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Freshman Academies: A Study of Student Outcomes

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Karen Kelley

December 2010

Dr. Virginia Foley, Chair

Dr. Donald Good

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Dr. Pamela Scott

Keywords: Freshman Academy, Smaller Learning Community, Graduation Rates,
Dropout Prevention, Transition Issues

ABSTRACT

Freshman Academies: A Study of Student Outcomes

by

Karen Kelley

The transition to high school has been identified by researchers as a pivotal point in students' lives. The addition of a Freshman Academy in some schools has targeted the 9th grade year to ease students' transition to high school and increase the likelihood of academic success.

One purpose of this study is to compare student outcomes of schools that have implemented a Freshman Academy with schools that have not. Student outcomes are defined for this study to include graduation rates, attendance rates, instances of out-of-school suspensions, and instances of expulsions. The second purpose of this study is to compare student outcomes before and after implementation of a Freshman Academy.

Two research questions were analyzed to determine the impact of the implementation of the Freshman Academy on student outcomes. A 2-way chi square analysis of variance was used for each research question.

There was a significant difference in the instances of out-of-school suspensions for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not. Instances of out-of-

school suspensions were higher in schools with a Freshman Academy. No significant difference was found between graduation rates, attendance rates, or instances of expulsions for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not. There was a significant difference in instances of out-of-school suspensions before and after implementation of Freshman Academy. The instances of out-of-school suspensions decreased after the implementation of Freshman Academy. No significant difference was found in graduation rates, attendance rates, or instances of expulsions before and after implementation of Freshman Academy.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the following people:

To my husband Troy Kelley whose focus on the needs of our family has not gone unnoticed. Thank you for your willingness to give of yourself. You are an incredible husband and father.

To my children Jonah and Kyndall, I am so proud of both of you. God has blessed each of you with unique talents. My hope for you is that you always make the most of every opportunity you have been given.

To my parents Johnny and Wanda Smith who have supported me and encouraged me always. Thank you for your unconditional love and support.

To my grandparents John Smith and Rudine Yates who have taught me great lessons through their examples. Thank you for the legacy you have created.

In memory of William Yates, Edward and Barbara Kelley, and Alethia Smith who did not live to see me accomplish this goal. You each had a great impact on my life and are deeply missed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Virginia Foley the chairperson of my committee. Her support and suggestions have been invaluable. I would also like to thank Dr. Donald Good, Dr. Pamela Scott, and Dr. Elizabeth Ralston whose input and suggestions have been extremely helpful.

I would like to acknowledge my colleagues at Pigeon Forge High School, who have encouraged me throughout the past 2 years. I feel blessed to have a job I love and to work with such wonderful people.

I would also like to express a special thank you to Marti Cantrell and the members of the Sevierville Cohort. I appreciate the support and encouragement you have provided me throughout this journey.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The global economy and increasingly complex technology have required a competitive workforce to secure the future of the United States as a world leader. An educated society has become necessary to achieve this goal; however, too many of the country's high schools have been considered failing schools. The consequences of such perceived failures have not only been detrimental to the country, they have been detrimental to the students of the United States. Jackson (2008) noted that many students in the United States have not been adequately prepared for the "demands and opportunities of a global economy" (p. 59). Although there have been many reform attempts, researchers have concluded that solving the problems is a complex task. The goal is "that all students will attend, stay and succeed in, and then graduate from high school well prepared for further learning, successful careers, and engaged citizenship" (Fleischman & Heppen, 2009, p. 107). According to Horwitz and Snipes (2008),

At a time when economic security is determined by academic skills and educational attainment, the overwhelming number of students who drop out of high school or leave the education system without the skills they need is nothing less than a national crisis. (p. 1)

According to Dedmond (2008), "Whether or not students leave high school with a diploma and plans for postsecondary education or training often hinges on the attitudes they develop in the eighth and ninth grade about themselves and their educations" (p. 16). Researchers have identified the transition to high school as a pivotal point in students' lives. The 9th grade year has been described as a point when parents naturally begin to allow greater autonomy for teenagers. Yet, research has shown that academically teens

may require more oversight. Neild (2009) described the 9th grade transition as “the place in the educational progression where students across the United States are at increased risk of getting ‘stuck’” (p. 56). When students experience a poor transition and as a result make failing grades during their 9th grade year, they have created a path of failure and increased the likelihood they will become high school dropouts (Weiss & Bearman, 2007). Smith (2006) described the transition from 8th to 9th grade as a major event that could be made less traumatic by effective transition programs.

At the beginning of the 21st Century a trend in education was the addition of a Freshman Academy as a way to ease students’ transition into high school. According to Wilder, Murphree, and Dutton (2009) the rationale for the creation of the Freshman Academy was the significance of the 9th grade year to students’ overall achievement coupled with the increased demands on schools by No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. Schools have faced pressure to meet increased federal and state benchmarks and high schools have sought ways to improve test scores, graduation rates, and attendance rates. Roughly 30 % of the students in the United States who drop out of high school were never promoted beyond the 9th grade (Neild, 2009). “If the freshman year is a time of increased risk for students ... it may also be a key point for intervention to minimize the risk of dropping out” (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008, p. 544).

Freshman Academies have emerged in large high schools where a personalized education might not otherwise be realized. According to Chmelynski (2004) the benefits of the Freshman Academy have included a more individualized education in which students are not as likely to become lost in the crowd. Teachers in the Freshman Academy have been given a common planning time to discuss students’ needs and any

additional concerns they may have. Some Freshman Academies have provided specialized classes ranging from time management and organization to extra reading and math classes to help struggling students.

Statement of the Problem

Many students find themselves on a path toward failure during their 9th grade year if they do not experience a successful transition. Freshman Academies have been designed to ease students' transition into high school and to increase their chances for success by providing them with needed increased academic, emotional, and social support. One purpose of this study is to compare student outcomes of schools (schools A and B) that have implemented a Freshman Academy with schools that have not (schools C and D). Student outcomes are defined for this study to include graduation rates, attendance rates, instances of out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions. The second purpose of this study is to compare student outcomes before and after implementation of a Freshman Academy. Graduation rates, attendance rates, instances of out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions for two schools implementing a Freshman Academy are compared with those of two schools that are not implementing a Freshman Academy in the same east Tennessee county. Data are also used to compare graduation rates, attendance rates, instances of out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions of students who participated in the Freshman Academy with students who graduated prior to implementation of the Academy in two schools located in the same east Tennessee county.

Study Sites

All four high schools are located in the same east Tennessee county. In 2009 the county included 25 schools serving over 14,000 students (Tennessee State Department of Education). Almost 60 % of students were reported as economically disadvantaged. Each of the high schools in the county operates on a 90-minute block schedule with four classes meeting each day. Dual enrollment courses are offered at each high school through the local community college. Students have the opportunity to earn over a semester of college credit while still in high school.

School A

In the year 2000 this large high school began implementing a Freshman Academy. In the year 2009 the school housed over 1700 students, with over 400 attending the Academy. All 9th grade students attend the Academy unless they transfer in after the school year begins and their classes are not compatible with the Academy. The Freshman Academy is located in a separate wing of the high school. Freshmen students are isolated from other high school students except during courses such as band and chorus that cannot be separated by grade level. This study site was the only school in Tennessee to be awarded a Smaller Learning Community Implementation Grant from the U.S. Department of Education in the year 2000. The school was selected as one of eight Exemplary Programs in the country by the grant program in 2002. Freshman Academy teachers were provided professional development opportunities as part of the grant, as well as additional opportunities funded by the county school system. School A was built in the 1970s and includes a main building as well as a vocational facility. In 2009 58.6%

of students attending school A were reported as being economically disadvantaged (Tennessee State Department of Education).

School B

In the year 2005 the second largest high school in the county began implementing a Freshman Academy. In the year 2009 the school housed almost 1200 students. The purpose for implementation was to target the failure rate within the 9th grade. The Freshman Academy is housed in a separate wing of the building. No grant money was received to implement the Freshman Academy at School B. Teachers within the Freshman Academy were trained by two teachers who had transferred from the Freshman Academy at School A and the handbooks from School A have been used at School B as a guide for the teachers. All 9th grade students attend the Academy unless they transfer in after the school year begins and their classes are not compatible with the Academy. Freshmen remain isolated from the rest of the student population except for cases such as band and chorus where classes can not be separated. School B is the most affluent high school in the county with only 35.8% of students reported economically disadvantaged in 2009 (Tennessee State Department of Education).

School C

School C is the smallest high school in the county. In the year 2009 the school housed almost 600 students. At one time the school population totaled almost 800, but it gradually declined after school D was built. The freshman class in the fall of 2010 consisted of approximately 150 students. The school has never considered implementing a Freshman Academy due to its small size. School C has a record of academic excellence, having graduated over 160 National Merit Finalists and once being

recognized in 2008 by *U.S. News and World Report* in its annual “America’s Best High Schools.” In 2009 48.3% of students at school C were reported as economically disadvantaged (Tennessee State Department of Education).

School D

School D is the newest high school in the county. The school opened in 1999, beginning with grades 7-9. A grade was added each year (and 7th and 8th grade eventually dropped) with the school graduating its first class in 2003. In the year 2009 the school housed over 700 students. In the spring of 2008 the school’s School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) Primary Team made a recommendation to target 9th graders due to their high instances of disciplinary issues. Additionally, there were high rates of failure for 9th graders and concerns that the school would not meet the state’s goal of 90% graduation if each 9th grade class continued on such a path. The guidance staff concluded that the school was not large enough to support the implementation of a true Freshman Academy that would keep 9th grade students isolated. However, the decision was made to implement a 9th grade Humanities Team to target transition issues.

The recommendation of the SWPBS Primary Team was to recruit experienced teachers with proven classroom management skills to teach the 9th grade students. Six experienced English and social studies teachers agreed to serve on the Humanities Teams. Each first-time freshman was assigned to a team of two teachers. The student would be enrolled in English one semester and history the other semester. The teachers on the team served as liaisons for the faculty and the parents if there were issues regarding the students. However, parents and other staff members rarely contacted the Humanities Team teachers for help with student issues. The Humanities Team was only

implemented during the 2008-2009 school year. According to the school's state report card, School D had the highest percentage, 61.1%, of economically disadvantaged high school students in the county in 2009 (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2010).

Research Questions

This quantitative study addresses two research questions to determine the impact of the implementation of a Freshman Academy on student outcomes. For the purpose of the study, student outcomes include graduation rates, attendance rates, instances of out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions.

1. Is there a significant difference between student outcomes for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not have a Freshman Academy?
2. For schools that have a Freshman Academy, is there a significant difference in student outcomes before and after the implementation?

Significance of the Study

This research study is of significance in an era when educational importance seems to converge with educational crisis in the United States. According to Jackson (2008), "two intertwined imperatives" face education in the United States: conquering the problem of an unrelenting lack of achievement and "preparing students for work and civic roles in a globalized environment, where success increasingly requires the ability to compete, connect, and cooperate in the international scale" (p. 58). Swanson (2009) noted that graduation rates within the United States have failed to reach a level that would elevate the country to a competitive level in a global economy. This study is of

value to high schools or school systems looking for ways to improve freshmen transition and possibly incorporate a Freshman Academy.

Researchers have found the 9th grade transition to be a crucial point in students' educational careers (Neild et al., 2008; Reents, 2002). According to Donegan (2008) a personalized education that includes not only academic focus but also emotional and social support could lead to increased student success. Such increased success during the freshman year could help to increase student academic success throughout high school and improve graduation rates (Neild et al., 2008).

Definition of Terms

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

American Diploma Project (ADP): a network of 35 states designed to prioritize college and career readiness among our nation's students (Achieve, 2010).

At-risk: a term used by educators to identify students who due to their background or environment are at higher risk of educational failure than other students (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005).

Attendance Rate: "the average number of days students attend school as compared to the average number of days the students are enrolled" (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2010, para. 4).

Dropout: students who leave high school without earning a high school diploma (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2010).

Expulsion: permanent removal of a student from the regular education setting for the entire semester or academic school year resulting from a zero tolerance offense or severe behavioral issues (Tennessee Code Annotated (TCA) 49-6-3401, 2010).

Freshman Academy: “a program for freshman (ninth-grade) students that is designed to provide the strategies and the support that are needed in order to make a successful transition from middle school to high school” (Wilder, Murphree, & Dutton, 2009, p. 11). The freshman academy is a type of smaller learning community in which freshmen students are separated from the other students in the high school. The Academy may be housed in a separate wing or another building.

Graduation Rate: “A federally required benchmark which calculates the percent of on-time graduates with a regular high school diploma. GED and Special Education diplomas are not allowed to count as a regular high school diploma under regulations from the U.S. Department of Education” (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2010, para. 12).

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): President George Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act in January 2002. “This act reauthorizes and amends federal education programs established under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The focus of the No Child Left Behind Act is for historic school reform based on: accountability, flexibility, research-based education, and parent options” (Tennessee State Department of Education, 2010, para. 1).

Out-of-School Suspension: a form of punishment in which a student is removed from the regular education setting and not allowed on school property for a specified period of time, including all school activities and functions (TCA 49-6-3401, 2010).

Resiliency: “ability to cope with adversity and overcome the most challenging circumstances” (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005, p. 319).

School-Wide Positive Behavior Support (SWPBS) Primary Team: a team within a school that focuses on improving the behavior within all areas of the building by developing school-wide expectations and ensuring that the expectations are taught, modeled, and rewarded. The team also evaluates discipline data to determine school-wide needs (Office of Special Education Programs Technical Assistance Center on Effective School-wide Interventions, 2010).

Smaller Learning Community (SLC): a reform movement to personalize learning environments that brings together a small core group of students and teachers (Fleischman & Heppen, 2009). Smaller learning communities can take the form of a freshman academy, career academy, or a small school.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

A delimitation of this study is that it was limited to one county in east Tennessee. While generalization to all high schools nationwide would be unlikely, the results of this study can be used by individuals seeking ways to improve high school transitions and student outcomes. This study analyzed state report card data that included students graduating from the study sites during the years 2002-2009. A limitation of this study is that student data for those students who transferred in after the implementation of the Freshman Academy in Schools A and B but did not attend the Academy were not able to be eliminated from the study.

Overview of the Study

This research study is arranged into five chapters. Chapter 1 consists of an introduction, a statement of the problem, research questions, the significance of the study, definitions of key terms, limitations and delimitations of the study, and an overview of

the study. Chapter 2 includes a review of relevant literature and is divided into three sections. The first section focuses on increased internal demands facing high school students that create a need for a Freshman Academy, including at-risk students and freshman transition issues. The second section of the literature review involves the increased external demands on schools, including NCLB, resulting state and federal benchmarks, and the American Diploma Project (ADP). The final section of the literature review contains possible solutions to the problem, including schools within schools, smaller learning communities (SLCs), Freshman Academies, and dropout prevention. Chapter 3 provides the research design, the population studied, the data collection procedures, the research questions and null hypotheses, and data analysis used in completing the research study. Chapter 4 describes the data collected and analyses. Chapter 5 presents the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

One purpose of this study was to compare student outcomes of schools (schools A and B) that implemented a Freshman Academy with schools that had not (schools C and D). Student outcomes were defined for this study to include graduation rates, attendance rates, instances of out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions. The second purpose of this study was to compare student outcomes before and after implementation of the Freshman Academy. Research indicated a need to concentrate reform efforts on the 9th grade transition year in order to improve student academic success and in turn improve graduation rates (Neild et al., 2008). Gewertz (2007) noted a national awareness of the 9th grade year as a “make-or-break year” (p. 14). Research also indicated that the implementation of a Freshman Academy could address the social, emotional, and academic needs of 9th grade students (Chmelynski, 2004). Although some students required more intense instructional remediation during the 9th grade year, others could simply benefit from increased bonding and connections to teachers and peers (Holland & Mazzoli, 2001; Knesting, 2008).

This review of literature addressed three topics that have led to the creation of Freshman Academies. The first section focused on increased internal demands facing high school students that create a need for a Freshman Academy, including at-risk students and freshman transition issues. The second section of the literature review included increased external demands on schools, including NCLB, resulting state and

federal benchmarks, and ADP. The final section of the literature review addressed possible solutions to the problem, including schools within schools, SLCs, Freshman Academies, and dropout prevention.

Increased Internal Demands on Schools

There have been many demands on high schools from within that have made the education of America's youth a difficult task. Such internal demands have included the wide array of baggage students arrive at school with daily. "The problems students bring to school tend to be multifaceted and complex" (UCLA, 2005, p. 1), yet educators must teach students regardless of the students' skill readiness or lack of physical or emotional needs being met at home. Adolescence has been described as a time when students naturally begin to become more independent (Weiss & Bearman, 2007). Such independence could lead to poor choices, such as alcohol and drug use or risky sexual activities. Regardless of the obstacles students face, schools of the United States have been charged with the job of ensuring that students become educated and productive members of our society (Wise, 2008).

At-risk Students

According to Hassinger and Plourde (2005) the term at-risk has been used by educators to identify students who due to their background or environment were at higher risk of educational failure than other students. Background and environmental factors cited included status as a minority, status as an English Language Learner, as well as students who had already become parents and those who were likely to be employed (Emeagwali, 2008). Lower socioeconomic status has also been used as a factor to identify at-risk students (Horwitz & Snipes, 2008). Rieg (2009) identified at-risk

students as those who are “at-risk of failing two more subjects and exhibited 10% or greater absenteeism” (p. 214).

Despite the reason a student might be considered at-risk, educators could increase the likelihood of academic success. Hassinger and Plourde (2005) studied the traits of high achieving Hispanic students who had overcome adversity and addressed common elements in the students’ support systems that contributed to academic success. They found that although educators could not change the factors that cause a student to be considered at-risk, educators could create a supportive school environment that will increase the likelihood of educational success. Hassinger and Plourde stated:

Teachers can become that caring relationship missing in so many students’ lives. Schools can in a sense try and build that support system that will lay the foundation to set many at-risk students up for success. Resiliency challenges educators to focus more on strengths instead of deficits. (p. 326)

Knesting (2008) identified four factors crucial to supporting at-risk students’ decisions to stay in school. These factors were listening to students, communicating caring, the school’s role in dropout prevention, and the students’ role in dropout prevention. According to Knesting, “Despite the aversive nature of school experiences, the students in the present study used their involvement with the supportive teachers or administrators, along with their determination to earn a high school diploma, to stay in school” (p. 10). Knesting’s study emphasized that although students possess characteristics that cause them to be considered at-risk, the school environment can have a positive impact on those students’ decisions to persevere and continue their educational endeavors.

Emeagwali (2008) described a small school designed to help at-risk students succeed by providing a hands on approach to learning that included career and technical education programs that students depicted as more friendly and sociable than a traditional high school. According to Emeagwali:

In the 2005-2006 school year, 100 percent of students were on track to graduate. This is due in no small part to the fact that teachers know each student by name, have identified their strengths and weaknesses, and work with them to make a postsecondary plan—even if that plan is to go straight to work. (p. 17)

This school also housed a child development center in which students with children could receive childcare while also receiving an education. The child development center served an additional purpose however. It was a fully licensed child care development center where students could work to become certified as child care assistants

In a study of Boston's Class of 2004, 75% of dropouts fit into four categories. The first category consisted of special education students who were taught in self-contained classrooms without inclusion services. The second category included students who were English Language Learners and entered school later than their peers. The third category consisted of students who had one or more of the following risk factors during 8th grade—multiple course failures, two or more years older than peers in the same grade level, and attends school less than 80 % of the time. The final category included students with numerous course failures during the 9th grade year (Pinkus, 2008). Pinkus added, "...success in ninth grade is critical to graduation" (p. 7).

According to Englund, Egeland, and Collins (2008) the earning potential for a high school graduate has been calculated to be 1.5 times that of a high school dropout.

Similarly, the income for a college graduate has been calculated to be 2.7 times greater than a high school dropout. Lynch, Hurford, and Cole (2002) studied parents of 9th grade students and found that “parents of at-risk students engaged in more parental enabling than parents of honors students” (p. 542). By enabling students’ poor behavior choices, adolescents failed to learn that their actions have consequences. The authors found a relationship between parental enabling and students’ locus of control. At-risk students were more likely to exhibit an external locus of control. The authors recommended parents’ encouragement of independent behavior to foster a development of internal locus of control.

Freshman Transition Issues

Researchers have identified the transition into high school as a crucial time in a student’s life. According to Wilder et al. (2009) the transition from middle school to high school “has been an extremely critical factor” in the students’ experiences in high school and their level of academic achievement (p. 11). Gossage (2007) reported that approximately 30% of 9th graders will not graduate in 4 years. However, if students experienced a successful transition, their chances of graduating high school 4 years later increased significantly. “Research shows that making a successful transition to high school can help students form lasting attachments to school and increase students’ likelihood of graduating from high school” (Kerr, 2002, p. 4). Gewertz (2007) noted the findings of the Consortium on Chicago School Research: “freshman who sustain good grades and attendance are far likelier to graduate than lower performing peers” (p. 14).

According to Horwitz and Snipes (2008) the 9th grade transition has posed a problem for students for differing reasons. Some students have not been adequately

prepared academically for the demands of the high school curriculum. According to Wise (2008) referencing a study by Lee, Grigg, and Donahue (2007), “barely 30 percent of rising freshmen can read at grade level” (p. 3). Many students have faced difficulties as they physically change schools, moving from a middle school to a larger high school, because they no longer had the same peer groups or familiar teachers to rely on if needed. Therefore, “compounding these academic obstacles incoming students face are the social challenges posed by a new, more demanding school environment—challenges that lead to student disengagement” (Wise, 2008, p. 3).

To increase the chances of a successful 9th grade transition, some school districts have established transition programs (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2009). These transition programs have included strategies to provide a more personal learning environment, address student needs through interdisciplinary teams, and track and evaluate student progress. “Personalizing learning refers to structures, policies, and practices that promote relationships based on mutual respect, trust, collaboration, and support” (Breunlin et al., 2005, p. 24). Dedmond (2008) recommended implementing freshman transition courses that would help students identify goals for future education and career plans.

According to Smith (2006) 9th grade students could benefit from ongoing transition activities that begin the fall of the 8th grade year. Communication and partnership between elementary and high school was a recurring theme in the research (Oakes & Waite, 2009). Miao and Wheelock (2005) recommended that when possible, such as in schools where feeder patterns are established, 8th grade teachers transition into the high school to join a 9th grade team. The addition of familiar faces within the

teaching staff could help reduce the feeling of anonymity among the students. Mizelle (2005) stated:

Adolescents can succeed in their transition to high school—if schools recognize that this transition is an extended process that involves middle and high school administrators, teachers, parents, and students and demands more than a short-term program developed and implemented primarily by high schools. Facilitating adolescents’ transition from middle school to high school requires programs that challenge and support students throughout middle school as well as programs that specifically address the transition period. (pp. 56-57)

Neild et al. (2008) explained that although high schools grant students greater freedoms than middle schools, the “freedom sometimes works to the detriment of academic success” (p. 548). High school reform efforts have been targeted at the 9th grade transition year with the goal of increasing the likelihood of academic success. According to Grossman and Cooney (2009) the preparation middle school students received for the transition into high school not only affects whether or not they graduate high school but also “the odds of staying in college until graduation” (p. 1).

Teacher Experience

Researchers agreed that teachers with the least experience and fewest qualifications were the ones generally assigned to teach freshmen. “Teachers who are assigned to ninth graders are more likely than teachers in the upper grades to be uncertified, new to the profession, new to the school, or sometimes all three” (Neild, 2009, p. 62). More experienced teachers were more likely to manage their classrooms effectively, have mastered instructional strategies, and had access to a wider variety of resources than less experienced teachers. According to Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, and Heilig (2005):

We found that, relative to teachers with standard certification, uncertified teachers and those in most other non-standard certification categories generally had negative effects on student achievement, after controlling for student characteristics and prior achievement, as well as teacher experience and degrees. (p. 16)

Berry, Hoke, and Hirsch (2010) insisted the disparity in the quality of teaching explains much of the difference in student achievement.

Certified teachers must pass a series of tests before single-handedly leading a classroom. They must take classes in education, complete student teaching, pass the tests for teacher licensure, and become hired. Once hired, teachers must undergo an evaluation process. Goldhaber and Brewer (2000) explained that it is taken for granted that teacher “licensure is an important and effective screen on the quality of teachers” (p. 129).

According to Walsh (2004) NCLB “...declared that teacher certification was an insufficient measure of a person’s qualifications to teach” (p. 23). The researcher added that the scores to pass the teacher licensure tests are set too low and individuals are provided too many opportunities to retake the exams. Fink (2009) argued that school administrators charged with teacher evaluations have not been trained to identify and explain effective instruction.

According to Akos and Galassi (2004), “If [teachers] are knowledgeable and sensitive to potential stumbling blocks for students and parents, they are in a pivotal position to provide the necessary academic and social support that is essential to addressing these challenges successfully” (p. 213). Thornton (2009) recommended that administrators encourage “highly qualified, enthusiastic educators” to teach the 9th grade students (p. 78). Dedmond (2008) advised recruiting the most experienced teachers for the 9th grade transition courses.

According to Berry, Hoke, and Hirsch (2004), “Consensus is growing among school reformers that teachers are the most important school-related determinant of student achievement” (p. 685). Donegan (2008) asserted: “If you want to reshape high school, start by changing ninth grade” (p. 54). The researcher added that most school’s lowest student to teacher ratio lies in the upper grades while the highest exists in the 9th grade. “This alone rings an alarm bell” that is usually compounded by a study of “teacher quality and experience” (p. 55). Donegan recommended restructuring the master schedule so that the most experienced teachers are the ones charged with the important task of teaching freshmen students and that the lowest student teacher ratio exist in these courses. This recommendation supported the findings of Watlington, Schockly, Guglielmino, and Felsher (2010) that student achievement decreased when taught by a series of new teachers.

Parental Involvement

Weiss and Bearman (2007) noted that the transition to high school coincided with a time when parental influence and involvement declined and peer influence increased. According to Englund et al. (2008), “Parental involvement in school has emerged in a number of studies as a significant predictor of high school graduation status” (p. 79). DePlanty, Coulter-Kern, and Duchane (2007) added that youth need the support of family to function well in school. The researchers noted that some parents believe their school involvement is not as important once their children reach grades 7-12 as it is during elementary school. The perceived desire and need for independence of the adolescent could cause the parents’ level of involvement to decrease. Deslandes (2003) found a steady decrease in parent involvement from grades 8 to 10 as well as a steady increase in

the autonomy of the students. According to Englund et al. (2008), “Without parental support, academically able adolescents may divert from a successful educational pathway to one of failure” (p. 89).

DePlanty et al. (2007) explained that parents did not feel their involvement was promoted by the school. While the teachers stated they had communicated with the parents, the parents described poor communication from the school. Halsey (2005) reported that teachers experience difficulty initiating parental involvement because the parents expect personal communication and teachers were more likely to rely on communication in the form of newsletters. The researcher recommended “persistent, personal communication was a necessary beginning for most of the parent involvement” (p. 64). Parents reported they felt a lack of opportunity for school involvement other than extracurricular activities such as athletic events. While teachers reported they would welcome parent volunteers in their classrooms, it was likely that some adolescents might feel uncomfortable being accompanied at school by a parent.

Deslandes and Bertand (2005) noted that parents would become involved in the school if they perceived the teachers would like it. Similarly, the parents would become involved in the students’ academic endeavors at home such as overseeing homework completion and assisting with special projects, if the parents perceived the students would like it. However, the researchers were clear to state that involvement at school was seen by parents as separate from involvement with academics at home.

Increased External Demands on Schools

Educators today face the difficult task of preparing an array of students to be productive members of a global society while also being evaluated and measured for effectiveness. According to Fleischman and Heppen (2009):

The standards-based school reform movement, together with the No Child Left Behind Act requirement that underperforming schools adopt reforms supported by scientifically based research, spurred policy makers, educators, and researchers to create and implement a variety of approaches to attain improvement. (p. 105)

Zimmerman and Dibenedetto (2008) describe that some educators feel frustration regarding the fairness and effectiveness of standardized tests as a measure of academic progress. Schools face criticism that America's students are not prepared to enter the workforce or our nation's colleges, while also facing penalties if found to be underachieving under NCLB.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001

NCLB was signed in January 2002, reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and amending its federal education programs (State of Tennessee Department of Education, 2010). "The focus of the No Child Left Behind Act is for historic school reform based on: accountability, flexibility, research-based education, and parent options" (para. 1). According to Herlihy (2007) there is a new focus on academic success in high schools due to NCLB:

Graduation rates and measures of student proficiency in reading and math are factored into state-defined standards for adequate yearly progress, therefore, high schools are seeking ways to ready their students to show acceptable levels of learning by the time they are tested in the tenth grade. (p. 19)

NCLB has intensified “accountability for academic success in public schools” (Wilder et al., 2009, p. 11).

Under NCLB states are required to report graduation rates (Wheelock & Miao, 2005). Because research has shown that students who experience an effective 9th grade transition are more likely to graduate from high school, reform efforts have been targeted to improve the freshman experience. According to Yakimowski-Streblick, Adedoyin, and Clark (2003) the Baltimore City Public School System began implementing a 9th grade transition program in 2001-02 in order “to increase student achievement in an era of No Child Left Behind federal legislation” (p. 10).

According to Test et al. (2009) educators have been required to implement programs and strategies “grounded in scientifically based research” (p. 115). NCLB defined scientifically based research as “research that involves the application of rigorous, systematic, and objective procedures to obtain reliable and valid knowledge relevant to education activities and programs” (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002, p. 540). As educators began implementing 9th grade transition programs as well as Freshman Academies, research has been done to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs.

One reason for the call to reform high schools in the United States is the reported inequity across the nation among schools. According to Fleischman and Heppen (2009):

By exposing the failure of the nation’s school system to provide all students with acceptable levels of education, the assessment and accountability measures of standards-based reform—including those embodied in the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)—have served as a dynamic engine, driving the search for demonstrably more effective programs and practices for low performing schools. The desire to find evidence-based solutions has been further energized by the NCLB requirement that underperforming schools adopt reforms supported by “scientifically based research.” (p. 107)

Cooper and Liou (2007) noted that, although the efforts of NCLB to reform America's schools are attempting to tackle the inequities among our nation's schools, it is not sufficient because "it focuses too much on outcomes" (p. 53).

Bracey (2007) explained that the focus on outcomes could make it difficult to recruit good teachers to schools where they are most needed, the low-achieving schools. He suggested instead a measurement "based on growth and not proficiency" (p. 130). Beaver (2004) reported that without a significant increase in funding the "No Child Left Behind Act will be difficult, if not impossible to implement" (p. 6).

According to Crum and Sherman (2008) schools have been required to meet 35 benchmarks each year in order to keep federal accreditation. School leaders have sought ways to increase student achievement in order to meet increasing benchmarks because accreditation standards have continued to increase annually in order for the schools to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP). Beaver (2004) noted that although schools may receive funding and help initially to help them increase scores, "if the poor performance continues, schools will lose federal funds, or have staff replaced" (p. 9).

American Diploma Project

ADP is a network of 35 states designed to prioritize college and career readiness among our nation's students (Achieve, 2010). "Successful completion of some postsecondary education is increasingly important in today's global economy" (Cohen, 2008, p. 21). Yet, there has been grave concern that our nation's high school graduates are ill-prepared for achieving the goal of a postsecondary degree. According to Cohen approximately one third of the nation's students who enrolled in a 2- or 4-year institution have been required to take remedial courses because they lacked the basic skills needed

in math, writing, and reading. ADP was designed “to improve postsecondary preparation by aligning high school standards, graduation requirements and assessment and accountability systems with the demands of college and careers” (Achieve, 2010, para. 2).

ADP Network States have pledged to require “all graduates to take a rigorous curriculum, aligned with state standards that prepare them for life after high school” (Cohen, 2008, p. 22). Requiring all students to complete courses that include Algebra II and Geometry could lead to increased frustration among students who are already ill-prepared for the difficulty of high school courses. According to Neild (2009) “For students who enter high school below grade level, trying to read and comprehend standard level high school texts is deeply frustrating, and many simply give up” (p. 61). These students could benefit from a 9th grade transition program with increased support for struggling students to increase their chances for academic success.

According to Bushaw (2007) middle school students have lofty goals that can be crushed by the traditional method of high schools’ division of students into separate paths. Bushaw advised schools to abandon “the long-accepted dichotomy between college preparation and work preparation and to replace the ‘sort and select’ mission with the unifying goal of preparing all students for meaningful postsecondary career opportunities that are linked to their interests” (p. 192).

Possible Solutions

Educators have begun to implement a variety of reforms aimed at improving the 9th grade transition and in turn improving students' overall academic success. According to Williams and Richman (2007) freshman students must be supported by school systems if chances of academic success are to be improved. "The large size of many high schools is commonly associated with lower levels of student achievement and engagement, particularly among poor and minority students" (Horwitz & Snipes, 2008, p. 4). Breunlin et al. (2005) stated that personalization is best achieved in small schools with fewer than 500 students or through the implementation of SLCs. Donegan (2008) recommended those teaching freshman be organized into interdisciplinary teams, sharing as many students as possible to increase planning for personalized support of freshmen students. Quint (2006) asserted, "Structural changes to improve personalization and instructional improvement are the twin pillars of high school reform" (p. 9).

Schools Within Schools

According to Research for Action (2010) the size of a school can affect its success. Smaller schools could offer greater personalization to students. When large schools have not had the option of rebuilding smaller individual schools, some have opted to create schools within schools. Research for Action described a school within a school as being administered autonomously and having a separate faculty from the other schools.

According to Wasley (2002) students have easily gotten lost in large schools in spite of the good intentions of teachers or the involvement of parents. Wasley advised that educators be responsible for a smaller number of students in order to truly get to

know the students, their strengths, and their needs. “Students do best in places where they can’t slip through the cracks, where they are known by their teachers, and where their improved learning becomes the collective mission of a number of trusted adults” (p. 10).

Hughes, Copley, and Baker (2005) documented the implementation of Capital High Academy for Ninth Graders Exceeding Standards (CHANGES), a school within a school. “The initial structure of CHANGES included an administrator, a counselor, five teachers, and another teacher who was to provide support and professional guidance to CHANGES classroom teachers” (p. 12). According to the authors while the purpose of initiating the school within a school included increasing the passing rate of freshmen students, it also included goals to improve students’ long-term success.

According to Oxley (2005) while the practice of organizing secondary schools into smaller units was not a new one, the terminology has changed throughout the last 4 decades. School within a school is a term that appeared in the 1960s and emphasized small structure. Oxley identified the terminology of the 21st century as SLC, that emphasized not only small structure, curricular specialization and choice, but also “a focus on the learner and learning, and in particular, the active and collaborative nature of teachers’ and students’ work” (p. 44).

Smaller Learning Communities

According to Fleischman and Heppen (2009), “Smaller learning communities (SLCs) include a variety of school redesign initiatives intended to create smaller theme-based units of organization, including schools within schools, academies within buildings, and free-standing small schools” (p. 117). Grants have been awarded to local

school systems to implement SLCs in schools with more than 1,000 students by the United States Department of Education's SLCs program, which was authorized under NCLB. The primary goal in creating the SLCs was personalization and in turn more engaged learning. Fleischman and Heppen added:

An analysis of seven year trends among schools participating in the federal smaller learning communities program suggests positive trends in terms of student participation in extracurricular activities, and ninth-grade promotion rates and downward trends in school violence, disciplinary action, and the use of drugs and alcohol. (p. 119)

Wells and Feun (2007) studied six high schools developing professional learning communities. The researchers noted that schools have faced many challenges when transitioning to learning communities, including changing the philosophy of teaching to innovative and collaborative rather than conservative and individualist. According to Herlihy (2007), "Smaller learning communities have emerged as one of the most common and potentially effective school reform strategies" (p. 10). However, Copland and Boatright (2004) warned that there must be "shifts in the emphasis and disposition of leadership" when large schools undergo the transformation to SLCs or they risk simply becoming "smaller versions of their former giant selves" (p. 763).

Jehlen and Kopkowski (2006) discussed the transformation of Wyandotte High School in Kansas City, Kansas, into SLCs. The school experienced positive results within the first year of implementation with graduation rates increasing and the dropout rate decreasing. According to the researchers:

Ask any teacher at Wyandotte about the biggest boon from the small school conversion and they will invariably reply that it is the relationships, with and among the students and with each other. Each day a team of about 10 teachers instructs the same 160 to 200 students within their learning community. (Teachers begin with a group of students in freshman year and stay with them through graduation.) The educators meet twice

weekly, discussing administrative tasks and curriculum. They even eat lunch together—not just to chat about the previous night’s *West Wing* [television drama cancelled in 2006], but to find out how their students are faring that day. (para. 22)

Freshman Academies

A Freshman Academy is a SLC designed to ease the 9th grade transition because studies have shown “that ninth graders have the most discipline incidents and retention and are most likely to drop out” (Chmelynski, 2003, p. 48). Freshman Academies have been housed in a separate wing or floor of the high school or in a separate building. Reents (2002) noted that Freshman Academies can help prevent students from getting “lost in a large high school setting and [having] less attention paid to them as individuals” (p. 14).

Macala (2002) discussed a Freshman Academy in Ohio designed “to be a bridge between middle level and high schools, improve freshman pass rates on state proficiency tests, increase attendance, and reduce discipline problems” (p. 27). A common theme among Freshman Academy research has been interdisciplinary teaming in which freshmen students have been assigned to teams, while the teachers were appointed to each team and given common planning times in order to discuss students’ needs and plan various activities.

Freshman Academies have taken different forms. Fulk (2003) described an intervention designed to assist a small number of students determined to be at-risk. Many Freshman Academies however have been designed for the entire 9th grade population of a school because the 9th grade transition can be difficult for all students. “Even those students who appear to be academically prepared for high school face considerable

challenges during the ninth grade transition” (Council of the Great City Schools, 2008, p. 2).

Holland and Mazzoli (2001) described implementation of a Freshman Academy in the Midwestern United States as “exhilarating and overwhelming” (p. 295). An identifying factor of this Freshman Academy according to its Program Leader was its emphasis on relationships. Research has indicated that 9th graders are more likely to disengage in large schools where they feel anonymity (Weiss & Bearman, 2007).

Sigler (2008) described the implementation of a Freshman Academy in a large Tennessee high school. After implementation the school experienced increases in mean grade point average (GPA), mean attendance, and mean scores on the English I End-of-Course test for 9th graders. The number of core course failures for 9th graders decreased as well. Due to the success of the Freshman Academy, Sigler recommended expanding the smaller learning community concept into other areas of the school.

Dropout Prevention

According to Fleischman and Heppen (2009), “In today’s global economy, students with only a high school education face far lower career earnings and greater chances of being unemployed than their college educated peers” (p. 110). Neild et al. (2008) and Neild (2009) advised that the costs of being a high school dropout include earning less, being less likely to be employed, and being more likely to be incarcerated. According to Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007), “Dropping out of high school culminates a long-term process of disengagement from school” (p. 326). Kennelly and Monrad (2007) asserted, “Paying attention to the key predictors during important

transition years, such as ninth grade, is crucial for targeting resources for dropout prevention” (p. 5).

Azzam (2007) discussed five strategies schools could use to increase the likelihood of success for students who are on the path toward dropping out of high school. The first strategy included creating a more engaging school environment in which connections were made between school and real world experiences. Next, Azzam advised instruction be improved by providing smaller classes with better teachers who give students individual attention. The third strategy suggested was to provide a school climate in which students feel safe. The fourth strategy was to “ensure that students have a relationship with at least one adult in the school” (p. 92). The final strategy Azzam advised to schools was to increase communication with parents in order to improve the likelihood of success for students who are on the path toward dropping out of high school.

Somers, Owens, and Piliawsky (2009) found that many students at-risk for dropping out of high school “do not understand the link between high school preparation, college preparation, and earning potential, which is clearly linked to life stability” (p. 355). The authors recommended that students receive specific guidance in career development “as early as the ninth grade” (p. 355).

The effectiveness of a dropout prevention strategy called “Check and Connect” was reported by What Works Clearinghouse (2006). Each student involved in “Check and Connect” was assigned a “monitor” to encourage him or her as well as to monitor school attendance and any academic or behavior problems. “Check and Connect was

found to have positive effects on staying in school and potentially positive effects on progressing in school” (p. 1).

According to What Works Clearinghouse (2007) another dropout prevention program called Project “Graduation Really Achieves Dreams” (GRAD) targeted students from low socioeconomic communities. The goal was to reduce the number of students dropping out of high school and increase the number who enrolled in college. Students attending Project GRAD schools were offered incentives to stay in school such as 4-year college scholarships as well as participation in summer institutes on a college campus. “Project GRAD had no discernible effects on progressing in school or on completing school” (p. 1).

Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morrison (2006) described reasons given for dropping out of school by 8th to 10th grade dropouts. Thirty percent of students who dropped out of high school reported doing so due to pregnancy. Forty percent of students who dropped out of school stated that they were failing school. Fourteen percent of dropouts reported difficulty working and attending school at the same time led to the decision to drop out of school. According to Christle, Jolivet, and Nelson (2007):

Although schools and school personnel cannot change the individual, family, and community factors that may put youth at risk for dropping out of school, they can provide protective factors that may reduce these risks by providing a positive and safe learning environment; by setting high, yet achievable academic and social expectations, and by consistently facilitating academic and social success, and thus keeping students in school. Comprehensive high school reform is needed in place of fragmented efforts ... that only scratch the surface of the overall issue. High schools need to change their organizational structure to become student-centered environments that nurture all students. They need to reassess the relevance of all educational programs to reflect students’ current and longer-term social and economic interests to continually promote school engagement. (p. 334)

Summary

The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine whether or not a significant relationship exists between the implementation of a Freshman Academy in large east Tennessee high schools and student outcomes. Researchers have identified the transition to high school as a critical stage in a student's educational journey (Neild et al., 2008). Reform efforts have been focused on the freshman year in order to increase the likelihood of student success.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology of this quantitative study, including research design, population, data collection procedures, research questions and null hypotheses, and data analyses.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Researchers identified the 9th grade transition as a pivotal point in students' lives that could set their course for high school success or failure (Kerr, 2002; Neild et al., 2008; Wilder et al., 2009). This quantitative study was designed to determine the relationship between the implementation of a Freshman Academy and student outcomes. The rationale was to evaluate available data from the time of implementation to determine if a significant relationship exists with graduation rates, attendance rates, and rates of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions. This chapter identifies the research design, participants of the quantitative study, data collection procedures used, research questions and null hypotheses, as well as data analyses methods that were employed.

Research Design

An *ex post facto* design was chosen to evaluate possible causal relationships among samples that occurred over an 8-year period. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006) an *ex post facto* design focuses on comparable groups that have been treated differently and the effect of such treatment. School A began implementing a Freshman Academy in the year 2000. Therefore, graduation rates for 2004-2009 would represent postimplementation. School B began implementing a Freshman Academy in the year 2005. Therefore, graduation rates for 2009 represent postimplementation. Schools C and D have not implemented a Freshman Academy.

Population

Data were collected from four high schools in an east Tennessee county on students attending in the years 2002-2009. Two schools (A and B) have implemented a Freshman Academy, while the other two schools (C and D) have not. Graduation rates, attendance rates, and instances of out of school suspensions and expulsions were compared to determine if there was a significant difference between schools with and without a Freshman Academy.

School A began implementing its Freshman Academy in 2000; therefore, these years include 1 year of graduation data for students who did not attend the Freshman Academy and 6 years of data for students who did attend. Graduation rates were compared to determine if there was a significant difference before and after implementation of the Freshman Academy. School B began implementing its Freshman Academy in 2005. Graduation rates, attendance rates, and rates of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions were compared to determine if there was a significant difference before and after implementation of the Freshman Academy. Schools C and D have not implemented a Freshman Academy.

Data Collection Procedures

The Director of Schools and the Institutional Review Board of East Tennessee State University were contacted for permission to collect data and conduct the study. Graduation rates, attendance rates, and records of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for all students attending between 2002 and 2009 inclusive were studied. These data were accessed from the schools' state report cards. The guidance department of each study site was contacted to provide the number of seniors for each year, 2003-

2009. State test data were not considered in this study because there is no consistent state test that was used throughout the study period. The current English I End of Course exam was first implemented in the spring of 2002. Prior to that the state of Tennessee used the Proficiency test.

Research Questions and Null Hypotheses

The study addressed two research questions to determine the impact of the implementation of Freshman Academy on student outcomes.

1. Is there a significant difference between student outcomes for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not have a Freshman Academy?

H_{O1}₁: There is no significant difference in graduation rates for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not have a Freshman Academy.

H_{O1}₂: There is no significant difference in attendance rates for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not have a Freshman Academy.

H_{O1}₃: There is no significant difference in instances of out-of-school suspensions for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not have a Freshman Academy.

H_{O1}₄: There is no significant difference in instances expulsions for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not have a Freshman Academy.

2. For schools that have a Freshman Academy, is there a significant difference in student outcomes before and after the implementation?

H₀2₁: There is no significant difference in graduation rates before and after the implementation of a Freshman Academy.

H₀2₂: There is no significant difference in attendance rates before and after the implementation of a Freshman Academy.

H₀2₃: There is no significant difference in instances of out-of-school suspensions before and after the implementation of a Freshman Academy.

H₀2₄: There is no significant difference in instances of expulsions before and after the implementation of a Freshman Academy.

Data Analyses

Data collected in this ex post facto study were analyzed using a series of chi square analysis of variance procedures. A chi square analysis compares observed data with expected data. For the purposes of this study the county average was used as the expected data for each analysis. The means and standard deviations for this study were tabulated using the program *SPSS for Windows*.

Research question #1 was used to compare student outcomes for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not have a Freshman Academy. For the purposes of this study student outcomes include graduation rates, attendance rates, and instances of suspensions and expulsions. Data for research question #1 were analyzed using a 2-way chi square analysis of variance.

Research question #2 was used to compare student outcomes before and after the implementation of the Freshman Academy for Schools A and B. Data for research question #2 were analyzed using a 2-way chi square analysis of variance.

Summary

Chapter 3 includes the research design, population being evaluated, research questions, null hypotheses, and data collection procedures that were used to conduct this quantitative study regarding the student outcomes of Freshman Academy. The data analysis techniques were also introduced in this chapter. Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the data. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The primary purpose of this study was to compare student outcomes of schools (schools A and B) that had implemented a Freshman Academy with schools that had not (schools C and D). Student outcomes were defined for this study to include graduation rates, attendance rates, and instances of out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions. The second purpose of this study was to compare student outcomes before and after implementation of the Freshman Academy. Schools A and B established Freshman Academies in order to improve the likelihood that incoming freshmen would one day be high school graduates.

Chapter 4 contains the statistical analyses of data concerning the two research questions presented in chapters 1 and 3. Data were collected from the Tennessee State Department of Education's website. Each school's state report card was retrieved from the website for the years 2002-2009. Total enrollment, graduation rates, attendance rates, and instances of out-of-school suspensions and expulsions were collected for each year available. Graduation rates were not published on the state report card in 2002. School D graduated its first class in 2003, and its graduation rate was not published in 2003. Therefore, graduation data were analyzed for 2003-2009 with School D not included in the 2003 data.

The state report card contained graduation rates for each high school as well as total enrollment. However, the number of seniors for each year was not available on the state report card. The researcher obtained the number of seniors from each school for the

years 2003-2009. These numbers were used with the graduation rate to calculate the number of graduates per school per year.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question #1: Is there a significant difference between student outcomes for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not have a Freshman Academy? For the purposes of this study, student outcomes include graduation rates, attendance rates, instances of out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions.

A contingency table was created for each category of student outcomes (i.e. graduation, attendance, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions). The contingency tables were organized into two categories, schools with a Freshman Academy and schools without a Freshman Academy, and included data from 2002-2009 inclusive. Graduation rates were analyzed for 2004-2009 because the first Freshman Academy class (School A) graduated in 2004. The observed frequencies were calculated using state report card data for each individual high school, per category of student outcomes, for the years 2002-2009. The expected frequencies were calculated using the state report card data for the county (the mean of the four high schools) per category for the years 2002-2009.

A two way chi square analysis was calculated for each of the following categories: rates of graduation, rates of attendance, rates of out-of-school suspension, and rates of expulsion.

Graduation Rates

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in graduation rates between schools with a Freshman

Academy and schools without a Freshman Academy. The two variables were number of graduates and Freshman Academy implementation (schools with a Freshman Academy and schools without a Freshman Academy). The number of graduates and Freshman Academy implementation were not found to be significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 7) = 1.57, p > .05$.

H₀₁: There is not a significant difference in graduation rates for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not have a Freshman Academy. Graduation rates for all schools have been displayed in Figure 1. The null hypothesis was not rejected at the .05 level of significance because the χ^2 value was 1.57. Means and standard deviations of the number of graduates for each school have been displayed in Table 1. Schools A and B both experienced tremendous growth between 2003 and 2009. The M of graduates for School A was 250.42 with a SD of 50.05. The M of graduates for School B was 204.71 with a SD of 29.94. The M of graduates for School C was 112.29 with a SD of 6.05. The M of graduates for School D was 126.33 with a SD of 17.27.

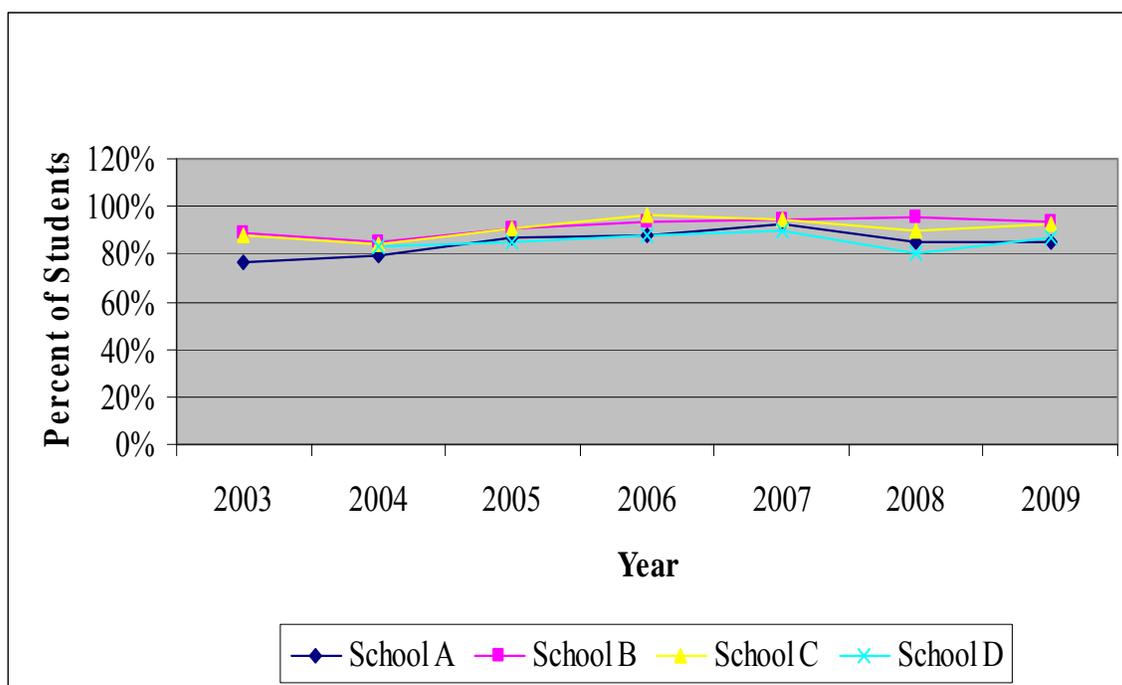


Figure 1. Rates of Graduation

Table 1

Graduation Data 2003-2009

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
School A	7	190.00	312.00	250.4286	50.04617
School B	7	165.00	247.00	204.7143	29.94280
School C	7	103.00	120.00	112.2857	6.04743
School D	6	105.00	148.00	126.3333	17.27040
Valid N (listwise)	6				

Attendance Rates

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in attendance rates between schools with a Freshman Academy and schools without a Freshman Academy. The two variables were number of students attending daily and Freshman Academy implementation (schools with a Freshman Academy and schools without a Freshman Academy). The number of students attending daily and Freshman Academy implementation were not found to be significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 8) = .12, p > .05$.

H₀1₂: There is not a significant difference in attendance rates for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not have a Freshman Academy. Attendance rates for all schools have been displayed in Figure 2. The null hypothesis was not rejected at the .05 level of significance because the χ^2 value was .12. Means and standard deviations of attendance data for each school have been displayed in Table 2. Schools A and B both experienced tremendous growth between 2002 and 2009. For School A, the M = 1575.25 and the SD = 113.68. For School B, the M = 997.38 and the SD = 102.07. For School C, the M = 554.75 and the SD = 27.42. For School D, the M = 705.25 and the SD = 78.51.

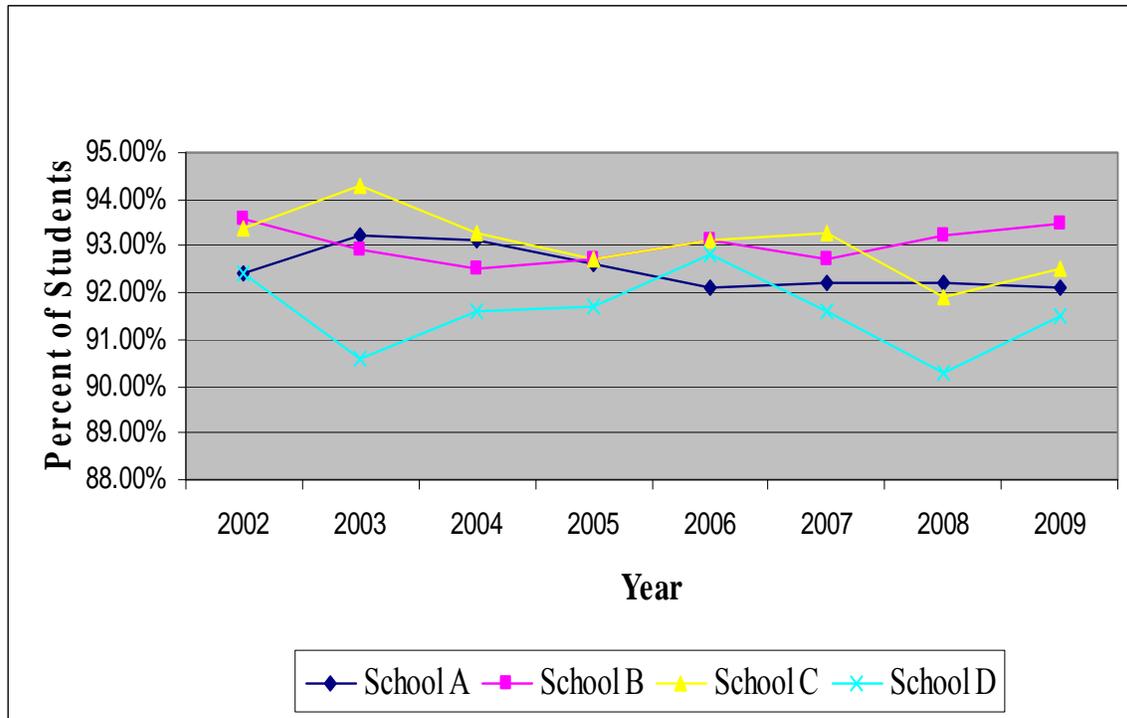


Figure 2. Rates of Attendance

Table 2

Attendance Data 2002-2009

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
School A	8	1398.00	1689.00	1575.2500	113.68220
School B	8	839.00	1109.00	997.3750	102.06712
School C	8	520.00	588.00	554.7500	27.42132
School D	8	639.00	866.00	705.2500	78.50887
Valid N (listwise)	8				

Instances of Out-of-School Suspensions

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in instances of out-of-school suspensions between schools with a Freshman Academy and schools without a Freshman Academy. The two variables were numbers of out-of-school suspensions and Freshman Academy implementation (schools with a Freshman Academy and schools without a Freshman Academy). The numbers of out-of-school suspensions and Freshman Academy implementation were found to be significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 8) = 147.5, p < .001$.

H₀₁₃: There is a significant difference in instances of out-of-school suspensions for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not have a Freshman Academy. Rates of out-of-school suspension for all schools have been displayed in Figure 3. The null hypothesis was rejected at the .05 level of significance because the χ^2 value was 147.5. Means and standard deviations of instances of out-of-school suspensions for each school have been displayed in Table 3. Schools A and B both experienced tremendous growth between 2002 and 2009. For School A, the M = 171.13 and the SD = 55.06. For School B, M = 29.13 and SD = 6.45. For School C, M = 21.13 and SD = 7. For School D, M = 57.75 and SD = 25.6.

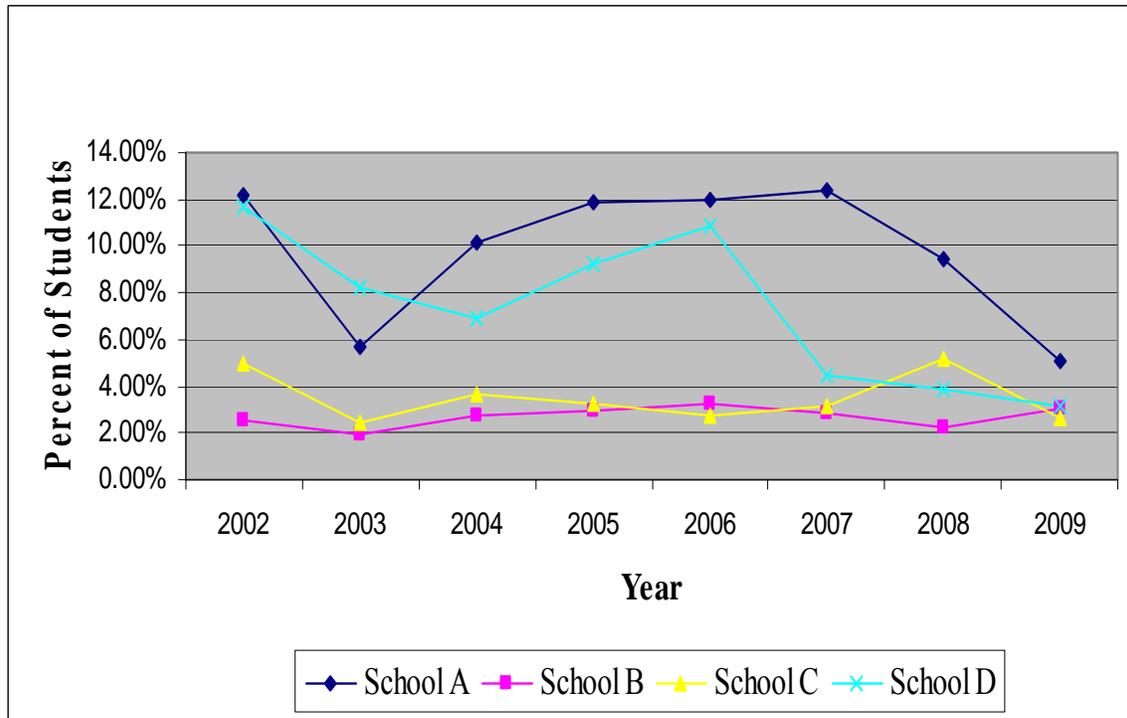


Figure 3. Rates of Out-of-School Suspension

Table 3

Out-of-School Suspension Data 2002-2009

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
School A	8	91.00	243.00	171.1250	55.05955
School B	8	19.00	36.00	29.1250	6.44621
School C	8	13.00	33.00	21.1250	6.99872
School D	8	24.00	91.00	57.7500	25.59994
Valid N (listwise)	8				

Instances of Expulsions

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in instances of expulsions between schools with a Freshman Academy and schools without a Freshman Academy. The two variables were numbers of expulsions and Freshman Academy implementation (schools with a Freshman Academy and schools without a Freshman Academy). The numbers of expulsions and Freshman Academy implementation were not found to be significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 8) = .76, p > .05$.

H₀14: There is not a significant difference in instances of expulsions for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not have a Freshman Academy. Rates of expulsion for all schools have been displayed in Figure 4. The null hypothesis was not rejected at the .05 level of significance because the χ^2 value was .76. Means and standard deviations of instances of expulsions for each school have been displayed in Table 4. Schools A and B both experienced tremendous growth between 2002 and 2009. For School A, the M = 1.13 and the SD = 1.25. For School B, the M = .38 and the SD = .52. For School C, the M = .25 and the SD = .71. For School D, the M = .88 and the SD = 1.46.

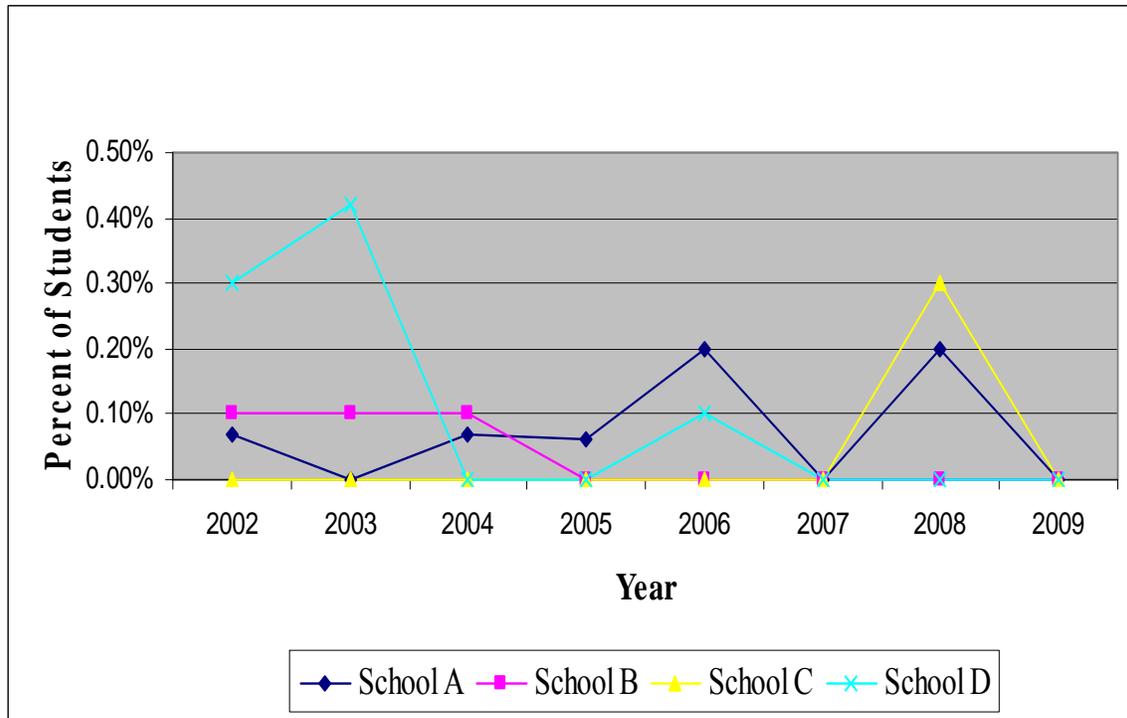


Figure 4. Rates of Expulsion

Table 4

Expulsion Data 2002-2009

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
School A	8	.00	3.00	1.1250	1.24642
School B	8	.00	1.00	.3750	.51755
School C	8	.00	2.00	.2500	.70711
School D	8	.00	4.00	.8750	1.45774
Valid N (listwise)	8				

Research Question #2: For schools that have a Freshman Academy, is there a significant difference in student outcomes before and after implementation?

A contingency table was created for each category of student outcomes (i.e. graduation, attendance, out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions). The contingency tables were organized into two categories, before implementation of a Freshman Academy and after implementation. The tables included data from 2002-2009 inclusive. Graduation rates were analyzed for 2003-2009 because 2003 was the first available graduation rate. The observed frequencies were calculated using the state report card data for each individual high school per category of student outcomes for the years 2002-2009. The expected frequencies were calculated using the state report card data for the county (the mean of the four high schools) per category for the years 2002-2009. For the questions regarding attendance rates and instances of out-of school suspensions and expulsions, only school B was analyzed. School A had no data available prior to implementation because the earliest data collected was 2002.

A two way chi square analysis of variance was calculated for each of the following categories: rates of graduation, rates of attendance, rates of out-of-school suspension, and rates of expulsion.

Graduation Rates

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in graduation rates before and after implementation of a Freshman Academy. The two variables were number of graduates and Freshman Academy implementation (before implementation and after implementation). The

number of graduates before and after Freshman Academy implementation were not found to be significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 7) = 2.22, p > .05$.

H₀₂₁: There is not a significant difference in graduation rates before and after implementation of a Freshman Academy. The null hypothesis was not rejected at the .05 level of significance because the χ^2 value was 2.22.

Attendance Rates

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in attendance rates before and after implementation of a Freshman Academy. The two variables were number of students attending daily and Freshman Academy implementation (before implementation and after implementation). The number of students attending daily before and after Freshman Academy implementation were not found to be significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 8) = .21, p > .05$.

H₀₂₂: There is not a significant difference in attendance rates before and after implementation of a Freshman Academy. The null hypothesis was not rejected at the .05 level of significance because the χ^2 value was .21.

Instances of Out-of-School Suspensions

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in instances of out-of-school suspensions before and after implementation of a Freshman Academy. The two variables were number of out-of-school suspensions and Freshman Academy implementation (before implementation and after implementation). The number of out-of-school suspensions before and after

Freshman Academy implementation were found to be significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 8) = 206.31, p < .001$.

H₀₂₃: There is a significant difference in instances of out-of-school suspension before and after implementation of a Freshman Academy. The null hypothesis was rejected at the .05 level of significance because the χ^2 value was 206.31.

Instances of Expulsions

A two way contingency table analysis was conducted to evaluate whether there was a significant difference in instances of expulsions before and after implementation of a Freshman Academy. The two variables were number of expulsions and Freshman Academy implementation (before implementation and after implementation). The number of expulsions before and after Freshman Academy implementation were not found to be significantly related, Pearson $\chi^2(1, N = 8) = 2, p > .05$.

H₀₂₄: There is not a significant difference in instances of expulsions before and after implementation of a Freshman Academy. The null hypothesis was not rejected at the .05 level of significance because the χ^2 value was 2.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 5 presents a summary of findings, conclusions, and recommendations regarding the implementation of a Freshman Academy in two high schools within the same east Tennessee county. One purpose of this study was to compare student outcomes for schools implementing a Freshman Academy with schools that were not. A second purpose of the study was to compare student outcomes before and after implementation of the Freshman Academy.

Summary of Findings

The data analyses reported are based upon two research questions that were tested at a .05 level of significance. The variables studied include graduation rates, attendance rates, instances of out-of-school suspensions, and instances of expulsions. Data were collected regarding four high schools located in the same east Tennessee county for 2002-2009. Each school's state report card was accessed from the Tennessee State Department of Education's website to collect the data.

Research Question #1

Is there a significant difference between student outcomes for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not have a Freshman Academy? For the purpose of the study, student outcomes include graduation rates, attendance rates, instances of out-of-school suspensions, and expulsions.

Graduation Rates. A chi square analysis of variance was used to determine if a significant difference exists between schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools

that do not. There was no significant difference in graduation rates for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not.

Attendance Rates. A chi square analysis of variance was used to determine if a significant difference exists between schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not. There was no significant difference in attendance rates for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not.

Instances of Out-of-School Suspensions. A chi square analysis of variance was used to determine if a significant difference exists between schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not. There was a significant difference in instances of out-of-school suspensions for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not. The instances of out-of-school suspensions for schools with a Freshman Academy were significantly higher than instances of out-of-school suspensions for schools without a Freshman Academy.

Instances of Expulsion. A chi square analysis of variance was used to determine if a significant difference exists between schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not. There was no significant difference in instances of expulsions for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not.

The findings of this study concur with Fleischman and Heppen (2009) and Research for Action (2010). Fleischman and Heppen concluded that problems facing high schools in the United States are so complex that one reform model may not be enough to turn around school performance. The authors emphasized the “need for educators to implement [Freshman Academy] with fidelity to its requirements and to support it for the time required for success” (p. 105). According to Research for Action

(2010) there is limited commitment to the Freshman Academy model because “there is disagreement among school administrators about whether ninth grade academies help or hinder students’ success” (p. 3). According to Quint (2006), “Even impacts that appear to be small can nonetheless be important” (p. 9).

Research Question #2

For schools that have a Freshman Academy, is there a significant difference in student outcomes before and after implementation?

Graduation Rates. A chi square analysis of variance was used to determine if a significant difference exists between student outcomes before and after implementation of Freshman Academy. There was no significant difference in graduation rates before and after implementation of Freshman Academy.

Attendance Rates. A chi square analysis of variance was used to determine if a significant difference exists between student outcomes before and after implementation of Freshman Academy. There was no significant difference in attendance rates before and after implementation of Freshman Academy.

Instances of Out-of-School Suspensions. A chi square analysis of variance was used to determine if a significant difference exists between student outcomes before and after implementation of Freshman Academy. There was a significant difference in instances of out-of-school suspensions before and after implementation of Freshman Academy. School B had significantly lower instances of out-of-school suspensions after implementation of Freshman Academy.

Instances of Expulsions. A chi square analysis of variance was used to determine if a significant difference exists between student outcomes before and after

implementation of Freshman Academy. There was no significant difference in instances of expulsions before and after implementation of Freshman Academy.

The findings of this study support recommendations of Quint (2006) and Sigler (2008) that students leave Freshman Academies and enter Career Academies for 10th through 12th grades. The rationale behind continuing the Academy format is to continue personalization and engaged learning. While improving the 9th grade transition may improve academic outcomes the 9th grade year, it may delay the transition experience to the 10th grade year.

Conclusions

One purpose of this study was to compare student outcomes for schools that had implemented a Freshman Academy with schools that had not implemented a Freshman Academy. A second purpose of the study was to compare student outcomes before and after implementation of the Freshman Academy. The following conclusions are based on the findings of this study.

No significant difference was found between graduation rates for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not. The administrator who spearheaded the effort to implement the Academy at School A left the school system. This researcher questions whether results would have been different had the administrator remained on staff. The level of administrative fidelity may have affected the success of the Academy at School A.

No significant difference was found with regard to attendance for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not. However, the observed attendance data exceeded the expected data for schools with a Freshman Academy. The results

suggest, but do not conclude, that the Freshman Academy had a positive impact on attendance.

There was a significant difference in the instances of out-of-school suspensions for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not. However, the observed number of out-of-school suspensions was greater than expected for schools with a Freshman Academy. An overwhelming majority of suspensions occurred at School A, the largest school in the county. The results suggest that size of the school may affect the number of out-of-school suspensions.

No significant difference was found with regards to instances of expulsions for schools that have a Freshman Academy and schools that do not. However, the observed number of expulsions for schools with a Freshman Academy was lower than the expected number. The results suggest, but do not conclude, that implementation of a Freshman Academy had a positive impact on instances of expulsions.

No significant difference was found in graduation rates before and after implementation of Freshman Academy. However, the graduation rate for School A did increase from 77% in 2003 to 92.6% in 2007. The results suggest, but do not conclude, that implementation of Freshman Academy had a positive impact.

No significant difference was found in attendance rates before and after implementation of Freshman Academy. However, attendance improved after implementation. The results suggest, but do not conclude, that implementation of Freshman Academy had a positive impact.

There was a significant difference in instances of out-of-school suspensions before and after implementation of Freshman Academy. School B had significantly

lower instances of out-of-school suspensions after implementation of Freshman Academy.

No significant difference was found in the instances of expulsions before and after implementation of a Freshman Academy. However, after implementation of a Freshman Academy, School B had no instances of expulsions. The results suggest, but do not conclude, that implementation of a Freshman Academy had a positive impact.

Recommendations for Practice

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to high schools aiming to improve the 9th grade transition and increase the number of students who graduate.

Given the insignificant findings, consideration should be given to other factors. Recruit teachers who are effective classroom managers as well as effective instructional leaders to teach the 9th grade students, as recommended by Thornton (2009) and Dedmond (2008). Encourage parent communication and involvement, including increased personal attempts at communication (such as a phone call or a hand written note) as recommended by Azzam (2007), Halsey (2005), and Deslandes and Bertand (2005). Expand the smaller learning community concept to the 10th through 12th grades if possible, as recommended by Sigler (2008). Provide opportunities for tutoring and extra help for struggling students, as recommended by Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007).

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional research should be conducted focusing on the number of core course failures experienced by freshmen and whether a significant difference exists when a

Freshman Academy is implemented. Further research should be conducted regarding whether the nature of work expected from students changes due to the Freshman Academy. Due to the possibility that implementation of Freshman Academy has a positive effect that is not sustained in the following year period, additional research is needed on whether there are instructional strategies 10th through 12th grade teachers can learn from Freshman Academy teachers. Further research should also be conducted regarding whether implementation of Freshman Academy sacrifices academic rigor or delays a difficult transition until the 10th grade year.

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APPENDIX
Institutional Review Board Letter



East Tennessee State University
Office for the Protection of Human Research Subjects • Box 70565 • Johnson City, Tennessee 37614-1707
Phone: (423) 439-6053 Fax: (423) 439-6060

August 23, 2010

Karen Kelley
1405 Perry Catlett Drive
Sevierville, TN 37876

Dear Ms. Kelley,

Thank you for recently forwarding information regarding "Freshman Academics: A Study of Student Outcomes."

I have reviewed the information submitted, which includes the completed Form 129.

The determination is that this proposed activity as presented meets *neither* the FDA nor the DHHS definition of research involving human subjects. Therefore, it does not fall under the purview of the ETSU IRB and does not require ETSU IRB approval.

Thank you for your commitment to excellence.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chris Ayres".

Chris Ayres, Chair
ETSU Campus Institutional Review Board



Accredited Since December 2005

VITA

KAREN KELLEY

- Personal Data: Date of Birth: September 13, 1975
 Place of Birth: Opelika, Alabama
 Marital Status: Married
- Education: Public Schools, Sevierville, Tennessee
 B.A. Psychology, University of Tennessee, Knoxville,
 Tennessee 1996
 M.S. Education, University of Tennessee, Knoxville,
 Tennessee 1998
 Ed.S. Administration and Supervision, Lincoln Memorial
 University 2003
 Ed.D. Educational Leadership, East Tennessee State
 University 2010
- Professional Experience: Intern, Seymour High School; Seymour, Tennessee, 1997-
 1998
 Teacher, Morristown-Hamblen High School East;
 Morristown, Tennessee, 1998-1999
 Teacher, Pigeon Forge High School; Pigeon Forge,
 Tennessee, 1999-present
- Honors and Awards: Outstanding Social Studies Intern, University of Tennessee,
 Knoxville, Tennessee, 1998
 Teacher of the Year, Pigeon Forge High School, Pigeon
 Forge, Tennessee 2010
 Secondary Schools Teacher of the Year, Sevier County
 Schools, Tennessee 2010
 State of Tennessee Regional Teacher of the Year 2011