureate. *Education Week*, 30(34), 23-27.
- Ellerbrock, C. & Kiefer, S. (2010). Creating a ninth-grade community of care. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 103, 393-406.
- EPE Research Center. (2006). Diplomas count: An essential guide to graduation rates and policies. *EdWeek*. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2006/06/22/index.html>

- Featherston, C. (2010). High school dropout prevention: a review of the literature. *Review of High Education & Self-Learning*, 3(7), 68-75.
- Felner, R., Seitsinger, A., Brand S., et al. (2007). Creating small learning communities: Lessons from the project on high-performing learning communities about “what works” in creating productive, developmentally enhancing, learning contexts. *Educational Psychologist*, 42(4), 209-221. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ80900). Retrieved March 28, 2012, from ERIC database
- Fields, G. (2005). *Reinventing ninth grade: Academics through personalization*. Rexford, NY: International Center for Leadership in Education, 2005.
- Finn, J., Fish, R., Scott, L. (2008). Educational sequelae of high school misbehavior. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 101, 259-274.
- Fortin, L., Lessard, A., Marcotte, D., Potvin, P., Royer, E. (2009). Why did they not drop out? narratives from resilient students. *The Prevention Researcher* 16(3), 21-28.
- Gall, M. D., Gall, J.P., & Borg, W.R. (2010). *Educational research: An introduction*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Gates Foundation: *Imagine the possibilities*. Seattle, WA. Retrieved from <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/united-states/Documents/EdWhitePaper.pdf>
- Georgia Department of Education (2011). *Validity and reliability for the 2010-2011 Georgia End of Course Tests*. Retrieved from: <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/>
- Georgia Department of Education (2012). NCLB waiver. Retrieved from: <http://www.gadoe.org/External-Affairs-and Policy/communications/Pages/NCLB-Waiver.aspx>
- Georgia Department of Education (2012). *Assessment, Research, Development, and*

- Administration*. Retrieved from: <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/EOCT.aspx>
- Glickman, C. (1998). *Revolutionizing America's Schools*. (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc. Print.
- Governor's Office of Student Achievement. (2008). *A simplified explanation of Georgia's high school graduation rate*. Retrieved from: <http://www.gaosa.org>
- Hall, M. (2006). High school transition and dropout prevention. *Teacher Connection* interview with Dr. Mike Hall. Retrieved from http://drmikehall.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=9&Itemid=36
- Hammond, B. (2009). *Freshman year: Make or break*. Retrieved from http://www.oregonlive.com/education/index.ssf/2009/05/freshman_year_make_or_break
- Hess, F. (2004). What is a 'public school'? Principles for a new century. *Phi Delta Kappan* 3(7), 68-75.
- Hickman, G., Bartholomew, M, Mathwig, J., & Heinrich, R. (2008). Differential developmental pathways of high school dropouts and graduates. *Journal of Educational Research*, 102, 3-13.
- Hickman, G. & Wright, D. (2011). Academic and school behavioral variables as predictors of high school graduation among at-risk adolescents enrolled in a youth-based mentoring program. *Journal of At-Risk Issues*, 2(15), 25-33.
- Howell, D.C. (2010). *Fundamental Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences*. Belmont, CA: Thomson-Wadsworth.

- Howell, D. C. (2010). *Statistical Methods for Psychology*. Belmont, CA: Cengage-Wadsworth.
- Howley, C. (2002). Grade-span configurations. *American Association of School Administrators*. Retrieved from: <http://www.aasa.org/publications/saissuedetail.cfm?ItemNumber=1790&snItemNumber=950&tnItemNumber=951>
- Hussar, W.J., & Bailey, T.M. (2011). *Projections of Education Statistics to 2020* (NCES 2011-026). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Jensen, E., & Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. (2010). *Teaching with poverty in mind: Secondary school*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Jerald, C. (2007). Keeping kids in school: Lessons from research about preventing dropouts. *The Center for Public Education*. Retrieved from http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/site/c.kjJXJ5MPIwE/b.2623467/k.8546/Keeping_kids_in_school_Lessons_from_research_about_preventingdropouts.htm
- Lessard, A., Fortin, L., Joly, J., Royer, E., & Blaya, C. (2004). Students at-risk for dropping out of school: Are there gender differences among personal, family and school factors? *Journal of At-Risk Issues*, 10(2), 91-27.
- Levine, T. (2010). What research tells us about the impact and challenges of smaller learning communities. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 85, 276-289.
- Lewis, T. (2012, April 16). Barge urges calm over graduation rate plunge. *Albany Herald*. Retrieved from: <http://www.albanyherald.com/news/2012/apr/16/barge-urges-calm-over-graduation-rate-plunge/>

- McCallumore, K., & Sparapani, E. (2010). The importance of the ninth grade on high school graduation rates and student success in high school. Project Innovation. *Research*, 5 Oct. 2011. Retrieved from http://drmikehall.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=9&Itemid=36
- Miller, P. (2011). *Theories of developmental psychology*. (5th ed). New York: Worth Publishers.
- Miner, B. (2005). The Gates Foundation and small schools. *Rethinking Schools*, 19(4), 21-26.
- Mizelle, N. & Irvin, J. (2000). Transition from middle school into high school. *Middle School Journal* 31(5), 57-61.
- National Center for Education Statistics: Common Core of Data (2001). Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/ccd/bat/result>
- National Center on Secondary Education and Transition. (2011). *Improving high school outcomes for all youth: Recommendations for policy & practice*. Policy brief. Retrieved from <https://disability.workforce3one.org/command/view.aspx?look=2001200280207834053&mode=info&pparams=>
- National Governor's Association (2012). *Federal Relations: high school reform*. Retrieved from <http://www.nga.org/cms/home/federal-relations/nga-key-committee-issues/page-ecw-issues/col2-content/main-content-list/high-school-reform.html>
- National High School Center (2007). *The first year of high school: A quick stats fact*

sheet. Retrieved from

http://www.betterhighschools.org/docs/NHSC_FirstYearofHighSchool_032807_000.pdf

National School Boards Association. (n.d.). NCLB guidance on graduation rates issued.

Retrieved from National School Boards Association website:

<http://www.nsba.org/SchoolLaw/Federal-Regulations?Archive?Graduation-rates.html>

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, 20 U.S.C.A. § 6301 *et seq.* (West 2003).

Noll, J. W. (2011). *Taking sides: Clashing views on educational issues*. 16th Ed. McGraw Hill, NY.

Oxley, D., & Kassissieh, J. (2008). From comprehensive high schools to small learning communities: accomplishments and challenges. *Forum* 50(2): 199-205.

Patterson, N., Beltyukova, S., Berman, K. & Francis, A. (2007). The making of sophomores: student, parent, and teacher reactions in the context of systemic urban high school reform. *Urban Education* 42, 124-144.

Pilar, K. (2007). *Personalization efforts and the relationship to school climate in select Michigan high schools*. *Masters Theses and Doctoral Dissertations*. Paper 28.

<http://commons.emich.edu/theses/28>

Plank, S., DeLuca, S., & Estacion, A. (2008). High school dropout and the role of career and technical education: A survival analysis of surviving high school. *Sociology of Education*, 81, 345-370.

Planty, M., Kena, G., & Hannes, G. (2009). *The condition of education 2009 in brief* (NCES 2009-082). National Center for Education Statistics.

- Raudonis, L. (2012). Year one of race to the top. What was accomplished? What lies ahead? *PAGEONE*, 34(3), 4-12.
- Ready, D., Lee, V., & Welner, K. (2004). Educational equity and school structure: school size, overcrowding, and schools-within-schools. *Teachers College Record* 106(10): 1989-2014). Retrieved from: <http://www.tcrecord.org> ID Number: 11679
- Reents, J. N. (2002). Isolating 9th graders: Separate schools ease the academic and social transition for high school bound students. *The School Administrator*. Retrieved from <http://www.aasa.org/publications/saarticledetail.cfm?ItemNumber=2668>
- Roderick, M. (1994). Grade Retention and School Dropout: Investigating the Association. *American Educational Research Journal*, 31(4): 729-759.
- Rouse, C. & Kemple, J. (2009). America's High Schools. *A Collaboration of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University and the Brookings Institution* 19(1) Spring 2009.
- Samel, A., Sondergeld, T., Fischer, J., Patterson, N. (2011). The secondary school pipeline: longitudinal indicators of resilience and resistance in urban schools under reform. *High School Journal* 94(3), 95-118. Spring 2011.
- Sammon, G. (2000). *Creating and sustaining small learning communities: A practitioner's guide and cd rom tool kit for career academies and other small learning communities*. Silver Spring, MD: GMS Partners, Inc.
- Serber, M. (2008). History education yesterday, today, and tomorrow. OAH Committee on Teaching. Retrieved from: <http://www.oah.org/pubs/nl/2008feb/serber.html>

- Shear, L., Means, B., Mitchell, K., House, A., Gorges, T., Aasha, J. (2008).
Contrasting paths to small-school reform: Results of a 5-year evaluation of the
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's National High Schools Initiative. *Teachers
College Record, 110*, 1986–2039.
- Schwerdt, G. & West, M. (2011). *The Impact of Alternative Grade Configurations on
Student Outcomes through Middle and High School*. CESifo Working Paper
Series No. 3530. Available at SSRN: <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1903669>
- Smith, J. (2006). Examining the long-term impact of achievement loss during the
transition to high school. *The Journal of Secondary Gifted Education 17*(4), 211-
221.
- Somers, C., Owens, D., & Piliawsky, M. (2009). Dropout prevention. *Education,
130*(2), 348-356.
- Stevenson, K. (2002). *Ten educational trends shaping school planning and design*.
Washington, D.C.: National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities. Retrieved
from: <http://www.edfacilities.org/pubs/trends.pdf>
- Stevenson, K. (2006). *Educational facilities within the context of a changing 21st century
America*. Washington, D.C.: National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities.
- Stevenson, K. (2007). *Educational trends shaping school planning and design: 2007*.
National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities. Retrieved from
<http://www.edfacilities.org/pubs/trends2007.pdf>
- Swanson, C. (2003). *Keeping Count and Losing Count: Calculating Graduation Rates
for All Students under NCLB Accountability*. Washington, D.C.: The Urban
Institute

- The National Center for Education Statistics (2010). Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2010028>
- The White House. (2012). *Race to the top initiative*. Retrieved from: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/fact-sheet-race-top>
- Toch, T. (2003). *High schools on a human scale: how small schools can transform American Education*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- United States Department of Education. (2012). *Race to the Top Initiative: Department of Education awards \$200 million to seven states to advance k-12 reform*. Dec. 2011. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>
- Usher, E. & Pajares, F. (2005). Sources of academic and self-regulatory efficacy beliefs of entering middle school students. *Contemporary Educational Psychology* 3, 125-141.
- Walker, K. (2009). *Research brief: Ninth Grade Academies*. Education Partners Inc. Annville, PA: Lebanon Valley College
- Warren, J. & Grodsky, E. (2009). Exit exams harm students who fail them-and don't benefit students who pass them. *Phi Delta Kappan* 90(9), 645-649.
- Waters, S., et al. (2010). Does the nature of schools matter? An exploration of selected school ecology factors on adolescent perceptions of school connectedness. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 80, 381-402.
- Weathers, M. (2006). The freshman grade academy: A program to facilitate the smooth transition of students from the junior high learning environment to the high school learning environment. *Nonpartisan Education Review, Testimonials*, 2(3). Retrieved from

<http://www.nonpartisaneducation.org/Review/Testimonials/v2n3.pdf>

Wills, Joan. (2008). *Preparing ALL Youth for Academic and Career Readiness*,

Washington, D.C.: National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for

Youth, Institute for Educational Leadership.

Werblow, J., & Duesbery, L. (2009). The impact of high school size on math

achievement and dropout rate. *The High School Journal*, 92(3), 14–23.

Wheelock, A., & Miao, J. (2005). The ninth grade bottleneck. *The School Administrator*.

Retrieved from

<http://www.aasa.org/publications/saarticledetail.cfm?mnitemnumber=&tnitemnumber>

Worrell, F. C., & Hale, R. L. (2001). The relationship of hope in the future and perceived

school climate to school completion. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 16(4), 357-

369. doi: 10.1521/scpq.16.4.370.19896

Zimmerman, B. (2000). Self-efficacy: An essential motive to learn. *Contemporary*

Educational Psychology, 25, 82-91. doi: 10.1006/ceps.1999.1016

Appendix A: IRB Approval

Dear Andrea,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application.

Your study does not classify as human subjects research because it does not involve interaction with human subjects or the use of identifiable human subjects data.

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and that any changes to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by submitting a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Application number.

If you have any questions about this determination, or need assistance in identifying whether possible changes to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Fernando Garzon, Psy.D.

Professor, IRB Chair

Counseling

(434) 592-4054

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1972

Appendix B: Central Office Personnel Survey

To central office personnel of public high schools in the state of Georgia; list of high schools' found through the Governor's Office of Student Achievement website:

<http://www.gaosa.org/score.aspx>

Verbal Communication Script:

"I am conducting a causal-comparative research study of the effects of Graduation Rate, End of Course Test scores, and attendance in freshmen at Ninth Grade Academies as compared to freshmen at Traditional Comprehensive High Schools in Georgia for the school year 2007-2008. The study will provide valuable information as to whether or not the implementation of a transition program, a Ninth Grade Academy, provides positive strategies for increased student achievement. The definition of a Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community for the purpose of this study is when ninth grade students are separated, either on a hall or other location like a separate building from the remaining high school grades as a transition intervention strategy." "Did your high school(s) operate a freshmen Ninth Grade Academy as a Small Learning Community during the school year of 2007-2008?" The answer was documented. If the answer was yes, a further question was asked: "Was the Ninth Grade Academy on campus or off campus?" The answer was documented. For all schools surveyed, a final question was asked, "What demographic best describes the high school in question: urban, suburban, or rural?" The answer was documented. The name of the contact personnel from the District Office was documented; however, this information is only for the researcher's purposes and is non-identifiable otherwise.

Appendix C: List of Public High Schools in the State of Georgia

District Name	High Schools in District
Appling County	Appling County High
Atkinson County	Atkinson County High
Atlanta Public Schools	Crim
	Douglass
	Early College High at Carver
	Grady
	Mays
	North Atlanta
	South Atlanta Computer Animation
	South Atlanta Health & Medical
	South Atlanta Law & Social Justice
	Tech/Southside
	Therrell School of Engineering
	Therrell School of Law
	Therrell School of Health
	The School of Arts @ Carver
	The School of Health Science @ Carver
	The School of Technology @ Carver
	Booker T. Washington High And Senior
Bacon	Bacon County High
Baker	Baker County K12 School

Baldwin	Baldwin High
Banks	Banks County High
Barrow	Apalachee High Winder-Barrow High
Bartow	Adairsville New Cass Woodland
Ben Hill	Fitzgerald High
Berrien	Berrien High
Bibb	Central Maynard H. Jackson Jr./Southside Northeast Rutland Southwest Westside High William s. Hutchings Career
Bleckley	Bleckley County High
Brantley County	Brantley High School
Bremen City	Bremen High School
Brooks	Brooks County High
Bryan	Bryan County High Richmond Hill High
Buford City	Buford High

Bullouch	New Southeast Bullouch Statesboro High Portal Middle/High school
Burke	Burke County High
Butts	Jackson High
Calhoun City	Calhoun High
Calhoun	Calhoun County Middle/High
Camden	Camden County High
Candler	Metter High
Carroll	Bowdon Central Temple Villa Rica
Carrollton City	Carrollton High
Cartersville City	Cartersville High
Catoosa	Lakeview-Fort Oglethorpe Ringgold
Charlton	Charlton County High
Chatham	Beach Groves Jenkins Johnson Savannah Arts Academy

	Windsor Forest
Chattahoochee	Chattahoochee County High
Chattooga	Chattooga High
Cherokee	Cherokee
	Creekview
	Etowah
	Sequoyah
	Woodstock
Chickamauga City	Gordon Lee High
Clarke	Cedar Shoals
	Clarke Central
Clayton	Forest Park
	Jonesboro
	Lovejoy
	Morrow
	Mount Zion
	Mundy's Mill
	North Clayton
	Riverdale
Clinch	Clinch County High
Cobb	Campbell
	Harrison
	Hillgrove

	Kell
	Kennesaw Mountain
	Lassiter
	McEachern
	North Cobb
	Osborne
	Pebblebrook
	Pope
	South Cobb
	Sprayberry
	Walton
	Wheeler
Coffee	Coffee County High
Colquitt	Colquitt County High
Columbia	Evans
	Greenbrier
	Harlem
	Lakeside
Cook	Cook High
Coweta	East Coweta
	Newnan
	Northgate
Crawford	Crawford County High

Crisp	Crisp County High
Dade	Dade County High
Dalton City	Dalton High
Dawson	Dawson County High
Decatur City	Decatur High
Decatur	Bainbridge High
Dekalb	Avondale
	Cedar Grove
	Chamblee Charter
	Clarkston
	Columbia
	Cross Keys
	Druid Hills
	Dunwoody
	Lakeside
	Lithonia
	Martin Luther King, Jr.
	McNair
	Miller Grove
	Redan
	Southwest Dekalb
	Stephenson
	Stone Mountain

	Towers
	Tucker
Dodge	Dodge County High
Dooly	Dooly County High School
Dougherty	Albany
	Dougherty Comprehensive
	Monroe
	Westover
Douglas	Alexander
	Chapel Hill
	Douglas County
	Lithia Springs Comprehensive
Dublin City	Dublin High
Early	Early County High
Echols	Echols County High
Effingham	Effingham County High
	South Effingham High
Elbert	Elbert County High
Emanuel	Emanuel County Institute
	Swainsboro High
Evans	Claxton High
Fannin	Fannin County High
Fayette	Fayette County

	McIntosh
	Sandy Creek
	Starrs Mill
	Whitewater
Floyd	Armuchee
	Coosa
	Model High
	Pepperell
Forsyth	Forsyth Central
	North Forsyth
	South Forsyth
	West Forsyth
Franklin	Franklin County High
Fulton	Alpharetta
	Banneker
	Centennial
	Chatthoochee
	Creekside
	Fulton Science Academy (TEACH Charter)
	McClarín Alternative
	Milton
	North Springs

	Northview
	Riverwood Inter. Charter
	Roswell
	Tri-Cities
	Westlake
Gainesville City	Gainesville High
Gilmer	Gilmer County High
Glascocock	Glascocock Co. Consolidated
Glynn	Brunswick
	Glynn Academy
Gordon	Gordon Central High
	Sonoraviille High
Grady	Cairo High
Greene	Greene County High
Gwinnett	Berkmar
	Brookwood
	Central Gwinnett
	Collins Hill
	Dacula
	Duluth
	Grayson
	Gwinnette InterVention Ed East (GIVE Center)

	Meadowcreek
	Mill Creek
	Norcross
	North Gwinnett
	Parkview
	Peachtree Ridge
	Phoenix High School
	Shiloh
	South Gwinnett
Habersham	Habersham Central High
Hall	Chestatee
	East Hall
	Flowery Branch
	Johnson
	North Hall
	West Hall
Hancock	Hancock Central High
Haralson	Haralson County High
Harris	Harris County High
Hart	Hart County High
Heard	New Heard County High
Henry	Dutchtown High
	Eagle's Landing

	Henry County
	Luella
	Ola
	Stockbridge
	Union Grove High
	Woodland
Houston	Elberta Open Campus
	Houston County
	Northside
	Perry
	Warner Robins
Irwin	Irwin County High
Jackson	East Jackson Comp High
	Jackson County High
Jasper	Jasper County High
Jeff Davis	Jeff Davis High
Jefferson City	Jefferson High
Jefferson	Jefferson County High
Jenkins	Jenkins County High
Johnson	Johnson County High
Jones	Jones County High
Lamar	Lamar Co. Comp. High
Lanier	Lanier County High

Laurens	East Laurens High West Laurens High
Lee	Lee County High
Liberty	Bradwell Institute Liberty County High
Lincoln	Lincoln County High
Long	Long County High
Lowndes	Lowndes High
Lumpkin	Lumpkin County High
Macon	Macon County High
Madison	Madison County High
Marietta City	Marietta High School
Marion	Marion County Middle/High
McDuffie	Thomson High
McIntosh	McIntosh County Academy
Meriweather	Greenville High Manchester High
Mitchell	Baconton Community Charter Mitchell County High
Monroe	Mary Persons High
Montgomery	Montgomery County High
Morgan	Morgan County High
Mountain Ed Center	

Murray	Murray County High
Muscogee	Carver
	Columbus
	Early College Academy
	Hardaway
	Jordan Vocational
	Kendrick
	Northside
	Shaw
	Spencer
	Newton
Oconee	Eastside
	Newton
	North Oconee High
Oglethorpe	Oconee High (South Oconee High)
	Oglethorpe County High
Paulding	East Paulding
	Hiram
	North Paulding
	Paulding County
	South Paulding
Peach	Peach County High
Pelham City	Pelham High

Pickens	Pickens County High
Pierce	Pierce County High
Pike	Pike County High
Polk	Cedartown High
	Rockmart High
Pulaski	Hawkinsville High
Putnam	Putnam County High
Rabun	Rabun County High
Randolph	Randolph Clay High School
Richmond	Academy of Richmond Co
	Butler
	Cross Creek
	Glenn Hills
	Hephzibah
	Johnson Magnet
	Josey
	Laney
	Westside High
Rockdale	Heritage
	Rockdale County
	Salem
Rome City	Rome High
Schley	Schley Middle High

Screven	Screven County High
Seminole	Seminole County Middle/High
Social Circle City	Social Circle High
Spalding	Griffin Spalding
Stephens	Stephens County High
Stewart	Stewart County High
Sumter	Americus Sumter High South
Talbot	Central Elem/High School
Tattnall	Tattnall County High
Taylor	Taylor County High
Telfair	Telfair County High
Terrell	Terrell High School
Thomas	Thomas County Central High
Thomaston-Upson	Upson-Lee High
Thomasville City	Thomasville High
Tift	Tift County High School
Toombs	Toombs County High
Towns	Towns County High
Truetlen	Truetlen Middle/High
Trion City	Trion High Callaway Lagrange

	Troup County
Turner	Turner County High
Twiggs	Twiggs County High
Union	Union County High
	Woody Gap Elem/High
Valdosta City	Valdosta High
Vidalia City	Vidalia Comprehensive High
Walker	LaFayette High
	Ridgeland High
Walton	Loganville High
	Monroe Area High
Ware	Ware County High
Warren	Warren County High
Washington	Washington County High
Wayne	Wayne County High
Webster	Webster County High
Wheeler	Wheeler County High
White	White County High
Whitfield	Northwest Whitfield County
	Southeast Whitfield County
	Whitfield County Career Aca
Wilcox	Wilcox County High
Wilkes	Washington-Wilkes Comp

Wilkinson

Wilkinson County High

Worth

Worth County High

Appendix D: Data Collection Spreadsheet Categories

District Name

High Schools in District

Phone Number

Name of Contact

Urban, Suburban, Rural (drop down fill box)

Ninth Grade Academy (yes) or (no)

On Campus (yes) or (no) (drop down fill box)

Extra Information= Any interesting information

Graduation Rate (2011)= Percentage

Attendance (2007-2008) 5 or fewer days absent= percentage

Attendance (2007-2008) 6-15 days absent=percentage

Attendance (2007-2008) more than 15 days absent=percentage

Attendance Total=Should total 100%

%Fail Ninth Grade Literature Scores= Percentage

%Pass Ninth Grade Literature Scores=Percentage

%Pass+ Ninth Grade Literature Scores

Ninth Grade Literature Score % Total= Should total 100%

%Fail Ninth Grade Algebra 1

%Pass Ninth Grade Algebra 1

%Pass+ Ninth Grade Algebra 1

Ninth Grade Algebra 1 % Total=Should total 100%

Race/Ethnicity:

Asian=Percentage

Black=Percentage

Hispanic=Percentage

Native American/Alaskan Native=Percentage

White =Percentage

Multiracial=Percentage

Total Race %=Should total 100%

Students with disabilities=Percentage

Limited English Proficient=Percentage

Eligible for Free/Reduced Meals=Percentage

Migrant=Percentage

Total Subgroups= Should equal 100%