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Evaluation of a Ninth Grade Transition Program  
For At-Risk Students

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A dissertation  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of Education  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Doctor in Education

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by  
Terry William Caldwell

May 2007

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Dr. Jasmine Renner

Dr. Terrance Tollefson

Keywords: At-Risk Students, Bearcat "PRIDE" Program

## ABSTRACT

Evaluation of a Ninth Grade Transition Program

For At-Risk Students

by

Terry William Caldwell

Researchers have identified the transition from middle to high school as a critical point in teenagers' educational development. Despite sweeping educational reforms, many students are leaving high school without graduating. Local school districts are struggling to redesign high schools to provide the educational programs necessary for at-risk students' success. Creating smaller learning communities and developing transition programs have shown success in addressing these problems.

Sustained research shows promise in minimizing the effects of the transition process and adds to the body of knowledge.

A case study approach using archival data was used to explore the differences in three Bearcat "PRIDE" treatment groups and

their 8th (pre-treatment) and 9th (post-treatment) grade measures.

Results of this study suggested students who participated in the Bearcat "PRIDE" program showed greater success in academic performance, reduced disciplinary actions, increased school attendance, and participation in extra-curricular activities of their 8th (pre-treatment) and 9th (post-treatment) grade measures.

## DEDICATION

To my wife, Dawn, for her everlasting love and support in allowing me to follow my passions and dreams. With your support I have been able to pursue my career and realize my potential as an educator. I am forever grateful.

To my mother and father for teaching me the value of perseverance in obtaining lofty goals. They taught me to understand the value of a quality education with the hope of contributing to our society.

To a wonderful family and a group of friends without whose encouragement and support this dissertation would not have been possible.

I am forever grateful to the faculty and staff of East Tennessee State University for the opportunities that they provided a young man many years ago.

Last, to the many teachers who have had a significant impact on my life. I now truly understand the value of your efforts.

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I believe I have been tremendously fortunate to have Dr. Louise MacKay as my Chair during this endeavor. The encouragement and expertise that you provided were the foundation of success. Dr. Russell West's belief in my ability as an educational leader was the push I needed to be a risk-taker. I am sincerely grateful for the motivation that Dr. Terrence Tollefson provided. With that inspiration I have aspired to greater heights and accomplishments.

ELPA Cohort 16 is a team destined for success. To be part of that team was one of the greatest opportunities of my life.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive and global economy, the challenges facing the U.S. educational system are daunting. The collective needs of students in public schools have changed dramatically over the past several decades. Despite sweeping educational reforms, one third of the nation's students are leaving high school without a diploma (Barton, 2005). "These dropouts and underachievers represent a tragic waste of the resources of our young people at a time when our country needs their fullest productivity" (Lichter, Rapien, Siebert, and Sklansky, 1962, p. v). Dropouts' earnings are significantly lower than those of high school graduates, dropouts make up nearly half of the heads of households on welfare, and dropouts make up half of the prison population. To prevent students from dropping out of school, schools must meet the educational and social needs of at-risk students, intervening in the educational process before they begin failing in school.

The transition from middle school to high school is a pivotal point at which such an intervention should take place. Researchers have identified ninth grade as "the most critical point to intervene and prevent students from losing motivation,

failing and dropping out of school" (Reents, 2002, p. 14). In the shift from middle school to high school, students are challenged to enter a new school with new peers just as their individual self-perception and self-esteem begins to drop with adolescence. In addition, high school brings new academic challenges. "The accountabilities of high school set in. The finality of grades is now a reality. Everything counts. Academic success is the critical building block for the rest of the high school experience" (International Center for Leadership in Education, 2005, p. 16).

Therefore, it is reasonable to suggest that proactive educators should develop local programs to ease this transition, thus increasing academic success. According to Fullan (2001), "Solutions must come through the development of *shared meaning*. The interface between individual and collective meaning and action in everyday situations is where change stands or falls" (p. 9). It is in finding this shared meaning that high dropout rates and the accompanying indicators of school failure can be addressed. Educational leadership for change must take place at the local level, creating a culture that supports education and supports the success of students.

### 9th Grade Transition: A Local Initiative

One such program that addresses cultural issues while improving standard indicators of achievement is the Bearcat "PRIDE" program at Virginia High School in Bristol, Virginia. The program is designed to provide 9th grade at-risk students the skills necessary for making a successful transition from middle school to high school. Each year since 2003, 30 at-risk 9th grade students have been selected to participate in a specifically designed program to meet their educational, social, and behavioral needs. The curriculum focus is extended time on language arts, algebra, and study skills. Also included in the curriculum are character education, technology integration, and organizational skill training. Each student is encouraged to participate in extra-curricular activities. A strong emphasis on parental involvement, correspondence, and participation in the educational process is a key aspect of the program. Improving attendance, reducing disciplinary referrals, and increasing academic performance on freshman Standards of Learning (SOL) tests are key performance objectives.

## History of the Program

### 2003-2004

The mission of the 2003-2004 Bearcat "PRIDE" Program was to produce confident, enthusiastic, and self-regulated learners through carefully planned student-centered team instruction. The enrichment program was designed to provide at-risk freshmen with the opportunity for academic and social success by:

1. Developing a strong collaboration between the middle school and the high school faculties;
2. Creating strong parental involvement;
3. Creating a sense of community with the freshman class;
4. Informing the students of the different academic environment and the life changes from middle to high school along with using these skills to apply to life changes.
5. Developing and sustaining relationships to enhance students' educational development.

The educational staff consisted of a middle school and high school English teacher, a high school mathematics teacher, a high school special educator and the program coordinator.

The 2003-04 educational programs consisted of a two-day summer orientation session involving the students, parents, and educators. During the academic year the students and educational

staff met one time per six weeks to provide the students with support and activities in conflict resolution, goal setting, developing a vision, and high school success.

A select group of 26 upcoming eighth grade students was chosen to participate in the program from a pool of 41 students who met the criteria for admission into the program. Emphasis was given to those students who had failed one or more of the core subjects and had not had serious attendance (20 or more days absent from school) or disciplinary problems (three or more suspensions and-or one expulsion). Eighth grade administrators, counselors, and teachers recommended the students. High school staff reviewed transcripts of the 8th grade and met with counselors to discuss possible students. If a student left the program during the school year the opportunity was made available for another student to enroll in the program.

The students received awards for conduct and academic performance. The coordinator of the program met periodically with individual students for counseling and support and contacted parents about student progress. The students had the opportunity to meet with the teachers and coordinator after school for academic support.

## 2004-2005

Virginia High School implemented a modified block schedule freshman transition program for incoming at-risk freshman students for the school year of 2004-2005. The selection process criteria established earlier by the transition team committee used the identical process and included the same educational professionals involved in selecting the 2003-04 Bearcat "PRIDE" participants. For this academic year, the committee recommended 37 students to participate in the Bearcat "PRIDE" program. Of the original 37 participants, six students were reassigned to alternative school, three students became wards of the court, and two students transferred, leaving 26 of the original students completing the 2004-2005 program.

The mission of the Bearcat "PRIDE" program was to produce confident, enthusiastic, and self-regulating learners through carefully planned student-centered team instruction. The vision was to foster growth and development of a student-centered exhibition (demonstration of skills learned through presentation of learned material) that linked students to powerful and valuable resources beyond the classroom.

The 2004-2005 Bearcat "PRIDE" program was designed to provide at-risk freshman class students the opportunity for academic and social success by:

1. Extending time for learning basic English, language arts and integrated algebra;
2. Integrating technology that facilitates and advances learning;
3. Integrating behavior modification plans, organizational skills, and character education to meet the needs of the students;
4. Implementing a study skills curriculum during the modified block schedule for English and integrated algebra. This course was designed to assist students with their personal development in academics and social skills to improve freshman performance;
5. Increasing motivation through goal setting, academic achievement, social and behavioral skills, academic awards, self-assessment, cooperative learning, and setting group norms.

The educational staff consisted of educators who volunteered to participate in the program. Included in the Bearcat "PRIDE" staff were the program coordinator, an algebra

teacher who led the integrated math initiative, and two English teachers who conducted self-contained classes of Bearcat "PRIDE" students. The Bearcat "PRIDE" students were integrated into the Standards of Learning (SOL) classes with other freshman students, including earth science, geography, wellness (physical and health education), and elective classes.

The 2004-2005 educational programs consisted of a school-within-a-school concept, which organizes the physical building into an independent school for freshman students. The program included a modified block-scheduling format. The subjects of English 9 and integrated algebra were conducted allotting 110 minutes per class to focus extended time on the high-stakes end-of-course subjects. During the modified block periods the students received instruction on study skills, organizational skills, and character education; individual academic and social counseling sessions; and faculty supervision and assistance with completion of homework and assignments from other classes.

Each student was encouraged to participate in an after-school program. The after-school program sessions were conducted Monday through Thursday from 2:45 pm to 3:30 pm. The time was used for make-up work for all classes, reading activities, instructional programs, academic interests, study skills, parent

meetings, and other pertinent activities to enhance the students' educational experience.

#### 2005-2006

Virginia High School continued the Bearcat "PRIDE" program for rising freshman students for the school year of 2005-2006.

The identical selection process criteria established by the transition team committee were used, including the same committee of educational professionals. The committee recommended 49 students to participate in the program. Of the original 49 participants, three students were reassigned to alternative school, two students were expelled from school, and one student was placed in the regular freshman classes, leaving 43 of the original students completing the program. The 2005-2006 mission and vision were also the same as those of the previous years.

The educational staff consisted of educators who volunteered to participate in the program. Included in the Bearcat "PRIDE" staff were the same program coordinator, the same integrated algebra teacher, and the same two English teachers. The class format of the modified block schedule was identical to that of the previous year. The Bearcat "PRIDE" students enrolled in the SOL classes of earth science and

geography were in self-contained classrooms with other Bearcat "PRIDE" students. The teachers for earth science and geography were different from those of the previous year. The two new teachers volunteered to participate in the program. The Bearcat "PRIDE" students were integrated into classes of wellness (physical and health education) and elective classes with other Virginia High School freshman students.

The 2005-2006 educational program consisted of the same school-within-a-school concept including a modified block-scheduling format with English 9 and integrated algebra. During the modified block periods, the students received similar instruction as the previous year in addition to a student-mentoring program. The mentoring program was designed to provide a caring relationship between a responsible adult and a young person to strengthen the young person's ability to resist self-destructive behavior (drugs or alcohol) or socially destructive behavior (crime or violence) and to succeed in school. The core of mentoring is growth through friendship. The mentor program at Virginia High School served the students during the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 school years. The "Reconnecting Youth" program was added, which was a peer-group approach to building life skills. The overall purpose of the program was to reach high-risk youth

who are on a potential dropout trajectory and was presented by an instructor of the "Reconnecting Youth" team.

#### 2006-2007

Virginia High School continued the Bearcat "PRIDE" program for the school year of 2006-2007. The identical selection process criteria established by the transition team committee were used, including the same committee of educational professionals. The committee recommended 44 students to participate in the program. When the fall school session began, 31 students participated in the program. The 2006-2007 mission and vision were also the same as those of the previous years. In addition to the educational curriculum single-sex classes in English and Algebra were introduced.

The educational staff consisted of educators who volunteered to participate in the program. Included in the Bearcat "PRIDE" staff were a different program coordinator, the same integrated algebra teacher, and two new English teachers. The class format of the modified block schedule was identical to that of the previous year. The Bearcat "PRIDE" students enrolled in the SOL classes of earth science and geography were in self-contained classrooms with other Bearcat "PRIDE" students. The teacher for earth science was the same while the geography

teacher was different from those of the previous year. The new teacher volunteered to participate in the program and had experience in educating at-risk students. The Bearcat "PRIDE" students were integrated into classes of wellness (physical and health education) and elective classes with other Virginia High School freshman students.

The 2006-2007 educational program consisted of the school-within-a-school concept with an alteration of both language arts and mathematics classrooms. The classrooms were then located on the same level and directly across the hall from each other. The modified block scheduled classes of English 9 and Integrated Algebra introduced the separation of boys and girls in the fourth year of the program in addition to the student-mentoring program. The "Reconnecting Youth" program was continued. A credited study skills class was implemented to enhance instruction and empower the students to develop study skill habits for the 2006-2007 sophomore students. The summer program consisted of a 2-week Algebra Readiness Institute (ARI) that involved 27 of whom 9 were incoming freshman Bearcat "PRIDE" students. The staff also conducted a 2-day summer orientation session involving the students, parents, and educators.

### Statement of the Problem

Freshman retention, attendance, discipline problems, core class failures, and SOL failures are issues plaguing many school systems, including the Bristol Virginia Public Schools. One means of addressing these problems is the development of a focused program aimed at helping at-risk students succeed during the pivotal freshman year. The Bristol Virginia High School's "PRIDE" program was designed to be just such a program; however, in order to establish the efficacy of the program, rigorous evaluation of program outcomes are necessary. The purpose of this dissertation is to evaluate the first three years of that program and to provide summative and formative information to improve the program in the future.

### Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will provide valuable information to teachers and administrators to analyze, examine, and revise procedures in the implementation of the "PRIDE" program to further meet the needs of the students, teachers, parents, and administrators involved in the program. A successful program has the potential to raise freshman academic performance, decrease discipline problems, reduce absenteeism, reduce freshman retention, increase the students' self-concept,

and decrease the number of students retained in the 9th grade. Furthermore, the successful implementation of the program over time could have a significant cultural impact on the school and school system. The 9th grade year provides the foundation for a successful high school experience and is an indoctrination period into the high school culture of high expectations. The potential benefits of this study have the possibility in a summative and formative manner to have a positive impact on institutional, regional, and national development of the design and implementation of 9th grade transitional programs, procedures, and methodology.

A successful school transitional program has the potential to create a lasting cultural change throughout the school. Creating a foundation of freshman success has the possibility of a ripple effect throughout the school. Transition from middle school to high school is an important feature of continuous, inclusive school improvement. The purpose is to assist students to succeed in college preparation courses in high school and prepare for demanding postsecondary education, careers, and life-long learning. Transition programs have the potential to accelerate achievement, decrease disciplinary issues, reduce absenteeism, and increase the students' self-concept, especially

for at-risk students. The leadership's ability to inspire quality staff development, use successful teachers as role models for staff leadership within the school, provide further teacher training in methodology, behavior management, and the promotion of a positive successful image has the possibility to affect the future performance of all students and teachers in grades 10, 11, 12 and the school community.

Through sustained research by educators and transition participants, it will be possible to minimize the effects of the transition process and continue the positive changes throughout the school community. The result of the continuing process is increased student success throughout high school, which becomes evident in student lives beyond the current school environment and meets their potential as productive citizens.

This innovative paradigm is designed to create a seamless transition from middle school to high school. This type of program is not easily implemented in the short-term; nevertheless, schools that conduct these transition programs will reap outstanding academic and social results for the students, teachers, and parents.

Although freshman academies show a great deal of promise, there is no guarantee these programs will solve the problems.

Transforming failing high school students is not a precise science (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004).

### Research Questions

1. Are there differences among the three Bearcat "PRIDE" treatment groups and their 8th grade (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) performance on the following six measures: (a) GPA, (b) Stanford 9 Reading scores, (c) attendance, (d) number of times tardy to school, (e) number of core course failures, and (f) the number of extra-curricular activities?
2. Is there a difference between males and females in the three treatment groups and their 9th grade (post-treatment) measures on: (a) GPA, (b) Stanford 9 Reading scores, (c) attendance, (d) number of times tardy to school, (e) number of core course failures, (f) number of in-school suspensions, (g) number of out-of-school suspensions (h) number of detentions; (i) the number of extra-curricular activities and, (j) promotion rates into the 10th grade?
3. Are there differences in the number of 9th grade extracurricular activities and promotion rates into the 10th grade based on treatment group and gender?

### Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

1. This will be a quantitative study conducted with a limited number of participants. The study will be limited to students enrolled at Virginia High School. The results cannot be generalized to other transition programs for at-risk students.
2. The participants in the study will be limited to the students of Virginia High School, the Bearcat "PRIDE" team, and the pilot study student group from 2003-2004. The responses may not be generalized to any other high school populations.
3. This study could be constructive to the teachers and administrative staff at Virginia High School in providing formative data to improve the "PRIDE" program for future classes. The summative data could provide valuable information to schools with similar programs.
4. The quantitative procedures cannot provide generalizations to be applied to the entire population of all schools and programs.
5. The research is confined to 9th grade students who attended and participated in the pilot enrichment program of 2003-2004, the first year of the Bearcat "PRIDE" program in

2004-2005, and the second year of the Bearcat "PRIDE" program in 2005-2006.

#### Definition of Terms

At-Risk Student - For the purposes of this study, an at-risk student is an 8th grade student who has been unsuccessful in a traditional school setting and who would benefit academically from a smaller, nontraditional school environment, is at risk for leaving school or graduating below potential, is overage for the grade level for a variety of reasons (e.g., failed grade(s), medical reasons; and-or have chronic problems of attendance and-or discipline (Virginia Department of Education, 2006).

Class Failure - The student's failure to meet the academic requirements of a specific core class (Bristol Virginia Public Schools, 2006).

Discipline Referral - The notification to the administrative staff that a student has not conformed to school policy.

Detention - "A disciplinary procedure imposed when a student has committed a minor school policy infraction. The procedure involves the student's staying one hour after school" (Bristol Virginia Public Schools, 2006, p. 43).

Expulsion - "Any disciplinary action imposed by a school board or a committee thereof, as provided in school board policy, whereby a student is not permitted to attend school within the school division and is ineligible for readmission for 365 calendar days after the date of expulsion" (Bristol Virginia Public Schools, 2006, p. 43).

Grade Point Average (GPA) - A common measure of the nation's high school students' academic achievement is the grade point average (GPA). Although the scale used to determine GPA varies from school to school, the most common scale is the four-point scale. In this scale, the letter grade "A" equals four points, and the scale progresses down to zero points for the letter "F." This four-point scale is used by the High School Transcript Study (HSTS) to compute each student's GPA (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). The average grade earned by a student is figured by dividing the grade points earned by the number of credits attempted.

In-School Suspension - "Any disciplinary action imposed whereby a student is not permitted to attend classes but will be allowed to attend school and to complete class work in a supervised private setting" (Bristol Virginia Public Schools, 2006, p. 43).

Modified Block Schedule - A schedule designed to provide extended time in the building block curriculum courses and high stakes and end-of-course examinations. For the purposes of the program, English and algebra were block scheduled. The classes were 110 minutes in length. The other academic and elective classes were 50 minutes in length.

Short-Term Suspension - "Any disciplinary action whereby a student is not permitted to attend school for a period not to exceed 10 school days" (Bristol Virginia Public Schools, 2006, p. 43).

Long-Term Suspension - Any disciplinary action whereby a student is not permitted to attend school for more than 10 school days but less than 365 calendar days" (Bristol Virginia Public Schools, 2006).

Perception - "Noun: 1. The object of perception. 2. An impression in the mind of something perceived by the senses, viewed as the basic component in the formation of concepts" (American Heritage Dictionary, 1985).

Retention - Children are retained in grade if they are judged not to have the academic or social skills to advance to the next grade. Children who are retained in grade may show lower academic achievement and motivation, and many may behave in ways that undermine their efforts in school and their social wellbeing. Students who are being disruptive enough to warrant a suspension or expulsion typically cannot be expected to be learning (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

Virginia Standards of Learning End-of-Course Tests (SOL) - The Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) in the areas of English, mathematics, history, social science, and science are intended "to set reasonable targets and expectations for what teachers are expected to teach and students expected to learn" (see the Virginia SOL Technical Manual, May 2000, page 1). The purposes of the educational assessments at selected grades (3, 5, and 8) and high school subjects are to inform parents and teachers about what students are learning in relation to the SOL and to hold schools accountable for teaching the SOL content.

Therefore, this review has been undertaken only with these two purposes in mind: any other applications or uses of these assessments, such as for grade advancement or high school

graduation, have not been considered (Virginia Department of Education, 1999).

Stanford Achievement Test: Ninth Edition - The Stanford Achievement Test Series, with a rich history dating from the early 20th century, measures students' school achievement in reading, language, mathematics, science, and social science. This Ninth Edition of the Stanford battery (Stanford 9) provides updated content that reflects the current "national consensus curriculum" and modern educational trends.

Formative assessment - Assessment used "for the purpose of enhancing the professional skills" (Danielson and McGreal, 2000, p. 8).

Summative assessment - "For the purpose of making consequential decisions" (Danielson and McGreal, 2000, p. 8).

#### Overview of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 includes the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, definition of terms, research questions, limitations, and delimitations, and an overview of the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature pertinent to the issues of the transition from middle school to high school. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology and procedures that were used in completing

this quantitative study. Chapter 4 provides the data collected in the study. Chapter 5 reports the results of the information obtained including pertinent findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides a review of literature related to the issues of at-risk 9th grade students during the transition to high school and intervention programs that have the potential for a successful impact on the students' educational and social development. The initial section will examine factors and issues regarding the students' transition from middle to high school. The second section will examine how the freshman experience is related to dropout and completion rates. This review will explore personal challenges the students encounter during the freshman experience and completion of high school. The final section will examine the organization of exemplary programs that have been effective in addressing the academic, social, and emotional needs of at-risk students during the transition from middle school to high school.

#### Transition to High School

During the educational process, students move through the system making many transitions throughout their careers such as progressing from one grade to the next or one educational level to the next, perhaps even transferring from one school to another, thus making the transition difficult. A transition

takes place at any of these points when a student moves from one educational process to another (Rice, 2001). The transition out of elementary grades is especially difficult, in part because elementary schools focus on task, while middle and high schools focus on performance (Alspaugh, 1998).

The transition from middle school to high school can be an overwhelming turning point in a student's social and academic life. During the 9th grade year, students face tremendous anxiety as they struggle with peer pressure, independence, self-identity, and academics (Walsh, 2002). The 9th grade plays a critical role in determining the student's future (Dedmond, 2005; Schiller, 1999). Ninth grade students are unique, in part because their hormones are in control of their minds rather than their brains (International Center for Leadership in Education, 2005). According to Alspaugh (1998) the achievement loss associated with the transition from middle to high school increases the students' dropout rates and promotes low self-esteem and self-perception.

Eccles, Lord, and Midgley (1991) studied current research of developmental scientists and hypothesized that "some of the negative psychological changes associated with adolescent development result from a mismatch between the needs of

developing adolescents and the opportunities afforded them by their social environments" (p.90). To further complicate the transition from middle school to high school, students are confronted with one of the most difficult developmental periods of their lives, placing them at greater risk for the downward spiral to academic failure and dropping out (Eccles et al., 1993). At this stage students are confronted with strong physical changes and varying stages of cognitive development that are magnified in this stage of life more than any other time. This developmental period involves so many emotional and physical changes that it places the students at a very high risk for difficulty. The Eccles study further provided evidence of the personal and positive decrease of relationships with teachers during the transition period, which is particularly difficult during adolescence when the need to build close relationships with adults in school and community is of paramount importance to the students' educational and social development (Eccles et al., 1993).

Hertzog and Morgan (1998) conducted a case study of students and educators in southern Georgia and found that the way in which students experience the transition to high school is a strong predictor of student success in the 9th grade. The

research established a positive relationship between transition program practices and reduced student retention and dropout rates. Hertzog and Morgan's focus groups pointed out that freshmen were not prepared for the rigors of the high school environment. Closer examinations of these focus groups revealed that unsuccessful students lacked academic preparation, were indifferent toward homework, had poor study skills, and lacked parental involvement. Furthermore, students who were retained were 50% less likely to graduate, and those who were retained twice were 75% less likely to graduate. However, after a transition team and plan were implemented, students' academic and social performance improved (Hertzog and Morgan).

In another study of 9th grade students, Roderick and Camburn (1999) found that good transitional experiences for students moving into high-risk environments does not ensure that they can overcome the challenges of the high-risk environment. The powerful effects of failure in elementary and middle schools are difficult to overcome and can cause students to dropout even when quality transition programs are in place. Through this research it becomes clear that the 9th and 10th grades are the weakest links in the educational system.

### Dropout and Retention Rates

Although all students encounter challenges during the grade nine transitions, the process is even more difficult for students who have been identified as at-risk of being retained in a grade or of dropping out completely. Retention and dropout rates are a significant problem nationally, even though education remains at the forefront of state and federal legislation designed to increase student achievement. Despite high graduation requirements, increased teacher salaries, and teacher competency testing for teachers, students at many high schools are not progressing to the 10th grade and are even dropping out of school altogether (Loyacono, 1992).

The report "The Education Pipeline in the United States 1970-2000" (Haney et al., 2004) stated that the graduation rate and teens graduating on time is a national emergency. The report's authors examined 30 years of enrollment statistics from all 50 states and found that the number of 9th grade students who did not progress to the 10th grade had tripled during that time. Also, fewer students were found to be graduating from high school on time. The report stated that the national graduation average for freshman promoted to the 10th grade was 75% or less

in 2000-2001 and was lower in the southern states (Haney et al.).

A similar study issued by the National Center for Educational Statistics (Kaufman, Alt, and Chapman, 2004) examined high school dropout and completion rates from 1972-2001. The report presented estimates of high school dropouts and completion rates through 2001 along with characteristics of dropouts and completers. The report affirmed that while the progress was made through the 1980s in reducing the number of dropouts, completion rates have stagnated. Furthermore, 77% of dropouts were between the ages of 15 through 18 while about two fifths of that group was between the ages of 15 through 17.

#### What Makes an At-Risk Student?

The risk of academic failure in our nation is a high priority issue for educators and policymakers. Communities, students, parents, and educators are increasing their focus on the education of at-risk students. In order to assist students, schools, and communities to address the needs of at-risk students it is paramount that we profile at-risk factors of educational failure. The purpose is to examine the issues that affect students and promote awareness in order to design educational and social approaches to improve education.

Prior research on at-risk students shows a combination of issues - parental factors, socioeconomic status, race, school transfers, retention, school alienation, school policies, and a host of other issues that have a strong influence on the students' decisions to drop out of school. Most research has shown that dropping out of school is caused and-or influenced by factors linked with students, their families, the schools they attend, the communities in which they live (Rumberger, 1995), socioeconomic status (Kaufman et al., 2004), attendance (Waggoner, 1991), school alienation (Weis, Farrar, and Petrie, 1989), core class failures (Cairns, Cairns, and Neckerman, 1989), school transfers (Rice, 2001), and a multitude of other factors.

Research has indicated a host of personal influences and issues facing students to be placed at-risk for dropping out of school. Students at-risk who experience attendance problems, poverty, race and-or language barriers, school alienation, school transfers, and lack of parental support are much more likely to leave school before meeting graduation requirements (Barro and Kolstad, 1987; Dillon, 1948; Rice, 2001; Waggoner, 1991; Weis et al., 1989). These researchers therefore

recommended the development of academic and counseling programs to address the issue of school dropouts.

Most empirical research has shown that dropping out of school is caused and-or influenced by factors linked with the students, families, the schools they attend, and the communities in which they live (Rumberger, 1995). The most powerful predictors of dropping out and poor school achievement have been found to be the parents' educational background and expectations for their children's academic success (Abbott, Hill, Catalano, and Hawkins, 2000), socioeconomic status (Weis et al., 1989), and family structure. Astone and McLanahan (1991) found that students from single-parent families and stepfamilies are more likely to drop out of school than students with two-parent families. Results of research on parental involvement vary widely by ethnicity and social class but have shown that students are more successful in school if their parents are involved in the process. A more recent study (Ingels et al., 2005) confirmed the links between family composition and structure along with parental income and education in relationship to students' academic performance.

Research has well documented the enormous educational disadvantages of an impoverished environment (Coleman et al.,

1966; Mayer, Mullins, and Moore, 2000). Furthermore, there is evidence that indicates the different characteristics of neighborhoods are helpful in examining dropout rates among communities (Clark, 1992).

Negative school related experiences also persuade students to decide to leave school early (Rumberger, 1995). The students who drop out of school have shown disruptive behavior, poor attitudes towards school, poor attendance (Balch, 1989; Barrington and Hendricks, 1989), and have been academically unchallenged (Gewertz, 2006).

Veitch (2004) investigated correlates of high school students dropping out by using data mining of existing data resources using decision trees. The study used various methods to predict high school non-completion that measured coping strategies by students in order to build the prediction model with discriminant analysis, which is a personal classification process. The author found that certain variables such as unexcused absences, grade point averages, and ethnic groups were contributing characteristics of students dropping out of school.

A large number of 8th grade students exhibit tendencies or behaviors that prohibit them from reaching their academic potential and ultimately keep them from graduating. We saw this

in our own school system, and the behaviors are supported by research. These behaviors include excessive tardies to school, absenteeism (Hale, 1998), detentions, school suspensions (McGee and Newcomb, 1992), core class failures (Cairns, Cairns, and Neckerman, 1989), retention (Queen, 2002), lack of parental involvement (Green and Scott, 1995), and lack of participation in school activities (Tinto, 1987).

The National Center for Education Statistics (Mayer et al., 2000) reported on the antecedents of the non-school related factors in identifying home conditions and community factors related to the aspects of life and school achievement. The report stated that environmental hazards students are exposed to in low-income homes create the probability of poor educational performance. The early developmental environment of hunger and poor nutrition, lack of home learning and parent availability, student mobility and school transfers, along with parents' lack of school participation has adverse effects on student academic and social performance. These factors can create the possibility of poor student performance and in later educational development, dropping out of school (Mayer et al.).

Finding dropout predictors that identify at-risk students is an important aspect of designing prevention programs because

these predictors can help to accurately identify students in need of academic and social assistance. The research has been helpful in screening potential dropouts and necessitates that many indicators need to be considered (Janosz, LeBlanc, Boulerice, and Tremblay, 1997).

Green and Scott (1995) examined data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1998 and identified six characteristics of 8th grade students that suggested the increased possibility of students dropping out of school or school failure. Those characteristics were: (a) single-parent families; (b) family income of less than \$15,000; (c) an older sibling who dropped out; (d) parents who did not finish high school; (e) limited proficiency in English; or, (f) at home without adult supervision for more than 3 hours per day.

Students who experience difficulty in keeping up with schoolwork and do not find resolutions to that difficulty are likely to drop out of school. The most common at-risk indicators are attention problems as a young child, multiple retentions, poor grades, absenteeism, lack of connection to school, behavior problems, lack of confidence, and limited future goals (Queen, 2002).

Research indicates that a wide range of individual, family, and school factors are linked to students dropping out of school. Academic achievement and low family socioeconomic status are high predictors for dropping out. According to Waggoner, (1991) the students from low socioeconomic status are twice as likely to drop out of school as students from average or above average means. Kaufman et al., (2004) reported an even higher factor, identifying students living in low-income families as being six times more likely than students from high-income families to drop out.

Family process variables were also identified as valuable predictors of projecting dropouts. Family process factors of parental academic support, supervision, and educational expectations are high predictors. However, the highest predictor of a student dropping out of school was the academic factor of a student being retained in a grade. A student who was retained was 11 times more likely to drop out of school (Bracey, 1996; Fine, 1991; Janosz et al., 1997; Rumberger, 1995).

School policies also play a factor in dropout rates. Rumberger (1995) pointed out that "discipline policies, grade retention policies, and policies affecting school transfer all

affect whether students are more likely to stay in school” (p. 618).

Even though education remains at the forefront of state and federal legislation and has brought many changes designed to increase student achievement through higher graduation requirements, increased teacher salaries, and minimum competency testing for teachers, the students at many high schools are not progressing to the 10th grade and are even dropping out of school altogether (Loyacono, 1992).

Historically, research has indicated a host of personal influences and issues facing students to be placed at-risk for dropping out of school. This review of the research shows students to be at-risk when they experience attendance problems, poverty, racial minority status, language barriers, school alienation, school transfers, and lack of parental support. These students are at high risk to leave school before meeting graduation requirements. The researchers reviewed in this chapter recommend the development of academic and counseling programs, while targeting educational policy and resources to address the issues of school dropouts.

### Student Self-Concept and Related Factors

Students' self-perception drops considerably during the transition from middle school to high school (Alspaugh, 1998; Hertzog and Morgan, 1998). Alspaugh reported that there was a significant drop in boys' and girls' self-concept in different areas according to gender, which is predictive in academic competence decline after transition. In order to address self-perception issues, Reents (2002) strongly advocated isolating ninth graders from other grades to ease the students' stress during the transition phase.

One measure of self-concept is The Harter Adolescent Self Perception Profile (Harter, 1988), which can be used to gauge student self-perception in a variety of areas. The instrument assesses self-perception and self-esteem related to attractiveness; body image; feelings of inadequacy; self-efficiency; competence in various domains; and general self-worth. Harter used the instrument to collect data from middle and high school students, in schools where principals voluntarily participated in the study and provided a variety of information about their schools. The results of the battery of tests showed that the transition to high school causes dramatic changes in students' self-esteem (Harter).

In a subsequent study, Harter, Whitesell, and Kowalski (1992) also found that self-perception declines after the transition to 9th grade. They examined the changing educational environments' effect on middle school students' academic self-concepts and motivation in a new grade or school, and on perceptions of scholastic competence and anxiety regarding general school performance. The study suggested that the changing educational environment complicated academic outcomes depending on the individual academic abilities the students bring to the school environment (Harter et al., 1992).

Other researchers have explored aspects of self-esteem as related to other indicators of risk. Simmons and Blyth (1987), for example, found that during early adolescence students, especially girls, reacted unfavorably to a sudden change in the school environment. There was a decline in the students' self-esteem, academic achievement, and participation in extra-curricular activities while entering the 7th grade from a K-6 school. This decline was a strong predictor of school failure and dropout. Their research indicated that students were still likely to have lower self-esteem, lower GPAs, and less participation in extra-curricular activities in their sophomore year of high school. The research concluded that these students

in the 7th grade might not recover enough to show scores in these areas equal to comparable students who attended a K-8 school and 9-12 high school (Simmons and Blyth).

Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, and Feinman (1994) revealed the harmful effects of school transitions on students' affective and behavioral domains of the self-system. They noted declines in student self-esteem, class participation, and grade point average after a transition. The research associated the negative affects of the transition with changes in the academic dimensions of the self-system, which are academic expectations, class preparation, and GPA.

#### Student Motivation

During the transition period from middle school to high school student motivation is another factor that leads to academic failure. Murdock, Anderman, and Hodge (2000) explored the influences of student effort, expectations others have for the students, the perceived value of education, and their future academic plans. Specifically, the study examined 7th and 9th graders' perceptions of expectations and values communicated to them by teachers and peers. Many students are negatively affected by discipline referrals and negative expectations of peers and teachers and, therefore, have difficulties making the

transition from middle school to high school. Murdock et al. also found that student-teacher relationships may be the key to understanding students' alienation. Peer influences can encourage or discourage academic success. Their research emphasized the importance of student perceptions on their motivation and educational performance and school adjustment (Murdock et al., 2000).

#### Parent Partnerships

The importance of parent involvement cannot be overestimated in the adolescents' transition from middle school to high school. When parents are involved in the high school experience, students have higher achievement (Linver and Silverburg, 1997) and better adjustment (Hartos and Power, 1997) and are less likely to drop out of school (Mac Iver, 1990; Queen, 2002).

Akos and Galassi (2004) examined more than 700 ninth grade parent, teacher, and student responses to questionnaires about the middle and high school experiences during the transition period. The results revealed that distinct types of transition programming and a different chronological sequence may be needed to facilitate adjustment to the three components of academic, social, and procedural factors during school transitions. The

research concluded that parents and teachers are significant sources of assistance to students during the transition from middle school to high school. Parental involvement during the transition phase regarding grades and achievement is a strong contributor to the success of 9th grade achievement.

Newman, Myers, and Newman (2000) demonstrated the impact of multiple influences on the students' ability to become academically successful during the transition period. In particular, the mothers' encouragement and support was paramount in the students' ability to establish a successful transition into high school.

Intervention by the school, family, and community working together is a vital component to the development of a student's support and motivation to successfully meet the rigors of the challenge of the high school experience (Fullan, 2003). Despite the strong link between socioeconomic and dropout rates demonstrated by Waggoner (1991) and Kaufman et al. (2004), other research indicates that parental involvement can overcome these demographics.

For example, Ford's (1993) study of African American teenagers found that demographic variables had little connection to the students' commitment to school and academic excellence

and parental values of education are more important than conventional measures of socioeconomic status. Newman et al. (2000) research supported these findings. They focused on low-income minority students and the role of parents and others in the school setting, finding, "Even when a school had poor ratings, parents' positive feelings toward that school were found to influence their children's perceptions and to correlate with high grade point averages" (p. 54). The authors strongly recommend that schools need to form partnerships with families and welcome parental participation and involvement in the educational process. It is important for teachers and administrators to fully understand their critical role in the students' educational and social lives who do not have adequate parental encouragement.

Newman et al. (2000) examined nine Ohio school divisions of low-income minority and academically promising students. The authors investigated the role of motivating factors of student peers, teachers, and parents. The study indicated that youth are susceptible to declines in academic motivation and performance during the transition period from middle to high school. Other research (Eccles et al., 1991) indicates that if motivation is

lost during this time period, it may not be regained during the high school years.

However, other studies have shown that although parental involvement is vital, parental participation has not reached the level needed to fully benefit all students (Epstein, 1995; Rioux and Berla, 1993). Parental involvement in education is a major factor in sustaining and encouraging student academic and social success. High schools with limited parental support traditionally have had limited success. According to Fields, "Despite uncertainties about many matters related to education, the research is clear on one thing - the value of parent involvement" (International Center for Leadership in Education, 2005, p. 67).

#### Best Practices and Exemplary Programs

When designing a freshman transition program it is critical to examine existing programs and methods for models of practice. In a growing trend, a few school systems across the country have explored methods and programs to address the freshman dilemma. Some school systems have implemented 9th grade academies or schools-within-a-school in order to address the problem. The purpose of these programs is to create an educational environment that addresses the transitional issues of 9th grade,

providing assistance and support during this pivotal time for the students (International Center for Leadership in Education, 2005; Southern Regional Education Board, 2002).

While there is no one formula for designing and implementing successful transition programs, targeted programs are designed to meet the unique academic, physical, social, and emotional needs of particular groups of students, for example, at-risk students. In many of these programs, freshman students are centrally located in a specific portion of the building isolated from the mainstream of the high school where the transition can be conducted gradually (Queen, 2002).

#### Smaller Learning Communities

The concept of smaller learning communities has been employed to develop programs that encompass all freshman students and faculty. Some programs employed "houses" or separate physical areas where faculty teams are organized to assist 9th graders in their adjustment to high school. Fritzer and Herbst (1996) examined a 3,000-student high school where the 9th grade had the highest enrollment, lowest grade point averages, more dropouts, and more behavioral referrals than the other grades (Paredes, 1991). The "house" concept incorporated regular, honors, and gifted-tracked teams of students to

facilitate the 9th grade transition. The program included physical separation of students and teacher teams that concentrated on the affective domain or interdisciplinary studies. The results clearly indicated that the "house" concept was helpful in significant and measurable ways (Fritzer and Herbst).

There are certain characteristics of successful programs that can be adapted and identified to the individual needs of school systems in order to accelerate achievement, especially for students who have been labeled as at-risk (Drummond, 2002; International Center for Leadership in Education, 2005; Southern Regional Education Board, n.d.). Restructuring and reorganizing for planned changes that occur naturally as a portion of the developmental process to meet the needs of students' transitioning from middle school to high school requires visionary leadership. The reform of institutional practices of teachers and staff requires collaborative planning from all levels of the school system (Lewis, 1999). The aim of the renewal of educational programming is to counteract risk factors along with reinforcing protective factors before the risk factors are stabilized (Coie et al., 1993).

A school system's central office must provide necessary financial, physical, data, and human resources to align the budget to the needs of the instructional program. The central office must provide support services with materials, staff development, and the time necessary for the staff to implement to programs (Queen, 2002).

In order to promote new and innovative educational programs, the central office leadership must truly understand the educational process from the small to the big picture. According to Fullan (2001),

We have to know what change feels like from the point of view of the teacher, student, parent and administrator if we are to understand the actions and reactions of individuals; and if we are to comprehend the big picture, we must combine the aggregate knowledge of these individual situations with the understanding of organization and institutional factors that influence the process of change as governments, teacher unions, school systems and communities interact (p. xi).

#### Transition Program Curriculum

Given the unique nature of the students' transition from middle school to high school, the best curriculum would be one that focuses on individual needs while including courses required for graduation and state law. In addition, a rigorous curriculum is the foundation of learning (National Association of Secondary Principals, 2004), so academic rigor must be built

into any successful curriculum plan. Designing smaller learning communities that are extremely supportive and create a family-like school environment with an intensive emphasis on literacy, mathematics, character development, career explorations, study skills development, and thinking skills produces results (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004).

### Literacy

An effective program requires a strong literacy program. Students who do not acquire literacy skills are at a disadvantage in the working world and cannot meet the requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (Bianccarosa and Snow, 2004).

The need for strong literacy programs is based, in part, on past and future trends in education and employment. Barton (2000) focused on the data from 1986-1996 and projections through 2006 by a National Adult Literacy Study, a measured prose document and quantitative research of more than 26,000 adults. It was projected that the average literacy ability required for all American occupations would rise by 14%. The 25 highest growing professions showed greater than normal literacy demands, while the 25 most declining professions had less than average literacy demands. The point is that there is a long-term

need for higher literacy. It is imperative that educators strive to teach literacy skills and to advocate the importance of literacy curricula in order to meet these increasing literacy needs.

Although there is no single intervention or literacy program that will meet all of the students' needs and improve achievement, some specific components can be identified. The Adolescence Literacy Funders Forum (Snow and Biancarosa, 2003) examined key instructional elements of effective programs. Based on their review of literature and current initiatives, literacy programs should include improved practices in instruction, infrastructure, texts, assessment, professional development, and technology, delivered through targeted approaches. Snow and Biancarosa's research provided specific strategies that work best with subgroups of struggling readers. It also provided information on what professional development and support is needed to improve literacy. Furthermore, the research showed structural changes in organization at the high school level that might improve program effectiveness.

#### Mathematics

The National Goals Act of 1999 stated that United States students would be first in the world in mathematics and science

achievement by the year 2000 (National Education Goals Panel, 1999). Although the target date for the goal has passed, the results are not impressive. The need for highly effective mathematics programs is paramount to the success of our schools and country.

Highly effective mathematics programs for adolescent students include small-group instruction that addresses algebra and functions, reasoning, and analytical ability (Carpenter and Trammell, 2004). Furthermore, all students should have access to the latest technological equipment and programs (National Education Goals Panel, 1999). A problem-centered approach should be employed to teach reasoning skills using prior knowledge and experiences (Southern Regional Education Board, 2001).

### Counseling

Research indicates that a key component of an effective program for freshmen is a guidance system that recognizes the instrumental role in supporting freshmen (DaGiau, 1997). The prominent role of guidance is to provide students and parents with support to ease the transition, information on curriculum mapping, employment opportunities (Southern Regional Education Board, 1998), goal-setting, and mentoring programs (Queen, 2002).

Lewis (1999) reported on one approach to counseling in the classroom, implemented in a rural school with largely minority students in California. This program conducted structured narrative lessons as a writing intervention program to foster resiliency, called "A Write Way." The program was designed to enhance planned interventions to strengthen protective factors and counteract risk factors associated with student success. The structured narrative approaches in the "Write Way" improved resiliency of the students and balanced the relationship with students, counselors, and teachers. According to Lewis (1999), "Counselors and teachers can work together to use structured narrative approaches to help students with care and support necessary to create more empowered learning stories, and to help students find meaning in their school participation" (p. 211).

#### Classroom Management

Classroom management consists of interdependent components of engaging curriculum, including working with anger, encouraging students to be responsible citizens, and dealing with conflict and stress. Teachers must have classroom management skills and must act as self-knowing models (Hanson, 1998). The teacher's ability to successfully manage classroom behavior increases the amount of time the students are actively

engaged in learning and is directly related to academic achievement (Wong and Wong, 2001). Furthermore, the research indicates that behavior is more likely to change for the better when students are guided and directed to elicit appropriate behavior and then recognized for the appropriate behavior (McIntyer, n.d.).

When students are engaged in the learning environment, they are less likely to be behavior problems within the classroom. There are three components of this engagement in school. First, a student's involvement in school activities reflects behavioral engagement. Second, a student's emotional relationship with peers, teachers, and the educational environment displays emotional engagement. Last, the cognitive component displays a student's effort to learn and improve academic and social skills (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris, 2004).

How teachers in a ninth grade transition program direct classroom behavior is a crucial and fundamental component to the success of teaching and learning of at-risk freshmen students.

#### Character Education

In addition to an emphasis on academic achievement and meeting local, state, and national standards, education reform must also implement character education development as a high

priority (Schwartz, Beatty, and Dachnowicz, 2005). A comprehensive character education program is designed to meet the students' needs, provide a caring school community, teach fundamental values, and support academics (Smith, 2006). Characteristics of quality character, such as responsibility and respect, are believed to be valuable in students' development for they lead to higher levels of personal functioning and support positive relations with others (International Center for Leadership in Education, 2005).

Reviewing existing research of 33 studies that showed evidence that the programs studied were effective (Berkowitz and Bier, 2005) indicated that character education programs have a positive impact on academic performance. They found that character education at the secondary level is particularly important because of the perceived decline in moral conduct, high-profile role models, and corporate scandals.

Effective character education programs are incorporated throughout the curriculum and include providing a caring school community, teaching universal values, moral reasoning, living skills, service learning, citizenship, conflict resolution, and drug and violence prevention (Smith, 2006).

## Career Explorations

The overall goal of education is to provide students with the skills and training necessary to pursue postsecondary education and-or to become productive and self-sufficient citizens. Career explorations provide students a motivating factor in the importance of their educational development in relation to their economic and social future.

Dedmond (2005) reviewed available course-related standards from Indiana, Maine, Tennessee, and Texas that provided the foundation to support career and life planning concerns. Dedmond found that educational curriculum for 9th graders can benefit from standards-based instruction that provides a framework for a freshman transition course. The fundamental premise of her work was that individuals are not motivated until they understand the benefits of their efforts. Students need assistance in seeing the long-term perspective of their educational career, how it applies beyond academics, and how it is applicable to career plans (Levine, 2005).

In the career exploration portion of a 9th grade transition program, students develop career goals after researching different careers. They then develop an educational study program to help them reach their career goals. Dedmond's (2005)

research suggests five component requirements: (a) 10-year educational and career plan; (b) curriculum that meets standards; (c) highly qualified teachers; (d) school-wide implementation; and, (e) leadership continuity over the first 4 years.

### Exemplary Programs

Although there is no one formula for designing and implementing a successful transition program, there are certain characteristics that can be applied to the design of new and innovative programs. Highly successful programs address the needs of the students, parents, and staff members.

The International Center for Leadership (2005) in partnership with The Council of Chief State Officers examined 30 schools from around the country to provide purposeful information to educators in order to assist students in completing rigorous and relevant curricula. The ICLE identified many schools across the country that achieved academic excellence with their freshman initiatives; one in particular was Caprock High School in Amarillo, Texas. Caprock High School implemented a smaller learning communities philosophy while providing motivation with a strong vision and commitment from the teachers, administration, and local school board. The

comprehensive implementation of the program significantly reduced absenteeism, increased course-passing rates, and increased graduation rates which had a significant impact on the overall culture of the school in the grades to follow (International Center for Leadership in Education, 2005).

Salem High School (n.d.) in Salem, Virginia is a second example of an exemplary program. The school formed a freshman transition committee in 1991 to examine the academic and social problems the 9th grade students were experiencing year after year. Their research revealed high failure rates, poor end-of-course examination performance, high disciplinary referrals, and a high retention rate. The first transition "process" was instituted in the 1992-1993 school year.

The committee put a team in place representing the core curriculum subjects of English, math, science, and history to address the needs of the freshman students and to create a smaller learning community. The team designed a common system of class rules, procedures, and high expectations. During the year the team met weekly to discuss student progress, to share ideas and educational strategies, and to meet with parents. In addition, the team implemented a "Program Planning Conference" for the students who had the most difficulties making the

transition to high school. The conference included the student, parents, guidance counselor, and academic teachers to formulate an individual program of study implementing short- and long-term goals for the student (Salem High School, n.d.).

The freshman transition program at Salem High School has documented improvements in grades, attendance, discipline, and student promotion. The program has become a model program in Virginia and has been represented at High Schools That Work conferences throughout the southeast (Salem High School, n.d.).

Another exemplary school, Thomas A. Edison High School in Fairfax, Virginia, is a comprehensive urban high school serving 1,720 students in the Fairfax County Public School System (Southern Regional Education Board and University of Virginia, 2003). School improvement efforts in 1998 discovered a history of low freshman performance in academics, student promotion to the 10th grade, and a high failure rate on SOL tests.

The Focus program is a 9th grade academic support program designed to assist students in making the transition from middle to high school. The school established two academic teams of core content teachers to address the problem by planning and integrating project-based learning methods, content enhancement, and reading programs with technology provided as a major

component. The program of studies included character development, reading for power, technology integration, cross-curricular learning, and problem-based learning along with core academic class offerings.

The data collected from spring 1998 to spring 2002 showed increases in freshman student performance on SOL tests (56% increase in mathematics, 51% increase in history, and 27% increase in science). Furthermore, Thomas A. Edison High School documented improvements in student pass-fail rates and student grade point averages.

Principal Luke Fennell attributed the success of the program to content alignment, analyzing data, teachers sharing best practices, additional instructional time, and the belief that all children can learn and master the required curriculum (Southern Regional Education Board and University of Virginia, 2003).

#### Benefits of Extra-Curricular Activities

Participation in school-sponsored extracurricular activities is another factor that can influence at-risk behaviors of dropping out of school including increasing attendance, raising levels of achievement, building healthy lifestyles and close personal relationships, and promoting

aspirations of higher levels of education while developing social potential. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations (2004), participation in interscholastic sports and fine arts activities promotes citizenship and sportsmanship also.

In a study conducted of high school athletic associations for the Carnegie Corporation (Poinsett, 1996), students and teachers across the country found that participation in athletics promoted responsible social behaviors and greater academic success, confidence in the students' physical abilities, respect of personal health and fitness, and the ability to develop strong social relationships with individuals and institutions.

In a study using large-scale databases to examine time-use patterns of American adolescents, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services found that students who did not participate in co-curricular activities were 57% more likely to drop out of school, 49% more likely to use drugs, 37% more likely to become teen parents, 35% more likely to smoke cigarettes, and 27% more likely to be arrested than students who spent 1 to 4 hours per week participating in co-curricular activities (Zill, Nord, and Loomis, 1995).

Furthermore, a study by The National Education Commission on Time and Learning (1994) indicated that student participation in school-sponsored extracurricular activities provided needed supervision and leadership for students during after-school hours. The researchers found that students who were not supervised after school hours were more likely to engage in criminal behavior, use drugs and alcohol, have poor grades, and drop out of school more than those students who did participate in after-school activities.

The National Center of Education Statistics (1995) also provides statistical evidence that students greatly benefit from participation in school-related extracurricular activities. This research showed that students who participated in extracurricular programs had better school attendance than students who did not participate. The study found that students who did participate were three times more likely to be in the top quartile in mathematics and reading than non-participants. Also, the study revealed that students who participated were more likely than non-participants to aspire to further their education after high school and two thirds of the participants expected to finish at least a bachelor's degree while only half

of the non-participants expected to do so (O'Brien and Rollefson, 1995).

### Conclusion

Given the national focus of the NCLB Act and increased accountability of schools, the daunting task of education reform is at the forefront of federal policy (U. S. Department of Education, 2002). New and innovative school programs are needed to combat the negative effects of transition. Educational leadership must develop viable programs while implementing evaluation methods to validate the effectiveness of the programs in order to meet the needs of the students (Hertzog and Morgan, 1999).

The review of the literature revealed several themes regarding the negative impact of the transition process and effective strategies for addressing the freshman problem. The research shows many issues negatively affect the students' ability to make a successful transition to high school. The transition from middle school to high school is a significant turning point in the students' life in regard to peer pressure, independence, and academic success (Dedmond, 2005; Schiller, 1999; Walsh, 2002).

The students in 9th grade enter a difficult developmental period (Eccles et al., 1993; International Center for Leadership in Education, 2005) and experience a drop in self-esteem and self-perception (Alspaugh, 1998; Hertzog and Morgan, 1998; Simmons and Blyth, 1987). Past failure and retention of students reduce their graduation chances and further complicate the transition process (Bracey, 1996; Fine, 1991; Hertzog and Morgan, 1996; Janosz et al., 1997; Roderick and Camburn, 1999; Rumberger, 1995).

The research also shows that the lack of parental support is a key issue in the students' inability to successfully make the adjustments necessary to high school (Barro and Kolstad, 1987; Epstein, 1995; Rice, 2001; Rioux and Berla, 1993; Waggoner, 1991; Weis et al., 1989). The transition process negatively affects student motivation (Eccles et al., 1991; Newman et al., 2000).

Numerous themes have emerged in the research of literature on successful programs and strategies to effectively address the transition to high school. The implementation of smaller learning communities, leadership, and collaborative planning along with the development of a rigorous curriculum has provided

a foundation of success for the development of freshman transition programs.

The implementation of smaller learning communities is essential to the success of transition programs in order to create a positive and nurturing learning environment, easing the adjustment to high school, increasing academic success, and involved student participation (Coie et al., 1993; Fritzer and Herbst, 1996; Lewis, 1999; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004).

Educational reform is a process of planned changes that involves systematic and visionary planning. The research shows that leadership and collaborative planning is of paramount importance to the development of effective transition programs (Coie et al., 1993; Queen, 2002).

The research supports that the cornerstone of a transition program is a rigorous curriculum that meets the educational and social needs of the students (International Center for Leadership in Education, 2005; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004). Transition studies have shown literacy development is the bedrock of the transition program and is critical to the success of the program to design a comprehensive and coordinated literacy program (National Association of

Secondary School Principals, 2004). Interventions of research based strategies with the structural elements of text-based collaborative learning, intensive writing, technology, student motivation, and ongoing formative assessment are fundamental for success (Bianccarosa and Snow, 2004; Ivey and Fisher, 2005).

In addition a comprehensive curriculum for at-risk transition students would include guidance support services (DaGiau, 1997), character education (Smith, 2006), career explorations (Dedmond, 2005), and classroom management practices (Wong and Wong, 2001) to provide a full complement of resources for the successful transition of students.

The freshman problem is a complicated one that has existed for many years in our educational culture and does not have a single solution. The research on school transfers has been well documented for several decades (Rice, 2001), but little guidance has been provided to target resources to address the problem until recently. Further study is needed to address the nation's freshman educational problems in order to document successes and failures. This investigation would provide valuable information to the programs' values to the students, school, and community. Hertzog and Morgan (1999) stated,

The result of a thoughtfully developed and well-implemented transition program is a less traumatic

student transition from the middle level to the high school. Use of this approach will, in turn, benefit students who will feel more comfortable in high school—and be more successful (p.26).

The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of the Bearcat "PRIDE" freshman transition program, and thereby add to the body of knowledge about how best to ease the difficult 9th grade transition.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Bearcat "PRIDE" Transition Program at Virginia High School, a program for at-risk students. The Bearcat "PRIDE" program was designed to provide 9th grade at-risk students the skills necessary for making a successful transition from the middle school to high school. This case study approach can be used where "the researcher explores in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time" (Creswell, 2003, p. 15).

This chapter will identify the participants of the study and define evaluation instruments, data collection, and the data analysis procedures. The formative assessment of the program is designed to provide data in analyzing and improving the program. Danielson and McGreal (2000) describe the importance of formative assessment as follows,

Formative judgments play a necessary role in the learning and growing process that defines formative work. Effective frameworks for the design of professional development all involve some noticeable

outcome. The most successful systems include mechanisms to ensure that schools use some type of formative assessment as a part of the required analysis and reflection on the outcomes (p. 104).

Summative data have the potential to provide information to the local school district and to other transitional programs for at-risk students with similar demographics and goals. Danielson and McGreal (2000) also weigh in on the importance of summative data in the evaluation process:

Legislators and policy-makers tend to value the summative purposes, those of quality assurance and accountability. They make the point that public schools are, after all, public institutions, supported by taxpayer money, and that the public has a legitimate interest in the quality of teaching that occurs there (p. 8).

The summative evaluation is invaluable in determining the success of the program and providing the necessary data and information to ensure the quality of the program.

#### Description of the Bearcat "PRIDE" Program

Three groups of at-risk 9th grade students were included in this study over a 3-year period: 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 academic years. Participants in each of the three treatment groups were selected by a transition team consisting of the middle school principal, high school principal, middle school assistant principal, middle school counselor, two middle school English teachers, and the 9th grade transition team coordinator.

The selection process criteria established by the transition committee for offering the opportunity to students and parents for considering enrollment into the program were:

1. Virginia Standards of Learning tests; each student attempted to complete SOL tests during the designated testing period.
2. Stanford Reading Test scores; any score below 6.0
3. Discipline referrals; three or more suspensions and-or one expulsion
4. School attendance records and absenteeism; 25 or more days absent from school
5. Individual academic course grades; four or fewer failed courses
6. Total GPA; relative to courses passed
7. School and class tardy records; no more than 20 unexcused tardies
8. Virginia Middle School teacher individual referrals; the middle school principal and-or any member of the committee could recommend a student for the program based on the student's potential successes in a controlled educational environment

9. Parent participation in school activities; all parents had to agree to schedule a meeting with the school academic staff or agree to a home visit.

The committee was instructed to examine the student data of the upcoming freshmen and to recommend students who would have the potential to achieve academically and socially in the specifically designed program for at-risk students. Furthermore, the committee was instructed to focus on the students who did not have extreme absenteeism or chronic and severe discipline records in order to focus on the students who have the potential to meet academic and social high school requirements for promotion to the 10th grade along with meeting graduation standards. Ninth grade students who were previously retained were not eligible to become part of the Bearcat "PRIDE" program.

During the 2003-2004 school year, 26 students participated in the program. Throughout the year all students participated during different sessions. All 26 students completed the program during the school year.

During the 2004-2005 school year, 37 students participated in the program. Of the original 37 participants, six students were reassigned to alternative school, three students became

wards of the court, and two students transferred, leaving 26 of the original students completing the program.

During the 2005-2006 school year, 49 students participated in the program. Of the original 49 students, three students were reassigned to alternative school, two students were expelled from school, and one student was placed in the regular freshman classes, leaving 43 of the original students completing the program.

#### Data Collection

In this quantitative methods case study the researcher will be the principal data collector during the collection of archival data. The International Review Board (IRB) at East Tennessee State University approval was secured for the research study before data were extracted from archival sources. Written permission from the principal at Virginia High School has been granted to conduct the study.

#### Archival Data

Archival data of the "PRIDE" team students was obtained from the computer program SASI by the researcher. The following 8th (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) data were collected: (a) GPA; (b) Stanford 9 Reading Achievement Test scores; (c) number of core course failures; (d) attendance

record, (e) number of days tardy to school; and, (f) number of extra-curricular activities. In addition to these, 9th grade (post-treatment) measures for a) the number of discipline referrals (detentions), (b) number of long-term suspensions (c) number of in-school suspensions, and, (d) 10th grade promotions were collected. The data were analyzed using SPSS.

#### Data Analysis

This study was guided by the following research questions.

*Research Question #1.* Are there differences among the three Bearcat "PRIDE" treatment groups and their 8th grade (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) performance on the following six measures: (a) GPA, (b) Stanford 9 Reading scores, (c) attendance, (d) number of days tardy to school, (e) number of core course failures, and (f) the number of extra-curricular activities? To answer this research question each criterion variable was measured as the difference between students' 9th and 8th grade performance. One-way ANOVAs (or the  $t$  test for independent samples for  $H_{01_2}$ ) were used to compare the mean differences among the Bearcat treatment groups. Six null hypotheses were evaluated:

$H_{01_1}$ : There is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups' 8th and 9th grade GPA.

- Hol<sub>2</sub>: There is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups' 8th and 9th grade Stanford 9 Reading scores.
- Hol<sub>3</sub>: There is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups' 8th and 9th grade attendance.
- Hol<sub>4</sub>: There is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups' 8th and 9th grade number of days tardy.
- Hol<sub>5</sub>: There is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups' 8th and 9th grade number of core course failures.
- Hol<sub>6</sub>: There is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups' 8th and 9th grade number of extracurricular activities.

*Research Question #2.* Is there a difference between males and females in the three treatment groups and their 9th grade (post-treatment) measures on: (a) GPA, (b) Stanford 9 Reading scores, (c) attendance, (d) number of times tardy to school, (e) number of core course failures, (f) number of in-school suspensions, (g) number of out-of-school suspensions and (h) number of detentions? To answer this research question eight two-way ANOVAs were conducted, one for each of the nine 9th grade criterion variables. The two factors used in each two-way ANOVA model were Bearcat treatment group and gender. Each two-

way ANOVA model tested three null hypotheses: two for the main effects of Bearcat treatment group and gender, and one null hypothesis for the group by gender 2-way interaction. Twenty-four null hypotheses were evaluated:

Two-Way ANOVA Model #1

- Ho2<sub>1</sub>: There is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups' 9th grade GPA.
- Ho2<sub>2</sub>: There is no difference between male and female students' 9th grade GPA.
- Ho2<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant two-way gender by Bearcat treatment group interaction.

Two-Way ANOVA Model #2

- Ho2<sub>4</sub>: There is no difference between the Bearcat treatment groups' 9th grade Stanford 9 Reading scores.
- Ho2<sub>5</sub>: There is no difference between male and female students' 9th grade Stanford 9 Reading scores.
- Ho2<sub>6</sub>: There is no significant two-way gender by Bearcat treatment group interaction.

Two-Way ANOVA Model #3

- Ho2<sub>7</sub>: There is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups' 9th grade attendance.

Ho2<sub>8</sub>: There is no difference between male and female students' 9th grade attendance.

Ho2<sub>9</sub>: There is no significant two-way gender by Bearcat treatment group interaction.

Two-Way ANOVA Model #4

Ho2<sub>10</sub>: There is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups' 9th grade number of days tardy.

Ho2<sub>11</sub>: There is no difference between male and female students' 9th grade number of days tardy.

Ho2<sub>12</sub>: There is no significant two-way gender by Bearcat treatment group interaction.

Two-Way ANOVA Model #5

Ho2<sub>13</sub>: There is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups' 9th grade core course failures.

Ho2<sub>14</sub>: There is no difference between male and female students' 9th grade core course failures.

Ho2<sub>15</sub>: There is no significant two-way gender by Bearcat treatment group interaction.

Two-Way ANOVA Model #6

Ho2<sub>16</sub>: There is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups' 9th grade in-school suspensions.

Ho2<sub>17</sub>: There is no difference between male and female students' 9th grade in-school suspensions.

Ho2<sub>18</sub>: There is no significant two-way gender by Bearcat treatment group interaction.

Two-Way ANOVA Model #7

Ho2<sub>19</sub>: There is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups' 9th grade out-of-school suspensions.

Ho2<sub>20</sub>: There is no difference between male and female students' 9th grade out-of-school suspensions.

Ho2<sub>21</sub>: There is no significant two-way gender by Bearcat treatment group interaction.

Two-Way ANOVA Model #8

Ho2<sub>22</sub>: There is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups' 9th grade detentions.

Ho2<sub>23</sub>: There is no difference between male and female students' 9th grade detentions.

Ho2<sub>24</sub>: There is no significant two-way gender by Bearcat treatment group interaction.

*Research Question #3.* Are there differences in the number of 9th grade extracurricular activities and promotion rates into the 10th grade based on treatment group and gender? This research question was answered with two sets of crosstabulated

tables, one set for the number of 9th grade extracurricular activities and one set for the 9th grade promotion rates into the 10th grade. Each set of crosstabulated tables had three tables: one for the overall relationship between Bearcat treatment group and the criterion variable (either number of extracurricular activities or promotion rates) and two partial tables for gender. Six null hypotheses were evaluated:

#### Ninth Grade Extracurricular Activities

- Ho3<sub>1</sub>: Overall there is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups and the number of 9th grade extracurricular activities.
- Ho3<sub>2</sub>: Among male students, there is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups and the number of 9th grade extracurricular activities.
- Ho3<sub>3</sub>: Among female students, there is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups and the number of 9th grade extracurricular activities.

#### Promotion Rates

- Ho3<sub>4</sub>: Overall there is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups and promotion rates into the 10th grade.

Ho3<sub>5</sub>: Among male students, there is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups and promotion rates into the 10th grade.

Ho3<sub>6</sub>: Among female students, there is no difference among the Bearcat treatment groups and promotion rates into the 10th grade.

### Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 describes the quantitative method study research design that was implemented to examine "The Evaluation of the Ninth Grade Bearcat "PRIDE" Program at Virginia High School. A Transition Program for At-Risk Ninth Grade Students: A Quantitative Study." The evaluation of the Bearcat "PRIDE" Transition Team was intended to present a formative assessment designed to provide the administration, school board, coordinator, and teachers with accurate data and information necessary in analyzing and improving the program. The summative assessment was designed to provide a statistical foundation for the school to develop a strategy for the program and school improvement. The evaluation of the program's purpose was to examine every possible detail through archival data to evaluate the Bearcat "PRIDE" program to benefit the students in their

pursuit of high school success, post secondary education,  
meaningful careers, and the hope of lifelong learning.

## CHAPTER 4

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The purpose of this quantitative study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Bearcat "PRIDE" Transition Program at Virginia High School, a program for at-risk students. The Bearcat "PRIDE" program was designed to provide 9th grade at-risk students the skills necessary for making a successful transition from the middle school to high school.

The quantitative indicators were GPA, Stanford 9 Reading Achievement Test scores, number of core course failures, attendance record, number of times tardy to school, and number of extra-curricular activities. Ninth grade post-treatment measures also included the number of discipline referrals (detentions), number of long-term suspensions; and 10th grade promotions.

The archival data were collected on the Bearcat "PRIDE" transition program students. The information was located by the use of the Schools Administrative Student Information (SASI), the data management system for public schools in Virginia, accepted by the Virginia State Department of Education. Data that were not accessible from SASI records were collected from student cumulative files.

### Research Question 1: Grade Point Average (GPA)

Are there differences among the three Bearcat "PRIDE" treatment groups and their 8th grade (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) performance of Grade Point Average (GPA)?

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the differences between the three Bearcat "PRIDE" groups and their 8th grade (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) GPAs. The criterion variable, GPA, was measured as the difference between the 9th and 8th grade GPAs. A positive value for the criterion variable indicated the 9th grade GPA was higher than the 8th grade GPA, while a negative value indicated the 9th grade GPA was lower than the 8th grade GPA.

There was a significant difference between the 9th and 8th grade GPAs among the groups,  $F(2, 90) = 7.81, p < .01$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The effect size, as measured by  $\eta^2$ , was large (.15). Because the overall  $F$  was significant, post hoc multiple comparisons were conducted to determine the pairwise differences among the three Bearcat "PRIDE" groups. A Tukey procedure was used because equal variances were assumed ( $F(2, 90) = .67, p = .51$ ).

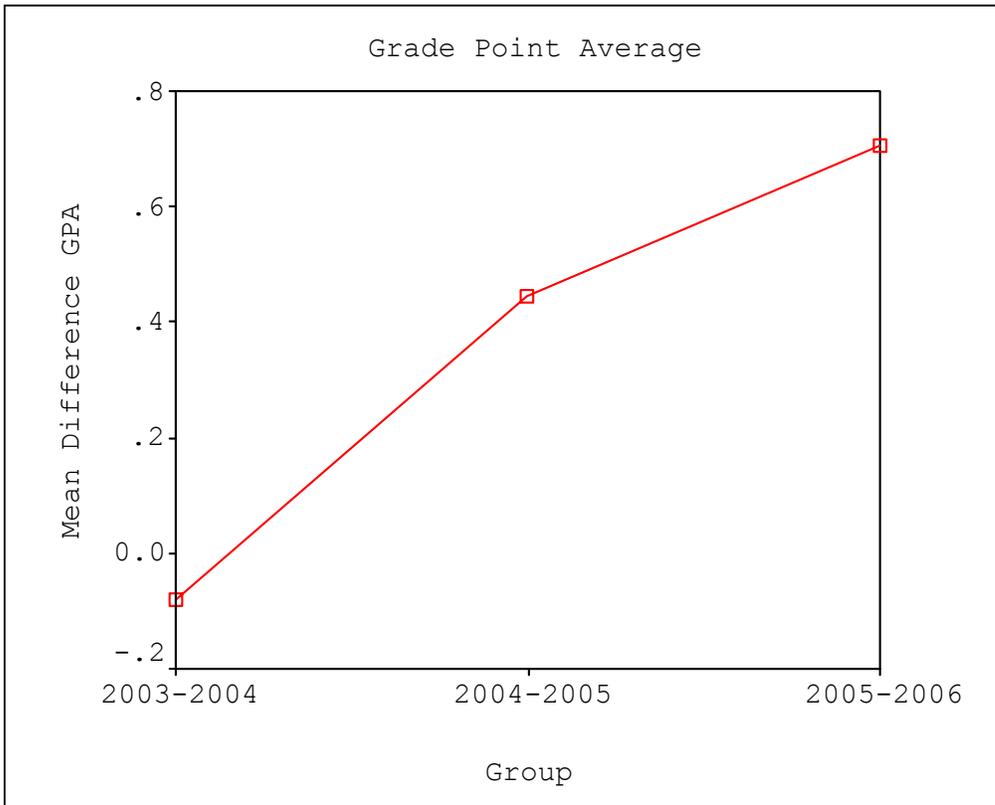
There was a significant difference between the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 groups ( $p = .05$ ) and between the 2003-2004 and

2005-2006 groups ( $p < .01$ ). There was no significant difference between the 2004-2005 group and the 2005-2006 group ( $p = .39$ ). The 9th grade GPA for the 2003-2004 group was only slightly lower than its 8th grade GPA ( $M = -.08, SD = .82$ ), while the 2004-2005 group showed an improvement of almost half a letter grade from 8th to 9th grade ( $M = .45, SD = .67$ ) and the 2005-2006 group had nearly three quarters of a letter grade improvement in GPA from the 8th to the 9th grade ( $M = .71, SD = .84$ ). The means and standard deviations of each group for 8th grade GPA, 9th grade GPA and the difference between 9th and 8th grade GPA are shown in Table 1. Figure 1 shows the line graph of the mean difference between pre-treatment and post-treatment GPA by group.

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations for Pre-Treatment and Post-Treatment GPA by Group*

Bearcat Group	<i>N</i>	8th Grade GPA (Pre)		9th Grade GPA (Post)		Difference (Post - Pre)	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2003-2004	25	1.42	.77	1.34	.75	-.08	.82
2004-2005	26	1.61	.70	2.05	.77	.45	.67
2005-2006	42	1.80	.74	2.51	.73	.71	.84
Total	93	1.64	.75	2.07	.88	.42	.85



*Figure 1.*  
Line Graph for Mean Difference between Pre-Treatment and Post-Treatment Grade Point Average by Group

### Research Question 1: Attendance

Are there differences among the three Bearcat "PRIDE" treatment groups and their 8th grade (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) attendance?

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the differences between the three Bearcat "PRIDE" groups and their 8th grade (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) attendance. The criterion variable, attendance, was measured as the difference between the 9th and 8th grade attendance. A positive value for the criterion variable indicated the 9th grade attendance was higher than the 8th grade attendance while a negative value indicated the 9th grade attendance was lower than the 8th grade attendance.

There was no significant difference in attendance among the groups,  $F(2, 89) = 1.14$ ,  $p = .33$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The effect size, as measured by  $\eta^2$ , was small (.03).

Not only were there no differences among the groups, each group showed very little difference between the 8th and 9th grade attendance records. The means and standard deviations of each group for 8th grade attendance, 9th grade attendance, and

the difference between 9th and 8th grade attendance are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*Means and Standard Deviations for Pre-Treatment and Post-Treatment Attendance by Group*

Bearcat Group	n	8th Grade Attend (Pre)		9th Grade Attend (Post)		Difference (Post - Pre)	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
2003-2004	25	160.88	14.54	158.60	16.05	-2.28	13.30
2004-2005	25	169.28	9.57	165.84	15.99	-3.44	12.92
2005-2006	42	167.05	7.95	167.60	10.42	.55	8.24
Total	92	165.98	10.91	164.67	14.10	-1.30	11.15

### Research Question 1: Number of Times Tardy

Are there differences among the three Bearcat "PRIDE" treatment groups and their 8th grade (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) number of times tardy?

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the differences between the three Bearcat "PRIDE" groups and their 8th grade (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) number of times tardy. The criterion variable, number of times tardy, was measured as the difference between the 9th and 8th grade tardies. A positive value for the criterion variable indicated the 9th grade tardies was higher than the 8th grade tardies while a negative value indicated the 9th grade tardies was lower than the 8th grade tardies.

There was a significant difference in the number of times tardy in the 8th and 9th grade among the groups,  $F(2, 89) = 4.67$ ,  $p = .01$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The effect size, as measured by  $\eta^2$ , was medium (.10). Because the overall  $F$  was significant, post hoc multiple comparisons were conducted to determine the pairwise differences among the three Bearcat "PRIDE" groups. A Tukey procedure was used because equal variances were assumed ( $F(2, 89) = 2.17$ ,  $p = .12$ ).

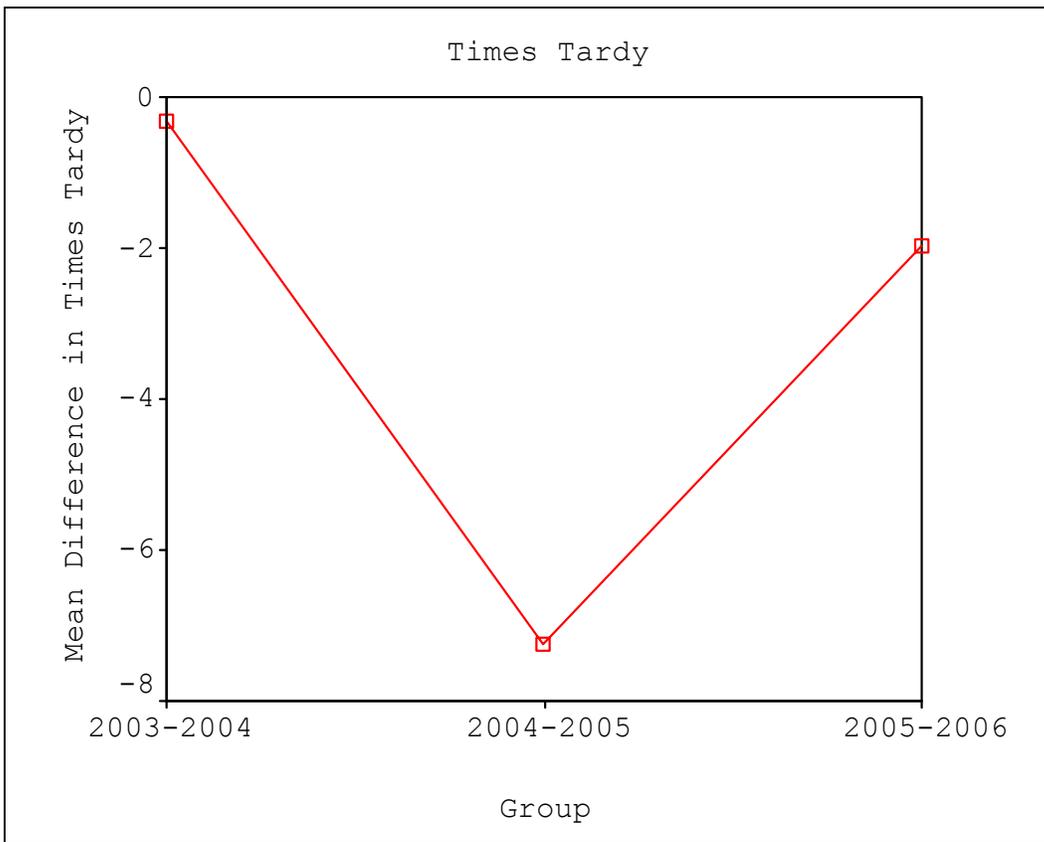
There was a significant difference between the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 groups ( $p = .01$ ) and between the 2004-2005 group and the 2005-2006 group ( $p = -.04$ ). There was no difference between 2003-2004 and 2005-2006 groups ( $p = .72$ ). While there was very little difference between the 8th and 9th grade number of times tardy for the 2003-2004 group ( $M = -.32, SD = 9.34$ ), 2004-2005 group had seven fewer tardies in the 9th grade compared to the 8th grade ( $M = -7.24, SD = 10.27$ ) while the 2005-2006 group showed almost three fewer times tardy in the 9th grade compared to the 8th grade ( $M = -1.98, SD = 6.59$ ). The means and standard deviations of each group for 8th grade tardies, 9th grade tardies and the difference between 9th and 8th grade tardies are shown in Table 3. Figure 2 shows the line graph of the mean difference between pre-treatment and post-treatment tardies by group.

Table 3

*Means and Standard Deviations for Pre-Treatment and Post-Treatment Times Tardy by Group*

Descriptive Statistics

Bearcat Group	n	8th Grade Tardy (Pre)		9th Grade Tardy (Post)		Difference (Post - Pre)	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
2003-2004	25	8.32	6.63	8.00	7.09	-.32	9.34
2004-2005	25	11.08	11.37	3.84	3.13	-7.24	10.27
2005-2006	42	5.79	5.86	3.81	5.31	-1.98	6.59
Total	92	7.91	8.13	4.96	5.66	-2.96	8.82



*Figure 2.*  
Line Graph for Mean Difference between Pre-Treatment and Post-Treatment Tardies by Group

### Research Question 1: Performance of Reading

Are there differences among the three Bearcat "PRIDE" treatment groups and their 8th grade (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) performance of reading?

A *t* test for independent samples was conducted to evaluate the differences between the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 Bearcat "PRIDE" groups and their 8th grade (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) reading. The measure of reading used in this study was the Stanford 9 Reading Achievement test that evaluates the grade level at which students read. Because reading scores were not collected during the first year of the program, the 2003-2004 Bearcat group was excluded from this analysis. The criterion variable, reading, was measured as the difference between students' 9th and 8th grade Stanford 9 Reading Achievement test scores. A positive value indicated the 9th grade reading score was higher than the 8th grade, while a negative value indicated the 9th grade reading score was lower than the 8th grade.

There was no significant difference in reading between the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 Bearcat groups,  $t(65) = .39, p = .70$  which is greater than .05. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The effect size, as measured by  $\eta^2$ , was small (<

.01). Not only was there no difference between the two groups, each group showed only minimal improvement in reading from the 8th to the 9th grade.

The means and standard deviations of each group for 8th grade reading, 9th grade reading, and the difference between 9th and 8th grade reading are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

*Means and Standard Deviations for Pre-Treatment and Post-Treatment SOL Reading by Group*

Bearcat Group	n	8th Grade Read (Pre)		9th Grade Read (Post)		Difference (Post - Pre)	
		M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
2004-2005	25	6.21	2.22	6.60	2.62	.39	1.35
2005-2006	42	6.14	1.90	6.67	2.56	.54	1.53
Total	67	6.17	2.01	6.65	2.56	.48	1.46

### Research Question 1: Performance of Course Failures

Are there differences among the three Bearcat "PRIDE" treatment groups and their 8th grade (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) performance of course failures?

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the differences between the three Bearcat "PRIDE" groups and their 8th grade (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) course failures. The criterion variable, course failures, was measured as the difference between the number of 9th and 8th grade core course failures. A positive value for the criterion variable indicated the 9th grade course failures was higher than the number of 8th grade course failures, while a negative value indicated the 9th grade course failures was lower than the 8th grade course failures.

There was no significant difference in course failures among the groups,  $F(2, 89) = 1.29, p = .28$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. The effect size, as measured by  $\eta^2$ , was small (.03). Although the find was not statistically significant, all three groups had fewer core course failures in the 9th grade as compared to the 8th grade. The means and standard deviations of each group for 8th grade course failures, 9th grade course failures, and the difference between 9th and

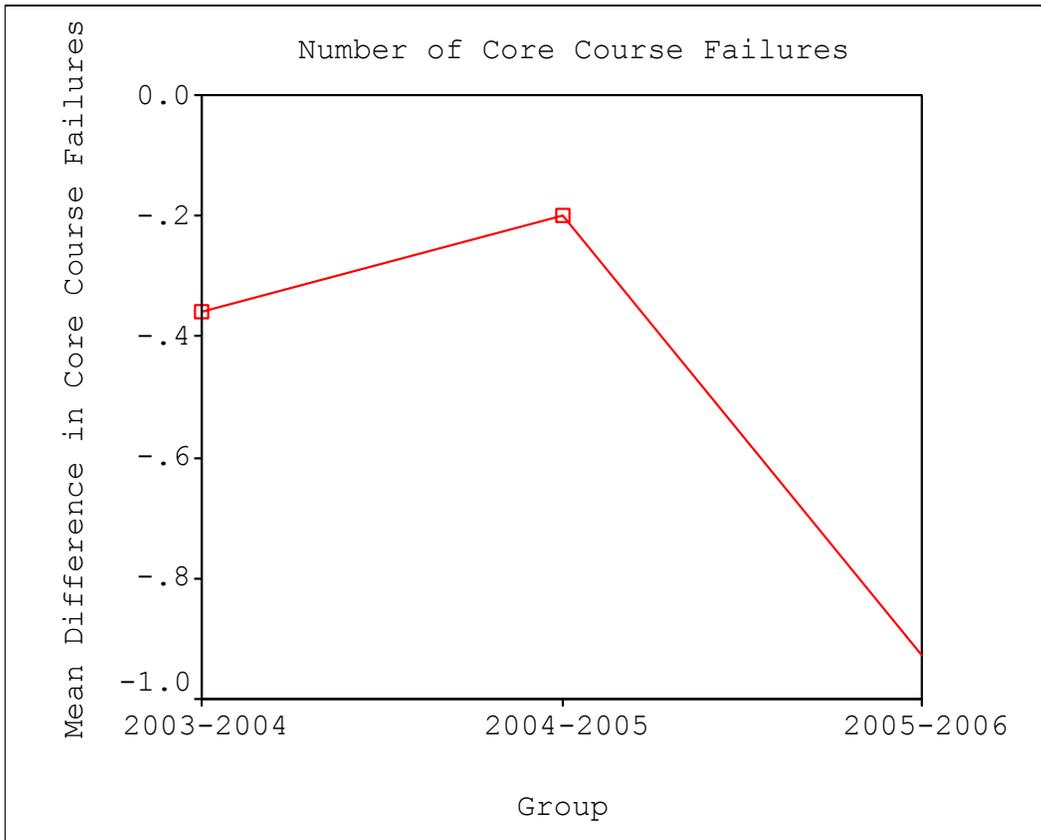
8th grade course failures are shown in Table 5. Figure 3 shows the line graph of the mean difference between pre-treatment and post-treatment course failures by group.

Table 5

*Means and Standard Deviations for Pre-Treatment and Post-Treatment Core Course Failures by Group*

Descriptive Statistics

Bearcat Group	<i>n</i>	8th Grade Failures (Pre)		9th Grade Failures (Post)		Difference (Post - Pre)	
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2003-2004	25	2.80	2.29	2.44	2.18	-.36	2.60
2004-2005	25	1.44	1.80	1.24	1.42	-.20	1.61
2005-2006	42	1.57	1.58	.64	1.01	-.93	1.70
Total	92	1.87	1.92	1.29	1.67	-.58	1.97



*Figure 3.*  
Line Graph for Mean Difference between Pre-Treatment and Post-Treatment Core Course Failures by Group

### Research Question 1: Extracurricular Activities

Are there differences among the three Bearcat "PRIDE" treatment groups and their 8th (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) extracurricular activities?

A 3 by 2 crosstabulated table was created to evaluate the differences among the three Bearcat groups and the number of pre-treatment and post-treatment extracurricular activities. To measure the difference between the number of 8th and 9th grade extracurricular activities, a variable was created that reflected: 1) no change in the number of extracurricular activities between the 8th and 9th grades and 2) the number of extracurricular activities in the 9th grade was higher than the number of extracurricular activities in the 8th grade. There were no cases in which the number of activities was higher in the 8th grade than in the 9th grade.

There was a significant difference in the groups' extracurricular activities from 8th to 9th grades,  $X^2 (2) = 10.15$ ,  $p = .01$ . The strength of the relationship, measured by Cramer's V, showed a definite relationship between the variables ( $V = .33$ ). As shown in Table 6, while only 8% of the students in 2003-2004 group had one or two more activities in the 9th grade than they did in the 8th grade, 44% of the 2004-2005 group and

42.9% of the 2005-2006 group had one or two more activities in the 9th grade than in the 8th grade.

Table 6

*Crosstabulated Table for Pre and Post-Treatment Extracurricular Activities by Bearcat Group*

Extracurricular Activities	2003-2004		2004-2005		2005-2006	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
No change in # of activities between 8th and 9th grades	23	92.0	14	56.0	24	57.1
1 - 2 more activities in 9th	2	8.0	11	44.0	18	42.9
Total	25	100.0	25	100.0	42	100.0

## Research Question 2: GPA, Group by Gender

Two way ANOVA was used to evaluate differences in 9th grade Grade Point Averages between the three Bearcat groups and gender. The two-way interaction for group by gender was not significant,  $F(2, 88) = .13, p = .88$ . In addition, there were no significant difference in the 9th grade GPA means of males and females,  $F(1, 88) = .71, p = .40$ . However, there was a significant difference in the 9th grade GPAs of the Bearcat groups,  $F(2, 88) = 18.21, P < .01$ . The effect size, as measured by  $\eta^2$  was large (.29).

Because the overall  $F$  for group was significant, the Tukey post hoc test was conducted to determine which pairwise Bearcat group GPA means were different. The Tukey procedure was chosen because equal variances were assumed,  $F(5, 88) = .73, p = .61$ .

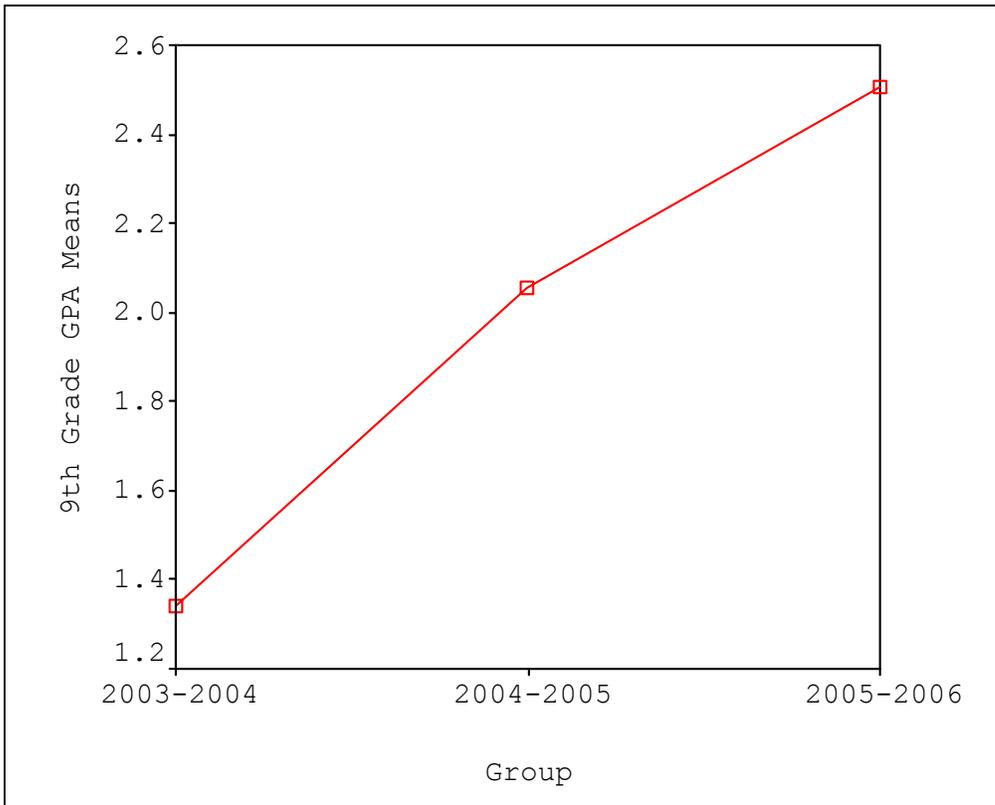
There were significant differences in the 9th grade GPA means of the Bearcat 2003-2004 group and the 2004-2005 group ( $p < .01$ ), and between the 2003-2004 and 2005-2006 groups ( $p < .01$ ). The GPA mean for the 2003-2004 group was .71 points lower than the mean for the 2004-2005 group and 1.16 points lower than the 2005-2006 Bearcat group. In addition, there was a significant difference between the 9th grade GPA means of the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 Bearcat groups ( $p = .05$ ). The mean for

the 2005-2006 was .45 points higher than the 2004-2005 group. The means and standard deviations for the 9th grade GPAs by Bearcat group and gender are shown in Table 7. Figure 4 shows the plot of 9th grade GPA means by Bearcat group.

Table 7

*Means and Standard Deviations for Ninth Grade GPA by Bearcat Group and Gender*

Group	Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2003-2004	Male	11	1.200	.590
	Female	14	1.450	.860
	Total	25	1.340	.749
2004-2005	Male	12	2.033	.591
	Female	14	2.071	.911
	Total	26	2.054	.765
2005-2006	Male	15	2.427	.721
	Female	28	2.546	.727
	Total	43	2.505	.718
Total	Male	38	1.947	.810
	Female	56	2.154	.915
	Population Total	94	2.070	.875



*Figure 4.*  
Plot of 9th Grade GPA Means by Bearcat Group

## Research Question 2: Stanford 9 Reading Scores, Group by Gender

Two-way ANOVA was used to evaluate differences in 9th grade Stanford 9 reading scores between the three Bearcat groups and gender. The two-way interaction for group by gender was not significant,  $F(1,65) = 1.16, p = .29$ . In addition, there was no significant difference between the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 groups,  $F(1,65) = .01, p = .94$ . The effect size was very small ( $<.001$ ). There was no difference between males and females,  $F(1,65) = .22, p = .64$ . The effect size was small ( $<.01$ ).

Table 8

*Means and Standard Deviations for 9th Grade SOL Reading by Group and Gender*

Group	Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2004-2005	Male	12	7.09	3.18
	Female	14	6.08	1.95
	Total	26	6.55	2.59
2005-2006	Male	15	6.33	2.65
	Female	28	6.74	2.57
	Total	43	6.60	2.58
Total	Male	27	6.67	2.87
	Female	42	6.52	2.38
	Total Population	69	6.577	2.563

### Research Question 2: Attendance, Group by Gender

Two way ANOVA was used to evaluate differences in 9th grade Attendance between the three Bearcat groups and gender. The two-way interaction for group by gender was not significant,  $F(2,88) = 1.00$   $p = .37$ . In addition, there were no significant difference in the 9th grade attendance between males and females,  $F(1,88) = .13$ ,  $p = .72$ . The effect size was very small ( $<.01$ ). However, there was a significant difference among the groups,  $F(2,88) = 3.37$ ,  $P = .04$ . The effect size was medium (.07).

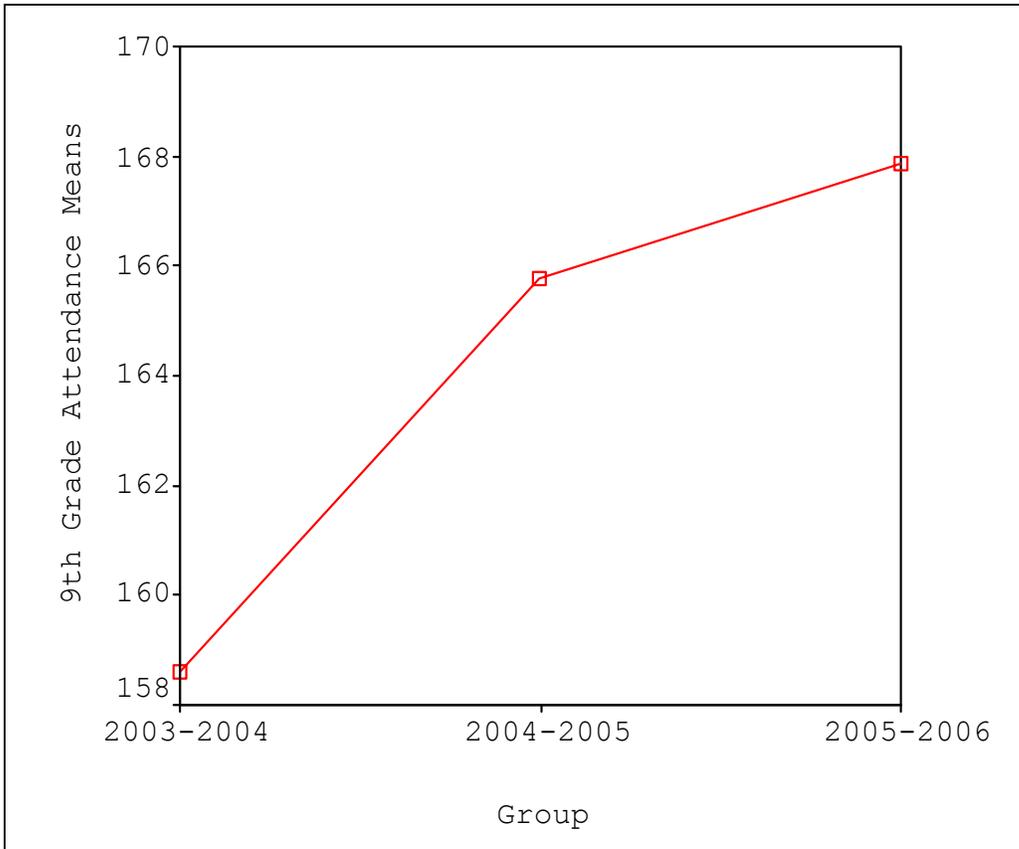
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances showed equal variances could not be assumed,  $F(5,88) = 2.69$ ,  $p = .03$ . Therefore, the Tamhane post hoc test was used to determine which pair of group means was different.

Table 9

*Descriptive Statistics for 9th Grade Attendance by Group and Gender*

Group	Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2003-2004	Male	11	158.18	17.80
	Female	14	158.93	15.21
	Total	25	158.60	16.05
2004-2005	Male	12	169.42	12.31
	Female	14	162.64	17.93
	Total	26	165.77	15.67
2005-2006	Male	15	166.00	9.34
	Female	28	168.86	11.02
	Total	43	167.86	10.44
Total	Male	38	164.82	13.57
	Female	56	164.82	14.44
	Population Total	94	164.82	14.02

There was no difference between the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 groups ( $p = .30$ ). However, the mean 9th grade attendance for the 2004-2005 group was higher than the attendance mean for the 2003-2004 group. There was a significant difference between the 2003-2004 and 2005-2006 groups ( $p = .04$ ). The mean attendance for the 2005-2006 group was higher than the mean for the 2003-2004 group. There was no significant difference in the attendance of the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 groups ( $p = .91$ ).



*Figure 5.*  
Plot of 9th Grade Attendance by Group by Gender

Research Question 2: Number of Times Tardy to School,

Group by Gender

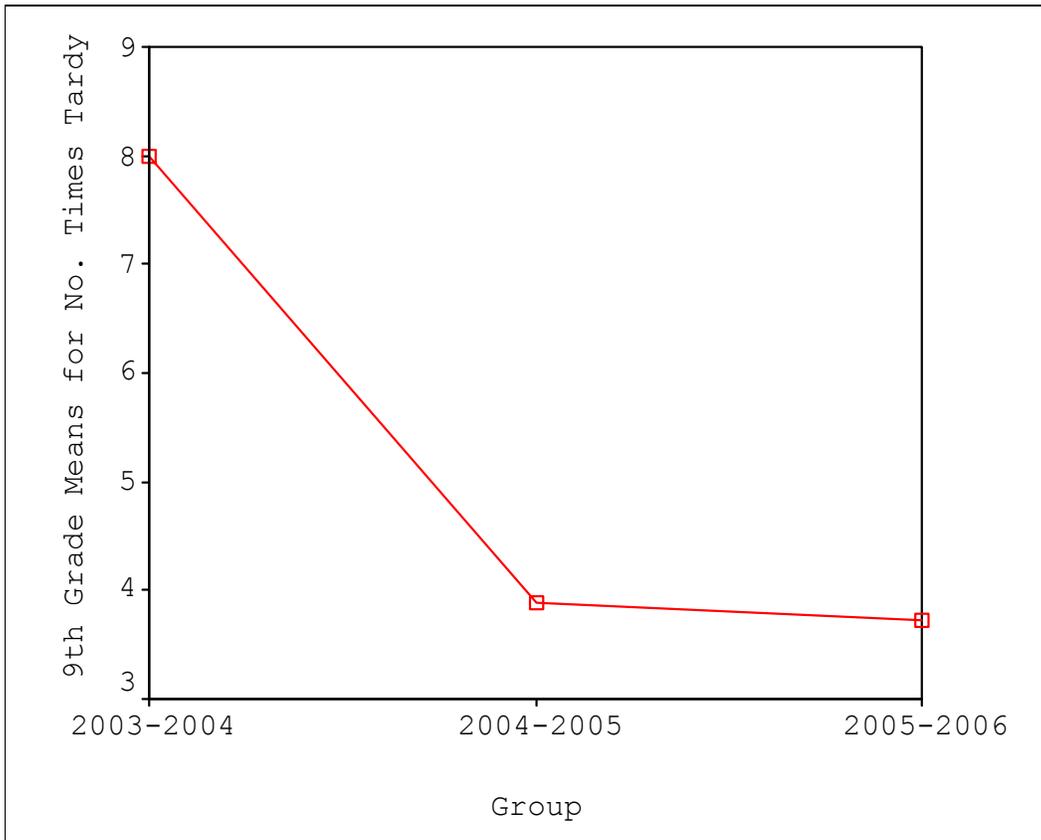
Two-way ANOVA was used to evaluate differences in 9th grade Number of Times Tardy to School between the three Bearcat groups and gender. The two-way interaction for group by gender was not significant,  $F(2,88) = .88, p = .42$ . In addition, there was no significant difference between males and females,  $F(1,88) = 2.99, p = .09$ . The effect size was small (.03). There was a significant difference among the groups,  $F(2,88) = 6.01, p < .01$ . The effect size was moderate (.12).

Because the overall  $F$  for the group was significant, post hoc tests were conducted to evaluate the pairwise differences between the group means. The Tamhane post hoc procedure was chosen because equal variances were not assumed,  $F(5,88) = 5.11, p < .01$ .

Table 10

*Means and Standard Deviations for 9th Grade Number of Times  
Tardy by Group and Gender*

Group	Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2003-2004	Male	11	6.27	3.10
	Female	14	9.36	9.00
	Total	25	8.00	7.09
2004-2005	Male	12	4.00	3.16
	Female	14	3.79	3.12
	Total	26	3.88	3.08
2005-2006	Male	15	1.73	1.79
	Female	28	4.79	6.19
	Total	43	3.72	5.28
Total	Male	38	3.76	3.22
	Female	56	5.68	6.71
	Population Total	94	4.90	5.62



*Figure 6.*  
Plot of 9th Grade Number of Times Tardy by Group and Gender

Research Question 2: Number of Core Course Failures,  
Group by Gender

Two-way ANOVA was used to evaluate differences in 9th grade Number of Core Course Failures between the three Bearcat groups and gender. The two-way interaction for group by gender was not significant,  $F(1,88) = .17, p = .86$ . In addition, there was no significant difference between males and females,  $F(1,88) = .03, p = .86$ . The effect size was very small ( $<.001$ ). There was a significant difference among the groups,  $F(2,88) = 10.20, p = <.01$ . The effect size was large (.19).

Because the overall  $F$  for the group was significant, post hoc tests were conducted to evaluate the pairwise differences between the group means. The Tamhane post hoc procedure was chosen because equal variances were not assumed,  $F(5,88) = 5.95, p <.01$ .

Table 11

*Means and Standard Deviations for Number of 9th Grade Core  
Course Failures by Group and Gender*

Group	Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2003-2004	Male	11	2.27	1.85
	Female	14	2.57	2.47
	Total	25	2.44	2.18
2004-2005	Male	12	1.25	1.06
	Female	14	1.29	1.68
	Total	26	1.27	1.40
2005-2006	Male	15	.73	1.10
	Female	28	.57	.96
	Total	43	.63	1.00
Total	Male	38	1.34	1.46
	Female	56	1.25	1.80
	Total Population	94	1.29	1.66



*Figure 7.*  
Plot of 9th Grade Core Course Failures by Group and Gender

Research Question 2: Number of In-School Suspensions,  
Group by Gender

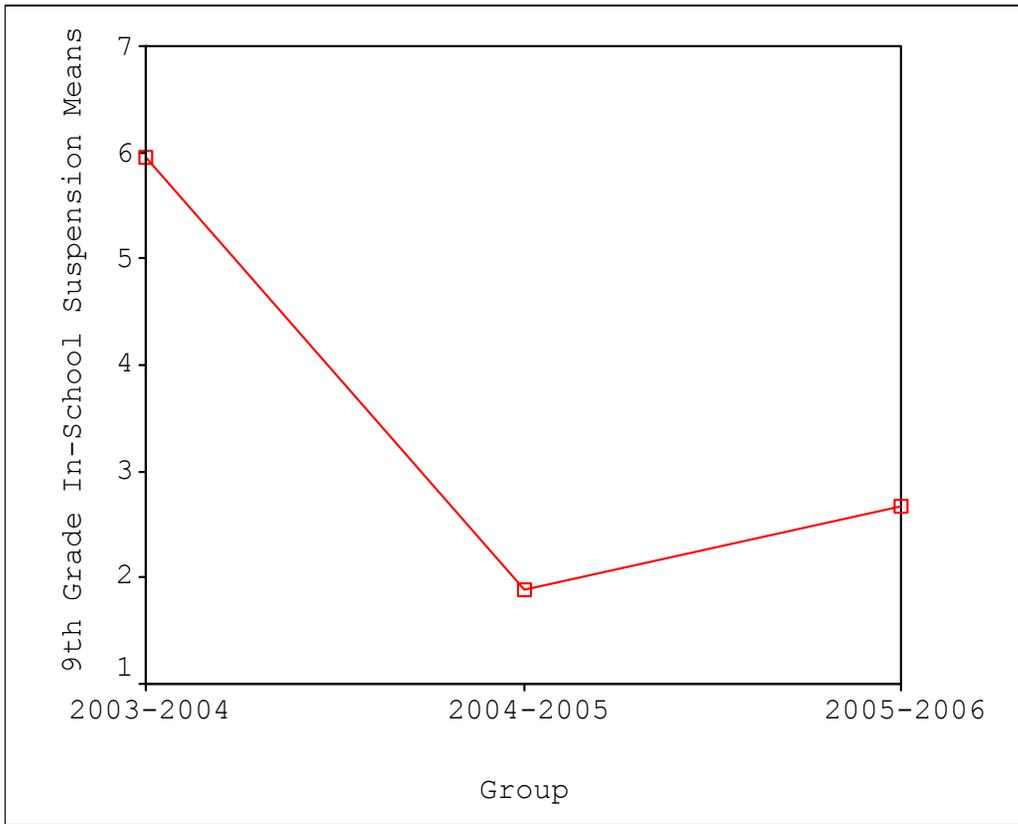
Two-way ANOVA was used to evaluate differences in 9th grade Number of In-School Suspensions between the three Bearcat groups and gender. The two-way interaction for group by gender was not significant,  $F(2,88) = .50, p = .61$ . In addition, there was no difference between males and females,  $F(1,88) = 1.99, p = .16$ . The effect size was small (.02). There was a significant difference among the groups,  $F(2,88) = 6.81, p < .01$ . The effect size was moderate (.13).

Because the overall  $F$  for the group was significant, post hoc multiple comparisons were conducted to determine which pair of group means was different. The Tamhane post hoc procedure was chosen because equal variances were not assumed,  $F(5,88) = 3.83, p < .01$ .

Table 12

*Means and Standard Deviations for Number of 9th Grade In-School Suspensions by Group and Gender*

Group	Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2003-2004	Male	11	7.45	6.38
	Female	14	4.79	5.90
	Total	25	5.96	6.13
2004-2005	Male	12	2.25	2.60
	Female	14	1.57	3.52
	Total	26	1.88	3.09
2005-2006	Male	15	3.07	3.73
	Female	28	2.46	3.65
	Total	43	2.67	3.64
Total	Male	38	4.08	4.81
	Female	56	2.82	4.37
	Total Population	94	3.33	4.57



*Figure 8.*  
Plot of 9th Grade In-School Suspensions by Group and Gender

Research Question 2: Number of Out-of-School Suspensions,  
Group by Gender

Two-way ANOVA was used to evaluate differences in 9th grade Number of Out-of-School Suspensions between the three Bearcat groups and gender. The two-way interaction for group by gender was not significant,  $F(2,88) = .67, p = .51$ . In addition, there was no difference between group means for 9th grade out-of-school suspensions,  $F(2,88) = 1.28, p = .28$ . The effect size was small (.03). There was no difference in the number of out-of-school suspensions between males and females,  $F(1,88) = 2.22, p = .14$ . The effect size was small (.03).

Table 13

*Means and Standard Deviations for 9th Grade Out-of-School  
Suspensions by Group and Gender*

Group	Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2003-2004	Male	11	1.82	1.54
	Female	14	1.57	2.14
	Total	25	1.68	1.86
2004-2005	Male	12	1.08	1.38
	Female	14	.79	1.48
	Total	26	.92	1.41
2005-2006	Male	15	1.73	2.46
	Female	28	.61	1.31
	Total	43	1.00	1.85
Total	Male	38	1.55	1.90
	Female	56	.89	1.61
	Population Total	94	1.16	1.76

## Research Question 2: Number of Detentions, Group by Gender

The two-way interaction for group by gender was significant,  $F(2, 88) = 8.78, p = <.01$ . Significant interaction means that the effect of a given factor on the criterion variable is dependent on levels of the other factor in the model. As such, it is inappropriate to evaluate a factor (also called a main effect) in isolation of the other factor. Instead, it is proper to evaluate the nature of the interaction.

As shown in Table 14, there was a substantial difference between the means for male and female students in the 2003-2004 Bearcat group. The mean number of detentions for males in the 2003-2004 group ( $M = 13.73, SD = 8.56$ ) was 9.16 points higher than the means for females ( $M = 4.57, SD = 3.56$ ). However, the mean number of detentions for males in the 2004-2005 group ( $M = 3.58, SD = 4.62$ ) was only 1.22 points higher than the mean for females ( $M = 2.36, SD = 2.31$ ). In the 2005-2006 group, the mean number of detentions for females ( $M = 4.57, SD = 4.53$ ) was .7 points higher than the mean for males in 2005-2006 ( $M = 3.87, SD = 3.16$ ). Furthermore, not only did the gap between males and females diminish over the 3-year period, there was a rather substantial drop in the overall mean number of detentions from the 2003-2004 program ( $M = 8.60, SD = 7.75$ ) to the 2004-2005

Bearcat program ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = 3.54$ ) and the 2005-2006 program ( $M = 4.33$ ,  $SD = 4.08$ ). Figure 9 shows the plot of 9th grade detention means by group and gender.

Table 14

*Means and Standard Deviations for 9th Grade Detentions by Group and Gender*

Group	Gender	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2003-2004	Male	11	13.73	8.56
	Female	14	4.57	3.86
	Total	25	8.60	7.75
2004-2005	Male	12	3.58	4.62
	Female	14	2.36	2.31
	Total	26	2.92	3.54
2005-2006	Male	15	3.87	3.16
	Female	28	4.57	4.53
	Total	43	4.33	4.08
Total	Male	38	6.63	7.14
	Female	56	4.02	3.97
	Population Total	94	5.07	5.59



Figure 9.  
Plot of 9th Grade Detention Means by Group and Gender

Research Question 2: Promotion Rates into 10th Grade,  
Group by Gender

Two-way ANOVA was used to evaluate differences in 9th grade Number of Promotions between the three Bearcat groups and gender. There was a significant difference in the promotion rates between the groups,  $X^2 (2) = 25.63, p < .01$ . The strength of the relationship between the variables, as measured by Cramer's  $V$ , was moderate (.52). As shown in Table 15, only 44% of students in the 2003-2004 group were promoted, compared to almost 85% of the students in the 2004-2005 group and 95% of the students in the 2005-2006 group.

Table 15

*Crosstabulated Table for Promotion into 10th Grade by Group*

	2003-2004		2004-2005		2005-2006	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Promoted						
No	14	56.0	4	15.4	2	4.7
Yes	11	44.0	22	84.6	41	95.3
Total	25	100.0	26	100.0	43	100.0

Differences Between the Groups for Males Only

Table 16

*Crosstabulated Table of Male Promotion Rates by Group*

	2003-2004		2004-2005		2005-2006	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
No	7	63.6	0	0.0	2	13.3
Yes	4	36.4	12	100.0	13	86.7
Total	11	100.0	12	100.0	15	100.0

Differences Between the Groups for Females Only

Table 17

*Crosstabulated Table of Female Promotion Rates by Group*

Promoted	2003-2004		2004-2005		2005-2006	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
No	7	50.0	4	28.6	0	0.0
Yes	7	50.0	10	71.4	28	100.0
Total	14	100.0	14	100.0	28	100.0

### Research Question 3: Ninth Grade Extracurricular Activities

Are there differences in the number of 9th grade extracurricular activities into the 10th grade based on treatment group and gender?

Three crosstabulated tables were used to evaluate the differences in the number of 9th grade extracurricular activities based on treatment group and gender: an overall table and two partial tables for gender. In each table the number of extracurricular activities had two levels: 1) no extracurricular activities and 2) one or more extracurricular activities.

Overall, there was a significant difference in the groups and the number of extracurricular activities in the 9th grade,  $X^2 (2) = 15.19, p < .01$ . The strength of the relationship, as measured by Cramer's  $V$ , was moderate (.40). As shown in Table 18, only 12% of the 2003-2004 Bearcat group had at least one extracurricular activity in the 9th grade, while 42.3% of the students in the 2004-2005 and 60.5% of the students in the 2005-2006 group had one or more extracurricular activities in the 9th grade.

Table 18

*Crosstabulated Table for Ninth Grade Extracurricular Activities  
by Bearcat Group*

9th Grade Extra. Activities	2003-2004		2004-2005		2005-2006	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
None	22	88.0	15	57.7	17	39.5
1 or 2	3	12.0	11	42.3	26	60.5
Total	25	100.0	26	100.0	43	100.0

The partial crosstabulated tables for males showed there was a violation of the assumption of Chi Square. Therefore, the null hypothesis for males was not tested. However, as shown in Table 19, among male students, only 9.1% of the 2003-2004 Bearcat group had one or more extracurricular activities in the 9th grade, while 41.7% of 2004-2005 and 53.3% of the 2005-2006 Bearcat groups had one or more extracurricular activities in the 9th grade.

Table 19

*Partial Crosstabulated Table for Extracurricular Activities by Bearcat Group for Male Students*

9th Grade Extra. Activities	2003-2004		2004-2005		2005-2006	
	Males		Males		Males	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
None	10	90.9	7	58.3	7	46.7
1 or 2	1	9.1	5	41.7	8	53.3
Total	11	100.0	12	100.0	15	100.0

Among female students, there was a significant difference among the Bearcat groups and their 9th grade extracurricular activities,  $X^2 (2) = 9.48, p = .01$ . Cramer's *V* indicated that the strength of the relationship was moderate (.41). As shown in Table 20, among female students, only 14.3% of the 2003-2004 Bearcat group had one or more extracurricular activities in the 9th grade, while 42.9% of 2004-2005 and 64.3% of the 2005-2006 Bearcat groups had one or more extracurricular activities in the 9th grade.

Table 20

*Partial Crosstabulated Table for Extracurricular Activities by Bearcat Group for Female Students*

9th Grade Extra. Activities	2003-2004 Females		2004-2005 Females		2005-2006 Females	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
None	12	85.7	8	57.1	10	35.7
1 or 2	2	14.3	6	42.9	18	64.3
Total	14	100.0	14	100.0	28	100.0

### Research Question 3: Ninth Grade Promotion Rates

Are there differences in the number of 9th grade promotion rates into the 10th grade based on treatment group and gender?

Three crosstabulated tables were used to evaluate the promotion rates of the three Bearcat groups: an overall table and two partial tables for gender. Overall, there was a significant difference in the promotion rates between the groups,  $X^2 (2) = 25.63, p < .01$ . The strength of the relationship between the variables, as measured by Cramer's  $V$ , was moderate (.52). As shown in Table 21, only 44% of students in the 2003-2004 group were promoted, compared to almost 85% of the students in the 2004-2005 and 95% of the students in the 2005-2006.

Table 21

*Crosstabulated Table for Promotion Rates by Group*

	2003-2004		2004-2005		2005-2006	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Promoted						
No	14	56.0	4	15.4	2	4.7
Yes	11	44.0	22	84.6	41	95.3
Total	25	100.0	26	100.0	43	100.0

The partial tables for males and females both showed violations of the assumption of Chi Square. Therefore, the null hypotheses were not tested.

As shown in Table 22, the promotion rate for males in the 2003-2004 Bearcat group was only 36.4%, while the promotion rate was 100% for males in the 2004-2005 and 86.7% for males in the 2005-2006 Bearcat groups.

Table 22

*Partial Crosstabulated Table for Promotion Rates by Bearcat Group for Male Students*

	2003-2004		2004-2005		2005-2006	
	Males		Males		Males	
Promoted	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
No	7	63.6	0	0.0	2	13.3
Yes	4	36.4	12	100.0	13	86.7
Total	11	100.0	12	100.0	15	100.0

Table 23 shows the promotion rates for female students by Bearcat group. The promotion rate for females in the 2003-2004 group was only 50%, compared to 71.4% of female students in the 2004-2005 group and 100% for female students in the 2005-2006 Bearcat group.

Table 23

*Partial Crosstabulated Table for Promotion Rates by Bearcat  
Group for Female Students*

Promoted	2003-2004 Females		2004-2005 Females		2005-2006 Females	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
No	7	50.0	4	28.6	0	0.0
Yes	7	50.0	10	71.4	28	100.0
Total	14	100.0	14	100.0	28	100.0

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the findings of the research questions, conclusions, recommendations for the high school staff for program development, and implications for future research. The evaluation of the Bearcat "PRIDE" Transition program was intended to evaluate the effectiveness of the Bearcat "PRIDE" Transition Program at Virginia High School, a program for at-risk students. Additionally, the study was designed to present a formative assessment designed to provide the administration, school board, coordinator, and teachers with accurate data necessary in analyzing and improving the program. The summative assessment is designed to provide a statistical foundation for the school and other transition programs for at-risk students with similar demographics and goals to develop a strategy for the program and school improvement.

The data provided by this study are sufficient to determine the effectiveness of the Bearcat "PRIDE" Transition Program at Virginia High School. The data provided for this study was sufficient to determine if the program intervention were successful in increasing students GPA's, increased literacy skills, increase school attendance, reducing core class

failures, increased participation in extra-curricular activities, reducing disciplinary actions, and determining the differences in gender comparisons.

#### Statement of the Problem

There is ample research and theory pertaining to the negative impact of the transition process and the effects on students' ability to make a successful transition to high school. The literature review highlighted the difficult transition to high school (Walsh, 2002) and (Eccles et al., 1993); the effects of the transition process on student self-esteem and self-perception (Alspaugh, 1998; Reents, 2002); the difficult nature of the transition process on academic success for at-risk students (Hertzog and Morgan, 1998; Reents); and, the lack of parental involvement in the students' educational development (International Center for Leadership in Education, 2005; Epstein, 1995; Newman, 2000); and the effects of an impoverished environment on student success and the transition process (Mayer et al., 2000). The researcher's purpose in this study was to augment previous research by presenting additional data pertinent to the field of study.

In this study, at-risk students were defined as 8th grade students who had been unsuccessful in a traditional school

setting and who might benefit academically from a smaller, nontraditional school environment, are at risk for leaving school or graduating below potential, are overage for the grade level for a variety of reasons (e.g., failed grade(s), medical reasons); and-or have chronic problems of attendance and-or discipline (Virginia Department of Education, 2006).

### Review of Methodology

The "Evaluation of the Ninth Grade Transition Program for At-Risk Students" employed a quantitative research method approach using archival data to address the research questions of this study. The quantitative indicators were GPA, Stanford 9 Reading Achievement Test scores, number of core course failures, attendance record, number of times tardy to school, and number of extra-curricular activities. Ninth grade post treatment measures also included the number of discipline referrals (detentions), number of long-term suspensions; and 10th grade promotions.

Three research questions were used to guide this study. In order to answer Research Question #1, each criterion variable was measured as the difference between students' 9th and 8th grade performance. One-way ANOVAs (or the  $t$  test for independent samples for  $H_{012}$ ) were used to compare the mean differences among

the Bearcat treatment groups. In order to answer Research Question #2, eight two-way ANOVAs were conducted, one for each of the nine 9th grade criterion variables. The two factors used in each two-way ANOVA model were Bearcat treatment group and gender. Each two-way ANOVA model tested three null hypotheses: two for the main effects of Bearcat treatment group and gender, and one null hypothesis for the group by gender 2-way interaction. In order to answer Research Question #3, two sets of crosstabulated tables were used, one set for the number of 9th grade extracurricular activities and one set for the 9th grade promotion rates into the 10th grade. Each set of crosstabulated tables had three tables: one for the overall relationship between Bearcat treatment group and the criterion variable (either number of extracurricular activities or promotion rates) and two partial tables for gender. The data were collected onsite at the end of the 3-year duration that was the basis for the quantitative comparisons.

## Findings

*Research Question 1.* Are there differences among the three Bearcat "PRIDE" treatment groups and their 8th grade (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) performance on the following six measures: (a) GPA, (b) Stanford 9 Reading scores, (c) Attendance, (d) Number of Times Tardy to School, (e) Number of Core Course Failures, and (f) the Number of Extra-curricular Activities?

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the differences between the three Bearcat "PRIDE" groups and their 8th grade (pre-treatment) and 9th grade (post-treatment) in GPAs, Attendance, Number of Times Tardy to School, and Number of Core Course Failures. A t test was used to evaluate Stanford 9 Reading scores. A 3 by 2 crosstabulated table was used to evaluate the number of extra-curricular activities.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted for GPAs and was significant,  $F(2,90) = 7.81, p < .01$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the effect size was large (.15). A one-way ANOVA was conducted for Attendance was not significant,  $F(2,89) = 1.14, p = .33$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted and the effect size was small (.03). A one-way ANOVA was conducted for the Number of Times Tardy,  $F(2,89) = 4.67, p = .01$ .

Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and effect size was medium (.10). A one-way ANOVA was conducted for the Number of Core Course Failures and was not significant,  $F(2,89) = 1.29$ ,  $p = .28$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained and the effect size was small (.03). A  $t$  test was conducted for Stanford 9 Reading scores  $t(65) = .39$ ,  $p = .70$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained and the effect size was small ( $<.01$ ). A 3 by 2 crosstabulated table for the Number of Extra-curricular Activities was conducted and was significant,  $X^2(2) = 10.15$ ,  $p = .01$ . Therefore, the strength of the relationship showed a definite relationship between the variables ( $V = .33$ ).

There were significant differences found between groups 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 in three of the six areas. The research found significant improvement in student performance of GPA, reduction of the Number of Core Course Failures, and the Number of Extra-curricular Activities participation. The research found no significant or minimal differences in Stanford 9 Reading scores, Attendance, and the Number of Times Tardy to School.

The differences between the 8th and 9th grade GPA, reduction of Number of Core Course Failures, and the Number of Extra-curricular Activities participation could be attributed to

support and implementation of the transition program, smaller learning community, study skills classes, literacy curriculum, academic and career counseling, after-school and summer programs, teacher mentoring, character education classes, monitoring of student agenda books, motivational strategies, and parent programs and involvement. The increased participation in extra-curricular activities could be attributed to parental involvement and the encouragement of the faculty to promote participation in after-school programs.

The data showed there were little or no differences in Stanford 9 Reading scores, Attendance, and the Number of Times Tardy to School. The lack of student improvement in Attendance and the Number of Times Tardy to School could be a result of the ineffectiveness of the parent programs and involvement. Student and family illnesses were also factors in the lack of improvement in attendance and the number of times tardy to school. In regard to Stanford 9 Reading scores, there was minimal improvement but not to the level anticipated. This could be due to the curriculum and lack of teacher staff development programs in teaching literacy for at-risk students (Bianccarosa and Snow, 2004).

*Research Question 2:* Is there a difference between males

and females in the three treatment groups and their 9th grade (post-treatment) measures on: (a) GPA, (b) Stanford 9 Reading scores, (c) Attendance, (d) Number of Times Tardy to School, (e) Number of Core Course Failures, (f) Number of In-school Suspensions, (g) Number of Out-of-school Suspensions, (h) Number of Detentions, (i) Number of Extra-curricular Activities, and (j) Promotion Rates into the 10th Grade?

Research Question 2 addressed the differences in GPA, Stanford 9 Reading scores, Attendance, Number of Times Tardy to School, Number of Core Course Failures, Number of In-school Suspensions, Number of Out-of-school Suspensions, Number of Detentions, Number of Extra-curricular Activities, and Promotion Rates into the 10th Grade. Two-way ANOVAs were conducted to evaluate the differences.

There were differences between gender in GPA, Detentions, and Promotion Rates into the 10th Grade. The two-way ANOVA conducted for GPAs was significant in the difference of means between males and females. Each gender continually improved its grade point averages. The male group mean in 2003-2004 was 1.200, 2004-2005 was 2.033, and 2005-2006 was 2.427. The female group mean in 2003-2004 was 1.450, 2004-2005 was 2.071, and 2005-2006 was 2.546. These data show a continual improvement in

male and female student GPA. The male group total GPA average for the 3-year study was 1.947 and the female group was 2.154, which indicated the female group outperformed the male group during the study.

The two-way ANOVA conducted for Number of Detentions was significant in the differences of means between males and females. Not only did the gap between males and females diminish over the 3-year period, there was a rather substantial drop in the overall mean number of detentions from the 2003-2004 program to the 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 programs.

A two-way ANOVA for Promotion Rates into the 10th grade was significant in the difference of means between males and females. Only 44% of the students in the 2003-2004 program were promoted compared to 85% of the 2004-2005 group and 95% of the 2005-2006 group.

There were no differences between gender in Stanford 9 Reading scores, Attendance, Number of Times Tardy to School, Number of Core Course Failures, and Number of In-school and Out-of-school Suspensions. The two-way ANOVA conducted for Stanford 9 Reading scores indicated there was no significant difference of means between males and females. The effect size was small ( $<.01$ ).

The two-way ANOVA conducted for Attendance indicated there was no significant difference of means between males and females. The effect size was small ( $<.01$ ) in the 2004-2005 group and the effect size as medium (.07) in the 2005-2006 group.

The two-way ANOVA for Number of Times Tardy to School indicated there was no significant difference of means between males and females. The effect size was small (.03).

The two-way ANOVA for Number of Core Course Failures indicated there was no significant difference of means between males and females. The effect size was very small ( $<.001$ ).

The two-way ANOVA for Number of In-school Suspensions indicated there was no significant difference of means between males and females. The effect size was small (.02).

The two-way ANOVA for Number of Out-of-school Suspensions indicated there was no significant difference of means between males and females. The effect size was small (.03).

The program and curriculum were designed to meet the needs of all students, male and female, and not target gender differences. Differences could be attributed to parental involvement of individual students. Thus, the results would indicate how each gender responded to the remediation methods prescribed and implemented by the Bearcat "PRIDE" team.

*Research Question 3:* Are there differences in the number of 9th grade extracurricular activities and promotion rates into the 10th grade based on treatment group and gender?

Three crosstabulated tables were used to evaluate the differences in the Number of Extra-curricular Activities based on treatment group and gender. There was a significant difference in groups and number of extra-curricular activities in the 9th grade,  $X^2 (2) = 15.19, p < .01$ . Only 12% of the 2003-2004 Bearcat group had at least one extracurricular activity in the 9th grade, while 42.3% of the students in the 2004-2005 and 60.5% of the students in the 2005-2006 group had one or more extracurricular activities in the 9th grade.

Among male students, only 9.1% of the 2003-2004 group had one or more extracurricular activities, while 41.7% of the 2004-2005 and 53.3% of the 2005-2006 Bearcat group had one or more extracurricular activities in the 9th grade.

The data showed there were significant increases in extracurricular activities throughout the 3-year study. This could be attributed to parental involvement and the staff's perseverance in promoting the participation in extracurricular activities. Furthermore, the sponsors of extracurricular

activities supported the Bearcat "PRIDE" program and the benefits for individual students and the school's success.

#### Program Evaluation

The administration and staff at Virginia High School deserve commendation for accepting the challenge to address the freshman problem. The transition team and school staff realized through data analysis that freshmen were being retained because of high absenteeism, discipline referrals, suspensions, and core course failures. The proactive approach employed by the school to address the educational and social challenges of freshman students had a positive impact and provided a foundation for cultural change during the 3-year study. The program at Virginia High School was an effective method to address the needs of freshman transition at-risk students.

#### Implications for the Educational Community

A single case study would be unable to provide the foundation for the implementation of a transition program for at-risk students in high schools across the country. Each educational community has cultural differences that would need to be addressed in order to fully implement a transition program. Programs such as the Bearcat "PRIDE" transition program for at-risk students could provide the foundation for programs

with similar goals. Many of the methodologies employed by the Virginia High School staff could be used as a guide to implement other programs. Successful components of the Bearcat "PRIDE" program that could be considered in developing transition programs are implementation of modified block schedule; weekly staff meetings; cross-curriculum training; instructional curriculum development that engages student learning with relevance and rigor; adult and student mentoring programs; staff training in effective classroom management; strong literacy development; and, most importantly, the implementation of in-depth parental educational assistance and participation.

#### Suggestions for the Bearcat "PRIDE" Program

Suggestions for possible revisions of the program at Virginia High School that could be applied to the development of other high school transition programs are altering the modified block schedule in order to keep students out of the mainstream and reduce discipline problems; include single-sex education classes ; maintain the volunteer teacher participation and rotate the teachers after a 3-year duration; provide staff development on learning theory; designate a plan to consistently apply disciplinary practices; provide funding for student motivational programs and activities; continue weekly staff

meetings to discuss the positive aspects of student performance; and, most importantly, implement additional transition activities from middle to high school such as student and teacher exchanges.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

Further research in the development of freshman academies and smaller learning communities would indicate the need to examine similar programs for at-risk students. Researchers could conduct a longitudinal study during the students' high school careers to determine the programs' effectiveness in successfully preventing students from dropping out of school and graduating on time. Additional studies could be implemented to track the students who dropped out of the program or transferred from Virginia High School. Those students' input, educational, and behavioral data would provide an informative study to analyze in order to increase the knowledge of successful and-or failed transition programs. A qualitative study could be conducted to provide further information to enlighten the educational community of freshman transition programs involving the administration, teachers, parents, and students. Further study could also examine the effects of successful programs in at-risk

students continuing in post secondary education, meaningful careers and lifelong learning.

Additional areas of study could focus on analyzing the impact of single-sex educational classes for non-vocational secondary education gender-separated classes to improve educational achievement and student behavior.

#### Final Notes

It is the opinion of the researcher that all high schools need to develop some form of a freshman transition program, whether it focuses on a targeted population or the freshman class as a whole. The student benefits and long-term cultural effects of the school can be significantly enhanced.

"A local initiative" was born when the principal of the school, Mrs. Ina Danko, who had prior transition program experience, allowed the researcher to examine new ways to address the freshman problem. Through her leadership, guidance, commitment, and a vision of cultural change, a proactive approach to address the educational and social problems of freshman students was implemented. Also, Mrs. Brenda Carroll, Assistant Principal, provided the resources for the foundation of knowledge of the implementation of the program.

Furthermore, the program was fully supported and monitored by the Board of Education.

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