The Relationship Between the Freshman Academy and Student Academic Success
at Morristown-Hamblen High School East

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by
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ABSTRACT

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by

Patricia A. Sigler

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not a significant relationship exists between the implementation of the Morristown-Hamblen High School East (MHHSE) Freshman Academy, student academic achievement, and the high school graduation rate at MHHSE.

The testing variables included GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, English I End-of-Course test scores, and graduation rate. Grouping variables included 8th grade (pretreatment) and 9th grade (posttreatment) groups, preacademy and postacademy groups, socioeconomic status, and gender. Ten faculty members of the MHHSE Freshman Academy were interviewed to ascertain their perceptions about the smaller learning community concept.

The population of the study was limited to students enrolled in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) and students enrolled at MHHSE 2 years prior to the implementation of the academy (2002-2004). Paired-samples t-tests were used to make comparisons between the same students on 8th grade (pretreatment) and 9th grade (posttreatment) measures. Independent-samples t-tests were used to make additional comparisons between different groups of students.
categorized according to socioeconomic status and gender, as well as preacademy and postacademy groups.

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that the 9th grade transition year is a very difficult year for most students. Male students and those classified as economically disadvantaged develop additional risk factors during their freshmen year that might identify them as potential dropouts. The MHHSE Freshman Academy has had a positive effect on student academic performance and conduct as measured by the data analyses and teacher opinions.
I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the following people:

To my wonderful husband, Chris Sigler, whose love and support during the past 28 years has enabled me to achieve many important goals, both personally and professionally. Thank you for always being there for me. You are the kindest and most generous person that I know. I love you with all of my heart.

To my son, Matthew Sigler, I am very proud of the man you are becoming. You will accomplish great things if you continue to work hard. Cherish your beautiful girl and never give up on your dreams. I love you.

To my daughter, Meghan Sigler, you are becoming quite a wonderful young lady. You are very smart and extremely talented. Have big dreams and never sell yourself short. You have a wonderful future ahead of you. I love you.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

There has never been a time in our nation’s long and distinguished history when attaining a public school education has been of such paramount significance to our nation’s youth as it is now. In an era when the United States is struggling to regain its economic superiority, preparing its youth to be successful and dynamic leaders of the future has become a crucial, if not daunting, task. The historic forces of education, combined with hard work and sacrifice, created a dynamic model that was the envy of all countries. However, many modern forces have brought about a devaluing of education, and these forces range from national policy initiatives to local apathy. A number of divergent forces are currently at work, helping the minds and hearts of our young adults to stray. The declining emphasis on education is evident across our country as we see an ever increasing dropout rate among high school students to forestalling advanced education in pursuit of short term economic interests.

The high school graduation rate in the United States is among the lowest of all of the industrialized nations. Bronner, in a 1998 article for The New York Times, released the results of a report published by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. In his report, Bronner (¶19) states, “Today’s graduation rates, with the United States at 72 percent, place it second to last in the 29-nation group, above Mexico.” In the most recent data published in the Digest of Education Statistics for 2006, the authors report, “In 2003-04, an estimated 74.3 percent of public high school students graduated on time, that is received a diploma 4 years after beginning their freshman year” (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2007, p. 54). Tennessee’s picture is much bleaker. The Digest of Education Statistics for 2006 reported that only 66.1% of
public high school students in Tennessee earned a diploma 4 years after beginning their freshman year (Snyder et al., 2007).

Wald and Losen, in their May 2005 report to The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, most succinctly described the national dropout rate phenomenon in these terms,

Every year, across the country, a dangerously high percentage of students—disproportionately poor and minority—disappear from the educational pipeline before graduating from high school. . . . While the graduation rate for White students is 75%, only approximately half of Black, Latino, and Native American students earn regular diplomas alongside their classmates. Graduation rates are even lower for Black, Latino, and Native American males. Yet, because of misleading and inaccurate reporting of dropout and graduation rates, the public remains largely unaware of this educational and civil rights crisis (p. 6).

A report published by Achieve, Inc., Closing the Expectations Gap, (2007) concurs with Wald and Losen. It states, ÒNationally, 30 percent of high school students (and nearly 50 percent of black and Latino students) fail to earn a diplomaÓ (p. 5). A report prepared by the Educational Testing Service, America’s Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation’s Future, states, ÒHigh school graduation rates peaked at 77 percent in 1969, fell back to 70 percent in 1995, and have stayed in this range into the current decade. The graduation rate for disadvantaged minorities is thought to be closer to 50 percentÓ (Kirsch, Braun, & Yamamoto, 2007, p. 3).

The accountability provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 have placed a great deal of pressure on all public schools, but especially high schools. In addition to meeting annual benchmark requirements for English and mathematics, high schools must also meet a yearly graduation rate benchmark. By 2014 all high schools will be expected to have a graduation rate of 100%. The formula is complicated but essentially involves keeping adequate records for students who enter the 9th grade as a cohort group and then dividing that number by the number of students who graduate with a high school diploma 4 years later. Students receiving a special education diploma, certificate of attendance, a GED, or who drop out of
school without a diploma have a negative impact on the graduation rate. The key to meeting the benchmark requirements for a strong graduation rate is to successfully graduate, within 4 years and 1 summer, all students who entered into the 9th grade cohort. This is much easier said than done (Bell et al., 2005).

Several studies and reports indicate that the freshman, or transition year, appears to be the most important indicator of high school success for a vast number of students. According to a study published by the Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center entitled Works in Progress: A Report on Middle and High School Improvement Programs,

The research suggests that schools may be losing students academically, socially, and emotionally during the transition year from middle school to high school. Students are dropping out of school in an era when attaining a high school diploma is more important than ever. Unfortunately, for some young adolescents, the road leading to a high school diploma abruptly begins and ends in ninth grade (Amato et al., 2005, p. 41).

In a paper presented at The Civil Rights Project Forum, Neild, Stoner-Eby, and Furstenberg state, "Our ability to predict dropout within four years of entering high school increases considerably when we know how students fare during their high school transition year. The experience of the ninth grade year contributes substantially to the probability of dropping out (2001, p. 29). The Achieve, Inc. (2006) report concurs, "The transition years during which students move from elementary to middle school and from middle school to high school had a decisive impact on students who would later drop out (p. 10). Neild et al. also state "Urban teenagers who leave school without graduating often have experienced earlier crisis points in high school, notably severe academic difficulty during the first year of high school (p. 1).

The failure of students to successfully acquire a regular high school diploma is not an individual failure. The implications are widespread. Dropping out of school severely impacts
the individual students, their families, the local communities, and the nation as a whole. According to the report prepared for The Civil Rights Project (Wald & Losen, 2005), When high numbers of youth leave school ill-prepared to contribute to our labor force and to civic life, our economy and our democracy suffer*(p. 4). In an Achieve, Inc. report *Identifying Potential Dropouts: Key Lessons for Building an Early Warning Data System*, Jerald (2006) states, *Keeping all students in high school and graduating more young people with better skills will save millions of taxpayer dollars, greatly expand tax revenues, reduce crime, and improve citizenship*(p. 2).

**Statement of the Problem**

State and federal mandates, a result of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, require all high schools to graduate 100% of its students by the year 2014. In order to accomplish the incredible expectations of this federal legislation, Morristown-Hamblen High School East (MHHSE) must effectively address the issue of academic success for all students, and most especially for those students entering high school during the most critical year, the 9th grade transition year.

The research indicates that most students who drop out of high school do so as a result of poor attendance and inferior academic performance, resulting in an insufficient number of credits, during the freshman year of high school. In order to combat the problem of poor academic success, that may lead to higher dropout and lower graduation rates, MHHSE has implemented a Freshman Academy designed to address the needs of all freshmen students, but primarily those most at-risk for academic failure. The purpose of this study is multifaceted: to conduct a formative evaluation that will closely examine the components of the MHHSE
Freshman Academy by evaluating student data and teacher perceptions in order to determine if a relationship exists between the MHHSE Freshman Academy and student graduation rates, as well as to provide valuable information that will help to improve the program; and to conduct a summative evaluation that will assist in determining whether or not it is feasible to implement additional smaller learning community initiatives throughout the school.

Study Site

History of Morristown-Hamblen High School East

Morristown-Hamblen High School East (MHHSE) is one of two public comprehensive high schools located in the city of Morristown, Hamblen County, in east Tennessee. For more than 115 years of this community’s history, MHHSE and its predecessors have served as both the cultural and educational focus of Morristown. Organized in 1892, the school was first located in the present Rose Center building. In 1921, Morristown High School was granted the distinction of becoming one of the first public high schools in the State of Tennessee to be accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). Since opening its doors in 1923, the present facility, located at One Hurricane Lane, has undergone many expansions and renovations, and steadily increasing enrollment has kept pace with and dictated many of those expansions. In the fall of 1968, a new high school was opened in the western part of Morristown and a zoning line was drawn north to south across the county, dividing the student body of Morristown High School. Those residing east of the line remained at what has become known as Morristown-Hamblen High School East (MHHSE).

MHHSE currently serves approximately 1,500 students in grades 9 through 12. Twelve percent of those students are served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
(IDEA) in either resource or least restrictive environment (LRE) classrooms. Over the past 5 years, MHHSE has experienced an average population growth of 80 students per year. The rate of increase can be attributed to the continued population growth of the Morristown/Hamblen County area. Expansion of the industrial sector and immigration has resulted in the construction of a large number of single family residences in the MHHSE school zone.

The ethnic makeup of the student body is representative of the ethnic makeup of the community, with one exception. While 85.7% of the student body is White, the next largest ethnic group in the school is African American at 7.3%. Hispanic students make up 6.5% of the student body. All of the remaining ethnic groups comprise less than 1% of the total student population. The student body is evenly distributed at approximately 50% male and 50% female. Recent census reports estimate the total population of Morristown to be 27,020 and Hamblen County’s population in 2005 to have been 59,898. In the community-at-large, Hispanics are the second largest ethnic group at 6%, while African Americans are a close third. The median household income of Morristown is currently $26,300, down slightly from $27,005, which was reported in 2000 (city-data.com, July 2006). Approximately 42% of MHHSE students qualify for and receive free or reduced price meals.

The administration, faculty, and staff of MHHSE are demographically similar to the students they serve. There are currently 4 administrators, 90 teachers, and 38 support staff at MHHSE. Thirty-seven percent are male and 63% are female. Of the 94 certified staff members, 92% are White, 4% are African American, and 2% are Hispanic.

The curriculum at MHHSE covers a wide array of subjects and educational levels. The curriculum in all courses is aligned with goals and objectives from state academic content standards and state assessments. The courses offered meet state requirements for students in
LRE, resource, regular, advanced (honors), Advanced Placement (AP), and elective classes. Core academic classes include English, mathematics, science, and social studies. Elective classes include agriculture, cosmetology, child care, family and consumer science, business, visual art, marketing, driver education, theatre arts, weightlifting, instrumental and vocal music, foreign language, and a variety of vocational-technical classes.

State and Federal Benchmarks

Since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, MHHSE has been successful in meeting state and federal benchmarks for English and mathematics. However, the state and federal benchmarks for graduation rates have been somewhat elusive. MHHSE’s graduation rate rose slightly from 87.2% in 2004, the first reported year, to 87.7% in 2006. However, it dropped considerably in 2007 to 81.9%. This is significantly below the current state required average of 90%. By 2014, the federal mandate requires that all high schools demonstrate a 100% graduation rate. This requirement has serious implications for MHHSE, especially with a student population of 12% receiving special education services.

MHHSE Freshman Academy

The MHHSE Freshman Academy was established in August 2004. The purpose for the implementation was two-fold. The MHHSE Freshman Academy initially began as a need to find a solution to the serious problem of student retention as well as issues with discipline and attendance during the 9th grade transition year. Successfully addressing the first issue will hopefully address the second, which is to improve the graduation rate and subsequently reduce the dropout rate for MHHSE students.
After completing extensive research, visiting freshman transition programs in other high schools, and attending conferences aimed at addressing the needs of transitioning freshmen students, a task force was convened in Hamblen County consisting of administrators, teachers, and guidance counselors from both Morristown-Hamblen High School East and Morristown-Hamblen High School West. The task force met on several occasions to evaluate the needs of transitioning freshmen students and to establish guidelines for the implementation of a Freshman Academy at both high schools. Subsequently, Morristown-Hamblen High School West chose to establish its freshman academy 2 years after the implementation of the academy at MHHSE.

The MHHSE Freshman Academy, located in a specific section of the building, creates a smaller learning community within the school where students receive support and a more focused emphasis on academics. Within the physical confines of the academy, teachers can focus on the specific problems and requirements of this model population. Innovative teaching strategies, crafted materials, an emphasis on higher academic expectations, and a nurturing environment offer students a new vision of the value of education combined with a sense of the future that lies before them. High profile programs implemented in the MHHSE Freshman Academy include an increased emphasis on study skills, journal writing, note taking, and reading in the content areas.

A curriculum that includes multilevel courses in the core subject areas has been designed specifically for freshmen students. Courses range from Gateway Intervention for students with special needs to honors and advanced placement courses for academically gifted students. In addition to courses in the core subject areas, all students are required to take courses in wellness and computer applications. Students also have choices of elective courses that include band, chorus, art, engineering, health science, and agriculture. All freshmen except those who passed
the Algebra I Gateway Exam in middle school or who are currently enrolled in Algebra I are required to take a course entitled Freshman Skills for Success. This course is based on Reading in the Content Area and has a very strong emphasis on reading, writing, and vocabulary skills. This course may be taught by teachers who are certified in one of the core subjects; however, MHHSE uses the talents of its English teachers to teach this course whenever possible. In addition to the emphasis on reading, writing, and vocabulary, this course includes units that teach essential skills for high school success. These units include instruction on the student handbook; school policies and procedures; library and research skills; goal setting, self-esteem, conflict resolution, and bullying; test taking skills; and the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* (Covey, 1998).

Other innovations of the MHHSE Freshman Academy include the use of peer mentors in each freshman classroom, separate lunch periods for academy students, a common planning room, and common planning time for increased collaboration among academy teachers.

In the spring of each year, middle school students and their parents are asked to actively participate in the registration process. Students are given the opportunity to select their elective classes, create a 6-year plan, meet with coaches, and take a tour of the building. Over 75% of students and parents take advantage of this opportunity to participate in the registration process on the MHHSE campus. In August, students and parents are again invited to campus for a more thorough orientation where they have the opportunity to meet with freshman teachers, learn about school policies and procedures, and walk through their individual schedules. For the past 4 years, over 90% of incoming freshmen students and their parents have participated in this event.
Research Questions

This quantitative case study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Are there significant differences on each of the following four measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, and number of discipline referrals) for students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy between 8th grade (pretreatment group) and 9th grade (posttreatment group) when tracking the same students?

2. Are there significant differences on each of the following measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) between students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) and students prior to the implementation of the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2002-2004)?

3. Are there significant differences on each of the following measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) between students classified as not economically disadvantaged and those classified as economically disadvantaged in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008)?

4. Are there significant differences on each of the following measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) between female students and male students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008)?

5. Are there significant differences in the graduation rate between students who attended the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005) and students not in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (1999-2004)?
6. According to the perceptions of the faculty members who have taught at MHHSE prior to and since the implementation of the Freshman Academy, are there significant differences in the academic achievement, work ethic, and behavior of MHHSE students since the establishment of the MHHSE Freshman Academy?

Significance of the Study

This quantitative case study is very significant for the stakeholders at Morristown-Hamblen High School East as well as the Hamblen County School System. This study may also be applicable to other high schools or school systems with similar populations of students that may be evaluating freshman transition programs.

Research indicates that the 9th grade transition year from middle school to high school is one of the most important years in a student’s educational career. The research also indicates that providing students with the tools necessary to be academically, emotionally, and socially successful during this transition year will improve the likelihood that each student will graduate from high school with a regular high school diploma.

It takes a great deal of time to research, develop, and establish programs that will help students to be successful during their high school career. Transition programs appear to be one of the most significant new programs available; however, they require a considerable amount of time and planning before implementation. This study is very significant in that it might provide all stakeholders with the opportunity to ascertain the success or failure of those programs already in place as well as provide an option for redefining those programs that may or may not be as successful.
Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the key terms are defined as follows:

**Accountability:** "the requirement that schools be responsible to the public for how well students do. This requirement is met through student testing" (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007, p. 359).

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP):** "a measure of the extent to which all students, as well as certain subgroups of students, in a school or district, demonstrate proficiency in at least reading/language arts and mathematics on state achievement tests and on other academic measures, such as graduation rates or student attendance rates. Each state has developed its own definition of AYP, and these definitions have been approved by the U.S. Department of Education and are available on the Department's Web site (www.ed.gov). State definitions of AYP must reflect the goal that all students are proficient in reading and math by the end of the 2013-2014 school year" (Supplemental Educational Services Quality Center, 2004, p. 41)

**At-risk:** students who exhibit problematic behaviors as a result of underlying factors such as learning disabilities, low socioeconomic status, youthful offenders, dysfunctional families, exposure to media violence, and/or drug abuse (State of Tennessee Department of Education, 2008).

**Dropout Rate:** the percentage of students who leave high school without having earned a regular high school diploma (State of Tennessee Department of Education, 2008).

**Expulsion:** permanent removal of a student from the educational setting for the remainder of the semester or the remainder of the academic school year as a result of a zero tolerance offense or as a result of severe behavioral issues (Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA) 49-6-3401, 2008).
**Formative Evaluation:** Evaluation that is used to improve an ongoing practice or program (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 473).

**Free or Reduced Lunch Eligibility:** Students who qualify for free and/or reduced price meals at school under qualifications provided by the National School Lunch Act due to their parent/guardian meeting a particular income criteria level and family size (Swanson, 2004; State of Tennessee Department of Education, 2008).

**Freshman Academy:** a smaller learning community committed to improving the educational success of all freshmen students transitioning into the high school program (Oxley, 2006).

**Grade Point Average (GPA):** the GPA represents the average number of grade points a student earns for each graded high school course. Grade points are points per course credit assigned to a passing grade, indicating the numerical value of the grade (A=4.0, B=3.0, C=2.0, D=1.0, and F=0.0). Dividing a student’s total grade points earned by the total course credits attempted determines a student’s GPA (National Center for Education Statistics: NAEP High School Transcript Study, 2007).

**Graduation Rate:** the percentage of students who enter high school with their cohort group during the ninth grade and graduate from high school within 4 years and 1 summer with a regular high school diploma (State of Tennessee Department of Education, 2008).

**In School Suspension (ISS):** an alternative learning placement whereby disruptive students are segregated from the general student population. Students in the in school suspension environment are provided with classroom assignments to complete while being confined to a restrictive classroom (TCA 49-6-3401, 2008).
**Miller-Boyd Alternative School:** a school designed for students who have been removed from their placement at MHHSE as a result of their failure to follow the school’s discipline policy. While at the Miller-Boyd Alternative School, students must wear uniforms, provide their own transportation and meals, and learn behavior management skills from specially trained faculty and staff. Students are placed in small class settings with a low student to teacher ratio (Hamblen County Board of Education, 2006).

**No Child Left Behind (NCLB):** The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. Proposed by President Bush shortly after his inauguration, NCLB was signed into law on January 8th, 2002. NCLB is built on four principles: accountability for results, more choices for parents, greater local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on doing what works based on scientific research (www.ed.gov, 2007).

**Out-of-School Suspension:** a form of punishment whereby the student is removed from the educational setting, and not permitted on school property or at any school function or activity, for a specific period of time (TCA 49-6-3401, 2008).

**Smaller Learning Community (SLC):** Full school redesign efforts intended to create smaller, more learning-centered units of organization including small schools and career academies (Oxley, 2006, p. 1). The MHHSE Freshman Academy is also referred to as a smaller learning community.

**Summative Evaluation:** An evaluation designed to determine the merit, the worth, or both of a developed practice and to make recommendations regarding its adoption and widespread use (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006, p. 477).
Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

This was a quantitative case study limited to those students who have been enrolled in the Freshman Academy at Morristown-Hamblen High School East. The results of this case study may be generalized to other transition programs, other high schools using the freshman academy concept, or other high schools considering the implementation of a 9th grade transition program.

Data with regard to MHHSE graduation rates were limited to those years following the 2003-2004 school year, the first year that graduation rate data were reported by the State of Tennessee. Data with regard to students who were not members of the MHHSE Freshman Academy were limited to 2 years prior to the implementation of the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2002-2003 and 2003-2004).

The researcher did not interview student subjects, who might be more capable of providing the best interpretation as to the success and or failure of the effectiveness of the MHHSE Freshman Academy. The researcher surveyed only those teachers who taught in the school prior to and since the inception of the freshman academy.

This study may be very valuable to teachers, administrators, and central office personnel by providing data to help improve programs offered in the MHHSE Freshman Academy. The data gathered may also assist the administration with the implementation of additional smaller learning community initiatives within MHHSE.

Overview of the Study

This research study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to relevant literature, the statement of the problem, an introduction to Morristown-Hamblen High School East, research questions to be answered, the significance of the study, definitions of key
terms, limitations and delimitations of the study, and an overview of the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of the significant literature focusing on the history of American high school education, the *No Child Left Behind* legislation, the high cost of being a high school dropout, creating smaller learning communities, and restructuring high schools for academic success. Chapter 3 describes the research design, population studied, data collection procedures, research questions and null hypotheses, and data analysis used in completing the study. Chapter 4 provides information concerning the data collected and analyzed for this study. Chapter 5 reports the results of the study as well as conclusions to be drawn and recommendations for practice and additional research.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative case study was to determine whether or not a significant relationship exists between the implementation of the Morristown-Hamblen High School East (MHHSE) Freshman Academy, student academic achievement, and the high school graduation rate at MHHSE. A review of the relevant literature indicates a fervent need for high school reform initiatives that will reduce the dropout rate and improve the graduation rate in order to meet the requirements established by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The research further indicates that the creation of smaller learning communities that provide support for at-risk students, the building of strong relationships between teachers and students, and an increase in academic rigor will help to facilitate the secondary schools efforts to adequately prepare its graduates for postsecondary educational opportunities and the world of work.

This literature review addresses five key areas of concern related to the establishment of freshman academies: the history of American high school education, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the high cost of being a high school dropout, the creation of smaller learning communities, and the restructuring of high schools for academic success. In order to effectively reform our secondary schools to satisfactorily prepare our students for the future, we must first understand the mistakes of the past by reviewing the history of high school education in America.
During the years immediately following the birth of our nation, there were very few opportunities for children to continue their educational experiences after the eighth grade. Students who were privileged enough to attend school during their formative years did so together in one room school houses taught by teachers with little or no formal educational experience or training. During those years, education was primarily based on religion and students were encouraged to become active participants in their local communities as well as in state and federal programs (Beach, 2007).

Even though very few children could afford to attend school on a regular basis due to the obligations of maintaining the family farm, the school became a fundamentally important organization within the community. In *School: The Story of American Public Education* (2001), Anderson, Cuban, Kaestle, and Ravitch state,

At this time, most children left school by the end of eighth grade to go to work or help out at home. The American common school usually offered eight years of instruction. With its emphasis on the three R’s, its reliance on rote recitations and spelling bees, its close ties to the citizenry, it’s underpaid teachers, and it’s usually crowded classrooms, it was a vital community institution (p. 64).

Prior to 1821, only two types of secondary schools existed in the United States, and those catered primarily to the upper-class of society. According to the authors of *History of Education in America*, Latin grammar schools were established for the privileged few and their primary purpose was to prepare their students for college. Academies, also referred to as boarding schools, provided an environment renowned for maintaining high moral standards. (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007).

However, it was not only the elite citizenry who clearly understood the value of a secondary education for their children. It was in the early 1800s that the middle and working
class citizens began to demand that their children be provided with a secondary level of education as well, but one supported by local taxes. Thus, the first public high school in America was established.

In 1821, Boston opened the English Classical School and renamed it the English High School in 1824. This first American high school was established to meet the needs of boys who did not plan to attend college. Boys as young as 12 were admitted by examination; however, very few poor or working-class youngsters were involved. English, mathematics, history, science, geography, philosophy, bookkeeping, and surveying were taught. Massachusetts passed a law in 1827 that required towns of 4,000 or more to create a high school, but not all towns complied (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007, p. 141).

In 1826, a female high school was also opened in Boston, but it soon closed due to lack of funds after an excessive number of young ladies attempted to enroll. Boston established a second female high school in 1855 that focused on teacher training for girls. The public high school phenomenon soon grew by tremendous proportions. At the beginning of the Civil War there were approximately 300 public high schools in America, 100 of those in Massachusetts alone.

The Civil War had an unfortunate but profound impact on education in the United States. Though money was redirected and many schools lost students and teachers to the war effort, most northern states continued to provide, at minimum, an elementary education for its students. The same could not be said for the south, as the majority of its schools were closed due to the financial and physical destruction that occurred in that region. At the conclusion of the war, elementary and secondary schools began to flourish once again, but were primarily in the north (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007).

Even though the expansion of the public high school concept was gradual after the conclusion of the Civil War, the dawning of a new century and the industrialization of the nation provided the impetus for more than 500,000 students to attend over 6,000 high schools across the
country in order to obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for full-time employment (Anderson et al., 2001; Dorn, 2003). The authors of *America’s Perfect Storm: Three Forces Changing Our Nation’s Future* state, “As the nation changed from a predominately agrarian society to an industrial one in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, labor-market success increasingly depended on attaining at least a modest level of formal education, along with a willingness to do a day’s work for a day’s pay” (Kirsch, Braun, Yamamoto, & Sum, 2007, p. 8).

With the increased desire for secondary education came the need for additional facilities. In 1920, $1 billion was spent on public education and 17 percent of seventeen-year-olds graduated from high school. Since the turn of the century, new high schools have been opening at a rate of one per day (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 97). The author of *America’s Public Schools: From the Common School to “No Child Left Behind”* concurs when he states, “Americans built an average of one new high school per day between 1890 and 1920, not all of them palaces, but an indication of impressive demand” (Reese, 2005, p. 181). He also states, “In 1890, high schools enrolled approximately 7 percent of all 14- to 17-year-olds; this jumped nearly 38 percent in 1920 and 65 percent by 1936. From 1890 to 1930, the high school population doubled every decade” (Reese, p. 182).

The Great Depression of the 1930s, another period of crisis in our nation’s history, also altered our country’s secondary educational system. Widespread unemployment among adults, technological advancements, and the strengthening of child labor laws became the impetus for keeping more and more children enrolled in school (Anderson et al., 2001; Reese, 2005). According to Kirsch et al. (2007), “Over time, as the structure of jobs and the economy changed, occupational and basic literacy skills became more essential for obtaining a decent job and
advancing in the workforce. Eventually, a high school diploma emerged as a key credential for economic success (p. 8).

The enactment of the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), that included child labor laws aimed at preventing parents from employing their children and seizing their wages, brought about the need for compulsory attendance laws. This law banned child labor and required that all children attend school at least until the age of 16. The law’s purpose was not to force children to attend school but to prevent adults from keeping them out (Anderson et al., 2001; Brinkley, 2003; Pullian & Van Patten, 2007).

As greater numbers of students enrolled in public high schools, educators found that the classical high school curriculum, instituted in the public high schools of the early 1800s, was outdated and unable to keep pace with the increasing complexity of skills required in the new industrial age. In order to keep pace with the diverse needs and abilities of students, the high school curriculum was reformed and the comprehensive high school was born.

The public high school took on qualities of both the academy and the classical school. It offered courses that were practical and cultural, on the one hand, and college preparatory, on the other. Training of the mind became equated with preparation for life, and the college preparatory course was considered to be the best mental training. Electives were offered in high schools, but curriculum was shaped by what colleges would accept for entrance (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007, p. 207).

The development of the comprehensive high school model created challenges never before experienced by educators. It was determined that the comprehensive curriculum was not successfully meeting the needs of all students. Even though the graduation rate had risen from 6% in 1900 to 51% in 1945, an unprecedented number of students were still leaving high school without a diploma (Reese, 2005). The launching of Sputnik by the Soviet Union in the 1950s concerned national leaders and led to the demand for high school curriculum reform. The nation
blamed the high schools for not adequately preparing its youth to meet the growing challenges of technology and globalization. Therefore, more rigorous courses in mathematics and science were added to the high school curriculum (Brinkley, 2003).

While the public high school became the central focus of teenage life for most white children in the 1950s, a growing number of minority children were essentially banned from public education.

African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans in particular were virtually excluded from this important transformation. For example, whereas 54 percent of southern white children of high school age were enrolled in public high schools by 1935, more than eight out of every ten African American children of high school age were not enrolled in secondary schools. As late as 1968, the average schooling for Mexican Americans in Texas was 4.7 years (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 126).

In the 1950s, the educational opportunities afforded to minority students were considerably inferior to those afforded to white students. Not only were fewer minority students enrolled in public schools as compared to their white counterparts, their facilities and extracurricular activities were substandard as well (Brinkley, 2003; O'Brien, 2007).

The landmark 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* sought to change the mindset that separate but equal was somehow fair and just. Brinkley (2003), quotes Chief Justice Earl Warren when he states, "We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of ‘separate but equal’ has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (p. 821). The U. S. Supreme Court may have ruled that separate but equal was unconstitutional; however, it failed to enforce its decision and the ramifications of racial inequality continued to plague our country, especially in the south (Brinkley, 2003; Vacca & Bosher, 2003).

In 1963, a champion for education became president of the United States when his predecessor, John F. Kennedy, was slain in Dallas, Texas. Lyndon Baines Johnson, a former
schoolteacher from Texas, worked to make available a quality education for all children, no matter their race, nationality, gender, or socioeconomic status.

Johnson believed that an equal chance at education meant an equal chance at life. He created a wide-ranging series of federal programs, from Head Start to low-cost college loans, to help disadvantaged students. And he signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned discrimination on the basis of race in all federally funded programs, including schools (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 146).

In 1965, President Johnson signed into law the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that helped to provide millions of federal dollars for educational programs aimed to ensure that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were provided with the same level of quality education as students from more affluent families (Brinkley, 2003; Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007; Reese, 2005). However, schools that failed to comply with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and that continued to practice segregation lost federal funding. The loss of millions of dollars in federal funding finally caught the attention of school systems across the country, and especially in the south. “With this pressure from the president, new federal laws, and the civil rights movement, the South finally gave way. By 1972, 91 percent of southern black children attended integrated schools” (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 149).

President Johnson was a staunch supporter of the Bilingual Education Act that provided funding to help those children whose first language was not English. Through this legislation, the federal government financially supported the publication of teaching materials in almost 70 languages as well as the development of numerous bilingual programs (Reese, 2005).

Federal legislation, aimed at ending sexual discrimination, was passed in 1972. Known as Title IX, this legislation denied federal grants to schools or programs that discriminated against students because of their gender. In 1974, a class action lawsuit was filed by the Women’s Equity Action League stating that schools were discriminating against females in
everything from textbooks to athletics, thereby violating the Title IX legislation. The enforcement of Title IX provided opportunities for women that extended far beyond the classroom.

As the case wound its way through the courts, students and parents pressured schools to comply. Gradually, bias-free textbooks and readers appeared. Vocational courses became coeducational. With more doors open to them, women began earning more than half of all undergraduate and master’s degrees. And by the early 1990s 40 percent of all high school athletes were female, up from just 1 percent in 1970 (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 162).

Another piece of federal legislation aimed at ending discrimination toward minority children was passed in 1976. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, commonly referred to as IDEA, ensures that all children with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education. The number of children who qualify for special education has grown nearly 40% in the past decade, with some 6.6 million children ages 3 to 21 diagnosed with special needs (Pulliam & Van Patten, 2007, p. 244). The federal funds supporting educational initiatives in our nation may have become stagnant since the original passage of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, but the programs that were developed within that legislation, remain in effect in 2008.

Laws seeking to abolish discrimination against all minority students were put into effect as the largest generation of Americans were being born. Subsequently, enrollment in high schools soared as more and more students were afforded the opportunity to obtain a public high school education. Reese (2005) states, Enrollments grew dramatically until the 1970s, when the last of the baby boomers entered secondary schools. There were 5.7 million pupils in grades 9 through 12 in 1950, 8.4 million in 1960, 13 million in 1970, and slightly more a decade later (p. 28).
As high school enrollment increased dramatically in the latter part of the 20th century, the faith and confidence in America’s public schools radically declined. A report, commissioned by the U. S. Department of Education for President Ronald Reagan and entitled *A Nation At Risk* stated that our nation’s high schools were not adequately meeting the educational needs of its students nor could they compete academically with students of other nations. This report brought attention to the low academic standards in our public high schools and identified them as a threat to our nation’s economic wellbeing (Loder, 2006).

*A Nation At Risk* was the result of the work of a task force created in 1981 by U. S. Department of Education Secretary, T. H. Bell, to study our nation’s schools. The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) was charged with several tasks that included an assessment of teaching and learning in public and private schools as well as colleges and universities; a comparative study of our nation’s schools with those of other advanced countries around the world; the relationship between college entrance requirements and high school graduation requirements; and defining inefficiencies in our nation’s educational system. In April 1983, the commission published *A Nation At Risk* that states,

> We report to the American people that while we can take justifiable pride in what our schools and colleges have historically accomplished and contributed to the United States and the well-being of its people, the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, ¶ 8).

In their report, the commission identified a number of indicators of the risk that revolved primarily around student achievement and illiteracy. The first indicator stated, *International comparisons of student achievement, completed a decade ago, reveal that on 19 academic tests American students were never first or second and, in comparison with other industrialized*
nations, were last seven times (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, ¶ 18). A second indicator stated, “About 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40 percent” (1983, ¶18). A third indicator reported, “Average achievement of high school students on most standardized tests is now lower than 26 years ago when Sputnik was launched” (1983, ¶18). Remaining indicators focus on the declining scores of college readiness aptitude tests such as the ACT and SAT; the increasing demand for remedial courses at the college level; and complaints from business and the military regarding the need for remedial training programs before students can be considered employable.

The recommendations that resulted from “A Nation At Risk” requested that high schools increase the number of credits required for a high school diploma, offer more courses in core academic subject areas, and incorporate the use of computer technology. However, the report did not give any indication as to how these recommendations were to be funded.

At the same time, the federal government was scaling back its role in education and shifting the burden of these reforms to state and local authorities. They, in turn, cracked down on students. And to ensure that students were meeting these new standards, an era of high-states testing was born (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 187).

The publication of “A Nation At Risk” provided the motivation for those disgruntled with public education to push for alternative options. During the 1980s and 1990s a growing trend, the issue of school choice, emerged as a hot topic and is still an important issue in 2008. “Choice became a multi-faceted reform ideal, embracing everything from open enrollment plans within school systems to charter schools and even home schooling” (Reese, 2005, p. 322). As parents became angry over the quality of education being provided to their children in their own neighborhood schools, they began to ask for permission to transfer their tax dollars for use at the school of their choice. As a result, vouchers were made available in many school systems across
the country, where authorized by state law. Tax money for educational purposes could be moved from one school to another or one system to another at a parent’s request. The face of neighborhood schools began changing as magnet schools, those schools having a specialized program of study, were created. Magnet schools tend to recruit the best and brightest as well as the most gifted and talented. On the private side, charter schools are those schools developed and supported by business and industry. In many communities where charter schools are located parents have again requested that their tax dollars be transferred to cover tuition payments. A final option, growing in popularity, is the home school. There are numerous home school programs in every state that will provide a curriculum for a fee. Parents must buy their own books and teach their own children. In many communities, parents have formed home school cooperatives where families can join together as a group to provide home school services to their children (Reese, 2005).

America’s public education system continues to be a hot topic of debate. While the 1983 report, *A Nation At Risk*, focused on the alleged inadequacies of high school education in the United States, Bracey (2007) contends that public schools have consistently taken the blame for every failure of the American economy. Bracey states, *Sputnik set a nasty precedent that has become a persistent tendency: when a social crisis of real, imagined, or manufactured appears, schools are the scapegoat of choice; when the crisis is resolved, they receive no credit* (¶ 26).

Whether or not a crisis exists in America’s public education system, sweeping reform was instituted at the national level with *The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. Since its implementation, this reform has had a profound effect on high school education in America. The section to follow outlines this latest reform effort, its importance, and the changes that need to be made at the high school level in order to meet its vast and daunting requirements.
No Child Left Behind

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB), a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and one of the most crucial pieces of legislation ever affecting school reform. Since the first days of his administration, he has expressed concern that our students, especially those that are disadvantaged, are lacking in essential skills and are unable to compete in a global economy. In the publication, *No Child Left Behind: A Desktop Reference*, Ginsburg and de Kanter (2002) state, "The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is a landmark in education reform designed to improve student achievement and change the culture of America’s schools (p. 9).

The NCLB is a framework that states and local education agencies must follow to establish programs that will improve student achievement.

The act, which passed with overwhelming bipartisan support, embodies four key principles: stronger accountability for results; greater flexibility for states, school districts and schools in the use of federal funds; more choices for parents of children from disadvantaged backgrounds; and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been demonstrated to work. The act also places an increased emphasis on reading, especially for young children, enhancing the quality of our nation’s teachers, and ensuring that all children in America's schools learn English. In keeping with these principles, and as this guide describes, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act affects virtually every program authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) ranging from Title I and efforts to improve teacher quality to initiatives for limited English proficient (LEP) students and safe and drug-free schools (Ginsburg & de Kanter, 2002, p. 9).

The most important principle of this legislation, and the one that has the greatest impact on high schools, is the adequate yearly progress (AYP) accountability component. The legislation has three major accountability elements: every classroom must have a highly qualified teacher; every student in grades 3 through 12 must be tested in reading, math, and science; and students in failing schools must be offered the opportunity to transfer to better schools (Darling-Hammond, 2006). The legislation requires that all states create annual
assessments that measure reading, math, and science skills for students in grades 3 through 8 every year, and at least once for each subject in high school (Beaver, 2004). At the present time, all Tennessee high school students are required to pass the English 10, Algebra I, and Biology I Gateway tests as well as a required number of academic course credits in order to receive a regular high school diploma. Students who fail to pass these tests or acquire the necessary number of credits will only be issued a certificate of attendance or a special education diploma for those students supported under IDEA (Swanson, 2003).

Nichols and Berliner (2008) are strong opponents of high-stakes testing who state, “There is no convincing evidence that high-stakes testing has the intended effect of increasing learning” (¶ 2). They also contend, “The pressure to score well on a single test is so intense that it leads to nefarious practices (cheating on the test, data manipulation), distorts education (narrowing the curriculum, teaching to the test), and ends up demoralizing educators” (¶ 3). Bracey (2007) contends that because of the increased focus on reading, mathematics, and science our students are not being prepared for leadership positions or to be responsible citizens.

While academic assessments are the primary accountability factor of the NCLB legislation, a secondary academic factor includes high school graduation rate. This secondary academic requirement was put in place to prevent schools from forcing low-performing students out of school in order to inflate assessment scores (Swanson, 2003). At the present time, Tennessee has established a graduation rate of 90% for all high schools. In 2014, 100% of students, including those receiving special education services, must graduate from high school with a regular high school diploma. High schools that fail to achieve this requirement will have failed to meet AYP. “Districts and schools that do not make sufficient yearly progress toward
state proficiency goals for their students, first will be targeted for assistance and then be subject to corrective action and ultimately restructuring (Ginsburg & de Kanter, 2002, p. 10).

There are numerous opponents of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. Bracey (2007) contends that the NCLB will not heal our nation’s public education system. He states, “Too many people who spend little or no time in schools created too much of our education legislation and reform policy” (¶ 79). McCluskey (2007) contends that the NCLB legislation has hurt children across our country. He states, “Indeed, if NCLB has taught one thing, it is this: When Washington gets involved in education, no one wins” (¶ 10). In an address to the National Press Club, U.S. Representative George Miller (D-CA) stated, “

We didn’t get it all right when we enacted the law. Throughout our schools and communities, the American people have a very strong sense that the No Child Left Behind Act is not fair. That it is not flexible. And that it is not funded. And they are not wrong (¶ 19-21).

Even though the future of the NCLB legislation is uncertain, an overwhelming challenge currently remains for all public high schools. At the present time, public high schools are still required to graduate 100% of its students within 4 years and 1 summer with a regular high school diploma.

*The High Cost of Being a High School Dropout*

One hundred years ago, leaving high school without a diploma was not deemed to be the socially humiliating event that it is today. During the early to mid 1900s, many teenagers saw no identifiable career benefit to obtaining a high school diploma, as the skills taught in high school were not necessarily the skills needed to obtain and maintain gainful employment. Many who left school without a high school diploma were able to have successful careers and flourish economically (Jerald, 2006). However in today’s society, graduating from high school has
become a societal norm and students who are classified as dropouts are stigmatized (Dorn, 2003). High school dropouts of today will struggle financially and have fewer job opportunities (Jerald, 2006). In the following section I will seek to describe the meaning of, as well as, the risk factors and costs associated with being a high school dropout.

**Who Is a High School Dropout?**

The definition of a high school dropout is fairly simple. A high school dropout is any person who leaves high school without having earned a high school diploma. According to the guidelines established in the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, a specific time frame is required for the completion of high school. Any regular education student who enters the 9th grade has 4 years and 1 summer to graduate and obtain a regular high school diploma, while special education students and students classified as limited English proficient have 5 years and 1 summer. Any student who does not meet these requirements is considered to be a dropout. While the definition of a high school dropout is fairly straightforward, the risk factors associated with becoming a high school dropout are not.

**Risk Factors**

The requirements for meeting the graduation standards established by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* have left educators scrambling for solutions to the high school dropout crisis that is currently plaguing the American high school. Unfortunately, there is no quick fix. Research studies conducted during the last 30 years have identified numerous risk factors associated with dropping out of high school. Many factors include individual student demographics that are unable to be controlled by schools, while others pertain to school factors.
In conducting a study to determine the effect of public high schools and Catholic high schools on the dropout rate in American schools, Byrk and Thum (1989) drew several conclusions. They discovered that the dropout rate for students who attend Catholic high schools is lower than the dropout rate for students who attend public high schools. The authors reported that Hispanics, African Americans, students from lower socioeconomic homes, and students from homes with low expectations for academic success were more likely to drop out of school than their peers. Byrk and Thum also found that students with these risk factors also tended to have lower test scores, higher absenteeism, and more discipline problems than their peers. Alspaugh (1998) conducted a study that indicated larger high schools tend to have higher dropout rates. Lunenberg (1999) reported that low grades, high absenteeism, discipline problems, and being retained in previous grades are all associated with high school dropouts.

A study conducted for the National Center for Education Statistics, indicates several risk factors for dropping out of high school. These factors include being a member of a single-parent home; having an annual family income of less than $15,000; having an older sibling or parent who did not finish high school; having limited English proficiency; and being at home with little or no adult supervision. The study identified additional risk factors as being retained in previous grades; frequently changing schools; parents who were not actively involved and or had low expectations; and high absenteeism. The eighth grade students in this study were followed over a 4-year period. The study found that students who had two or more of the above risk factors were eight times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers with no risk factors. The study also found that students with two or more risk factors were more likely to test poorly in reading, math, and science; more likely to become a teenage parent; more likely to have used
illicit drugs; more likely to become involved in gang activity; and more likely to have been suspended or expelled from school (Green & Scott, 1995).

Battin-Pearson et al. (2000) conducted a study to test five theories associated with dropping out of high school. The five individual theories included low academic achievement; participation in deviant behaviors (i.e. pregnancy and illicit drug use); having antisocial peer affiliations; poor family structures (i.e. single-parent homes and low parental expectations); and demographic factors (i.e. gender, ethnicity, low socioeconomic status). The authors concluded that all of the theories, when considered together, led to poor academic achievement, and were the greatest indicator of a student dropping out of school before the end of the 10th grade. The authors also concluded that when viewed alone, having antisocial peer affiliations, participating in deviant behaviors, and low socioeconomic status also have a profound impact on dropping out of high school.

Barclay and Doll (2001) reviewed several studies and concluded that students who dropped out of high school began showing signs of academic failure as early as the middle school years. They also found that students who were not engaged in school or who had difficulty with interpersonal relationships tended to become dropouts.

In a report published for the American Psychological Association entitled Developing Adolescents, the authors cited the work of previous studies when they stated that students of varying ethnic backgrounds allude to different reasons for dropping out of school. White students refer to feelings of estrangement, alienation, poor relationships with teachers and failing grades. African American teenagers responded that being suspended or expelled were their primary reasons for dropping out, while Hispanics mention the need to work or taking care of younger siblings as their motivation for dropping out of high school (Gentry & Campbell, 2002).
A 2006 qualitative study sponsored by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation entitled *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts*, reported that there is no single underlying factor for why students drop out of high school. The authors of this report conducted focus groups and surveyed dropouts from around the country. They concluded that dropping out of school is a gradual process and not the result of a single identifiable act. They present five main factors for why students drop out of high school. These include boring classes, high absenteeism, spending time with friends who were not interested in school, an abundance of freedom and very few rules, and failing grades. Additional causes include low parental involvement, taking care of ailing family members, and the need to get a job. Most of the participants in this study stated that they could have graduated from high school, but various factors within their own lives prevented them from doing so. They state that support from teachers, administrators, and parents might have made the difference (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006).

Jerald (2007) cites several research studies in his report for *The Center for Public Education*. He reached the conclusion that dropping out of high school is directly related to academic performance and commitment to school. He found that a student’s educational experiences, including high absenteeism and low academic achievement, were an excellent predictor of whether or not a student would drop out of school. He also found, as did many other researchers that dropping out of school is not a sudden event. He reported that students often show very definite signs of educational problems well before entering high school. Jerald (2006) states, “Students who become disengaged from school and develop disciplinary problems are more likely to drop out. . . less participation in extracurricular activities, and bad relationships with teachers and peers all have been linked to lower chances for graduation” (p. 5).
Suh and Suh (2007) conducted a mixed methods study of over 6,000 students to determine risk factors for dropping out of school. While the study determined that a low grade point average (GPA) has the highest impact on dropout rate, two other factors, low socioeconomic status and behavior problems in school, are significant as well. As in other studies, these researchers have discovered that having multiple risk factors increases the likelihood of a student dropping out of school.

Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007) completed a mixed methods study that examined 196 Kentucky high schools categorized as either low dropout schools (LDOS) or high dropout schools (HDOS). They found that LDOSs provided a safe, clean environment for students where teachers were nurturing and caring, set high expectations for academic success, and were excellent role models. They found that several school factors do influence whether or not a student will drop out of school. These school factors include creating a sense of belonging or engagement in school, fostering academic success, and having high behavioral expectations.

Several studies have been completed during the last 40 years in order to identify risk factors associated with dropping out of high school. For most of that time period, it was believed that demographic indicators such as ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status played the most important roles in determining whether or not a student was at risk for dropping out of high school. However, recent research studies indicate that additional factors related to school may play an important role in determining whether or not a student will drop out of high school. It is important to note that no single risk factor is a strong indication of whether or not a student will drop out of high school. In most instances, multiple risk factors led to the student making the decision to drop out of high school. Many students mentally if not physically drop out of school before entering high school, while others have mitigating factors affecting their decisions later in
their high school careers. Regardless of the risk factors involved in this life altering decision, many students do not understand the potential costs associated with those decisions.

The Cost

Being a high school dropout is expensive not only for the dropout but for society as well. Costs include high unemployment rates, lower wages, higher crime rates, and increased health care costs (Bridgeland et al., 2006). According to the 2006 Digest of Education Statistics, 75.7% of those who reported themselves as dropouts in 2005, were either in the labor force and unemployed or not in the labor force at all. During that same time period, a $6,000 difference in the median annual income was reported between high school completers and noncompleters (Snyder et al., 2007).

According to Vail (2004), 4 decades ago most high school graduates were able to find high-paying jobs without gaining a college diploma. Even students who dropped out of school were still able to secure jobs that paid decent salaries. Today, the scenario is much different. Barton (2006) reports that in today's tenuous labor market, it is not enough to have only a high school diploma. He indicates that a college diploma is necessary as well because educational requirements have changed for most occupations in today's job market.

In a February 2005 policy information report published by Educational Testing Service entitled, One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities, the author states,

The earning power of high school dropouts has been in almost continuous decline over the past three decades. High percentages of young dropouts are either not employed or are not even in the labor force. Most wander through life like lost travelers, without guidance or goals, and many end up in prisons. The earning power in constant 2002 dollars of 25- to 34-year-old dropouts who work full time for a full year has been in steady decline, during an age period critical to getting established, forming families, and
raising children. In 1971, male dropouts earned $35,087 (in 2002 dollars), falling to $23,903 in 2002, a decline of 35 percent. In the same period, the earnings of female dropouts fell from $19,888 to $17,114 (Barton, p. 5).

Barton (2005) estimates that the United States is currently in 10th place in the world with regard to high school completion rates. This fact indicates that our students do not have the skills or knowledge to be adequately prepared for the jobs that are available in today’s labor market.

A report for The Civil Rights Project, entitled Confronting the Graduation Rate Crisis in the South, states that high school dropouts are less likely to form stable family relationships, may be unable to find stable employment, may participate in criminal activities, and have a high probability that their own children will also become high school dropouts (Wald & Losen, 2005). The authors also state,

A renewed commitment to keeping more students in school until they graduate from high school is not just sound educational policy; it is sound economic, public safety, and criminal justice policy. Increasing on-time graduation rates offers a win/win strategy that will not only improve the region’s economic vitality, but will predictably reduce crime, lower incarceration costs, and salvage lives in the process (Wald & Losen, 2005, p. 4-5).

In a June 2006 Achieve, Inc. report, Identifying Potential Dropouts: Key Lessons for Building an Early Warning Data System, the author states that dropouts tend to be unemployed, receive welfare, and participate in criminal activities. They are also less likely to have health insurance, participate in pension plans, remain healthy, live long lives, and vote (Jerald, 2006).

According to the 2007 Achieve, Inc. report, Closing the Expectations Gap, about 67 percent of today’s new jobs require some postsecondary education or training, and that percentage is expected to rise. The result is that employment opportunities for individuals without education skills are quickly disappearing, while jobs that pay well and support a middle-class lifestyle now require higher-level skills than ever before (p. 5).

Those with higher levels of education are afforded higher income, greater stability with regard to employment opportunities, and a reduced dependence on the welfare system.
also less likely to become criminals, be incarcerated, suffer from major illnesses, divorce their spouses, or become single teenage parents whose children become dropouts as well (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Swanson, 2004).

The dropout crisis in our nation is phenomenal. There are numerous risk factors associated with dropping out of high school and the costs are extraordinary. In order to combat this very serious crisis in our educational system, high schools must develop ways to better meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of students but especially those who are deemed to be at greatest risk for dropping out of high school. In keeping with the state and federal mandates imposed by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, it is imperative that schools develop programs that will ensure that as many students as possible leave high school with a regular high school diploma prepared with the knowledge and skills necessary to enter either higher education opportunities or the world of work.

Creating Smaller Learning Communities

As indicated in the research on risk factors associated with high school dropouts, most students who drop out of high school do so as a result of several risk factors but most especially from a lack of academic success and the ability to become engaged in the overall high school experience. In order to combat this problem, high schools must develop programs that will help ensure that students are academically successful and are able to become involved in high school experiences. The creation of smaller learning communities within the high school setting may be one alternative used to help students obtain a regular high school diploma.

According to a report published by the Comprehensive School Reform Quality Center (CSRQC) entitled Works in Progress: A Report on Middle and High School Improvement
Programs, the transition from middle school to high school is very difficult for students, especially for those who are considered to be low-performing or at-risk. This is especially true for students in larger high schools who lose the academic focus necessary to be successful primarily because they have been unable to form personal relationships and bond with teachers or other adults (Amato et al., 2005).

In order to help combat this transitioning problem, high schools are developing programs that help to make the transition from middle school to high school much easier for students. The CSRQC report continues by stating,

American high schools use several strategies to meet the challenges associated with transitioning from middle school to high school. These strategies range from jump-start programs for ninth graders to academies and small learning communities and aim to: restructure and reorganize high schools into smaller learning communities; develop school-based early intervention programs, and engage parents, teachers, and students in the transition process. These strategies have multiple goals, including helping students balance social activities with academic demands and personalizing the transitional experience (Amato et al., 2005, p. 42).

The authors explain that in the freshman academy design the faculty is divided into teams encompassing the four core academic areas. Team members share students and provide academic support to individual students as necessary. The team participates in collaborative activities, has rules and expectations that are uniform among the team members, and works to engage students in academic tasks within the four curriculum areas (Amato et al., 2005).

Alspaugh’s (1998) study revealed that students who make more than one transition in their educational career tend to experience achievement loss. However, students who are in smaller cohort groups during a transition process tend to experience more desirable academic success. The results of a subsequent study indicate that school systems should adjust their grade level organization in order to reduce dropout rates (Alspaugh, 2000).
A study conducted by Akos and Galassi (2004) reveals that students, parents, and teachers have different perceptions about the high school transition process. Students identified homework, social and organizational changes, and grades as the three most difficult obstacles to overcome in a new high school setting. Parents identified academics and time management as issues of concern. The report suggests that parents should stay involved and remain aware of their child’s academic progress. This study provided important information about how to help students make a successful transition.

Black (2004) identifies the transition from middle school to high school as the most difficult transition for a student to make. She states that 9th grade students are not only dealing with new academic expectations, but they are struggling to travel through large and daunting environments full of strangers. She states that many freshmen students lose their self-confidence by the end of the first grading period and some never recover. Black reports that a smaller learning environment in Houston, Texas has helped to reduce dropout rates, increase attendance, improve behavior and test scores, and increase promotions to the 10th grade.

In *Leadership for the Schoolhouse: How is it Different? Why is it Important?* Sergiovanni (1996) states,

The traditional definition of school defined by brick and mortar—a definition that equates a single school with a single school building—will have to be abandoned. Instead, schools should be defined as small collections of people who are committed to each other, and who are connected to similar values and ideas. In this definition, common connections from shared commitments and values, not bricks, are the ingredients that make a school. Thus in any school building there might be several quite independent schools functioning side by side as learning communities each unique in its purposes, but each the same in the loyalty and commitment it asks of its members (p. 101).

Sergiovanni explains that students will perform tasks for people they trust and admire and for whom they care. In communities of learning where caring is evident, the relationships between
students and teachers are constructive and beneficial. In larger more impersonal school settings, students will find other ways to meet their needs. In this respect they often turn to behaviors that are unsafe and detrimental to their wellbeing.

Cawelti (1997) indicates that high schools with smaller enrollments create improved opportunities for student engagement and teacher collaboration. He also indicates that students in smaller learning environments show larger gains in math, reading, history, and science test scores. He cites a previous study that indicates students from smaller schools have higher achievement, better attitudes, and greater participation in school activities (Cawelti).

Lief (2000) states that successful schools create a sense of community and belonging where students and teachers are known and respected. This critical element in helping to ensure student success is much easier to accomplish in smaller learning environments.

Ayers, Bracey, and Smith (2001) report that in smaller schools students are well-known, a circumstance that is essential to well-being and learning. They state that smaller schools raise student achievement, reduce violence and disruptive behavior, increase attendance and graduation rates, improve teacher satisfaction and school climate, and increase parent and community involvement.

Drake (2000) explains that the purpose of smaller learning communities is to enable students to attend large schools but experience atmospheres that are smaller and more personal. He states in smaller learning communities teachers are more responsive to the needs of their individual students.

In research conducted by Wasley and Lear (2001), the authors indicate several reasons for the success of smaller learning communities. They state that the relationships between students and teachers, as well as with the parents, are strong and lasting; the leadership of the organization
is all encompassing allowing teachers to share in the decision making processes; smaller schools focus on specific goals to be achieved and do not try to be comprehensive; professional development is provided specifically for the teachers of the smaller learning community; the school culture is strong; and the entire community is engaged in the purpose of educating its young people for future community participation.

In *School Reform: The Critical Issues*, Evers, Izumi, and Riley (2001) cite the extensive research conducted by Cotton on the issue of school size. They state that small schools are superior to large schools on most academic measures. They cite that the teachers in smaller schools know whether or not a student is having academic or emotional problems. They also indicate that smaller schools have fewer discipline issues, less absenteeism, and fewer dropouts than do larger schools. Evers et al. state,

School size is also a factor in adolescent alienation, which has been the subject of much of the public dialogue on school violence. The research shows that students who attend small schools have a greater sense of belonging than those who attend large schools. In fact, minimizing the alienation that commonly afflicts adolescents appears to be one of the most redeeming qualities of small schools. Large and impersonal high schools can obviously cloak the more severe manifestations of student alienation to a much greater degree than small schools. Small schools can overcome these realities because they are more likely to foster a greater sense of community among students. The evidence shows that students in smaller schools are more likely to bond with their teachers and peers, and that they more readily identify with their schools. Parent involvement is also higher in small schools (p. 387).

Ancess (2003) states a positive teacher-student relationship is the mitigating factor in improving student self-confidence and academic performance. She states that it is much easier for positive relationships to develop in smaller communities than in larger ones. Positive relationships address a human being's basic need for belonging.

Lee, Ready, and Welner (2004) state that based upon sociological evidence, social interactions are generally more positive in smaller learning environments. They also indicate
that smaller schools show greater achievement gains in mathematics and reading. They suggest that dividing larger high schools into smaller learning communities, as opposed to building several smaller schools, is more cost effective and allows students and teachers to form closer bonds that will exist throughout the student's high school career.

Wheelock and Miao (2005) have found positive teacher-student relationships that foster mutual respect and a commitment to learning are keys to ensuring that students graduate from high school. They state that this can only be accomplished in smaller learning communities. They report that,

Interviewed or shadowed 9th graders repeatedly report they disengage from school when they feel teachers don't care about getting to know them as individuals. Although many 9th graders say they aspire to enroll in post-secondary schooling, many also say they feel they don't belong in school. Such apparently contradictory perspectives suggest school leaders must consider how 9th-grade practice can build on students' strengths to enhance student commitment to school while also ensuring schools offer learning experiences worth committing to (Wheelock & Miao, 2005, ¶21).

A 2005 report published by the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), *Best Practices for Implementing HSTW and MMGW: Keeping Students Moving Forward on the Journey From Middle Grades to High School*, states, "The ninth grade has the highest failure rate of any grade, and this dramatically increases the likelihood that students will not finish high school (¶1). The report continues, "Teachers matter enormously. When they serve as teacher-advisors, their students are more apt to set educational goals and make plans for high school (¶7).

Blanchard and Harms (2006) report research on smaller learning communities has identified a correlation between student achievement and student engagement in school. Smaller learning communities provide a more supportive learning environment that leads to positive
personal relationships between teachers and students. Those positive relationships have a
profound impact on academic success, attendance, and behavior.

A report published by the National High School Center (2007) states,

Because the research is clear that the first year of high school is pivotal, but the transition
into high school is often characterized as a time when students experience a decline in
grades and attendance, school systems must support first-year high school students to
improve their chances of success. One strategy to address the challenges facing freshmen
is the creation of ninth grade academies that are apart from the rest of the high school or
the creation of separate stand-alone schools (¶13-14).

Creating smaller learning communities that provide a safe and supportive environment to
help students make a smooth transition into the high school setting is only the first step to
implementing change at the high school level. By nurturing ninth grade students and helping
them to be successful, educators are laying the foundation for continued academic success
throughout the remainder of the student’s high school career. However, built upon that
foundation must be additional levels of success that will provide the student with the skills and
knowledge necessary to become a successful and productive adult in today’s society.

Restructuring High Schools for Academic Success

American high school students are not adequately prepared to meet the challenges
required to be successful in postsecondary educational opportunities and the world of work. The
high school curriculum that provided young men and women with the skills necessary to enter
the labor market in the mid 1900s is outdated and in need of restructuring. Fifty years ago that
curriculum met the needs of the fewer than 50% of students who were expected to graduate from
high school. It no longer does (Darling-Hammond, 1997). In order to provide our students with
the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in the global economy, we must restructure our
educational system and provide our students with opportunities for academic success.
A 2005 report commissioned by Achieve, Inc. entitled *An Action Agenda for Improving America’s High Schools*, estimates that U.S. taxpayers pay between one and two billion dollars annually to provide remedial education services to students at community colleges and 4-year universities. Businesses, colleges, and high school graduates may pay as much as 16 billion dollars annually for remedial services. The report (2004) contends,

The demands of college and work are dramatically different today than a generation ago, but American high schools remain virtually unchanged. State and federal efforts to improve education standards have focused more on providing a strong foundation for learning in the early years than on ensuring students have the skills and knowledge they need at high school graduation. Governors and state and local education officials assumed raising student achievement in the elementary and middle grades would solve the problems with high schools. As a result, high schools have been largely untouched by the past two decades of education reform. As evidence of unacceptable high dropout rates and low academic performance has become more compelling, inattention has begun to give way to action (p. 4).

The report (2005) indicates that high schools that recognize the need for change are providing their students with more rigorous coursework, making instruction more relevant, meeting the learning style needs of their students, and helping students to establish positive relationships with adults who will help to direct their learning. The report continues,

Governors, state and local officials, business leaders, and educators must act now to bring the American high school into the 21st century. It is no longer acceptable for high schools to prepare only some students for college and work. That must be the goal for all students. This will require more rigorous coursework and tests that measure college and work readiness. It also will require restructuring high schools that may be too impersonal, inflexible and alienating for some young people, particularly those who need extra academic and social supports to catch up and succeed. Today, all students need to learn the rigorous content traditionally reserved for college-bound students, particularly in math and English. There is no one-size-fits-all model for the high schools we need. In some communities, large comprehensive high schools already offer rigorous college- and work-ready courses. In other locations, large high schools need to be broken up into small learning communities. These “schools-within-schools” can organize the instructional program around different themes, such as arts, law enforcement and international studies, and provide students with internships or other opportunities to apply what they learn in school. In still other cases, local communities need to create new small high schools, each with a particular theme and instructional philosophy. States should support different high school design approaches, but all high schools must share a
common goal to prepare all students for successful transitions to careers, college and citizenship (2005, p. 9).

Swanson (2007) states students who do not continue their education after high school will not be able to thrive financially. He also indicates that our nation’s high schools are not adequately preparing students for the jobs that are available in today’s labor market. He states that high school reform should be enacted in order to provide a more rigorous and relevant curriculum that will help to prepare our students for the employment opportunities of the future.

*Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* suggests providing students with a caring and supportive environment in addition to a rigorous curriculum. The authors suggest providing students with opportunities to create a sense of belonging to the school and ownership in their own learning by allowing them to make choices. They also suggest creating smaller learning communities, reducing the pupil-teacher ratio in classes, and encouraging caring and supportive relationships between students and teachers (DiMartino, Smith, McCarthy, Clark, & Wolk, 2004).

According to the SREB (2005) report, more demanding coursework does not lead to a higher failure rate. On the contrary, more rigorous coursework is generally more engaging and more interesting to students. This in turn results in lower failure rates and improves student engagement in the learning process. The report indicates that enrolling ninth-graders into low-level academic courses that have low expectations and boring assignments will essentially set them up for failure.

Darling-Hammond (1997) and Darling-Hammond, Ancess, and Ort (2002) identified key components necessary to develop an effective high school. They state that having a small school is only a small piece of the puzzle. They also cite several additional steps that must be taken including building continuous relationships between teachers and students that are allowed to
develop over time; engaging students using an authentic curriculum that challenges their minds and allows them to develop concepts, providing a caring and respectful community that supports diversity for all students, providing students with knowledgeable and quality teachers who put the needs of their students ahead of their own, providing time for teachers to engage in cooperative planning and professional development, and establishing family and community connections that foster relationships that support all students.

Cawelti (1997) states, “At its simplest, restructuring means substantially changing the way important components of the high school interact together with the goal of significantly increasing the achievement of all students” (p. 5).

Drake (2000) contends,

The success of urban schools is dependent on their responsiveness to the needs of students, parents, and communities. School administrators, faculty, and staff must be able to adapt when changes in the environment indicate that a change in programs is necessary to insure quality education and services for students. There should be a continuous focus on the fact that responsive schools are learner-centered and organized in such a way as to promote positive relationships between teachers, students, and parents (¶34).

High school diplomas must be authentic and supported by well documented and proven educational practices. In order for a high school to be deemed effective, it must meet the needs of its students by providing a curriculum that will prepare as many students as possible for postsecondary education and the world of work. The school must provide a curriculum that is rigorous and relevant while allowing students and teachers to form lasting relationships that foster an atmosphere of mutual caring and respect. High school reform is necessary in order to accomplish all of these goals.


Conclusion

This quantitative case study was used to ascertain whether or not a relationship exists between the implementation of the MHHSE Freshman Academy, student academic achievement, and the graduation rate at Morristown-Hamblen High School East. A study of the available research indicates a strong need for high school reform in order to reduce the dropout rate and improve the graduation rate. While the research does indicate that students are more successful in smaller schools, the creation of smaller learning communities is not necessarily the single most important factor in a school’s ability to help at-risk students graduate from high school. The research cites several factors including teacher-student relationships, a caring environment, and the implementation of specific programs aimed at keeping students on track for graduation as being needed as well. The research also indicates a need to increase curriculum rigor to better prepare high school graduates for postsecondary educational opportunities and the world of work.

Chapter 3 describes in detail the methods and procedures used to complete this quantitative research study.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Introduction and Research Design

The quantitative case study used to evaluate the Morristown-Hamblen High School East (MHHSE) Freshman Academy had two major rationales. The first was to conduct a formative evaluation that closely examines the components of the MHHSE Freshman Academy, by evaluating student data and teacher perceptions in order to establish whether or not a relationship exists between the MHHSE Freshman Academy and student graduation rates as well as to provide valuable information that will help improve the program. The second was to conduct a summative evaluation that will assist in determining whether or not it is feasible to implement additional smaller learning community initiatives within the school.

A quantitative case study design was chosen to evaluate the MHHSE Freshman Academy because I have chosen to concentrate specifically on the attributes of a single specific phenomenon that has occurred over a 4-year period. According to McMillan and Schumacher, a case study approach is used when studying a single phenomenon, or case, in greater depth, for a specific period of time, and while using multiple sources of data (2006).

This chapter identifies the participants of the quantitative case study, the data collection procedures employed, the research questions and null hypotheses, as well as the data analysis techniques that were used. The data collected from the formative evaluation were used to determine whether or not a relationship exists between the MHHSE Freshman Academy and student graduation rates and to improve the components of the MHHSE Freshman Academy.

The data collected from the summative evaluation may be used to determine whether or not it is feasible to implement other smaller learning community initiatives within MHHSE.
They may also be used by other school systems desiring to implement smaller learning communities in high schools that have similar characteristics and demographics. McMillan and Schumacher explain that summative evaluations are used to determine the success of a program, by making comparisons with other programs (2006).

*Population*

Data were collected from all students who entered Morristown-Hamblen High School East as first time freshmen during the following school years: 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008. These time frames represent the 4 academic years that the MHHSE Freshman Academy has been in existence. To be eligible for consideration in the study, the student must have attended a Hamblen County middle school during the eighth grade academic year preceding enrollment in high school.

Data were also collected from students who were first time freshmen during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 school years in order to make comparisons between students who were and students who were not members of the MHHSE Freshman Academy. I also evaluated the achievement, attendance, and discipline data for students who were identified as economically disadvantaged as determined by their participation in the free or reduced price lunch program in comparison with students who are not economically disadvantaged, as well as academic, attendance, and behavioral differences between females and males within the MHHSE Freshman Academy.

I interviewed 10 members of the Morristown-Hamblen High School East faculty who were employed for at least 4 years prior to the implementation of the freshman academy, and are still employed at MHHSE. The results of the interviews were used to ascertain teacher opinions
and attitudes as to whether or not the implementation of the MHHSE Freshman Academy has resulted in a positive improvement in the overall culture of the school with regard to student academic performance, work ethic, and discipline.

Data Collection Procedures

During this quantitative case study, I was the primary collector of all data. Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at East Tennessee State University to conduct the research study was obtained before any data were extracted from Morristown-Hamblen High School East. Permission was obtained from the principal of Morristown-Hamblen High School East and the Hamblen County Department of Education to collect data for this research study.

Data were obtained from student permanent records located at Morristown-Hamblen High School East and from SASI, the student data management system used by the Hamblen County Department of Education since 2002. Data extracted from both sources included student GPAs, attendance, discipline, core course credits, and English I End-of-Course test scores.

Interviews

Purposeful Sample. Interviews were conducted with members of the MHHSE faculty. Faculty members were selected for participation in the oral interviews based upon two criteria. The first criterion was that they had been employed as a faculty member at MHHSE since the 1999-2000 school year. The second criterion was that they had taught at least one full academic year in the MHHSE Freshman Academy. Thirteen faculty members were eligible to be interviewed based upon the above criteria. Eligible faculty members were contacted personally. I received responses from and interviewed 10 faculty members.
Recruiting Protocol. The faculty members selected to participate in the interviews were initially contacted through a written request and then personally in a face-to-face meeting. They were informed as to the purpose of the study as well as the date, time, and location of the interview. After the interview was completed, I followed up with a personal thank you note and a gift card to a local store to each participant.

Interview Guide. The interview questions were the same for each participant. The interview setting was informal. The interview questions were directly related to the intent of the study and the research questions. The Interview Guide is identified as Appendix A.

Interview Logistics. The interviews with each of the participants took place in the individual participant’s classroom. Each interview was tape recorded and the Interview Guide was used. Additional follow-up questions were asked when appropriate.

Ethical Protocol. As an administrator at the school where I conducted the interviews, I worked with a vulnerable population, employees. As a result, I did, and will continue to do, everything within my power to protect all participants. As the researcher, I have constantly kept in mind the three ethical considerations of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. While I work with a vulnerable population, I believe the risks involved in this research were minimal.

I received informed consent from all participants that included a guarantee of anonymity, the right to withdraw without fear of penalty, permission to use direct quotes, and information regarding the research topic. Points of consent were incorporated throughout the data collection process to ensure that each participant was willing to continue participation in the interview process. Participants were provided with a copy of the Informed Consent form as well as the name and address of the person to contact if they have any questions or concerns. The identity
of each participant was disguised during the data collection process and in the reporting of results.

*Research Questions and Null Hypotheses*

This quantitative case study was guided by the following research questions and null hypotheses.

*Research Question #1:* Are there significant differences on each of the following four measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, and number of discipline referrals) for students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy between 8\textsuperscript{th} grade (pretreatment group) and 9\textsuperscript{th} grade (posttreatment group) when tracking the same students?

\(H_{01} \): There are no significant differences in GPA for students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy between 8\textsuperscript{th} grade (pretreatment group) and 9\textsuperscript{th} grade (posttreatment group) when tracking the same students.

\(H_{02} \): There are no significant differences in attendance for students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy between 8\textsuperscript{th} grade (pretreatment group) and 9\textsuperscript{th} grade (posttreatment group) when tracking the same students.

\(H_{03} \): There are no significant differences in the number of core course failures for students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy between 8\textsuperscript{th} grade (pretreatment group) and 9\textsuperscript{th} grade (posttreatment group) when tracking the same students.

\(H_{04} \): There are no significant differences in the number of discipline referrals for students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy between 8\textsuperscript{th} grade (pretreatment group) and 9\textsuperscript{th} grade (posttreatment group) when tracking the same students.
Research Question #2: Are there significant differences on each of the following measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) between students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) and students prior to the implementation of the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2002-2004)?


Ho2₅: There are no significant differences in English I End-of-Course test scores between students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and
2007-2008) and students prior to the implementation of the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2002-2003 and 2003-2004).

Research Question #3: Are there significant differences on each of the following measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) between students classified as not economically disadvantaged and those classified as economically disadvantaged in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008)?


Ho32: There are no significant differences in attendance between students classified as not economically disadvantaged and those classified as economically disadvantaged in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008).

Ho33: There are no significant differences in number of core course failures between students classified as not economically disadvantaged and those classified as economically disadvantaged in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008).

Ho34: There are no significant differences in the number of discipline referrals between students classified as not economically disadvantaged and those classified as economically disadvantaged in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008).
Ho3₅: There are no significant differences in English I End-of-Course tests scores between students classified as not economically disadvantaged and those classified as economically disadvantaged in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008).

Research Question #4: Are there significant differences on each of the following measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) between female students and male students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008)?


Research Question #5: Are there significant differences in the graduation rate between students who attended the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005) and students not in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (1999-2004)?

Ho5: There are no significant differences in the graduation rate between students who attended the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005) and students not in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (1999-2004).

Research Question #6: According to the perceptions of the faculty members who have taught at MHHSE prior to and since the implementation of the Freshman Academy, are there significant differences in the academic achievement, work ethic, and behavior of MHHSE students since the establishment of the MHHSE Freshman Academy?

Data Analysis

The data collected in this quantitative case study were categorized and tabulated using the program SPSS for Windows. I analyzed the data collected using the following methods.

Research question #1 compares the results between 8th grade and 9th grade scores, for the same student, on four different measures. Therefore, research question #1 was analyzed using paired samples t-tests for each measure, for each of the four years. Research questions #2, #3, #4, and #5 each make comparisons between two different groups of students on one or more measures. Therefore, research questions #2, #3, #4, and #5 were analyzed using independent samples t-tests for each measure. Research question #6 involves teacher responses to oral interviews. As a result, the responses recorded from research question #6 were reported in a descriptive manner.
Summary

Chapter 3 introduced the research methodology and procedures that were employed to conduct this quantitative case study to determine whether or not a relationship exists between the MHHSE Freshman Academy and student academic success. The population evaluated, the data collection procedures and data analysis techniques engaged, and the research questions and null hypotheses studied have been considered and outlined in this chapter. Chapter 4 presents a statistical analysis of the data collected. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this quantitative case study.
CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The purpose of this quantitative case study was to determine whether or not a significant relationship exists between the implementation of the Morristown-Hamblen High School East (MHHSE) Freshman Academy, student academic achievement, and the high school graduation rate at MHHSE. The MHHSE Freshman Academy was established to ensure a smooth transition from middle school to high school, to address the issue of student academic retention, to improve attendance, to reduce discipline issues, to build strong relationships between teachers and students, and to improve the graduation rate.

Chapter 4 contains statistical analyses of the data with regard to the six research questions presented in Chapters 1 and 3. The quantitative indicators used in this study included the eighth grade measures of GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, and number of discipline referrals. The ninth grade measures also included GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals and scores on the English I End-of-Course test. An additional quantitative indicator was the MHHSE graduation rate. The thoughts and opinions of MHHSE teachers working with students within the MHHSE Freshman Academy were also gathered and reported.

I collected quantitative data on all students who entered the MHHSE Freshman Academy as first-time freshmen during the academic years, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008. I also collected data on students who were not members of the MHHSE Freshman Academy but who were first-time freshmen during the 2002-2003 and 2003-2004 academic years. The data were extracted from SASI, the data management system used by the Hamblen
County Department of Education. Data not accessible from SASI were collected from student permanent records, maintained at Morristown-Hamblen High School East.

**Analysis of Research Questions**

*Research Question #1:* Are there significant differences on each of the following four measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, and number of discipline referrals) for students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy between 8th grade (pretreatment group) and 9th grade (posttreatment group) when tracking the same students?

*Research Question #1 - GPA*

A paired-samples *t*-test was used to determine if there was a significant relationship between the 8th grade (pretreatment group) and the 9th grade (posttreatment group) on GPA for four groups of students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy.

\( \text{Ho1}_1: \text{There are no significant differences in GPA for students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy between 8th grade (pretreatment group) and 9th grade (posttreatment group) when tracking the same students.} \)

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2004-2005 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different GPA in 8th grade than in 9th grade \((N = 332)\). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade GPA \((M = 3.26, SD = 0.63)\) was significantly different from the mean 9th grade GPA \((M = 2.81, SD = 1.01)\), \(t(331) = 12.00, p < .001\). The standardized effect size index, \(d\), was .66, indicating a medium effect. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .38 to .53. Therefore, the null hypothesis \(\text{Ho1}_1\) with regard to the 2004-2005 MHHSE Freshman Academy was rejected.
A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2005-2006 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different GPA in 8th grade than in 9th grade \((N = 348)\). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade GPA \((M = 3.14, SD = 0.70)\) was significantly different from the mean 9th grade GPA \((M = 2.64, SD = 1.01), t(347) = 12.94, p < .001\). The standardized effect size index, \(d\), was .69, indicating a medium effect. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .42 to .58. Therefore, the null hypothesis \(H_0\) with regard to the 2005-2006 MHHSE Freshman Academy was rejected.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2006-2007 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different GPA in 8th grade than in 9th grade \((N = 386)\). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade GPA \((M = 3.10, SD = 0.70)\) was significantly different from the mean 9th grade GPA \((M = 2.49, SD = 1.00), t(385) = 18.64, p < .001\). The standardized effect index, \(d\), was .95, indicating a large effect. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .55 to .68. Therefore, the null hypothesis \(H_0\) with regard to the 2006-2007 MHHSE Freshman Academy was rejected.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2007-2008 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different GPA in 8th grade than in 9th grade \((N = 311)\). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade GPA \((M = 3.17, SD = 0.72)\) was significantly different from the mean 9th grade GPA \((M = 2.84, SD = 0.87), t(310) = 9.44, p < .001\). The standardized effect index, \(d\), was .54, indicating a medium effect. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .26 to .40. Therefore, the null hypothesis \(H_0\) with regard to the 2007-2008 MHHSE Freshman Academy was rejected.

The means, standard deviations, \(t\) scores, and \(p\) values of each group for 8th grade GPA, 9th grade GPA, and the difference between 8th and 9th grade GPA are shown in Table 1.
Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations for Pretreatment and Posttreatment GPA by Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MHHSE Freshman Academy Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04-05</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>-0.45</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05-06</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>-0.50</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>12.94</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06-07</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-0.61</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>18.64</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07-08</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>3.17</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>9.44</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p* significant at p ≤ .05
Research Question #1 – Attendance

A paired-samples t-test was used to determine if there was a significant relationship between the 8th grade (pretreatment group) and the 9th grade (posttreatment group) on attendance, as measured by percentage of days present, for four groups of students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy.

Ho1: There are no significant differences in attendance for students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy between 8th grade (pretreatment group) and 9th grade (posttreatment group) when tracking the same students.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2004-2005 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different percentage of days present in 8th grade than in 9th grade (N = 332). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade percentage of days present (M = 95%, SD = 6%) was significantly different from the mean 9th grade percentage of days present (M = 94%, SD = 6%), t(331) = 2.16, p = .032. The standardized effect size index, d, was .12, indicating a small effect. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .00 to .01. Therefore, the null hypothesis Ho1 with regard to the 2004-2005 MHHSE Freshman Academy was rejected.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2005-2006 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different percentage of days present in 8th grade than in 9th grade (N = 348). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade percentage of days present (M = 94%, SD = 58%) was not significantly different from the mean 9th grade percentage of days present (M = 94%, SD = 63%), t(347) = 1.40, p = .164. The standardized effect size index, d, was .07, indicating a small effect. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in
means was .00 to .01. Therefore, the null hypothesis $H_{01}$ with regard to the 2005-2006 MHHSE Freshman Academy was retained.

A paired-samples $t$-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2006-2007 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different percentage of days present in 8th grade than in 9th grade ($N = 386$). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade percentage of days present ($M = 94\%, SD = 8\%$) was not significantly different from the mean 9th grade percentage of days present ($M = 94\%, SD = 65\%$), $t(385) = 1.65, p = .101$. The standardized effect index, $d$, was .08, indicating a small effect. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .00 to .01. Therefore, the null hypothesis $H_{01}$ with regard to the 2006-2007 MHHSE Freshman Academy was retained.

A paired-samples $t$-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2007-2008 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different percentage of days present in 8th grade than in 9th grade ($N = 311$). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade percentage of days present ($M = 95\%, SD = 6\%$) was significantly different from the mean 9th grade percentage of days present ($M = 93\%, SD = 7\%$), $t(310) = 4.24, p < .001$. The standardized effect index, $d$, was .24, indicating a small effect. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .01 to .02. Therefore, the null hypothesis $H_{01}$ with regard to the 2007-2008 MHHSE Freshman Academy was rejected.

The means, standard deviations, $t$ scores, and $p$ values of each group for 8th grade percentage of days present, 9th grade percentage of days present, and the difference between 8th and 9th grade percentage of days present are shown in Table 2.
### Table 2

**Means and Standard Deviations for Pretreatment and Posttreatment Attendance by Group**

| MHHSE Freshman Academy Group | 8th Grade Pretreatment | 9th Grade Posttreatment | Difference (Post - Pre) | N  | M   | SD  | M   | SD  | M   | SD  | t   | p   |
|------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 04-05                        | 332                    | 95%                     | 94%                     | -1%| 6%  | 6%  | 332 | 95% | 6%  | 94% | 6%  | 2.16| .032|
| 05-06                        | 348                    | 94%                     | 94%                     | 0% | 6%  | 63% | 348 | 94% | 58% | 94% | 63% | 1.40| .164|
| 06-07                        | 386                    | 94%                     | 94%                     | 0% | 8%  | 65% | 386 | 94% | 8%  | 94% | 65% | 1.65| .101|
| 07-08                        | 311                    | 95%                     | 93%                     | -2%| 6%  | 7%  | 311 | 95% | 6%  | 93% | 7%  | 4.24| <.001|

*significant at p ≤ .05
Research Question #1 – Core Course Failures

A paired-samples *t*-test was used to determine if there was a significant relationship between the 8th grade (pretreatment group) and the 9th grade (posttreatment group) on the number of core course failures for four groups of students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy.

Ho1.3: There are no significant differences in the number of core course failures for students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy between 8th grade (pretreatment group) and 9th grade (posttreatment group) when tracking the same students.

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2004-2005 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different number of core course failures in 8th grade than in 9th grade (*N* = 332). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade number of core course failures (*M* = 0.18, *SD* = 0.67) was significantly different from the mean 9th grade number of core course failures (*M* = 0.38, *SD* = 1.09), *t*(331) = 3.14, *p* = .002. The standardized effect size index, *d*, was .17, indicating a small effect. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.32 to -.07. Therefore, the null hypothesis Ho1.3 with regard to the 2004-2005 MHHSE Freshman Academy was rejected.

A paired-samples *t*-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2005-2006 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different number of core course failures in 8th grade than in 9th grade (*N* = 348). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade number of core course failures (*M* = 0.35, *SD* = 0.94) was not significantly different from the mean 9th grade number of core course failures (*M* = 0.44, *SD* = 1.03), *t*(347) = 1.32, *p* = .188. The standardized effect size index, *d*, was .07, indicating a small effect. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.22 to .04. Therefore, the null hypothesis Ho1.3 with regard to the 2005-2006 MHHSE Freshman Academy was retained.
A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2006-2007 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different number of core course failures in 8th grade than in 9th grade (N = 386). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade number of core course failures (M = 0.16, SD = 0.55) was significantly different from the mean 9th grade number of core course failures (M = 0.57, SD = 1.14), t(385) = 7.26, p < .001. The standardized effect index, d, was .37, indicating a small effect. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.51 to -.30. Therefore, the null hypothesis H013 with regard to the 2006-2007 MHHSE Freshman Academy was rejected.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2007-2008 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different number of core course failures in 8th grade than in 9th grade (N = 311). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade number of core course failures (M = 0.13, SD = 0.44) was significantly different from the mean 9th grade number of core course failures (M = 0.27, SD = 0.75), t(310) = 3.33, p = .001. The standardized effect index, d, was .19, indicating a small effect. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.23 to -.06. Therefore, the null hypothesis H013 with regard to the 2007-2008 MHHSE Freshman Academy was rejected.

The means, standard deviations, t scores, and p values of each group for 8th grade number of core course failures, 9th grade number of core course failures, and the difference between 8th and 9th grade number of core course failures are shown in Table 3.
Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations for Pretreatment and Posttreatment Number of Core Course Failures by Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MHHSE Freshman Academy Group</th>
<th>8th Grade Pretreatment</th>
<th>9th Grade Posttreatment</th>
<th>Difference (Post - Pre)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04-05</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05-06</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06-07</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07-08</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p* significant at *p* ≤ .05
Research Question #1 – Discipline Referrals

A paired-samples t-test was used to determine if there was a significant relationship between the 8th grade (pretreatment group) and the 9th grade (posttreatment group) on the number of discipline referrals for four groups of students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy.

Ho1: There are no significant differences in the number of discipline referrals for students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy between 8th grade (pretreatment group) and 9th grade (posttreatment group) when tracking the same students.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2004-2005 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different number of discipline referrals in 8th grade than in 9th grade (N = 332). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade number of discipline referrals (M = 0.32, SD = 0.90) was significantly different from the mean 9th grade number of discipline referrals (M = 0.87, SD = 1.48), t(331) = 7.22, p < .001. The standardized effect size index, d, was .40, indicating a medium effect. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.70 to -.40. Therefore, the null hypothesis Ho1 with regard to the 2004-2005 MHHSE Freshman Academy was rejected.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2005-2006 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different number of discipline referrals in 8th grade than in 9th grade (N = 348). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade number of discipline referrals (M = 0.43, SD = 1.08) was significantly different from the mean 9th grade number of discipline referrals (M = 1.50, SD = 2.65), t(347) = 8.65, p < .001. The standardized effect size index, d, was .46, indicating a medium effect. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -1.31 to -.83. Therefore, the null hypothesis Ho1 with regard to the 2005-2006 MHHSE Freshman Academy was rejected.
A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2006-2007 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different number of discipline referrals in 8th grade than in 9th grade (N = 386). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade number of discipline referrals (M = 0.64, SD = 1.44) was significantly different from the mean 9th grade number of discipline referrals (M = 1.66, SD = 2.42), t(385) = 9.39, p < .001. The standardized effect index, d, was .48, indicating a medium effect. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -1.23 to -.81. Therefore, the null hypothesis Ho14 with regard to the 2006-2007 MHHSE Freshman Academy was rejected.

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether students in the 2007-2008 MHHSE Freshman Academy had a significantly different number of discipline referrals in 8th grade than in 9th grade (N = 311). The results indicated that the mean 8th grade number of discipline referrals (M = 0.53, SD = 1.22) was significantly different from the mean 9th grade number of discipline referrals (M = 1.64, SD = 2.05), t(310) = 11.34, p < .001. The standardized effect index, d, was .64, indicating a medium effect. The 95% confidence interval for difference in means was -1.30 to -.92. Therefore, the null hypothesis Ho14 with regard to the 2007-2008 MHHSE Freshman Academy was rejected.

The means, standard deviations, t scores, and p values of each group for 8th grade number of discipline referrals, 9th grade number of discipline referrals, and the difference between 8th and 9th grade number of discipline referrals are shown in Table 4.
Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for Pretreatment and Posttreatment Number of Discipline Referrals by Group

<p>| MHHSE Freshman Academy Group | Pretreatment | | Posttreatment | | Difference (Post - Pre) | | t | | p* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 8th Grade | | 9th Grade | | | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04-05</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>7.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05-06</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>2.31</td>
<td>8.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06-07</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>9.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07-08</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>2.05</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>11.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*significant at p ≤ .05
Research Question #2: Are there significant differences on each of the following measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) between students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) and students prior to the implementation of the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2002-2004)?

Research Question #2 – GPA


An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether 9th grade students (N = 1378) in MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) had a significantly different GPA from 9th grade students (N = 756) enrolled at MHHSE prior to the implementation of the Freshman Academy (2002-2004). The testing variable was GPA and the grouping variable was preacademy students (2002-2004) or postacademy students (2004-2008). The test was significant, t(2132) = 5.01, p < .001. Postacademy students (M = 2.68, SD = 0.99) tended to have higher GPAs than preacademy students (M = 2.44, SD = 1.15). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.33 to -.14. The $\eta^2$ index was .01, indicating a small effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho2_1 was rejected.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the mean GPA for the two groups.
Figure 1. Boxplot for 9th Grade Mean GPA between Preacademy (2002-2004) and Postacademy (2004-2008) Students
Research Question #2 - Attendance


An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether 9th grade students (N = 1378) in MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) had a significantly different attendance, as measured by the percentage of days present, from 9th grade students (N = 756) enrolled at MHHSE prior to the implementation of the Freshman Academy (2002-2004). The testing variable was percentage of days present and the grouping variable was preacademy students (2002-2004) or postacademy students (2004-2008). The test was significant, t(2132) = 5.86, p < .001. Postacademy students (M = 94%, SD = 7%) tended to have a higher percentage of days present than preacademy students (M = 91%, SD = 10%). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.03 to -.01. The $\eta^2$ index was .02, indicating a small effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho2 was rejected.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the mean attendance for the two groups.
Figure 2. Boxplot for 9th Grade Mean Attendance between Preacademy (2002-2004) and Postacademy (2004-2008) Students
Research Question #2 – Core Course Failures


An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether 9th grade students (N = 1378) in MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) had a significantly different number of core course failures from 9th grade students (N = 756) enrolled at MHHSE prior to the implementation of the Freshman Academy (2002-2004). The testing variable was the number of core course failures and the grouping variable was preacademy students (2002-2004) or postacademy students (2004-2008). The test was significant, t(2132) = 6.25, p < .001. Postacademy students (M = 0.43, SD = 1.03) tended to have fewer core course failures than preacademy students (M = 0.75, SD = 1.37). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .23 to .43. The η² index was .02, indicating a small effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho2₃ was rejected.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of the mean for the number of core course failures for the two groups.
Figure 3. Error Bar for 9th Grade Mean Core Course Failures between Preacademy (2002-2004) and Postacademy (2004-2008) Students
Research Question #2 – Discipline Referrals


An independent-samples $t$-test was conducted to evaluate whether 9th grade students ($N = 1378$) in MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) had a significantly different number of discipline referrals from 9th grade students ($N = 756$) enrolled at MHHSE prior to the implementation of the Freshman Academy (2002-2004). The testing variable was the number of discipline referrals and the grouping variable was preacademy students (2002-2004) or postacademy students (2004-2008). The test was not significant, $t(2132) = 0.85, p = .395$. Postacademy students ($M = 1.43, SD = 2.24$) tended to have only slightly fewer discipline referrals than preacademy students ($M = 1.52, SD = 2.70$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.12 to .31. The $\eta^2$ index was .00, indicating no effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho2₄ was retained.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of the mean for the number of discipline referrals for the two groups.
Figure 4. Error Bar for 9th Grade Mean Discipline Referrals between Preacademy (2002-2004) and Postacademy (2004-2008) Students
Research Question #2 – English I End-of-Course Test Scores


An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether 9th grade students (N = 1126) in MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) had significantly different English I End-of-Course test scores from 9th grade students (N = 634) enrolled at MHHSE prior to the implementation of the Freshman Academy (2002-2004). The testing variable was scores on the English I End-of-Course test and the grouping variable was preacademy students (2002-2004) or postacademy students (2004-2008). The test was significant, t(1758) = 8.16, p < .001. Postacademy students (M = 2.52, SD = 0.53) tended to have higher English I End-of-Course test scores than preacademy students (M = 2.28, SD = 0.66). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.29 to -.18. The η² index was .04, indicating a medium effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho2 was rejected.

Figure 5 shows the distribution of the mean scores on the English I End-of-Course test for the two groups. The means, standard deviations, t scores, and p values of the preacademy and postacademy analyses for each of the five measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) are shown in Table 5.

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Figure 5. Error Bar for 9th Grade Mean Scores on the English I End-of-Course Test between Preacademy (2002-2004) and Postacademy (2004-2008) Students
Table 5

*Means and Standard Deviations for Preacademy and Postacademy Analyses on Five Measures*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Academic Measure</th>
<th>Pre</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Preacademy</th>
<th>Postacademy</th>
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<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>1378</td>
<td>2134</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>t</td>
<td>p*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>756</td>
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<td>2134</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>t</td>
<td>p*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Failures</td>
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<td>2134</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1.37</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>t</td>
<td>p*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
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<td>2134</td>
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<td>p*</td>
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<tr>
<td>English I</td>
<td>634</td>
<td>1126</td>
<td>1760</td>
<td>2.28</td>
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<td>2.52</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
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</table>

*p*significant at *p* ≤ .05
Research Question #3: Are there significant differences on each of the following measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) between students classified as not economically disadvantaged and those classified as economically disadvantaged in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008)?

Research Question #3 – GPA

Ho3: There are no significant differences in GPA between students classified as not economically disadvantaged and those classified as economically disadvantaged in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008).

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether or not there was a significant difference in mean GPA between 9th grade students \((N = 825)\) in MHHSE Freshman Academy classified as not economically disadvantaged and 9th grade students \((N = 552)\) in the MHHSE Freshman Academy classified as economically disadvantaged as determined by their participation in the free or reduced price lunch program. The testing variable was GPA and the grouping variable was not economically disadvantaged or economically disadvantaged. The test was significant, \(t(1375) = 10.04, p < .001\). Students classified as not economically disadvantaged \((M = 2.89, SD = 0.95)\) tended to have higher GPAs than those students classified as economically disadvantaged \((M = 2.37, SD = 0.96)\). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .42 to .63. The \(\eta^2\) index was .07, indicating a medium effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho3 was rejected.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of the mean GPA for the two groups.
Figure 6. Boxplot for MHHSE Freshman Academy-Mean GPA - Based Upon Economic Status
Research Question #3 – Attendance

Ho3$_2$: There are no significant differences in attendance between students classified as not economically disadvantaged and those classified as economically disadvantaged in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008).

An independent-samples $t$-test was conducted to evaluate whether or not there was a significant difference in attendance between 9$^{th}$ grade students ($N = 825$) in MHHSE Freshman Academy classified as not economically disadvantaged and 9$^{th}$ grade students ($N = 552$) in the MHHSE Freshman Academy classified as economically disadvantaged as determined by their participation in the free or reduced price lunch program. The testing variable was percentage of days present and the grouping variable was not economically disadvantaged or economically disadvantaged. The test was significant, $t(1375) = 9.22, p < .001$. Students classified as not economically disadvantaged ($M = 95\%, SD = 5\%$) tended to have a higher percentage of days present than those students classified as economically disadvantaged ($M = 92\%, SD = 8\%$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .02 to .04. The $\eta^2$ index was .06, indicating a medium effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho3$_2$ was rejected.

Figure 7 shows the distribution of the mean attendance for the two groups.
Figure 7. Boxplot for MHHSE Freshman Academy-Mean Attendance - Based Upon Economic Status
Research Question #3 – Core Course Failures

Ho3: There are no significant differences in number of core course failures between students classified as not economically disadvantaged and those classified as economically disadvantaged in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008).

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether or not there was a significant difference in the number of core course failures between 9th grade students (N = 825) in MHHSE Freshman Academy classified as not economically disadvantaged and 9th grade students (N = 552) in the MHHSE Freshman Academy classified as economically disadvantaged as determined by their participation in the free or reduced price lunch program. The testing variable was number of core course failures and the grouping variable was not economically disadvantaged or economically disadvantaged. The test was significant, t(1375) = 5.47, p < .001. Students classified as not economically disadvantaged (M = 0.30, SD = 0.87) tended to have fewer core course failures than those students classified as economically disadvantaged (M = 0.61, SD = 1.20). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.42 to -.20. The $\eta^2$ index was .02, indicating a small effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho3 was rejected.

Figure 8 shows the distribution of the mean number of core course failures for the two groups.
Figure 8. Error Bar for MHHSE Freshman Academy-Mean Core Course Failures - Based Upon Economic Status
Research Question #3 – Discipline Referrals

Ho3₄: There are no significant differences in discipline between students classified as not economically disadvantaged and those classified as economically disadvantaged in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008).

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether or not there was a significant difference in the number of discipline referrals between 9th grade students ($N = 825$) in MHHSE Freshman Academy classified as not economically disadvantaged and 9th grade students ($N = 552$) in the MHHSE Freshman Academy classified as economically disadvantaged as determined by their participation in the free or reduced price lunch program. The testing variable was number of discipline referrals and the grouping variable was not economically disadvantaged or economically disadvantaged. The test was significant, $t(1375) = 6.90$, $p < .001$. Students classified as not economically disadvantaged ($M = 1.09$, $SD = 1.89$) tended to have fewer discipline referrals than those students classified as economically disadvantaged ($M = 1.92$, $SD = 2.59$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -1.07 to -.60. The $\eta^2$ index was .03, indicating a small effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho3₄ was rejected.

Figure 9 shows the distribution of the mean number of discipline referrals for the two groups.
Figure 9. Error Bar for MHHSE Freshman Academy-Mean Discipline Referrals Based Upon Economic Status
Research Question #3 – English I End-of-Course Test Scores

Ho35: There are no significant differences in English I End-of-Course test scores between students classified as not economically disadvantaged and those classified as economically disadvantaged in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008).

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether or not there was a significant difference in the scores on the English I End-of-Course test between 9th grade students \((N = 729)\) in MHHSE Freshman Academy classified as not economically disadvantaged and 9th grade students \((N = 397)\) in the MHHSE Freshman Academy classified as economically disadvantaged, as determined by their participation in the free or reduced price lunch program. The testing variable was English I End-of-Course test score and the grouping variable was not economically disadvantaged or economically disadvantaged. The test was significant, \(t(1126) = 5.53, p < .001\). Students classified as not economically disadvantaged \((M = 2.58, SD = 0.52)\) tended to have higher scores than those students classified as economically disadvantaged \((M = 2.40, SD = 0.54)\). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .12 to .25. The \(\eta^2\) index was .03, indicating a small effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho35 was rejected.

Figure 10 shows the distribution of the mean scores for the English I End-of-Course test for the two groups. The means, standard deviations, \(t\) scores, and \(p\) values of the analyses, with regard to economic status, on each of the five measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) are shown in Table 6.
Figure 10. Error Bar for MHHSE Freshman Academy-Mean Scores on the English I End-of-Course Test Based Upon Economic Status
Table 6

*Means and Standard Deviations for Economic Status Analyses on Five Measures*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Academic Measure</th>
<th>Not E.D.</th>
<th>E.D.</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Not Economically Disadvantaged</th>
<th>Economically Disadvantaged</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
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<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
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<td>552</td>
<td>1375</td>
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<td>0.95</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
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<td>552</td>
<td>1375</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Failures</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>552</td>
<td>1375</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
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<td>552</td>
<td>1375</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>1.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English I</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>1126</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>0.52</td>
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</table>

*p* significant at *p* ≤ .05

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Research Question #4: Are there significant differences on each of the following measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) between female students and male students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008)?

Research Question #4 – GPA


An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether or not a significant difference exists in the mean GPA between female (N = 690) and male (N = 687) 9th grade students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy. The testing variable was GPA and the grouping variable was female or male. The test was significant, \( t(1375) = 6.42, p < .001 \). Female students \( (M = 2.85, SD = 0.92) \) tended to have higher GPAs than male students \( (M = 2.51, SD = 1.02) \). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was .23 to .44. The η² index was .03, indicating a small effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho4₁ was rejected.

Figure 11 shows the distribution of the mean GPA for the two groups.
Figure 11. Boxplot for MHHSE Freshman Academy-Mean GPA - Based Upon Student Gender
Research Question #4 – Attendance


An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether or not a significant difference exists in attendance between female \( (N = 690) \) and male \( (N = 687) \) 9th grade students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy. The testing variable was percentage of days present and the grouping variable was female or male. The test was not significant, \( t(1375) = 0.40, p = .691 \). Female students \( (M = 94\%, SD = 6\%) \) and male students \( (M = 94\%, SD = 6\%) \) tended to have the same percentage of days present. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.01 to .01. The \( \eta^2 \) index was .00, indicating no effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho4 was retained.

Figure 12 shows the distribution of the mean attendance for the two groups.
Figure 12. Boxplot for MHHSE Freshman Academy-Mean Attendance - Based Upon Student Gender
Research Question #4 – Core Course Failures


An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether or not a significant difference exists in the number of core course failures between female ($N = 690$) and male ($N = 687$) 9th grade students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy. The testing variable was number of core course failures and the grouping variable was female or male. The test was significant, $t(1375) = 3.97, p < .001$. Female students ($M = 0.31, SD = 0.89$) tended to have fewer core course failures than male students ($M = 0.53, SD = 1.14$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.33 to -.11. The $\eta^2$ index was .01, indicating a small effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho4 was rejected.

Figure 13 shows the distribution of the mean number of core course failures for the two groups.
Figure 13. Error Bar for MHHSE Freshman Academy-Mean Core Course Failures - Based Upon Student Gender
Research Question #4 – Discipline Referrals


An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether or not a significant difference exists in the number of discipline referrals between female (N = 690) and male (N = 687) 9th grade students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy. The testing variable was number of discipline referrals and the grouping variable was female or male. The test was significant, t(1375) = 5.15, p < .001. Female students (M = 1.12, SD = 1.86) tended to have fewer discipline referrals than male students (M = 1.73, SD = 2.52). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.85 to -.38. The $\eta^2$ index was .02, indicating a small effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho4 was rejected.

Figure 14 shows the distribution of the mean number of discipline referrals for the two groups.
Figure 14. Error Bar for MHHSE Freshman Academy-Mean Discipline Referrals - Based Upon Student Gender
Research Question #4 – English I End-of-Course Test Scores


An independent-samples t-test was conducted to evaluate whether or not a significant difference exists in English I End-of-Course test scores between female (N = 593) and male (N = 533) 9th grade students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy. The testing variable was English I End-of-Course test score and the grouping variable was female or male. The test was not significant, t(1124) = 0.46, p = .648. Female students (M = 2.51, SD = 0.54) and male students (M = 2.53, SD = 0.53) tended to have similar scores. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -.08 to .05. The $\eta^2$ index was .00, indicating no effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho4 was retained.

Figure 15 shows the distribution of the mean scores on the English I End-of-Course test for the two groups. The means, standard deviations, t scores, and p values of the analyses, with regard to gender, on each of the five measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) are shown in Table 7.
Figure 15. Error Bar for MHHSE Freshman Academy-Mean Scores on the English I End-of-Course Test - Based Upon Student Gender
Table 7

*Means and Standard Deviations for Gender Analyses on Five Measures*

<table>
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<th>Academic Measure</th>
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<th>Total</th>
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<th>Male</th>
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<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>SD</td>
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<td>687</td>
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<td>687</td>
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<td>94%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Core Failures</td>
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<td>687</td>
<td>1378</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>690</td>
<td>687</td>
<td>1378</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>1.86</td>
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<td>533</td>
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<td>2.51</td>
<td>0.54</td>
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</table>

*p* significant at $p \leq .05$
Research Question #5: Are there significant differences in the graduation rate between students who attended the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005) and students not in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (1999-2004)?

Research Question 5 – Graduation Rate

Ho5: There are not significant differences in the graduation rate between students who attended the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005) and students not in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (1999-2004).

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to determine whether or not there was a significant difference in the graduation rate between students who were enrolled in the 9th grade prior to the implementation of the MHHSE Freshman Academy (1999-2004) and students who attended the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005). The testing variable was graduation rate and the grouping variable was preacademy or academy. The test was not significant, \( t(4) = 0.81, p = .461 \). While preacademy graduation rates (\( M = 84.90, SD = 3.72 \)) were lower than the academy graduation rate (\( M = 88.20 \)), there were not enough cases of the academy graduation rate available to draw a conclusive conclusion. The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means was -14.65 to 8.01. The \( \eta^2 \) index was .14, indicating a large effect. As a result of this analysis, the null hypothesis Ho5 was retained.

Figure 16 shows the distribution of the mean graduation rates for the two groups.
Figure 16. Bar Graph of Mean MHHSE Graduation Rates for Preacademy and Academy Students
Research Question #6: According to the perceptions of the faculty members who have taught at MHHSE prior to and since the implementation of the Freshman Academy, are there significant differences in the academic achievement, work ethic, and behavior of MHHSE students since the establishment of the MHHSE Freshman Academy?

Research Question #6 – Teacher Perceptions

Oral interviews were conducted with 10 members of the MHHSE faculty who were employed since the 1999-2000 school year and who are still presently employed at MHHSE. These same faculty members have taught at least one full academic year in the MHHSE Freshman Academy. The participants were contacted personally, provided with a letter explaining the purpose of the study and the date, time, and location of the interview.

During the actual interview, an interview guide was used. All participants received the same set of open-ended questions. Each interview was tape recorded so as to maintain an accurate record of each participant’s comments. After the interviews were completed, each participant received a personal thank you note and a gift card to a local store. Responses to the oral interview questions are summarized below and also contain respondent quotes.

Interview Question #1: The MHHSE Freshman Academy was established in 2004. What were you very first thoughts when you heard that you were going to be a part of the MHHSE Freshman Academy?

The majority of the respondents indicated that their initial reactions to being a part of the MHHSE Freshman Academy were negative. One respondent commented that her first thoughts were, “More work.” Another responded, “I have to move my room. I was just very skeptical about it.” Another stated, “It is something new, what else are we going to have to do?” Another
comment included, I was a little apprehensive, a little nervous. I guess I was a little negative at first. I guess I didn’t think it would work. Another respondent stated, My feelings were mixed. I thought the academy was, in the beginning, silly. I felt that it was not preparing the freshman for life, but I was willing to give it my best shot.

Two of the respondents indicated that their initial reactions were positive. One stated, I was excited because I love teaching freshmen and from everything I heard, I thought it would be a great idea, so I wanted to be a part of it. A second remarked, didn’t have any objections to it. I was eager to try to see if it would help some of our discipline problems. From my standpoint, I saw it as a positive change.

Interview Question #2: What have been your experiences as a faculty member in the MHHSE Freshman Academy?

All of the respondents indicated that their experiences as a faculty member in the MHHSE Freshman Academy have been positive. One respondent stated, They were good. The freshmen did really well in my classes. They worked hard for me. I had to spend more time with the freshmen on study skills than I would with upperclassmen, but it wasn’t a problem. They were eager to learn. A second respondent commented, Everything is positive. I can’t think of one negative thing about the academy. It really keeps us closer together and I think it has helped the kids. Another stated, My favorite years of teaching started when I went to the Freshman Academy. Another respondent commented, Everything has been positive. My attitude totally changed once I became a part of the academy. We are a close knit group. I like it. A different respondent stated, think it has been great. As a faculty, we get to see freshmen in a different light. They are like our own kids. Another teacher commented,
I am really starting to see closeness with the teachers; the faculty up there is really coming together. Where the segregation, I thought, was maybe a bad thing in the beginning, now I see as a good thing. If we did it in other places it may not be a bad thing.

Final comments included, "I think that it made a big difference as far as them being more comfortable at the high school level."

Interview Question #3: How would you describe your relationship with the students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy?

All of the respondents stated that they have very positive relationships with the students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy. Several respondents stated that when freshmen and upperclassmen were present in the same class, the freshmen would react to situations based upon how the upperclassmen reacted. Now the freshmen look to the teacher for his or her reaction. One teacher stated, "I think we are closer to them, but in the same point, I think that kids know that we expect more from them because we have a closer relationship."

Another stated, "I go to the games and I seem them at the mall or at community events."

Interview Question #4: How would you describe your relationship with students outside of the MHHSE Freshman Academy?

Most of the respondents stated that they have also maintained positive relationships with the students outside of the MHHSE Freshman Academy. One teacher responded,

I have a lot of students come in for tutoring. I have a lot of students come back and ask me questions and I have even had students come back the next year and tell me how things are going in their next math class or to voice complaints. Some even come back to thank me.
Another stated,

A lot of kids will come back and say, ‘I didn’t realize how much I learned in your class.’ Or they will come back and say, ‘Will you tutor me even though I am not in the freshman academy anymore?’ When you pass them in the hall, they do not look the other way. They are very eager to say hello and keep in touch with you.

One teacher responded, ‘We don’t get into the rest of the building very often to see the other students and interact with them.’ Another stated,

That is a good question because this is the first year that I actually am teaching upperclassmen. It is different because the kids are older and they are a lot more mature. The freshmen, there is a lot of immaturity, so there is a big difference with the age level. Different in the way you have to handle them.

*Interview Question #5a: How has the MHHSE Freshman Academy changed student conduct in the classroom?*

All of the respondents stated that they had seen a positive change in student conduct in the classroom as a result of the MHHSE Freshman Academy. One respondent commented, ‘Yes. It has gotten better every year. The first year, probably because it was the first year and something new, I didn’t think went as well, but every year it has gotten better.’ Another stated,

The last couple of years, before we stated the academy, were horrible. We had a couple of classes go through here that were setting records right and left on the amount of discipline referrals. I personally have not had to write up hardly any freshmen because of the level of expectations that we have.

One respondent stated, ‘With the kids being closer to us, conduct is better. It is still a struggle to take them from what they did in middle school and to try to make them more restrained. You hope to hold them more accountable. As far as fights and discipline, it is not a big problem. Tardies are the biggest problem.’

Several respondents commented that having upperclassmen in the same class with freshmen created its own set of discipline problems. One remarked, ‘They do not have to feel...’
like they have to be big in front of an upperclassman. They are just with their peers. They don’t have to show out. Another stated, “I saw a drastic change when it was first developed. That was when my attitude totally changed about the academy. I saw a big change in discipline. I guess because they are true freshmen.”

*Interview Question #5b: How has the MHHSE Freshman Academy changed student conduct in other areas of the school (i.e. hallways, cafeteria, restrooms, gymnasium, etc.)?*

All of the respondents stated that the MHHSE Freshman Academy has also had an impact on changing student conduct in the common areas of the school. One responded,

“I think it has done great things for the cafeteria. I like that they pretty much have one or two lunches. I think that, once again, it keeps them separated a little bit more. I think it has helped in every part of the building.”

Another teacher commented,

“In the academy, we have to stand outside our door, greeting each one with a handshake. This year they seem a lot nicer. They are nice to each other and nice to the teachers. In the pep rallies and assemblies, I think they behave better than in the past.”

Another remarked, “I can tell a difference from the time prior to the beginning of the academy. I can see a big difference in interaction and everything that is going on.”

Another commented,

“I think it is better. There is always somebody out in the halls. As far as the cafeteria goes, lunches are smaller. They are all freshmen. It seems like the freshmen don’t have as many fights or issues as maybe some of the other grades because it is just them.”

*Interview Question #5c: Have the changes in student conduct been instantaneous or gradual?*

The responses to these questions were mixed. Several of the teachers commented that the changes in student conduct as a result of the MHHSE Freshman Academy happened within the
first year of the implementation. Other teachers responded that the changes had happened gradually. However, all teachers commented that student conduct has improved over the entire school. One teacher stated,

I think some of it was very immediate, but I think the best parts of it have been gradual. I think they are doing a better job of monitoring themselves and being aware of what they are doing themselves and what their peers are doing. Even if they knew it all along, they have tools now, without seeming like a goody-goody or a teacher’s pet, to help regulate that in the classroom.

Another respondent commented,

It has gotten better as time goes on. It just keeps getting better. I think they are more aware of when someone is misbehaving in class. They know about the social contracts and they know what they are accountable for. They really watch for you as a teacher to pick up on that foul that was called and follow through. They understand the rules better.

*Interview Question #5d: At what point did you recognize the change in student conduct in comparison with past patterns of behavior?*

The responses to this question also varied depending on whether the respondent felt that the changes were instantaneous or gradual. One teacher stated, ŉI noticed a change in the first week. The behavior in my freshman class was so much better.̊ Another commented, ŉWhen we started the academy, the kids followed suit. You set your standards and they followed suit.̊ Another remarked, ŉBeing in that area and then coming out last year and this year, I think it was when I came out I could tell a difference in the students prior to the academy and now.̊ Another teacher remarked, ŉ

In talking to the sophomore and junior teachers, I have heard that their behavior is better. I think that what they learn and the things that they do, whether it is discipline, self-management, or time management, I think they are able to build on that as they get to be older.
Interview Question #6: How have your teaching methods changed as a result of teaching students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy?

All of the respondents remarked that they had adapted their teaching methods in order to help students in the academy be more successful. One teacher stated,

I had to teach more study skills. I did have to adapt my teaching in that I gave them more pointers on how to study. I gave them more clues as to what I was looking for in terms of how I was going to test them, what I was going to quiz them over. It probably changed a little bit in terms of my lecture. I had to teach them how to take notes and what was important to write down.

Another commented, ‘We have focused on learning styles, so that has really changed a lot. I tend to do more notebooks, things like that. I am trying to teach the kids organizational skills to get them ready for the future.’ A third remarked, ‘I have definitely tried not to be so redundant. I have been aware of what they are doing in other classes. I try to reinforce what the other teachers are teaching. I have also learned to be a lot more patient since I am dealing with freshmen.

Other comments included, ‘I have to be more flexible, especially knowing where they are coming from in middle school with grades, not grading, but when it comes to makeup work and things like that. I give them more makeup opportunities.’ Another stated, ‘I am teaching differently in that I am trying to involve each one of them a little more. You get to know each one of them a little bit more, probably on a more personal level.’ Another teacher commented, ‘My pacing for that freshman class has really ramped up. I am getting through a lot more now than I ever did. I am actually moving at twice the pace.’ Other teachers remarked that they have incorporated more hands-on activities in their classrooms.
Interview Question #7: If we did not have a freshman academy, how would you deal with the increasing pressures brought on by federal and state mandates for improving education?

Many of the respondents struggled with this question, but the responses were all very similar. Most remarked they would do whatever they had to do to help their students be successful. One stated,

You just have to stay on it. I mean it is just something that has to be done. You look at each situation and say, OK, what can I do here that is going to make a difference? How am I going to impact it at this level?

Another commented, it is one of those things where it just becomes almost a survival mode. You just do the best that you can. Luckily we have this and it has helped us. Another remarked,

This is my fifteenth year. Without the last few years going as well as they have and being as enjoyable as they have, I would probably, at this point, be in a different profession or else seriously looking for another profession. You don’t stop trying. You just keep beating your head against the wall.

Another teacher stated, I have no idea. I get my curriculum, my state standards, and look and try to get through it just like you always do. But the freshman academy makes it so much simpler for everybody. A final comment included, it is a big struggle, but I think the academy helps a lot. Kids feel more accountable all the way around. It is really helping.

Interview Question #8: How has the MHHSE Freshman Academy fostered a sense of community within the school?

All of the teachers interviewed stated that the MHHSE Freshman Academy has fostered a sense of community within the school, but especially within the academy itself. One teacher commented,
I think that the other grade level teachers have always said that the freshman academy is clique-ish, but it is because we are always together working in our little groups, checking on students with each other. Informally, they are starting to do more communicating among themselves, so it is kind of a trickle over.

Another commented, “They are a tight little community.” A third teacher stated,

I think that has been one of the biggest assets. It has become, in and amongst the students and faculty, its own little entity. It has really been wonderful to watch a lot of people work with colleagues. I think it has been good. A fourth remarked, “We do good things to make our academy work. We collaborate together.”

Final comments included,

I think that within the freshman academy, it is a great sense of community. We are more aware of when someone needs something. You just take care of them. I love being down there. I love being in the freshman academy. I think it is a good thing for us, but then you have to be a little bit weird to teach freshmen. Just look at the people that are up there teaching them. You have to be a little bit goofy. We are all bound together.

*Interview Question #9: Is there anything that you would change about the Freshman Academy or do you have any suggestions for improvement?*

Several teachers offered suggestions for improvement. These included the recommendation that the academy concept be expanded into other areas of the school, that freshman students have the opportunity to participate in intramural activities as a reward, and that we have a separate building for our freshman students.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations with regard to the study conducted of the Morristown-Hamblen High School East (MHHSE) Freshman Academy. The purpose of this quantitative case study was to determine whether or not a significant relationship exists between the implementation of the MHHSE Freshman Academy, student academic achievement, and the high school graduation rate at MHHSE. A formative evaluation that included the analyses of student data and an appraisal of teacher perceptions through open-ended questions was conducted to examine the components of the MHHSE Freshman Academy in order to properly evaluate the existing program and to provide recommendations for future improvement. The summative evaluation was designed to provide information to assist the school administration in the implementation of additional smaller learning community initiatives within the school and for examination by other school systems desiring to implement smaller learning communities in high schools that have similar characteristics and demographics.

Summary of Findings

The statistical analyses reported are based upon five research questions, introduced in Chapter 1, that were tested at a .05 level of significance. The test variables used in this study included GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, scores on the English I End-of-Course test, and graduation rate. Grouping variables used in this study included 8th grade (pretreatment) and 9th grade (posttreatment) scores, preacademy and
postacademy participation, economic status, and gender. I collected data on a total of 2,133 students. The number of student participants in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008) totaled 1,377. The number of students who were first-time freshman during the 2002-2003 or 2003-2004 school years and not members of the MHHSE Freshman Academy totaled 756. The data were extracted from SASI, the data management program maintained by the Hamblen County Department of Education and from student permanent records. The results of a sixth research question, also introduced in Chapter 1, are based upon open-ended oral interviews and were recorded in a descriptive manner with respondent quotes.

Research Question #1

Are there significant differences on each of the following four measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, and number of discipline referrals) for students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy between 8th grade (pretreatment group) and 9th grade (posttreatment group) when tracking the same students?

GPA. Paired-samples t-tests were used to determine if a significant difference exists between the 8th grade (pretreatment group) and the 9th grade (posttreatment group) on the measure of GPA for students who were members of the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008). A significant difference was found for each group between the 8th grade mean GPA and the 9th grade mean GPA. The 8th grade mean GPA was significantly higher than the 9th grade mean GPA. Student GPAs were lower during the 9th grade transition year.
Attendance. Paired-samples t-tests were used to determine if a significant difference exists between 8th grade (pretreatment group) and the 9th grade (posttreatment group) on the measure of attendance for students who are members of the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008). A significant difference was found between two of the four groups. Student attendance remained the same or dropped during the 9th grade transition year.

Core Course Failures. Paired-samples t-tests were used to determine if a significant difference exists between 8th grade (pretreatment group) and the 9th grade (posttreatment group) on the measure of number of core course failures for students who are members of the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008). While all four groups experienced mean increases in the number of core course failures from the 8th grade year to the 9th grade year, significant differences were only found between three of the four groups. Core course failures increased during the 9th grade transition year.

Discipline Referrals. Paired-samples t-tests were used to determine if a significant difference exists between 8th grade (pretreatment group) and the 9th grade (posttreatment group) on the measure of number of discipline referrals for students who are members of the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008). A significant difference was found for each group between the 8th grade number of discipline referrals and the 9th grade number of discipline referrals. The 8th grade means for the number of discipline referrals were significantly lower than the 9th grade means for the number of discipline referrals. Student discipline referrals increased during the 9th grade transition year.

The findings of this study coincide with several previously conducted studies (Barclay & Doll, 2001; Black, 2004; Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2001) that have concluded the
freshman year is one of, if not the most, critical years of high school. Neild et al. report that students who have a difficult time transitioning into high school are more likely to become high school dropouts. They also state that students who drop out of high school have most likely experienced severe academic difficulty as freshmen (Neild et al.). A study conducted by Jerald (2007) concluded that low academic achievement, high absenteeism, and disciplinary problems are three primary indicators of whether or not a student will become a high school dropout. Jerald (2006) also stated that students display signs of becoming dropouts long before entering high school.

*Research Question #2*

Are there significant differences on each of the following measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) between students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) and students prior to the implementation of the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2002-2004)?

An independent-samples t-test was used to determine if a significant difference exists on each of the following measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) between students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) and students prior to the implementation of the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2002-2004). A significant difference was found between the two groups on four out of the five measures.

Postacademy (2004-2008) students had a higher mean GPA, higher mean attendance, lower mean core course failures, and higher mean scores on the English I End-of-Course test than preacademy (2002-2004) students. The mean GPA ranged from 2.44 (preacademy) to 2.68
(postacademy), and the standard deviations ranged from 1.15 (preacademy) to 0.99 (postacademy). The mean attendance, as measured by the percentage of days present, ranged from 91% (preacademy) to 94% (postacademy), and the standard deviations ranged from 10% (preacademy) to 7% (postacademy). The mean number of core course failures ranged from 0.75 (preacademy) to 0.43 (postacademy), and the standard deviations ranged from 1.37 (preacademy) to 1.03 (postacademy). The mean scores on the English I End-of-Course test ranged from 2.28 (preacademy) to 2.52 (postacademy), and the standard deviations ranged from 0.66 (preacademy) to 0.53 (postacademy).

While the number of discipline referrals for the postacademy (2004-2008) group was lower than the number of discipline referrals for the preacademy (2002-2004) group, a significant difference was not found between the two groups. The mean number of discipline referrals ranged from 1.43 (postacademy) to 1.52 (preacademy), and the standard deviations ranged from 2.24 (postacademy) to 2.70 (preacademy). The results suggest, but do not conclude, that the MHHSE Freshman Academy had a positive impact on GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, and scores on the English I End-of-Course Test.

The findings of this study support several previously conducted studies (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Alspaugh, 1998; Ayers, Bracey, & Smith, 2001; Blanchard & Harms, 2006) that all report smaller schools and or small learning communities help to raise student achievement, reduce discipline issues, and increase attendance. A study conducted by Amato et al. (2005) found that the creation of smaller learning communities helped to provide individualized academic support for at-risk students and fostered collaborative activities among faculty members. Cawelti (1997) maintains that students in smaller learning communities demonstrate higher academic
achievement and a better attitude toward school. Lief (2000) states that student academic success is much easier to achieve in smaller learning communities.

Research Question #3

Are there significant differences on each of the following measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) between students classified as not economically disadvantaged and those classified as economically disadvantaged in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008)?

An independent-samples t-test was used to determine if a significant difference exists on each of the following measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) between students classified as not economically disadvantaged and those classified as economically disadvantaged in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008). A significant difference was found between the two groups on each of the five measures. Students classified as not economically disadvantaged (n.e.d.) had a higher mean GPA, higher mean attendance, lower mean core course failures, lower mean discipline referrals, and higher mean scores on the English I End-of-Course test than those students classified as economically disadvantaged (e.d.).

The mean GPA ranged from 2.89 (n.e.d.) to 2.37 (e.d.), and the standard deviations ranged from 0.95 (n.e.d.) to 0.96 (e.d.). The mean attendance, as measured by the percentage of days present, ranged from 95% (n.e.d.) to 92% (e.d.), and the standard deviations ranged from 5% (n.e.d.) to 8% (e.d.). The mean number of core course failures ranged from 0.30 (n.e.d.) to 0.61 (e.d.), and the standard deviations ranged from 0.87 (n.e.d.) to 1.20 (e.d.). The mean
number of discipline referrals ranged from 1.09 (n.e.d.) to 1.92 (e.d.), and the standard deviations ranged from 1.89 (n.e.d.) to 2.59 (e.d.). The mean score on the English I End-of-Course test ranged from 1.09 (n.e.d.) to 1.92 (e.d.), and the standard deviations ranged from 1.89 (n.e.d.) to 2.59 (e.d.).

The results suggest, but do not conclude, that students with a lower socioeconomic status experience less academic success, higher absenteeism, higher failure rates, greater behavioral issues, and lower standardized test scores than their peers who are not economically disadvantaged.

The research indicates that students who have poor attendance and high failure rates are at greater risk for dropping out of high school. This study supports the findings of previous studies that indicate students who are economically disadvantaged are at greater risk for becoming high school dropouts. Kirsch et al. (2007) found that the graduation rate for disadvantaged minorities is only 50%. Wald and Losen (2005) report that every year a large number of poor and minority students disappear from the educational system before graduating from high school. Greene and Scott (1995) report that students with two or more risk factors, including low socioeconomic status, are more likely to use illegal drugs, become teen parents, involve themselves in gang activities, and be suspended or expelled from school.

Research Question #4

Are there significant differences on each of the following measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) between female students and male students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008)?
An independent-samples t-test was used to determine if a significant difference exists on each of the following measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and English I End-of-Course test scores) between female students and male students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, and 2007-2008). A significant difference was found between the two groups on three of the five measures. Female students had a higher mean GPA, lower mean core course failures, and lower mean discipline referrals than male students. The mean GPA ranged from 2.85 (females) to 2.51 (males), and standard deviations ranged from 0.92 (females) to 1.02 (males). The mean number of core course failures ranged from 0.31 (females) to 0.53 (males), and the standard deviations ranged from 0.89 (females) to 1.14 (males). The mean number of discipline referrals ranged from 1.12 (females) to 1.73 (males), and the standard deviations ranged from 1.82 (females) to 2.52 (males).

There was no difference found between the two groups on the mean for attendance as measured by the percentage of days present. The mean attendance was 94% for both groups. No significant difference was found between the two groups for the mean scores on the English I End-of-Course test. The mean scores ranged from 2.51 (females) to 2.53 (males), and standard deviations ranged from 0.54 (females) to 0.53 (males).

The results suggest, but do not conclude, that male students experience less academic success and greater behavioral issues than female students.

According to several research studies (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Byrk & Thum, 1989; Greene & Scott, 1995; Suh & Suh, 2007) students with one or more risk factors are more likely to drop out of high school than students without these same risk factors. Risk factors include gender, ethnicity, low socioeconomic status, high absenteeism, and
behavioral problems. The researchers contend that no single risk factor determines whether or not a student will drop out of high school, but several risk factors together may raise the chances significantly. This study supports the findings of these researchers. Male students and students categorized by a lower socioeconomic status tend to experience greater academic failure than their peers.

*Research Question #5*

Are there significant differences in the graduation rate between students that attended the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005) and students not in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (1999-2004)?

An independent-samples t-test was used to determine if a significant difference exists between graduation rate of preacademy (1999-2004) graduates and academy (2004-2005) graduates. While the mean graduation rate for the preacademy graduates was lower than the academy graduation rate, no significant difference was detected. This may be because only one graduation class was available for the academy group. The mean graduation rate ranged from 84.90 (preacademy) to 88.20 (academy). The standard deviation of 3.72 was only available for the preacademy group.

The results of this study differ from results published by Snyder et al. (2007) that states that the high school graduation rate in Tennessee is 66.1% and the national graduation rate is 74.3%. The graduation rate for students at Morristown-Hamblen High School East is significantly above both of these figures. However, the graduation rate at MHHSE still falls considerably short of the current state required graduation rate of 90%.
Research Question #6

According to the perceptions of the faculty members who have taught at MHHSE prior to and since the implementation of the Freshman Academy, are there significant differences in the academic achievement, work ethic, and behavior of MHHSE students since the establishment of the MHHSE Freshman Academy?

Interviews were conducted with 10 faculty members of MHHSE to determine their opinions and attitudes with respect to the MHHSE Freshman Academy. Open-ended questions were asked of each participant and their responses were recorded. Teacher responses, including direct quotes, were summarized in Chapter 4.

All of the teachers interviewed are very supportive of the MHHSE Freshman Academy. While many had reservations about the academy concept in the beginning, they all report that the academy has fostered a sense of community within the school and has provided the freshmen students with a caring and nurturing environment that enables them to make a smooth transition into the high school setting.

The findings of this study support several previously conducted studies. Wasley and Lear (2001) state that a positive relationship between students and teachers is one key component of successful smaller learning communities. Drake (2000) reported that teachers in smaller learning communities are more responsive to the needs of the students. Ayers et al. (2001) concluded that teacher satisfaction and the overall school climate is enhanced in smaller schools. Sergiovanni (1996) stated that the relationship between teachers and students is constructive and beneficial in smaller communities of learning where a caring atmosphere is apparent.
Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not a relationship exists between the implementation of the Morristown-Hamblen High School East (MHHSE) Freshman Academy, student academic achievement, and the high school graduation rate at MHHSE. The following conclusions are based upon the previously reported findings.

1. Based on the findings of this study, a significant difference was found between the 8th grade (pretreatment) and 9th grade (posttreatment) data on all four measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, and number of discipline referrals). Ninth grade students had lower GPAs and attendance rates, a higher number of core course failures, and a higher number of discipline referrals than during their 8th grade year. These results may be attributable to the differences in academic, attendance, and behavioral expectations between the middle schools and the high school. The 8th grade GPA is based upon grades in 11 or 12 courses, while the high school GPA is based upon grades in only eight courses. The majority of discipline referrals at the high school level are for cell phone possession and being tardy to class. Tardiness is not an issue at the middle school because students will be counted present for the entire day if they arrive at school by 11:15 AM. However, at the high school, attendance is based upon being present 70 minutes in each class period. These results indicate that a freshman academy, or smaller learning community, might be beneficial for students transitioning from middle school to high school.

2. Based on the findings of this study, a significant difference was found between 9th grade students enrolled in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) and 9th grade students not enrolled in the academy (2002-2004) on four out of five measures (GPA, attendance,
core course failures, and English I End-of-Course test scores). No significant difference was found between the two groups on the measure for the number of discipline referrals. Ninth grade students who were members of the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) had a higher GPA, higher attendance, a lower number of core course failures, and a higher score on the English I End-of-Course test. The lack of a significant difference in the number of discipline referrals between the two groups may be attributable to the change in administration that occurred at the beginning of the 2004-2005 school year. The change in administration resulted in an increased emphasis on disciplining those students whose behavior was not conducive to a successful learning environment. While the previous conclusion indicates that students do have a difficult time transitioning into high school, these results suggest that the intimate learning environment of the MHHSE Freshman Academy is conducive to academic success.

3. Based on the findings of this study, a significant difference was found between 9th grade students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) who are not economically disadvantaged and 9th grade students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) who are considered to be economically disadvantaged based upon their participation in the free or reduced price lunch program on all five measures (GPA, attendance, number of core course failures, number of discipline referrals, and scores on the English I End-of-Course test). Students who are not economically disadvantaged have a higher GPA, higher attendance, a lower number of core course failures, a lower number of discipline referrals, and higher scores on the English I End-of-Course test than do students who are classified as economically disadvantaged. The research demonstrates that students who during their freshman year experience severe academic difficulty, including low grades,
high absenteeism, and behavioral issues, leave school without graduating (Lunenberg, 1999; Neild et al., 2001). The results of this study indicate that students who are classified as economically disadvantaged are at greater risk for either not graduating on time or dropping out of high school.

4. Based on the findings of this study, a significant difference was found between 9th grade female students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) and 9th grade male students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2008) on three out of five measures (GPA, number of core course failures, and number of discipline referrals). No significant difference was found between the two groups on attendance or English I End-of-Course test scores. Female students have a higher GPA, lower number of core course failures, and a lower number of discipline referrals than male students. The research indicates that risk factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, poor academic achievement, and discipline problems are all associated with high dropout rates (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Byrk & Thum, 1989; Jerald, 2007; Lunenberg, 1999). The results of this study indicate that male students are at a greater risk of becoming high school dropouts than female students.

5. Based on the findings of this study, a significant difference does not exist between the graduation rate of students who have attended the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2004-2005) and the graduation rate of students not in the MHHSE Freshman Academy (1999-2004). The results of this analysis are inconclusive because only one data point currently exists for the members of the MHHSE Freshman Academy. If this one data point is indicative of future data points, I expect to see an improvement in the overall graduation rate and anticipate that MHHSE will meet the state benchmark of 90%.
6. According to the thoughts and opinions of the faculty members in the MHHSE Freshman Academy, the freshman academy has helped to improve student conduct and fostered a sense of community within and among the students and faculty. This smaller learning community has provided students with an environment that promotes student accountability for learning, academic success, and behavior.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations for practice are made to the faculty and administration at Morristown-Hamblen High School East.

1. Continue to implement the current programs and practices in existence in the MHHSE Freshman Academy.

2. Foster and support communication and dialogue between the middle school and high school teachers with regard to academic and behavioral expectations for students at the high school level.

3. Promote and support communication and dialogue between parents, students, teachers, and the community.

4. Research and implement programs and practices that focus primarily on supporting and improving the academic performance of at-risk students (i.e. economically disadvantaged, males) at all grade levels but predominantly at the freshman level.

5. Continue to evaluate the graduation rate. Research and implement programs and practices that support and improve the academic performance of students in grades 10 through 12.

6. Expand the smaller learning community concept into other areas of the school.
Recommendations for Future Research

Educational leaders use the research studies of current educational practices to make sound and rational decisions when considering the implementation of new programs. As a result of the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations for future research are designed to guide future studies:

1. This study should be replicated using ethnicity as a grouping variable.
2. This study should be replicated using special education as a grouping variable.
3. This study should be replicated to include a comparison between the 8th grade (pretreatment) and 9th grade (posttreatment) measures for students who were not members of the MHHSE Freshman Academy (2002-2004). An additional comparison should then be made between the preacademy and postacademy students on differences between the 8th and 9th grade measures.
4. A longitudinal study should be conducted to track and evaluate the academic progress of students through middle school, high school, and into postsecondary education.
5. A longitudinal study should be conducted to track and evaluate the transition of students from the freshman academy into the high school.
6. This study should be replicated using additional standardized test scores (i.e. Gateway, Explore, PLAN, ACT, other end-of-course test scores) administered in eighth grade and throughout high school.
7. A comparison study should be conducted with other freshman academy programs in high schools with similar characteristics and demographics.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

I. Introduction

A. Welcome the participant.

B. Statement of Intent: The intent of this case study is to examine the effect of the MHHSE Freshman Academy on student academic performance and the high school graduation rate at Morristown-Hamblen High School East in Hamblen County, Tennessee.

C. Research Question: What are faculty perceptions about the Freshman Academy at Morristown-Hamblen High School East?

D. I would like to thank you for your willingness to talk with me about the Freshman Academy at Morristown-Hamblen High School East. I will use your words to develop a theoretical framework explaining the phenomenon of the MHHSE Freshman Academy. I plan to share that theoretical framework in a manuscript submitted for publication. Therefore, your participation in this study is critically important. Your words, and the resulting theoretical framework, will help me to understand your opinions and perceptions about the effect that the MHHSE Freshman Academy, have on student academic success and the graduation rate at MHHSE.

I assure you that your participation in this study will remain anonymous. I may quote you in my final research report. However, I will not use your name in association with these quotes, nor will I use any identifiers that might link you to your words. this session should take approximately one-half hour. I am tape recording this session to have an accurate record of your comments. Do you have any questions before I begin the tape recorder?

E. Sign Informed Consent Form I ask each interviewee to read and sign the informed Consent form. Give the interviewee a copy of the signed form.

F. Turn on tape recorder Do I have your permission to tape record this session?

II. Main Interview Questions

1. The MHHSE Freshman Academy was established in 2004. What were your very first thoughts when you heard that you were going to be a part of the MHHSE Freshman Academy?

2. What have been your experiences as a faculty member of the MHHSE Freshman Academy?
3. How would you describe your relationship with the students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy?

4. How would you describe your relationship with students outside of the MHHSE Freshman Academy?

5. How has the MHHSE Freshman Academy changed student conduct in the classroom? How has the MHHSE Freshman Academy changed student conduct in other areas of the school (i.e. hallways, cafeteria, restrooms, gymnasium, etc.)? Have the changes in student conduct been instantaneous or gradual? At what point did you recognize the change in student conduct in comparison with past patterns of behavior?

6. How have your teaching methods changed as a result of teaching students in the MHHSE Freshman Academy?

7. If we did not have a freshman academy, how would you deal with the increasing pressures brought on by federal and state mandates for improving education?

8. How has the MHHSE Freshman Academy fostered a sense of community within the school?

9. Is there anything that you would change about the Freshman Academy or do you have any suggestions for improvement?

III. Conclusion

A. Based on the information that you have given me, I would summarize your comments in this way: Is my summary correct? Please remember that I plan to write a dissertation for publication based on my research findings. Based on your feelings about the MHHSE Freshman Academy, what would you want to emphasize in the dissertation?

B. That concludes our session. Do you have any additional comments before I stop the tape recorder?

C. Turn off the tape recorder. Do you have any additional comments off the record?

D. Again, I wish to thank you for your participation in this study.
APPENDIX B

IRB

IRB APPROVAL - Initial Expedited Review
Waiver of Requirement for Written Documentation of Informed Consent
Granted for Faculty Only
Waiver or Alteration of Requirement to Obtain Informed Consent
Granted for Parental Permission and Child Assent by Child Advocate

June 30, 2008

Patricia Sigler
1685 Canterbury Drive
Morristown, TN 37814

Re: The Relationship Between the Freshman Academy and Student Academic Success at Morristown Hampton High School East
IRB#: c07-186d
ORSPA #: None

The following items were reviewed:
- FORM 103 with Assurance Statement
- Narrative (5/9/2008)
- Letter to Participants (6/9/2008)
- Supplemental Submission Form-Children Participants
- Letter from Dr. Gary Johnson addressing PERPA guidelines to Parental Permission
- CV
- Conflict of Interest Form (no potential conflict of interest identified)

On June 27, 2008, a final approval was granted for a period not to exceed 12 months and will expire on 6/26/2009. Your Continuing Review is scheduled for 08/04/2009. The expedited approval of the study will be reported to the convened board on August 7, 2008.

The Chair determined that: (1) the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to participants because the study consist of data collected from student records and interview with adults and (2) involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required outside of the research context as written documentation of consent is not required for survey of adult volunteers.
The following enclosed stamped, approved Letter to Participants have been stamped with the approval and expiration date and this document must be copied and provided to each participant prior to participant enrollment:

- Letter to Participants - Faculty Interview (stamped approved 6/9/2008)

Federal regulations require that a copy be given to the subject at the time of consent. The Child Advocate determined (1) research is not greater than minimal risk to children because the study consist chart review of records. The Child Advocate determined that the requirement for parental permission is waived under 45 CFR 46.116(d). The research is NOT subject to FDA regulations. The study does not involve funding from the Dept. of Education and the eight categories mentioned in the federal regulations. The Child Advocate determined that the requirement for assent is waived or altered.

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks to Subjects or Others must be reported to the IRB (and VA R&D if applicable) within 10 working days.

Proposed changes in approved research can not be initiated without IRB review and approval. The only exception to this rule is that a change can be made prior to IRB approval when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the research subjects [21 CFR 56.108 (a)(4)]. In such a case, the IRB must be promptly informed of the change following its implementation (within 10 working days) on Form 109 (www.etsu.edu/irb). The IRB will review the change to determine that it is consistent with ensuring the subject’s continued welfare.

Sincerely,

Chris Ayres, Chairperson
ETSU Campus Institutional Review Board
APPENDIX C

Letter to Teachers

June 9, 2008

Dear Participant:

My name is Patricia A. Sigler, I am a graduate student at East Tennessee State University and I am an employee at Morristown-Hamblen High School East. I am working on my doctorate degree in Educational Administration and Supervision. In order to finish my studies, I need to complete a research project. The name of my research study is “The Relationship Between the Freshman Academy and Student Academic Success at Morristown-Hamblen High School East”.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether or not a significant relationship exists between the implementation of the Morristown-Hamblen High School East (MHHSE) Freshman Academy, student academic achievement, and the high school graduation rate at MHHSE. I would like to conduct a brief interview with teachers who have been employed at MHHSE since 1999 and who have taught for one full academic year in the MHHSE Freshman Academy. The interview should only take about 30 minutes to complete. You will be asked questions about your opinions and attitudes with regard to the MHHSE Freshman Academy. This study may provide benefit by providing more information about the MHHSE Freshman Academy.

This study involves no more than minimal risk to the participants. The participants in this study will not be identified, either directly or through any identifiers which could ultimately link them to the research. This method is completely anonymous and confidential. In other words, there will be no way to connect your name with your responses. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the ETSU IRB (for non-medical research) and personnel particular to this research, the ETSU Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, and the Department of Health and Human Services will have access to the study records.

If you do not want to participate in the interview, it will not affect you in any way. There are no alternative procedures except to choose not to participate in the study.

Participation in this research experiment is voluntary. You may refuse to participate. You can quit at any time. If you quit or refuse to participate, the benefits or treatment to which you are otherwise entitled will not be affected.

If you have any research-related questions or problems, you may contact me, at (423) 586-2643. I am working on this project under the supervision of Dr. Louise MacKay. You may reach her at (423) 436-4430. Also, the chairperson of the Institutional Review Board at East Tennessee State University is available at (423) 439-6055 if you have questions about your rights as a research subject. If you have any questions or concerns about the research and want to talk to someone independent of the research team or you can’t reach the study staff, you may call an IRB Coordinator at 423/439-6055 or 423/439/6002.

Sincerely,

Patricia A. Sigler

[Stamp: APPROVED BY THE ETSU/VA IRB]

JUN 27 2008

ETSU/VA IRB

JUN 26 2009

BY CHAIR/IRB COORDINATOR
VITA

PATRICIA A. SIGLER

Personal Data:  
Date of Birth:  October 31, 1961  
Place of Birth:  Cincinnati, Ohio  
Marital Status:  Married

Education:  
Anderson Senior High School, Cincinnati, Ohio  
Bachelor of Science in Education, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, 1983  
Masters of Education in Educational Administration and Supervision, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee, 2001  
Educational Specialist in Educational Administration and Supervision, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee, 2004  

Professional Experience:  
Fourth Grade Teacher, Morningside Elementary School, Atlanta, Georgia, 1985-1991  
Seventh Grade Teacher, St. Hedwig School, Detroit, Michigan, 1991-1992  
Second Grade Teacher, Holy Redeemer School, Detroit, Michigan, 1992-1993  
Fifth Grade Teacher, Northeast Elementary School, Clarksville, Tennessee, 1994-1996  
Fifth Grade Teacher, Devonshire Magnet School for Academics and Performing Arts, Charlotte, North Carolina, 1997-1999
Sixth Grade Math Teacher, Lincoln Heights Middle School, Morristown, Tennessee, 1999-2002

Assistant Principal, Morristown-Hamblen High School East, Morristown, Tennessee, 2002-Present