THE EFFECTS OF FRESHMAN TRANSITION PROGRAMS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT SCORES, ATTENDANCE RATES, AND DISCIPLINE INCIDENTS FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS IN PUBLIC MISSOURI HIGH SCHOOLS

by

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The undersigned, approved by the Department Chair of Graduate Studies in Education, have examined a dissertation entitled:

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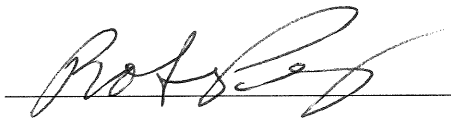
Presented by Jeff Wilcox, a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Education and hereby certify that in their opinion is worthy of acceptance.



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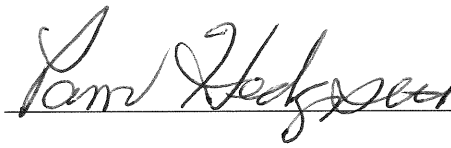

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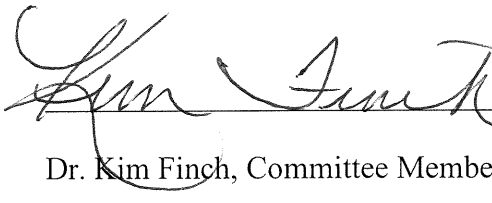

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Abstract

The transition of students from the eighth grade into their freshman year can be a time where students begin to fall short academically, attend school less, and promote actions leading to increased discipline occurrences. This transition to high school can be even more troublesome when students are deemed at-risk. During the transition from middle or junior high school to the freshman year, resiliency of students can be tested. Students being able to move in a positive direction in the face of change, such as during a transitional time, need to show strength in resiliency (Werner & Smith, 1992).

This is a quantitative research study to determine if freshman transition programs help students, specifically those at-risk, succeed in achieving higher test scores, higher attendance rates, and lower major discipline incidents throughout their high school career. The researcher investigated all public Missouri high schools to determine if different outcomes occur in academic test scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents between high schools integrating freshman transition programs into their curriculum and those without freshman transition programs.

Results of this study showed public Missouri high schools with freshman transition programs in place were making an impact on student achievement scores in the areas of Algebra I and English II for the school years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016, but not attendance rates, or reduction in major discipline incidents. Mean assessment scores were higher for schools having freshman transition programs in place. Attendance rates were lower while major discipline incidents were higher for school offering freshman transition programs. Though many of these results were not significant, an impact was still being made.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

An adolescent's freshman year in high school marks a critical juncture in the schooling of many students (Neild, 2009). A successful transition to high school plays a crucial role in the outcomes of freshman students, specifically at-risk students (Neild, 2009). During the transition from middle or junior high school to the freshman year, resiliency of students can be tested. Students being able to move in a positive direction in the face of change, such as during a transitional time, need to show strength in resiliency (Werner & Smith, 1992).

To help with resiliency and allow students to move in a positive direction during their freshman year, transition programs can be put in place. Freshman transition programs are becoming more prevalent among school districts across the country, establishing a base for future educational outcomes (Dedmond, 2005). Students, specifically at-risk students, who do not perform well during their freshman year in high school are more apt to struggle throughout high school. The decisions made by freshman students during the first few weeks of school are crucial. During this pivotal time, freshmen mindsets include thoughts of actually finishing school or not (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). Students who have not shown good performance during their middle school grade years are more apt to have difficulties during high school and have decreased graduation rates (Andrews & Bishop, 2012).

Knowing the struggles many at-risk students face during their freshman year of high school, the researcher included all public Missouri high schools. The researcher investigated if different outcomes in academic test scores, attendance rates, and major

discipline incidents occurred between high schools integrating freshman transition programs into their curriculum and those without freshman transition programs. Additionally, the researcher explored if the percentage of students in the district identified as at-risk by being eligible for free and/or reduced price lunch impacted the effect of a freshman transition program on academic test scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents.

Problem Statement

The transition of students from the eighth grade into their freshman year can be a time where students begin to fall short academically, attend school less, and promote actions leading to increased discipline occurrences. This transition to high school can be even more troublesome when students are deemed at-risk. Students in Missouri are considered at-risk by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education if they are eligible for free and/or reduced price lunch. The researcher used this definition for this study. Some high schools within Missouri have implemented at least some aspects of freshman transition programs, as an attempt to assist freshmen during this transition. The researcher focused on the effectiveness of these programs throughout students' high school careers in the areas of academics, attendance, and discipline to determine if the programs are effective at helping students, specifically at-risk students with academics as measured by English II EOC and Algebra I EOC test scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents. End of Course test results were chosen due to being directly related to Missouri learning standards. The standards were based on knowledge and skill needed for each grade for specific course offerings.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

Many times students are successful in their transition to high school. Sometimes, however, students' resiliency becomes compromised. Resiliency is a term describing people who can successfully adapt to a situation even though risk factors are present. Being able to quickly adapt from a disruptive change, such as changing schools or buildings, denotes the concept of resiliency (Hanewald, 2011). One risk factor associated with the freshman year might include age differences among students. The age span between freshmen and senior students is a time of adolescent maturity (DaGiau, 1997). Other risk factors may include peer relationships, study habits for rigorous courses, or motivation for attending school all together. It is during this time that stress and adversity may have an effect on the resiliency of students and their ability to cope with the challenges set before them (Maston, 1994). Many students respond differently when it comes to changing situations or beginning new schools. When it comes to supporting resiliency and student efficacy in school, effective coping strategies may differ due to different student circumstances or level of self-efficacy (Burney & Bielke, 2008). Factors challenging resiliency can be helped or prevented with a different style of classroom, such as the inclusion of a freshman transition program (Hanewald, 2013).

Many students, particularly students who are considered at-risk, find transitioning to high school a stumbling point in their educational career (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). Resilient adolescents tend to have better social skills, academic superiority, and ability to meet the demands of changing school settings than their counterparts having troubles with a transition (Boon, 2008). A successful transition program needs to include components such as informing and mentoring students about study habits that lead to

positive academic performance. Other components of a successful freshman transition program include making and continuing positive social interactions with students and faculty (Geltner, Law, Forehand, & Miles, 2011). Freshman transition programs must also acquaint students with the layout of the school building and the procedural aspects of the school to proactively help students overcome any apprehension (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). Knowing at-risk youth have greater risk of being resilient during the transition to high school, having these components to help and prevent an unsuccessful experience can make a difference (Geltner et al., 2011).

Keeping the conceptual framework of resiliency in mind, the researcher attempted to determine if freshman transition programs help to promote increased attendance and achievement, while decreasing discipline incident of students during high school, thus guiding students toward a path of success in high school. This study determined if at-risk students in high schools with a freshman transition program excel on test scores as well as attendance rates. This study also determined if high schools housing freshman transition programs have a decreased number of major discipline incidents compared to those high schools without a freshman transition program in place.

Purpose for the Study

This is a quantitative research study to determine if freshman transition programs help students, specifically those at-risk, succeed in achieving higher test scores, higher attendance rates, and lower major discipline incidents throughout their high school career. The researcher performed a quantitative study to determine if students were able to improve academic performance, attendance at school, and receive fewer referrals for major discipline. The independent variable was the presence of a freshman transition

program at the high school the participant attends with the dependent variables being test scores, attendance rates, and number of major discipline occurrences. The second set of independent variables were the four percentage categories of FRL students. The dependent variables included test scores, attendance rates, and number of major discipline incidents.

Research questions were then developed based on the dependent and independent variables sought to be answered (Johnson, 2005). This study was designed to determine if freshman transition programs in high schools were an effective way to aid in the success of at-risk students throughout their high school careers. Evidence of increased achievement and attendance rates along with decreased major discipline incidents were assessed to determine program success. Knowing the middle school transition to high school is a critical stage in a student's academic trajectory effecting resiliency of the student, transition programs at the high school have the potential to provide needed resilience (Langenkamp, 2010). A student who is already struggling in the middle grades with academics, attendance, and/or discipline will most likely struggle even more in high school. A student's resiliency to be able to bounce back or recover in order to be successful in high school can certainly become compromised if appropriate steps are not taken to help the student (Hanewald, 2011). The results of this research can benefit students, parents, schools, and other stakeholders involved in the educational process of a child.

Research Questions

RQ_1 While a freshman transition program in a high school is intended to improve the academic success of students, increase attendance, and reduce disciple incidents,

which if any of these stated objectives are achieved by implementing a freshman transition program?

RQ_2 How will a freshman transition program in a high school, intended to improve the academic success of students, increase attendance, and reduce major discipline incidents, be affected by the percentage of students considered at-risk because they are eligible for free and/or reduced priced lunches?

Null Hypotheses

H_0 Students in a high school with a transition program will not academically outperform other students attending high schools not offering a freshman transition programs.

H_0 Students in a high school with a transition program will not have better attendance than other students attending high schools not offering a freshman transition programs.

H_0 Students in a high school with a transition program will not have fewer major discipline incidents than other students attending high schools not offering a freshman transition programs.

H_0 Students attending high schools offering freshman transition programs do not perform academically above other students when comparing high schools with similar percentages of students eligible for free and/or reduced price lunches.

H_0 Students attending high schools offering freshman transition programs do not have higher attendance rates than other students attending high schools when comparing high schools with similar percentages of students eligible for free and/or reduced price lunches.

H_0 Students attending high schools offering freshman transition programs do not have fewer major discipline incidents than other students when comparing high schools with similar percentages of students eligible for free and/or reduced price lunches.

Limitations

* Varied percentages of at-risk students

* Interventions other than freshman transition programs taking place

* Effectiveness of instructors

* Assumption of honesty from principals returning demographic surveys

* Number of surveys returned

Delimitations

* Geographically to the state of Missouri

* Only public high schools

Design Controls

Through the use of a quantitative study of the data related to students in all public Missouri high schools, the researcher attempted to determine if freshman transition programs were having the intended effect and if the percentage of at-risk students had an impact on the results. The researcher developed an informational survey to send to all public Missouri high school principals to determine the high schools utilizing freshman transition programs and the percentage of students eligible for free and/or reduced price lunches (FRL). The survey was emailed to all public Missouri high school principals and included assurance that their responses would remain confidential. Principals, however, would be able to request a summary of the findings. A timeline was given as to when to

expect the surveys to be returned. A follow up emails, as well as phone calls, were attempted as the deadline approached to encourage a larger response.

The responses received from the principals allowed the researcher to place the high schools into two groups: one group being high schools with some form of a transition program and the other group as high schools without a transition program. The researcher also sub divided the high schools into four groups based on their percentages of students eligible for free and/or reduced priced lunches. The groups included public high schools with 0%-25% FRL, 26%-50% FRL, 51%-75% FRL, and 76%-100% FRL.

Definition of Terms

Freshman Transition Program: A program offered to ninth grade students providing special assistance during the transition from middle or junior high school to aid in high school success.

At-Risk Student: For the purpose of this study, the term 'at-risk' will be based on socio-economic status defined through qualification for free and/or reduced priced lunch.

Major Discipline Incidents: Incidents resulting in out of school suspension such as use or possession of alcohol, drugs, tobacco, violent acts, or weapons.

Summary

Research has shown students who perform poorly as freshman tend to struggle throughout the rest of high school (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). Many changes take place in high school not seen in the middle level schools. Difficult changes include larger populated environments, increased accountability for earned grades, and lack of established relationships with previous school faculty. The difficult changes happening

during this transitional time can put an adolescent's resiliency in question (Hanewald, 2011).

Providing students help moving in a positive direction during their freshman year can aid in resiliency. Freshman transition programs are promoting resiliency and establishing bases for future educational outcomes (Dedmond, 2005). During the crucial time of students' first days as freshmen, mindsets tend to include thoughts of finishing school or not (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). While the transitional time may be difficult for many freshmen students, those deemed at-risk show a greater need for additional support. This is a pivotal time when freshman transition programs can be effective (Neild, 2009). School districts with a preponderance of students deemed at-risk tend to struggle to educate them due to their multiple needs (Voyles, 2012). When supporting resiliency and student efficacy in school, effective coping strategies may differ due to different student circumstances (Burney & Bielke, 2008). A better understanding of the needs of students deemed at-risk is also being realized though many school districts which continue to struggle with at-risk education (Voyles, 2012).

The researcher investigated all public Missouri high schools to determine if different outcomes occur in academic test scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents between high schools integrating freshman transition programs into their curriculum and those without freshman transition programs. Additionally, the researcher explored if the percentage of students in the district identified as at-risk by being eligible for free and/or reduced price lunch impacted the effect of a freshman transition program on academic test scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents.

The following chapters will include literature, methodology, analysis of data, and conclusions and recommendations based on the findings. Chapter two gives the review of literature including characteristics of at-risk students and the relationship to school academics, attendance, and discipline. This chapter will also include policies related to at-risk students, challenges for educating at-risk students, and an overview of freshman transition programs to meet the needs of at-risk students. Chapter three includes the methodology of the research. Research questions, null hypotheses, participants and procedures are discussed. The overall research design, instrumentation and data treatment will also be identified. Chapter four includes the analysis of data based on the results of the data collected and analyzed. Research questions and null hypotheses will also be reviewed. Finally, chapter five includes conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the analyzed data. This chapter will also include implications for the future of educations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Successfully transitioning from middle school or junior high into a high school setting plays a vital role in the outcomes of freshman students (Neild, 2009). During this transitional time, a student's strength in resiliency is most likely to be tested (Werner & Smith, 1992). Students deemed at-risk for failure in school tend to face greater adversity in the transition, thus compounding the difficulties in handling resiliency (Hanewald, 2011). Understanding and differentiating the specific educational needs of at-risk youth are important to a successful transition to high school. A successful transition to high school can help adolescent students form lasting attachments to school and greatly increase their chances of persisting to graduation (Legters & Kerr, 2001). Freshman transition programs provide differentiated interventions designed to help students at-risk of failure in high school (Dedmond, 2005).

To further understand the importance of a successful transition and the student dynamics of those considered at-risk, specific researched sections will be presented in this chapter. *Adolescent Resiliency and the Transition to High School,* a description of adolescence and the struggles ensuing, especially for at-risk students during the transition to high school, will be discussed. *Characteristics of the At-Risk Student* will follow as well as *Policies Related to At-Risk Students.* These sections will identify common traits of at-risk students and specific policies relating to meeting the needs of at-risk students' education. Meeting the needs of an at-risk student may not come easy for many educators; therefore, the section *Challenges for Meeting the Educational Needs of At-Risk*

Students will follow. Lastly, the section titled *Freshman Transition Programs* will discuss characteristics of effective programs designed to help at-risk students make successful transitions into high school.

Adolescent Resiliency and the Transition to High School

Transitioning grade levels are moments where great promise or peril for children are noticed. Transitions are a time of finding new personal growth opportunities, new learning, greater responsibility, and more independence (Neild, 2009). The particular transition of moving from middle or junior high school can be difficult. During this transitional time, resiliency of students can be tested (Werner & Smith, 1992).

Transitions in education tend to present challenges for parents, teachers, and students (Smith, Feldwisch, & Abell, 2006). Most students welcome advancing to high school, but anxiousness concerning a larger, grade-orientated, more impersonal and competitive environment surrounds many (Haviland, 2005). Eighty percent of ninth graders in the United States experience a literal move during a transition to high school. This literal move consists of changing buildings or locations from an elementary or middle school to a high school at another physical location (Neild, 2009). Students will recognize the need to acclimate themselves to new high school level policies, practices, and school buildings (Andrews & Bishop, 2012).

Though many adolescents will enter this educational chapter in their lives, not all will prevail successfully in the ninth grade or continue on to be a successful graduate. Many students will become disadvantaged academically and personally in high school due to the difficulty of navigating the transition to the ninth grade (Geltner et al., 2011). Many students will fail in academic areas, have poor attendance, or drop out altogether.

Persistence to graduation becomes a struggle for many and nonexistent for others. The process of quickly recovering from the difficultness of this transition denotes the concept of student resiliency (Hanewald, 2011). Finding a way to help with maintaining student resiliency and allowing students to move in a positive direction in the face of change is needed (Werner & Smith, 1992).

The transition between junior high/middle school and high school requires special attention due to the overall student experience in middle grades correlating strongly with high school graduation rates (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). A student who is already struggling in the middle grades will most likely struggle even more in high school. A student's resiliency to be able to bounce back or recover in order to be successful in high school can certainly become compromised if appropriate steps are not taken to help the student (Hanewald, 2011).

This transition to adolescence brings on emotional, social, and cognitive changes from those of childhood (Karaman, 2013). Adolescence is a time of biological change in an individual's life. Adolescence tends to transpire during the time students begin in the middle school or junior high cycle of education and continues into high school. Adolescent behavior, however, is not always something easily predictable. Teen adolescence is also a time when students are the most receptive to building positive relationships, thus encouraging students to want to attend school (Frushour, 2006). Positive relationships of teenagers can influence a student's success or failure in school (Frushour, 2006). Teenagers who are entering high school for the first time tend to face emotional changes coming with many pressures and challenges of approaching adulthood

(DaGiau, 1997). Ways of coping with the changes and challenges coming from the high school setting may differ for teenagers.

The transitioning period of students out of middle level or junior high grades comes during a time in their lives when they are going through cognitive, emotional, physical, and social changes (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). Changes with students going through the period of adolescence tend to have an observable increase in social pressure and overall expectations of society and school (Karaman, 2013). Adolescence can also have an influence on their success or failure in high school. Researchers tend to agree the ninth grade year is a pivotal one for students (DaGiau, 1997).

The freshman year plays a role in setting the stage for future educational outcomes (Dedmond, 2005). A student's success or failure during this essential year is directly linked to the probability of succeeding to graduation (Hughes, Copley, & Baker, 2005). While this transitional time can be tumultuous for adolescent students, at-risk students are in need of additional resources in order to see them through to graduation.

Characteristics of the At-Risk Student

At-risk is a term given to students who are considered likely to fail in school or other aspects of life (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). Students may be classified as at-risk early in their elementary years of school. Noticed characteristics of at-risk students tend to show by the time the student reaches the seventh grade (Neild, 2009). At-risk characteristics are the most obvious by the end of a student's eighth grade year and shows greater need for additional support, thus reinforcing the need for freshman transition programs (Neild, 2009).

Research has shown approximately one third of United States students are deemed at-risk of academic failure (Hickman & Wright, 2011). Furthermore, at-risk students tend to face greater adversity compounding difficulties in handling resiliency during their high school years (Hanewald, 2011). Many different definitions of the term at-risk can be found from one educational system to another. Common identifiers of at-risk children include those who have poor school attendance, behavioral problems, low socioeconomic status, low achievement, and/or retention in a grade level (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). The most common perception of at-risk students includes those who have socioeconomic, learning, and/or behavioral difficulties (Frymier, 1992). Poverty itself may be one of the most important attributes when it comes to students and high achievement (Burney & Beilke, 2008). Commonly, at-risk descriptions also include children with high achievement ability who choose not to perform to their potential. Though research shows many at-risk youth come from families with low socioeconomic status, it is not uncommon for some at-risk youth to come from middle to high socioeconomic families as well. The length of time a family has lived in poverty is also considered a factor in defining at-risk youth (Burney & Beilke, 2008). Students who attend schools high in poverty tend to have lower test scores in reading and math versus students who attend lower poverty schools (Olivares-Cuhat, 2011). The structure of contemporary families, economic trends, and work pressures on parents seem to be shaping the picture of the at-risk students (Hickman & Wright, 2011).

Through the analysis and recognition of school failure, at-risk students began being recognized as needing additional help with a particular focus given to the at-risk indicators of poor socioeconomic status, grades, attendance, and choices in behavior

(Mohan & Shields, 2014). While growing up, the lives of at-risk students may be altered in some way. Poor family circumstances, abuse, or simply not getting along with a teacher when they were young can cause a student to become at-risk (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). Research shows that in a given year, approximately 1.6 million children in the United States experience homelessness. Research also shows that many of these 1.6 million children are at-risk to underperform in an educational setting (Mohan & Shields, 2014). Since 1972, there is a trend showing that poor minority students are over-representing other students in drop-out statistics (McMurrey, 2014). Many at-risk youth have come from families who have experienced divorce, increased financial stress, drug abuse, and/or poverty (Hickman & Wright, 2011). Generally students are considered at-risk if there is a likelihood they will fail in life or school (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). Furthermore, students who fail in school tend to be at a greater risk of additional psychosocial outcomes, including gang involvement, substance abuse, and increased trouble with authorities (Voisin & Elsaesser, 2013). Students may be classified as at-risk early in their elementary years, but at-risk characteristics typically become more obvious by the time the student reaches the eighth grade (Neild, 2009).

Students in ninth grade demonstrate diversity in academics and also in their social, mental, and emotional skills. Considering these various needs, student resiliency is affected and help is needed to be successful in high school. These issues challenge teachers to offer lessons authenticating each student as a unique human being (Battalio, 2005). Student engagement in school is an important aspect of key developmental outcomes (Voisin & Elsaesser, 2013). Unfortunately at times, some at-risk students slip

through the cracks and never receive the help they need, while others who have been identified successfully complete high school (Neild, 2009).

Schools today have many students who are considered at-risk. Educators in school districts with many at-risk students will struggle to meet their multiple needs (Voyles, 2012). A better understanding of the needs of students deemed at-risk is also being realized though many school districts continue to struggle with at-risk education (Voyles, 2012). At-risk characteristics are the most obvious by the end of a student's eighth grade year and shows greater need for additional support (Neild, 2009).

Students who are deemed at-risk have distinct indicators (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). One indicator relates to academics and includes not making good or passing grades. Many at-risk students are known to make poor grades. Another indicator includes having poor attendance at school. Typically at-risk students are those who have missed a great deal of school. An indicator certainly noticed in many school districts of an at-risk student is that of having multiple school discipline issues. Students who were already suffering from these specific indicators in the middle or junior high school levels are heavily affected and may already feel high school is too challenging and are unable to succeed (Bornsheuer, Polonyi, Andrews, Fore, & Onwuegbuzie, 2011).

At-risk student academics. One of the major identifiers of students who are classified as at-risk is having poor academic grades in school (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). Research shows academic success correlates to positive relationships and school engagement (Bilge, Tuzglo, & Catis, 2014). Having low achievement is connected to negative emotions and poor learning behavior, which in turn enforces failure among students (Hagenauer & Hascher, 2014). This low achievement and failure in school can

cause youth to be put at a significant risk for many subsequent psychosocial outcomes, including substance abuse, gang involvement, and risky behaviors in general (Viosin & Elsaesser, 2013). Many times students feel school is a place of dread and dislike when they are failing one or more subjects (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). Though this does not apply to all, many at-risk students have failed numerous subjects while in school, been held back because of academics, or currently are failing one or more academic areas.

Often children who are deemed at-risk will need additional support in order to achieve any level of success in an academic setting (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). Students coming from lower income families can have limited access to additional resources or programs outside of school. These are programs providing additional enrichment or remediation opportunities adding to student competence in the school educational setting (Burney & Beilke, 2008). Academic preparedness of students entering high school is of upmost importance. A lack of being prepared for the academic rigor of high school can cause a student to have to repeat the ninth grade (Blount, 2012). For the most part, this pattern of academic failure has been noticed for quite a while prior to reaching high school.

Academic challenges of students entering the ninth grade are of great concern in an adolescent student's life (Roskosky, 2006). At-risk students tend to bring along barriers to new schooling and overall emotional struggles with learning, thus needing teachers to find many ways to help them succeed (Edmonds & Quig, 2005). The reasons for at-risk students making poor grades will vary. Too often students may have difficulty understanding the credit system for courses or graduation requirements needed for

completion of high school (Geltner et al., 2011). Many times previous lack of success will cause a student to just give up on school.

Students of lower income families may also have trouble doing well academically. When looking at students who live in poverty, the impact thereof on achieving successfully and academically in school is greatly influenced (Burney & Beilke, 2008). Some students who live in poverty tend to have inadequate nutrition leading to hindered cognitive development and concentration (Cole, 2011). These students may be taking on several different responsibilities around their house at night to assist with the functioning of their family. This might allow little time for homework or studying, reducing the educational benefit of long term learning taking place outside of the classroom. Lack of parental support or educational background of parents is also noted in families of low socioeconomic status. The lack of parental support on student achievement or their wellbeing at school in general tends to influence students performing lower in school (Mohan & Shields, 2014). Parents who also work during the hours the student is home have little time to help with school work or monitor their student's progress academically. The length of time a family has been living in poverty as well as the poverty level when the student was as young as five years old influences performance and achievement in school (Burney & Beilke, 2008).

During the years prior to high school, some students also realize early they will not be held accountable for the grades they make. Many school districts will not hold children back prior to high school. Students who struggled in middle school or who were not adequately challenged during school find their lack of knowledge catching up with

them in the ninth grade (Bornsheuer et al., 2011). By the time students get to high school, it can be almost too late.

The freshman year is a time when grades really start counting for students (Roskosky, 2006). The grades from this time and forward are the ones that will be noticed by colleges and universities as well as prospective employers. Students in high school are held accountable for the grades they make. Schools with policies for transitional academic counseling, such as freshman transition programs, show students perform better academically (Holt & Campbell, 2004). Collaboration from parents, teachers, and other stakeholders involved in the educational process to help with student academic success is a must (Herlihy, 2007). To receive high school credits towards graduation, students must be able to pass the classes. Students who do not get additional help at this critical time in their lives will become even more frustrated with continued failure, as well as frustrated with school in general. Having poor grades also leads to a lack of motivation to continue even trying. It is this lack of achievement, identified as an at- risk factor, that keeps students from experiencing enjoyment during learning (Hagenauer & Hascher, 2014). At-risk students generally score lower on standardized tests as well. Teachers must learn to motivate students to perform better on standardized tests. This has become an increasingly important part of an educator's job.

At-risk student attendance. Attendance alone, during a student's freshman year of high school, is directly related to completing high school and is one of the highest predictors of failing an academic course (Blount, 2012). Students who have poor attendance tend to feel alienated by teachers and their peers when they return to school

(Edwards, 2013). Students having chronic attendance issues tend to be of greater risk to drop out (Scott, 2005).

Key components of student absences derive from family factors, economical influences, school factors, or additional student variables (Cole, 2011). Regardless of the influencing factors causing poor attendance, it contributes to lower achievement (Edwards, 2013). From early on in a child's school career, attendance is a huge factor in determining the child's success or failure academically. Students who are truant a lot tend to disengage from the school culture and eventually drop out (Gonzalez & Cramer, 2013).

Often school has become an unwelcoming place for an at-risk student. Many times students will dislike or even dread coming to school when they have failed one or more subjects (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). Delinquency is very common during adolesence (Karaman, 2013). At-risk students can relate school to prison when they feel there are too many rules and unfriendly people. Urban public schools tend to have the highest dropout rates, while educating students having physical, emotional, and mental disabilities (Durhan-Barnes, 2011).

In 2011, approximately 1.3 million students dropped out of high school (Bornsheuer et al., 2011). Many students choose to stay home for various reasons. Some students want to give up because of poor grades. Other students may have poor parental support, give in to peer pressure, or lack motivation all together. Poor economic stability of the student's family can influence increased absences from school (Cole, 2011). A common reason student absences are becoming more prevalent is due to child care. This is more true in single parent situations or lower income families where

childcare takes a toll on their financial situation. Working parents may have an older child stay home from school to babysit. In multi-children situations, this is even more common.

Due to one reason or another, many students who drop out of school have chronic attendance problems (Scott, 2005). Across the nations, overall dropout rates have shown to decrease since the 1990s, but have remained constant for minority students and students with disabilities (Gonzalez & Cramer, 2013). Of those who drop out, not all return to graduate. Some students see school as an unwelcoming place due to unpleasant behavior conversations or past parental history at the school.

Students who begin to attend school infrequently and drop out, many times are doing so to escape failure (Bornsheuer et al., 2011). This decreases a student's motivation to even want to try to attend school. With motivation itself as a fundamentally social phenomenon transformed by engagement and goals of the learner, this can be addressed by school faculty (Burney & Beilke, 2008). Research has shown declining student attendance will negatively impact exam scores, math and reading achievement, peer and teacher relationships, and promotion rates. Early identification of at-risk students followed with intervention practices can make an impact on overall student success (Edwards, 2013).

At-risk student discipline. A common identifier of at-risk behavior is seen as inappropriate or aggressive behavior from students (Ryan, Peterson, Tetreualt, & Hagen, 2007). Making minor discipline choices is another indicator of at-risk students. In a 2009-2010 study of 26,000 United States middle and high schools, an estimate of over two million students were suspended for poor discipline choices. A vast majority of

these suspensions resulted from minor infractions such as tardiness, dress code, disruption of class, or other violations of school rules (Losen & Martinez, 2013). At-risk students going through the period of adolescence during this time can struggle with poor discipline choices (Neild, 2009). Suspension, whether in school or out of school, is a common practice among United States schools in removing students from the classroom (Losen & Martiniz, 2013). Regardless of the reasons for particular suspensions, class time is missed and can hurt a student's chance to successfully graduate (Andrews & Bishop, 2012).

Aggressive and inappropriate behavior is frequently displayed by at-risk youth (Ryan et al., 2007). With the increased social pressures and expectations of school, problem behavior can occur (Karaman, 2013). Having a social disconnect with the characteristics of at-risk students can lead to struggles and misunderstandings as teachers try to educate them (Durham-Barnes, 2011).

Many at-risk students show disruptive behavior while in school or specific classes. This disruptive behavior may result from many things. A student may have serious problems at home and bring those same problems to the classroom. Having poor social adjustment to a new school or classroom in general can cause a student to externalize problem behaviors (Johnson, 2014). Some teachers do not know how to properly manage an at-risk student which could lead to increased acting out in class. Teachers who work with children presenting a broad array of behavioral and emotional problems are challenged more if they do not know how to address the problems. Students who have mental health disorders add an additional component to students being considered at-risk. Recent statistics show one in four youth experience some type of mental disorder, and

left untreated can inhibit the student's ability to maintain social connections at school. This component causes higher levels of psychological stress, increased levels of truancy, and more behavior problems (Slaten & Ellison, 2015).

Promotion of positive and prevention of negative discipline has been an essential dimension of school connectedness for a long time (Strahan, Cope, Hundley, & Faircloth, 2005). At-risk students are known to exhibit classroom disruptions resulting in discipline measures. With at-risk students already tending to have frequent discipline problems, the transition to high school has been associated with increased behavioral issues (Smith et al., 2006). Students who have struggled through elementary and middle school years will tend to struggle with discipline issues during high school, hampering their chance to successfully graduate (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). Discipline measures usually vary from teacher-to-teacher or school-to-school. Though some teachers or districts handle discipline differently, classroom disruptions are a huge problem in schools today. Students who are at-risk account for a large number of classroom disruptions. Disruptive student behavior in the classroom inhibits student learning and impacts student retention of what is taught in the classroom (Seidman, 2005). It is very difficult for students to focus on what is being taught in the classroom if there are students disrupting class. It is also frustrating for a teacher to focus on teaching a lesson when students are being disruptive.

Policies Related to At-Risk Students

Historically, looking to meet the needs for at-risk students has resulted in various legislation and educational practice. Legislation for special needs students was passed to provide parents and students some assurance that a proper education would be given

regardless of previous successes or failures in school. Many at-risk students, however, continue to go unidentified or misidentified as having a learning or behavior disability rather than just needing some extra assistance. Special education requirements such as PL 94-142 have existed since 1975. PL 94-142 is known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. This legislation is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1975 (IDEA) and was put in place to ensure all children were provided access to public education without regard for a disability condition (Keogh, 2007). Though specific requirements have to be met to show a student's disability is having an adverse impact on their educational performance and there is a need for specialized instruction, some students can receive additional support under Section 504 legislation (Dobson, 2013). 504s, as they are more commonly called, provide accommodations to students as a support for their education even though the student does not meet the guidelines to receive special education services.

Students with special needs have specific risk factors presenting them with challenges to be successful in school. Teachers educating students considered at-risk also face challenges in meeting the student needs. A constant challenge for teachers and leaders of schools is the need to search for programs and strategies designed to improve the quality of education and instruction in schools (Jones, 2009). Many states and school districts nationwide have struggled to redesign schools to allow all young people to receive the education they need for success (Dedmond, Brown, & LaFauci, 2006).

Additional political reports and legislation have been made in order to close the achievement gap and help address the needs of at-risk students. The 1983 U.S Department of Education's Report, *A Nation At Risk*, painted a picture of America's

public schools as failing to meet the individual needs of all students (Holland, 2002). Teaching based on what works for specific students was a key component of the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* act of 2001 (Respress & Lutfi, 2006). Due to the federal guidelines set forth by the *NCLB* legislation, areas of focus including student attendance and achievement became front stage in determining school success or failure (Cole, 2011). This legislation reauthorized the 1965 *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* and set out to increase math and reading scores, while closing achievement gaps among students (McMurrey, 2014).

Helping students deemed at-risk of being unsuccessful in school was a focus of this legislation. Among the issues addressed in *NCLB* were preventing dropouts, improving achievement for disadvantaged students, training and recruiting quality teachers and leaders, and improving literacy (Jones, 2009). Dropout prevention was a focus of the legislation due to the long term socioeconomic ramifications and success of future graduate families (Lemon & Watson, 2011). In 2007, the Alliance for Excellence in Education reported families who were led by a high school graduate would accumulate ten times more wealth over time than those headed by someone who dropped out of high school (Lemon & Watson, 2011). With this higher level of education, a greater impact on the socioeconomic status of families can definitely be impacted. This legislation mandated standardized testing as an accountability measure for both students and schools (Respress & Lutfi, 2006).

The most recent legislation known as the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* has replaced *NCLB*. While the focus of *ESSA* and *NCLB* are similar in wanting to drive students be successful in school, distinct differences are noticed how performance is

measured and what is considered success. According to the US Department of Education (2015), *ESSA* is a law focusing on a clear goal of preparing all students for success in college and careers while allowing individual states to drive performance based on many measures. Greater support will be given to specific subgroups of students who show a need for additional resources in order to improve academically. Measures other than federal mandated standardized testing can be used in order to determine success.

Challenges for Meeting the Educational Needs of At-Risk Students

Many teachers are able to identify students who might be struggling academically due to being at-risk, but many do not have the time or experience to provide assistance (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). Many teachers may not understand the need for individual relationships and school engagement with at-risk students. Unfortunately, many veteran teachers who do understand the need and could help with at-risk students tend to migrate from more challenging schools due to those struggles (Glazerman & Max, 2011). Teacher quality and retention thereof can help create a positive school culture and higher student achievement for all (Fusarelli & Militello, 2012). Schools serving students who are deemed at-risk tend to have struggles providing an appropriate form of education due to the vast array of differentiated needs (Voyles, 2012). Not knowing how to successfully make an impact on an at-risk student is common yet frustrating for some teachers. This frustration can turn into student-teacher conflicts, potentially leading to further problems. Many times, student-teacher conflicts end with at-risk students being removed from the classroom.

In an effort to address the growing need, alternative schools were developed in response to excessive expulsions, chronic failure, and unacceptable statistics of student

dropout rates (Gilson, 2006). Alternative schools placed many at-risk students together to receive their education. This continues to be a popular program today; however, funding has eliminated many alternative school programs across Missouri and nationwide. Alternative programing for disruptive students helps offset the common practice of removing students from class or giving them a failing grade. These opportunities afford students who struggle with both their constitutional and educational rights (Thomas & Bainbridge, 2000). Students, whether poor, disruptive, or abused, have the fundamental right to learn and can do so if given equal opportunity (Thomas & Bainbridge, 2000). Alternative classrooms provide opportunities for at-risk students to receive an education.

Many at-risk student factors can be positively addressed and academic failure can be prevented through allocation of resources and appropriate interventions (Dedmond, 2005). Throughout the United States, communities value the education students attain in our public school system (Lys, 2009). As educators continue to uncover various strategies for successfully meeting the needs of at-risk students, freshman transition programs are being utilized as they place these students in subjects and programs appropriate to their level and provide school counseling services (Hanewald, 2013).

Schools today have many students who are considered at-risk. Educators in school districts with many at-risk students will struggle to meet their multiple needs (Voyles, 2012). Mental services for students having high at-risk populations are also in high demand. Current estimates show one in four youth have some type of mental disorder (Slaten & Elison, 2015). Left untreated or without intervention can inhibit a student's ability to adapt well to school change, cause greater psychological stress, and

increase their risk of dropping out of school. A better understanding of the needs of students deemed at-risk is also being realized, though many school districts continue to struggle with at-risk education (Voyles, 2012). Twenty-first century schools are under a primary challenge to educate all children at high levels of learning (Fusarelli & Militello, 2012). Intervening early in an at-risk student's schooling is based on the philosophy of taking a proactive approach, addressing problems early, and producing a better outcome (Zhang, Fei, Quddus, & Davis, 2014). This seems to be one of the most stressful, complex, and difficult challenges facing teachers in the classroom. The difficulty of teaching at-risk students is also an issue recognized with administrators who are continuously working to remedy the problem (Robinson, 2004).

Schools with transient populations, cultural diversity, and low achievement tend to be hard to staff with effective teachers (Fusarelli & Militello, 2012). Teaching in diverse classrooms can be a challenge for many new teachers, causing high percentages to leave their position within the first five years of service (Durham-Barnes, 2011). Veteran teachers, for the most part, want only the hardworking students in their class while newer teachers are not sure how to manage students who are disruptive. Unfortunately, within many districts, preferences are given to teachers with more seniority when it comes to teaching assignments (Glazerman & Max, 2011). Many times veteran teachers will get their wish to teach only the best, hardworking students. Newer teachers will end up having to teach students who are harder to reach or at-risk and end up giving up on the teaching profession within a few short years. Teachers with greater seniority or more advanced degrees also tend to leave challenging schools in order to work with students who need less interventions (Glazerman & Max, 2011).

Early intervention, including Response to Intervention (RTI), has shown to have many positive effects when it comes to improving student academic outcomes (Zhang, et. al, 2014). Intervening early with students who are at-risk for dropping out of school will have an impact on student attendance in a positive direction (Cole, 2011). Teachers using differentiated instruction and knowing the differences among students can help in the effectiveness of at-risk learning (DiMartino & Miles, 2004). Teaching appropriate social behaviors and assuring a safe school for students to learn show benefits to student growth in high poverty areas (Olivares-Cuhat, 2011).

Ways to teach diverse students are constantly being reviewed and initiated. One program being utilized by some school districts is a freshman transition program, including an alternative setting. These classrooms or programs may offer alternative forms of discipline other teachers may not use. Successful teachers will prepare the classroom to minimize disruptions, are well prepared with lesson plans, and design routines to maintain a momentum of the students. Student boredom is often a cause of class disruptions. Classes helping with at-risk student discipline problems will focus on the causes of the misbehavior and respond to the students as individuals, using the disruptions as a lesson to teach and a time to model self-discipline (Strahan, et. al., 2005). Teachers in freshman transition programs can assist students in understanding why they chose a particular behavior and guide them to accept responsibility for that behavior. They will allow students to discover better choices to make and allow for students to react differently.

Freshman Transition Programs

By the end of the student's eighth grade year, at-risk characteristics are most obvious, denoting a student may need extra help in order to achieve in school, thus reinforcing the need for freshman transition programs (Neild, 2009). Research shows almost one of every three students in the eighth grade in the United States will not graduate high school (Dedmond et al., 2006). The transition from middle level schooling to high school is a pivotal time where the potential for students to drop out is great (Lys, 2009). Attendance rates during the first year of high school have shown to be directly related to the completion of high school (Blount, 2012). Furthermore, the dropout rates have shown to be significantly lower in districts around the country having freshman transition programs (Andrews, 2012).

Freshman transition programs work to rectify student attendance and prevent students from dropping out of school. If reasons for high school drop-out rates are not rectified, only two thirds of students entering high school will ever receive a diploma (Dedmond, 2005). Due to the transition to high school being such an overwhelming adjustment to many students, freshman transition programs have been shown to reduce drop-out rates as well as help retention rates in the ninth grade (Blount, 2012).

Freshman transition programs added to high schools are now evolving as a possible successful alternative approach to help meet the needs of at-risk students (Legters & Kerr, 2001). Recognizing the diversity of students may be easy, but knowing what to do after the recognition is another story. The diversity of students challenges teachers to offer lessons authenticating each student as a unique human being (Battalio, 2005). Research shows all of these factors can be helped or prevented with a different

style of classroom such as the inclusion of freshman transition (Hanewald, 2013). Identifying at-risk students and providing interventions early in their school careers allows the faculty time to better understand each student's needs. This early identification also allows educators a chance to differentiate instruction and implement newer classroom policies designed to improve student learning (Zhang et al., 2014). Transitioning from the middle school grades into the freshman year can be stressful to both parents and students (Clark & Hunley, 2007). In the past, at-risk students were rushed through the basic curriculum designed for students with the same learning styles without the consideration for students who tend to learn differently.

At-risk learners pose more pronounced needs than mainstream students. In short, at-risk students may need more support and encouragement from their teachers on a continual basis. This ongoing support and encouragement is what a freshman transition class can include. Effective freshman transition programs include curriculum, facility, safety, and discipline needs (Smith et al., 2006). Being able to improve students' wellbeing must begin with being able to accurately identify those students who are indeed at-risk (Hanewald, 2011). Once it is realized that some students learn differently and have a plethora of different needs, greater attention can be put on designing classrooms to fit these needs. The transition into high school is the time to work with the differentiated needs of students. Transitioning from the eighth grade year to high school is a major stepping stone of adolescent youth and their parents (Kinney, 2006). These stepping stones are reinforced through educational programs that steer toward those students who need the added assistance the most. For schools implementing freshman transition programs, it is suggested they focus on study skills, stress management, and

making the best use of time during and after school (Lampert, 2005). A collaborative effort through a freshman transition teacher, core teachers, and parents can add value to the overall program. Confidence can be built among students when they know there are people who care about them showing up to school. Holding students accountable and setting high expectations for them can help students build confidence and set a foundation for future success.

The transition between middle school and the ninth grade is known to be the most difficult in a student's school career. Difficulties in the transition to high school most heavily affects students who may already have attendance, discipline, and academic problems prior to high school (Bornsheuer et al., 2011). This is a time students become more stressed academically, socially, and physically.

Many students who are considered at-risk find the transition to high school as a stumbling point in their education (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). Resilient adolescents tend to have better social skills, academic superiority, and ability to meet the demands of changing school settings than their counterparts having troubles with a transition (Boon, 2008). A successful transition program needs to include components informing and mentoring students about maintaining successful study habits and benefits of having a positive academic performance. Freshman transition programs can equip students with school building and procedural aspects of high school to proactively help students overcome any apprehension (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). Other components of a successful freshman transition program include making and continuing positive social interactions with students and faculty (Geltner et al., 2011). Knowing at-risk youth have greater risk of being resilient during the transition to high school, having these

components to help and prevent an unsuccessfulness experience can make a difference (Geltner et al., 2011).

Freshman transition for social and emotional wellbeing. Nearly all children experience increased levels of physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development during adolescence. Because of this, researchers have devoted time during the past two decades to provide educators with data supporting the need for additional structures during the ninth grade year (Legters & Kerr, 2001). Positive student emotions are known to decrease during years of school, with the most obvious happening during adolescence (Hagenauer & Hascher, 2014). With this in mind, it is vital to help students navigate the transition to high school. A successful transition to high school can help adolescent students form lasting attachments to school and greatly increase their chances of persisting to graduation (Legters & Kerr, 2001). Freshman transition programs are designed to assist students who need more support to be successful in school.

The feeling when entering a new school must be positive or change to positive in order for a student to be successful in school. The feelings students may go through include fear, seclusion, and isolation from teachers and students. Positive relationships must be built in order to assist in this. Due to students feeling set apart from other students, teachers must set the tone and develop a positive relationship with these particular students. In research conducted more than a decade ago, it was concluded that caring relationships define the essence of success in teaching. Teachers creating caring atmospheres in the classrooms are more likely to assist in the needs of at-risk students (Joyce, Wolf, & Calhoun, 1993). Freshman transition programs can also assist in easing anxiety and better equip ninth graders to the surroundings in which they will be for the

next four years. Adolescence is a time in a student's life when they are the most receptive to building relationships on a positive level (Frushour, 2006). Freshman transition programs and classrooms are perfect platforms to assist in building these positive relationships. Freshman transition activities can also be planned to acquaint students with the system they are about to enter and make students feel more cared for and important (Haviland, 2005). Students need to feel like a stakeholder in their educational process.

Freshman transition for academic skills. Effective freshman transition programs demonstrate a focus on student achievement (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Student mentoring, a major component of many freshman transition programs, assists in the prevention of many negative aspects such as loneliness, feeling overwhelmed, or not fitting in related to the freshman year which can be problematic to the at-risk student (Hickman & Wright, 2011). Each year many students who experienced a variety of challenges are moving into their high school careers. In her July 2006 article published in *Principal's Research Review*, Dedmond stated students who participate in transition programs are less likely to drop out of high school when those programs include students, staff, and parents.

Additional support is needed for at-risk students to be able to successful in an academic setting (Johnson, & Lampley, 2010). A freshman transition program is a place where an academic focus can be monitored and improved. Many freshman transition educators teach various study skill lessons as well as test taking skills to help students achieve. Generally, these classes are also smaller in nature and allow for a more personal level of teaching than the general classroom.

Freshman transition interventions and classes can offer opportunities for ninth grade students to develop positive relationships with upper classmen. Mentoring, as freshman transition offers, is a popular strategy used as an intervention, diversion, and prevention for failures during the ninth grade year (Hickman & Wright, 2011). Meeting the individual needs of at-risk students can be supported with the implementation of mentoring programs (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). A freshman transition program needs to be based on the idea that all learners are capable of success and their success is partly based on how they feel entering a new school (Lindsay, 1998).

Freshman transition for school procedures and format. Areas such as time management, social skills, and peer pressure, just to name a few, become more noticeable during this phase of a student's school career. Many freshmen express concern about how much more difficult high school classes seem when compared to previous level classes when managing time. This is more pronounced if extracurricular activities are taking place (Haviland, 2005). This is a time when freshmen need to be developing positive relationships, learning to study and manage time effectively, and learning how to positively contribute to the high school they attend.

Studies have tended to show student success in high school dramatically increases if they have a positive experience during their freshman year (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). Many traditional programs involving freshmen students entering high school for the first time are designed as a one-day overview or orientation to the new school. A comprehensive long-term transition program is needed by all students to help their success in high school and beyond (Dedmond et al., 2006). For more than two decades, many schools and districts across the country have tried to develop freshman transition

type programs or academies that address the issue of helping students want to come to school (Dedmond, 2005). Danielson (1996) wrote of teaching being a matter of relationship building. Relationships in the classroom should be instilled with rapport and respect from the teacher and the students and between each other. Though these relationships should begin being built long before students even get into high schools, a successful program will put steps in place to help ensure at-risk students will begin getting the added assistance before they enter high school. Using differentiated instruction, promoting a safe school climate, and teaching appropriate social behaviors will support students (Olivares-Cuhat, 2011). Ensuring a welcoming environment is a process beginning well before students arrive in the classroom. Keeping this in mind, a focus on freshman transition is a must (Lindsay, 1998). Students who are deemed at-risk as well as other students who might want extra help to transition into high school can benefit greatly through a freshman transition program. At-risk students developing relationships with their teachers and becoming valued members of their classes creates a healthy environment and positively influences social development. This will only increase academic achievement for these children.

During the transition into high school, many students have mixed feelings. These feelings may include positive ones of meeting new people and having more choices of classes offered. Negative feelings may include getting lost in a larger school, being picked on by older students, and having more challenging course work. It is these negative feeling that cause students to not want to attend school, affecting their chances to be successful (Frasier, 2007). Freshman transition programs include approaches to meeting many individual needs of at-risk students. The need of feeling welcome and

supported in a place students do not feel comfortable being can greatly increase the odds they will attend there (Johnson & Lampley, 2010). Students, especially at-risk, need an environment of positive school engagement in order to reduce the chances of dropping out or achieving low grades (Bilge et al., 2014). Developing a freshman transition program with activities to ease the anxiety and stress, while supporting the student during the planning of the transition, will reduce the negative effects associated with the transition (Frasier, 2007). This reduction in the negative effects will encourage students to feel at ease increasing their motivation to attend school rather than skip.

Summary

Freshmen students who perform poorly tend to struggle throughout the rest of high school (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). Many changes take place in high school that were not seen in the middle level schools. Troublesome changes include larger populated environments, increased accountability for grades, and lack of established relationships with previous school faculty and students. The difficult changes happening during this transitional time can put an adolescent's resiliency in question (Hanewald, 2011).

Performance of students in American schools has gained greater attention over the past several years from the local, state, and federal levels (Jones, 2009). Freshman transition programs are becoming more prevalent throughout high schools in order to assist with helping remedy the different factors causing students to be considered at-risk. Students making a successful transition to high school increase the likelihood they will graduate and become successful in society (Legters & Kerr, 2001). Engagement in school has a powerful influence on youth development as well as the subsequent psychosocial outcomes following youth who fail in school (Voisin & Elsaesser, 2013). It

is obviously a challenge in today's schools to create a collaborative school culture supporting student individuality and the needs for different forms of being educated (Slater, 2004). Students who are at-risk need a different form of educating than those who are not. Academically gifted, average, or struggling learners should be fully welcomed to their school communities. All stakeholders in the educational process share a responsibility for their learning. When it comes to the process of educating students, all students have the right to learn.

Freshman transition programs can assist with this type of learning. Many programs meet for one hour a day and provide a great deal of support for students at-risk. Freshman transition programs can release some of the anxiety associated with the move to high school. It is common for students to show anxiety when transitioning to high school (Haviland, 2005). A properly trained teacher in the area of freshman transition concepts can help. A great amount of motivational activities are given and a collaborative effort between teachers and parents provide a firm foundation for the student's new high school career. Lastly, school discipline problems are something that have to be prevented. All children cannot learn if the ones sitting next to them are disrupting class. Freshman transition programs work on finding the reasons for class disruptions and other discipline problems and work toward eliminating them.

Leaving a middle school or junior high school can be a challenging time for many students. Students are both excited and anxious when it comes to entering the high school setting (Andrews & Bishop, 2012). High school buildings are typically bigger and usually consist of four grades levels rather than two. The sheer number of students, classrooms, and teachers can be overwhelming to ninth grade students. The students'

socio-emotional functioning or their overall sense of well-being is an important aspect to consider when entering the high school setting (Hanewald, 2013). This is important to consider too when looking to students with disabilities or at-risk identifiers. Students who have difficulty making it through the transition to high school are shown to have increased symptoms of depression as well (Geltner et al., 2011). Getting lost in larger high school environments and being picked on by older students is a great concern for students with disabilities (Frasier, 2007). Finding the balance of involving an effective freshman transition program and bringing together middle and high school educators to help deter social anxieties can help support the social needs of incoming students. (Frasier, 2007).

The difficulty transitioning to high school affects students who may already struggle with attendance issues, negative school discipline, and poor academic success (Bornsheuer et al., 2011). Without freshman interventions in place, many students may never have the opportunity to progress to graduation. Freshman transition programs are interventions educators are in need of in educational systems (Dedmond et al., 2006; Strahan et al., 2005). The concept of freshman transition programs has been around for quite some time, but programs incorporating the sustained application of skills, relationship building, and authentic learning are needed for academic success (Dedmond et al., 2006). Students who do well academically and personally during their freshman year of high school are more likely to graduate high school and be positive contributors to their communities (Geltner et al., 2011). All children can learn the curriculum and be successful in school with the proper guidance and leadership into their high school career. In freshman transition classrooms, students not only learn more about subject matter to

perform better on tests, but they also learn more about themselves and how to make better decisions in the classroom and in life. Teachers specially trained to work with at-risk students are able to encourage positive connections between themselves and the student. These connections are felt during the lessons given, as the students respond to the lessons, and during follow-ups with students (Strahan et al., 2005). These teachers also demonstrate warm, supportive relationships by showing knowledge of individual students, developing assignments that include collaboration, and by involving students in classroom decisions to show ownership. All of this combined with reforming school organizations and instructional improvement will help an at-risk student succeed in school (Neild, 2009).

Chapter three includes the methodology of the research. Research questions, null hypotheses, participants and procedures are discussed. The overall research design, instrumentation and data treatment will also be identified. Chapter four includes the analysis of data based on the results of the data collected and analyzed. Research questions and null hypotheses will also be reviewed. Finally, chapter five includes conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the analyzed data. This chapter will also include implications for the future of education.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

A successful transition to high school can play a crucial role in the outcomes of freshman students (Neild, 2009). This quantitative study focused on 152 Missouri public high schools. The purpose of this study attempted to determine if offering freshman transition programs, in public Missouri high schools, were an effective way to aid in the success of at-risk students in the areas of academic test scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents while in high school. Additionally, the researcher explored if the percentage of students in the high schools identified as at-risk by being eligible for free and/or reduced price lunch impacted the effect of a freshman transition program on academic test scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents.

This chapter includes information about the participants of this study as well as details concerning the research design. Information on the instrumentation used in this study shows how data are collected and the validity and reliability thereof. Information explaining the data analysis performed will also be explained.

Research Questions

RQ_1 While a freshman transition program in a high school is intended to improve the academic success of students, increase attendance, and reduce major disciple incidents, which if any of these stated objectives are achieved by implementing a freshman transition program?

RQ_2 How will a freshman transition program in a high school, intended to improve the academic success of students, increase attendance, and reduce major

discipline incidents, be affected by the percentage of students considered at-risk because they are eligible for free and/or reduced priced lunches?

Null Hypotheses

H_0 Students in a high school with a transition program will not academically outperform other students attending high schools not offering a freshman transition programs.

H_0 Students in a high school with a transition program will not have better attendance than other students attending high schools not offering a freshman transition programs.

H_0 Students in a high school with a transition program will not have fewer disciple incidents than other students attending high schools not offering a freshman transition programs.

H_0 Students attending high schools offering freshman transition programs do not perform academically above other students when comparing high schools with similar percentages of students eligible for free and/or reduced price lunches.

H_0 Students attending high schools offering freshman transition programs do not have higher attendance rates than other students attending high schools when comparing high schools with similar percentages of students eligible for free and/or reduced price lunches.

H_0 Students attending high schools offering freshman transition programs do not have fewer major discipline incidents than other students when comparing high schools with similar percentages of students eligible for free and/or reduced price lunches.

Participants

The students from 152 Missouri high schools were assessed from the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years on the use of freshman transition programs or aspects thereof. Assessment data from the 2016-2017 school were not used due to invalidation of EOC scores from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Two year averages of the high schools showed total student populations ranging from 20 to 2517. The two year average of free and/or reduced price lunch for the public Missouri high schools ranged from 8.35% to 98.6%.

Other participants included each high school principal within the school districts acting as facilitators as they received a short demographic questionnaire concerning the use, or not, of freshman transition programs.

Sampling Procedure

All public high schools in Missouri were invited to provide responses to the initial survey seeking basic grouping data. There are 518 total school districts in Missouri, but only 448 have high schools. Within the 448 school districts, 499 Missouri public high schools were identified. The 499 high schools are located within urban, suburban, and rural areas. This provided diversity as it pertained to student demographics, including socioeconomic status. Having such a large and diverse set of students located within 448 public Missouri school districts offering secondary education provided adequate representation of high school students. One hundred fifty two districts responding to the initial survey were included in the study.

Research Setting

The public Missouri school district high schools represented in this research resided within urban, suburban, and rural communities. These school districts were located within 114 counties in Missouri. Populations for these counties ranged from 2171 to 1,000,438. Family median income for these communities ranged from $32,118 to $82,226 yearly. Community unemployment ranged from 3.2% to 9.3%. Diverse ranges of poverty were also seen in these communities ranging from 5.8% to 29.3% of families living below the poverty level.

Research Design

All public Missouri high school principals received a demographic survey. This survey was used only for the purpose of determining if each high school practices a freshman transition program, the year the program began, and the percentage of students qualifying for free and/or reduced priced lunch. This demographic survey was emailed to all Missouri public high school principals. Having such a large and diverse set of students located within 448 public Missouri school districts offering secondary education provided adequate representation of high school students. A deadline was given as to when this questionnaire needed to be completed. As the deadline neared, a second request was emailed and personal phone calls made to increase participation of those who had not responded. After the deadline passed, a list of schools having freshman transition programs in place, or aspects thereof, was made as well as those who do not have freshman transition programs. This data were collected on February 8, 2018, through February 23rd, 2018.

Furthermore, public Missouri high schools having freshman transition programs were divided into four categories showing increased populations of at-risk students. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education recognizes students who qualify for free and/or reduced lunch as at-risk. Category 1 (Q_1) represents high schools with free and/or reduced lunch populations of 0% to 25%. Category 2 (Q_2) represents high schools with free and/or reduced lunch populations of 26% to 50%. Category 3 (Q_3) represents high schools with free and/or reduced lunch populations of 51% to 75%. Category 4 (Q_4) represents high schools with free and/or reduced lunch populations of 76% to 100%.

Once the high schools having freshman transition programs were compiled, additional data were assessed. Data concerning End Of Course (EOC) testing results for English II and Algebra I, overall attendance rates, and major discipline incidents for all grades were found as archival data through the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website. The particular archived data assessed through DESE came from each high school represented as having freshman transition programs and those not having freshman transition programs. Furthermore, archived data assessed through DESE came from high schools within four categories of public Missouri high schools with particular at-risk populations. The calendar years of 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 were used as a data collection point from DESE.

Once data sets were in place, a Factorial MANOVA analysis of variance was conducted through the use of SPSS to determine the level of significance between variables. The particular analysis of variance of a Factorial MANOVA was used due to having two independent variables of having a freshman transition program and

percentage of free and/or reduced lunch as the factorial stat. The multiple dependent variables included academic test scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents.

Instrumentation

The researcher had a survey consisting of three questions.

1. Does your school have a Freshman Transition program?
2. If you answered yes to question one, in what school year did the program begin?
3. What is the percentage of students in your school that are eligible for free and/or reduced price lunches?

This study then focused on the results of English II EOC scores, Algebra I EOC scores, yearly attendance rates, and major discipline incidents reported for students during the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years. Student achievement, attendance, and discipline data for the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years were compiled through the viewing of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website.

Data Treatment

Once the demographic survey given to the high school principals of all public Missouri high schools was analyzed showing which schools have freshman transition components, a Factorial MANOVA analysis of variance was performed to test for statistical significance in the areas of English II EOC and Algebra I EOC scores, yearly attendance rates, and major discipline incidents between schools integrating a freshman transition program, but grouped into four categories of percentages of students who qualify for free and/or reduced priced lunches. A Factorial MANOVA analysis of variance was performed to test for statistical significance in the areas of English II EOC

and Algebra I EOC scores, yearly attendance rates, and major discipline incidents between schools integrating a freshman transition and those not. The researcher performed a quantitative study to determine if students were able to improve academic performance, attendance at school, and receive fewer major referrals for discipline. The independent variable for the Factorial MANOVA was the presence of a freshman transition program or not at the high school the participant attends with the dependent variables being test scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents. The four categories of increasing at-risk percentages also acted as independent variables for the Factorial MANOVA while dependent variables remained as test scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents. The Factorial MANOVA was selected for this particular research project due to being a technique allowing multiple populations to be analyzed with multiple continuous dependent variables. The level of significance was represented with an alpha level of $<.05$. This significance level denotes the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis when it is true. A significance level of .05 indicates a 5% chance of having a conclusion that a difference will exist when there is not an actual difference.

Summary

The data collected for students from all public Missouri high schools were used to perform a statistical analysis to discover if freshman transition programs are an effective way to aid in the success of students while in high school. The data collected were also used to determine if the operation of freshman transition programs intended to improve academics, attendance, and disciple were affected by the percentage of students considered at-risk because they are eligible for free and/or reduced lunches. Participants included students from all public Missouri high schools during the calendar years of

2014-2015 and 2015-2016. Two year averages showed student populations ranging from 20 to 2517 per school.

This research took place within 152 public Missouri high schools. Much diversity was seen among the student demographics when looking at socioeconomic backgrounds of the students making up each high school. Schools ranged from 8.35% to 98.6% having free or reduced lunch status, and communities ranged from 5.8% to 29.3% of families living below the poverty level

Building principals of the identified high schools received a demographic survey to determine if each high school practices a freshman transition program or aspects thereof. Once high schools were identified as having freshman transition programs in place, data were assessed concerning English II EOC and Algebra I EOC scores, overall attendance rates, and major discipline incidents. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website was used to gain the English II EOC and Algebra I EOC scores as well as overall attendance rates and major discipline incidents for each high school.

High schools having freshman transition programs were also divided into four categories showing increased populations of at-risk students. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education recognizes students who qualify for free and or reduced as at-risk. Category 1 (Q_1) represents high schools with free and or reduced lunch populations of 0% to 25%. Category 2 (Q_2) represents high schools with free and or reduced lunch populations of 26% to 50%. Category 3 (Q_3) represents high schools with free and or reduced lunch populations of 51% to 75%. Category 4 (Q_4) represents high schools with free and or reduced lunch populations of 76% to 100%.

A Factorial MANOVA analysis of variance was performed to test for a statistical significance in the areas of English II EOC and Algebra I EOC scores, yearly attendance rates, and student disciple incidents between high schools offering freshman transition program aspects and those not. This particular type of analysis was chosen due to multiple consistent dependent variables being analyzed. This analysis had the independent variable of freshman transition programs offered at the high schools the participant attended and the dependent variables as English II EOC and Algebra I EOC scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents. A Factorial MANOVA analysis of variance was performed to test for statistical significance in the areas of English II EOC and Algebra I EOC scores, yearly attendance rates, and major discipline incidents between schools integrating a freshman transition program, but they were grouped into four categories of percentages of students who qualify for free and/or reduced priced lunches. A level of significance of $<.05$ was represented during this analysis. Results of this data analysis will be discussed in chapter four.

Chapter four includes the analysis of data based on the results of the data collected and analyzed. Research questions and null hypotheses will also be reviewed. Finally, chapter five includes conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the analyzed data. This chapter will also include implications for the future of education.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this quantitative study was to attempt to determine whether offering freshman transition programs, in public Missouri high schools, were an effective way to aid in the success of at-risk students in the areas of academic test scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents while in high school. Additionally, the researcher wanted to explore if the percentage of students in the high schools identified as at-risk by being eligible for free and/or reduced priced lunch impacted the effect of a freshman transition program on academic test scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents.

Data from the school years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 were collected from 152 public Missouri high schools taking part in the study. Assessment data from the 2016-2017 school were not used due to invalidation of EOC scores from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). Choosing to take part in the study, the high school principals answered a demographic survey determining if their school offered a freshman transition program or not. The high school principals also answered what year their freshman transition program began and the percentage of students taking part in free and/or reduced priced lunches. Data from the school years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 were archived from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) for End of Course testing in English II and Algebra I, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents.

Research Questions

RQ_1 While a freshman transition program in a high school is intended to improve the academic success of students, increase attendance, and reduce major disciple incidents, which if any of these stated objectives are achieved by implementing a freshman transition program?

RQ_2 How will a freshman transition program in a high school, intended to improve the academic success of students, increase attendance, and reduce discipline occurrences, be affected by the percentage of students considered at-risk because they are eligible for free and/or reduced priced lunches?

Null Hypotheses

H_0 Students in a high school with a transition program will not academically outperform other students attending high schools not offering a freshman transition programs.

H_0 Students in a high school with a transition program will not have better attendance than other students attending high schools not offering a freshman transition programs.

H_0 Students in a high school with a transition program will not have fewer disciple occurrences than other students attending high schools not offering a freshman transition programs.

H_0 Students attending high schools offering freshman transition programs do not perform academically above other students when comparing high schools with similar percentages of students eligible for free and/or reduced price lunches.

H_0 Students attending high schools offering freshman transition programs do not have higher attendance rates than other students attending high schools when comparing high schools with similar percentages of students eligible for free and/or reduced price lunches.

H_0 Students attending high schools offering freshman transition programs do not have fewer major discipline incidents than other students when comparing high schools with similar percentages of students eligible for free and/or reduced price lunches.

Results

In this data analysis, tables and summaries were set to End of Course testing for English II, End of Course testing for Algebra I, Yearly Attendance Rate, and number of Major Discipline Incidents. A Factorial MANOVA was conducted to indicate significance between variables. The overall interaction between freshman transition programs and free and/or reduced lunch percentages were also noted using Wilks' Lambda.

2015 English II EOC results were disaggregated by having a freshman transition program or not. Data for the 2014-2015chool year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between having or not having a Freshman Transition Program in place and End of Course testing scores for English II. Public Missouri high schools having a Freshman Transition Program had a higher mean (74.09) for English II EOC scores than those schools not having a Freshman Transition Program (72.12). When analyzing this data using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated an alpha level of .538. Considering research question number one

(RQ_1), the results indicated no significant difference in English II EOC scores of students in a freshman transition program and students not in a transition program.

2015 Algebra I EOC results were disaggregated by having a freshman transition program or not. Data for the 2014-2015 school year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between having or not having a Freshman Transition Program in place and End of Course testing scores for Algebra I. Public Missouri high schools having a Freshman Transition Program had a higher mean (55.17) for Algebra I EOC scores than those schools not having a Freshman Transition Program (54.36). When analyzing this data using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated an alpha level of .828. Considering research question number one (RQ_1), the results indicated no significant difference in Algebra I EOC scores of students in a freshman transition program and students not in a transition program.

2015 attendance rate results were disaggregated by having a freshman transition program or not. Data for the 2014-2015 school year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between having or not having a Freshman Transition Program in place and attendance rate. Public Missouri high schools having a Freshman Transition Program had a lower mean (84.76) for attendance rates than those schools not having a Freshman Transition Program (87.01). When analyzing this data using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated an alpha level of .407. Considering research question one (RQ_1), the results indicated no significant difference in

year attendance rates of students in a freshman transition program and students not in a transition program.

2015 major discipline incidents totals were disaggregated by having a freshman transition program or not. Data for the 2014-2015 school year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between having or not having a Freshman Transition Program in place and Major Discipline Incidents. Public Missouri high schools having a Freshman Transition Program had a higher mean (20.04) for major discipline incidents than those schools not having a Freshman Transition Program (6.30). When analyzing this data using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated an alpha level of .122. Considering research question number one (RQ_1), the results indicated no significant difference in major discipline incidents of students in a freshman transition program and students not in a transition program.

2016 English II EOC results were disaggregated by having a freshman transition program or not. Data for the 2015-2016 school year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between having or not having a Freshman Transition Program in place and End of Course testing scores for English II. Public Missouri high schools having a Freshman Transition Program had a higher mean (81.49) for English II EOC scores than those schools not having a Freshman Transition Program (77.04). When analyzing this data using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated an alpha level of .771. Considering research question number one

(RQ_1), the results indicated no significant difference in English II EOC scores of students in a freshman transition program and students not in a transition program.

2016 Algebra I EOC results were disaggregated by having a freshman transition program or not. Data for the 2015-2016 school year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between having or not having a Freshman Transition Program in place and End of Course testing scores for Algebra I. Public Missouri high schools having a Freshman Transition Program had a higher mean (60.09) for Algebra I EOC scores than those schools not having a Freshman Transition Program (57.88). When analyzing this data using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated an alpha level of .656. Considering research question number one (RQ_1), the results indicated no significant difference in Algebra I EOC scores of students in a freshman transition program and students not in a transition program.

2016 attendance rates were disaggregated by having a freshman transition program or not. Data for the 2015-2016 school year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between having or not having a Freshman Transition Program in place and attendance rate. Public Missouri high schools having a Freshman Transition Program had a lower mean (86.38) for attendance rates than those schools not having a Freshman Transition Program (88.43). When analyzing this data using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated an alpha level of .875. Considering research question one (RQ_1), the results indicated no significant difference in

year attendance rates of students in a freshman transition program and students not in a transition program.

2016 major discipline incidents were disaggregated by having a freshman transition program or not. Data for the 2015-2016 school year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between having or not having a Freshman Transition Program in place and major discipline incidents. Public Missouri high schools having a Freshman Transition Program had a higher mean (18.07) for major discipline occurrences than those schools not having a Freshman Transition Program (5.87). When analyzing this data using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated an alpha level of .561. Considering research question number one (RQ_1), the results indicated no significant difference in major discipline incidents of students in a freshman transition program and students not in a transition program.

Table 1

2015 English II EOC Results Disaggregated by FRL%

EII EOC/FRL%	N	MD	SE	Sig.
EII EOC with 0-25% FRL + 51-75% FRL	68	12.69	3.17	.001
EII EOC with 0-25% FRL + 76-100% FRL	28	22.93	3.81	.000
EII EOC with 26-50% FRL + 51-75% FRL	124	8.04	1.80	.000
EII EOC with 26-50% FRL + 76-100 FRL	84	18.28	2.77	.000
EII EOC with 51-75% FRL + 76-100 FRL	72	10.25	2.83	.002

Note. EII EOC= English II EOC Results; P. = <.05

The above data for the 2014-2015 school year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages and End of Course testing scores for English II. The data shown are the mean difference (MD) in English II EOC scores with the standard error (SE) disaggregated by Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages. When analyzing this table using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated alpha levels of .001, .000, .000, .000, and .002. Considering research question number two (*RQ_2)*, these results indicated the difference between English II EOC scores and Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages were statistically significant between five specific Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentage categories.

Table 2

2015 Algebra I EOC Results Disaggregated by FRL%

AI EOC/FRL%	N	MD	SE	Sig.
AI EOC with 0-25% FRL + 51-75% FRL	68	16.43	5.47	.019

Note. AI EOC= Algebra I EOC Results; P. = <.05

The above data for the 2014-2015 school year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages and End of Course testing scores for Algebra I. The data shown are the mean difference (MD) in Algebra I EOC scores with the standard error (SE) disaggregated by Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages. When analyzing this table using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated an alpha level of .019. Considering research question number two (*RQ_2)*, these results indicated the difference between Algebra I scores and Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages were statistically significant between one specific Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentage category.

Table 3

2015 Attendance Rate Disaggregated by FRL%

ATT/FRL%	N	MD	SE	Sig.
ATT with 26-50% FRL + 51-75% FRL	124	3.25	1.14	.031
ATT with 26-50% FRL + 76-100 FRL	84	7.13	1.76	.001

Note. ATT = Attendance Rate; P. = <.05

The above data for the 2014-2015 school year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages and Attendance Rate. The data shown are the mean difference (MD) in Attendance Rates with the standard error (SE) disaggregated by Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages. When analyzing this table using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated alpha levels of .031 and .001. Considering research question number two (*RQ_2)*, these results indicated the difference between Attendance Rates and Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages were statistically significant between two specific Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentage categories.

Table 4

2015 Major Discipline Incidents Disaggregated by FRL%

MDI/FRL%	N	MD	SE	Sig.
MDI with 0-25% FRL + 26-50% FRL	80	20.35	4.35	.000
MDI with 0-25% FRL + 51-75% FRL	68	19.07	4.42	.000
MDI with 0-25% FRL + 76-100% FRL	28	14.52	5.31	.041

Note. MDI = Major Discipline Incidents; P. = <.05

The above data for the 2014-2015 school year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages and Major Discipline Incidents. The data shown are the mean difference (MD) in Major Discipline Incidents with the standard error (SE) disaggregated by Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages. When analyzing this table using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated alpha levels of .000, .000 and .041. Considering research question number two (RQ_2), these results indicated the difference between Major Discipline Incidents and Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages were statistically significant between three specific Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentage categories.

Table 5

2016 English II EOC Results Disaggregated by FRL%

EII EOC/FRL%	N	MD	SE	Sig.
EII EOC with 0-25% FRL + 51-75% FRL	68	10.21	3.06	.006
EII EOC with 0-25% FRL + 76-100% FRL	28	25.78	3.67	.000
EII EOC with 26-50% FRL + 51-75% FRL	124	5.70	1.73	.008
EII EOC with 26-50% FRL + 76-100 FRL	84	21.27	2.67	.000
EII EOC with 51-75% FRL + 76-100 FRL	72	15.57	2.73	.000

Note. EII EOC= English II EOC Results; P. = <.05

The above data for the 2015-2016 school year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages and End of Course testing scores for English II. The data shown are the mean difference (MD) in English II EOC scores with the standard error (SE) disaggregated by Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages. When analyzing this table using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated alpha levels of .006, .000, .008, .000, and .000. Considering research question number two (*RQ_2)*, these results indicated the difference between English II EOC scores and Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages were statistically significant between five specific Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentage categories.

Table 6

2016 Algebra I EOC Results Disaggregated by FRL%

AI EOC/FRL%	N	MD	SE	Sig.
AI EOC with 0-25% FRL + 51-75% FRL	68	17.47	5.26	.007
AI EOC with 0-25% FRL + 76-100% FRL	28	25.88	6.32	.000
AI EOC with 26-50% FRL + 76-100 FRL	84	16.07	4.60	.004

Note. AI EOC= Algebra I EOC Results; P. = <.05

The above data for the 2015-2016 school year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages and End of Course testing scores for Algebra I. The data shown are the mean difference (MD) in Algebra I EOC scores with the standard error (SE) disaggregated by Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages. When analyzing this table using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated alpha levels of .007, .000, and .004. Considering research question number two (*RQ_2)*, these result indicated the difference between Algebra I scores and Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages were statistically significant between three specific Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentage category.

Table 7

2016 Attendance Rate Disaggregated by FRL%

ATT/FRL%	N	MD	SE	Sig.
ATT with 26-50% FRL + 76-100 FRL	84	5.16	1.60	.004

Note. ATT = Attendance Rate; P. = <.05

The above data for the 2015-2016 school year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages and Attendance Rate. The data shown are the mean difference (MD) in Attendance Rates with the standard error (SE) disaggregated by Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages. When analyzing this table using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated an alpha level of .004. Considering research question number two (*RQ_2)*, these results showed the difference between Attendance Rates and Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages were statistically significant between one specific Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentage category.

Table 8

2016 Major Discipline Incidents Disaggregated by FRL%

MDI/FRL%	N	MD	SE	Sig.
MDI with 0-25% FRL + 26-50% FRL	80	13.79	3.93	.004
MDI with 0-25% FRL + 51-75% FRL	68	12.44	3.99	.013

Note. MDI = Major Discipline Incidents; P. = <.05

The above data for the 2015-2016 school year were taken from public Missouri high schools participating in this study. Public Missouri high schools were assessed to determine the correlation between Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages and Major Discipline Incidents. The data shown are the mean difference (MD) in Major Discipline Incidents with the standard error (SE) disaggregated by Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages. When analyzing this table using an alpha level of <.05 to test for statistical significance, the results indicated alpha levels of .004 and .013. Considering research question number two (*RQ_2)*, these results indicated the difference between Major Discipline Incidents and Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentages were statistically significant between two specific Free and/or Reduced Priced Lunch percentage categories.

Table 9

Wilks' Lambda

FTP+FRL+FTP+FRL	Value	F	H df	E df	Sig.
	.859	.890	24.00	397.94	.616

Note. FTP = Freshman Transition Program, FRL = Free and/or Reduced Lunch;

P. = <.05

Using the multivariate test of Wilks' Lambda, a non-significant interaction between freshman transition programs and free and/or reduced price percentages is indicated with a significance of .616.

Summary

The results of this research provided information helpful to the determination if freshman transition programs were effective in Missouri high schools. Though not significant, mean results for academics were higher for schools offering freshman transition programs. Though not significant as well, mean results for yearly attendance rates and major discipline incidents were slightly worse for schools offering freshman transition programs. A significant interaction does exist when exploring increased percentages of at-risk students and schools offering freshman transition programs. Using the multivariate test of Wilks' Lambda, a non-significant interaction between freshman transition programs and free and/or reduced price percentages was indicated.

Finally, chapter five includes conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of the analyzed data. This chapter will also include implications for the future of educations.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Review of literature indicated a difficult transition to high school affects students who may have trouble with discipline, academics, and attendance (Bornsheuer et al., 2011). Without interventions in place, some students may never progress to graduation. Freshman transition programs are interventions educators are in need of in educational systems (Dedmond et al., 2006; Strahan et al., 2005). The concept of freshman transition programs has been around for quite some time, but programs incorporating the sustained application of skills, relationship building, and authentic learning are needed for academic success (Dedmond et al., 2006). Students who do well academically and personally during their freshman year of high school are more likely to graduate high school and be positive contributors to their communities (Geltner et al., 2011). All children can learn the curriculum and be successful in school with the proper guidance and leadership into their high school career.

The researcher conducted a quantitative study as an attempt to determine whether offering freshman transition programs, in public Missouri high schools, were an effective way to aid in the success of at-risk students in the areas of academic test scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents while in high school. Additionally, the researcher explored whether the percentage of students in the high schools identified as at-risk by being eligible for free and/or reduced priced lunch impacted the effects of freshman transition program on academic test scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents.

Findings

The following research questions and null hypotheses were presented with specific findings identified thereafter:

RQ_1 While a freshman transition program in a high school is intended to improve the academic success of students, increase attendance, and reduce disciple incidents, which if any of these stated objectives are achieved by implementing a freshman transition program.

2014-2015 and 2015-2016 mean EOC scores for both English II and Algebra I were higher for schools offering freshman transition programs; however, they were not statistically significant. 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 mean yearly attendance percentages were lower for schools offering freshman transition programs; however, they were not statistically significant. The means of major discipline incidents for the years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 were higher for school offering freshman transition programs; however, they were not statistically significant. The findings indicated freshman transition programs did not show significant improvement in achieving the goals of improved academic success, increased attendance, reduced discipline incidents.

RQ_2 How will a freshman transition program in a high school, intended to improve the academic success of students, increase attendance, and reduce discipline occurrences, be affected by the percentage of students considered at-risk because they are eligible for free and/or reduced priced lunches?

Many of the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 mean EOC scores for both English II and Algebra I were higher for schools offering freshman transition programs, with lower percentages of free and/or reduced lunch. There was, however, no statistical significance

between the results. The 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 mean yearly attendance percentages were lower for schools offering freshman transition programs, with lower percentages of free and/or reduced lunch. There was, however, no statistical significance. The means of major discipline incidents for the years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 were higher for schools offering freshman transition programs, with higher rates of lower free and/or reduced lunch percentages, however were not statistically significant. The findings indicated freshman transition programs did not show significant improvement in achieving the goals of improved academic success, increased attendance, reduced discipline incidents when comparing at-risk percentages in schools.

H_0 Students in a high school with a transition program will not academically outperform other students attending high schools not offering a freshman transition programs.

2014-2015 and 2015-2016 mean EOC scores for both English II and Algebra I were higher for schools offering freshman transition programs; however, they were not statistically significant. Due to the mean scores not being statistically significant, the researcher failed to reject H_0.

H_0 Students in a high school with a transition program will not have better attendance than other students attending high schools not offering a freshman transition programs.

2014-2015 and 2015-2016 mean yearly attendance percentages were lower for schools offering freshman transition programs; however, they were not statistically significant. Due to the mean yearly attendance percentages not being statistically significant, the researcher failed to reject H_0.

H_0 Students in a high school with a transition program will not have fewer major disciple incidents than other students attending high schools not offering a freshman transition programs.

The means of major discipline incidents for the years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 were higher for school offering freshman transition programs, however were not statistically significant. Due to the means of major discipline incidents not being statistically significant, the researcher failed to reject H_0.

H_0 Students attending high schools offering freshman transition programs do not perform academically above other students when comparing high schools with similar percentages of students eligible for free and/or reduced price lunches.

2014-2015 and 2015-2016 mean EOC scores for both English II and Algebra I decreased as free and/or reduced lunch percentages increased. Mean English II EOC scores for 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 were significantly different between 0-25% and 51-75% FRL, 0-25% and 76-100% FRL, 26-50% and 51-75% FRL, 26-50% and 76-100% FRL, and 51-75% and 76-100% FRL. Mean Algebra I EOC scores for 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 were significantly different between 0-25% and 51-75% FRL. Mean Algebra I EOC scores for 2015-2016 were also significantly different between 0-25% and 76-100% FRL as well as 26-50% and 76-100% FRL. These specific results allowed the researcher to fail to reject H_0.

H_0 Students attending high schools offering freshman transition programs do not have higher attendance rates than other students attending high schools when comparing high schools with similar percentages of students eligible for free and/or reduced price lunches.

Mean yearly attendance rates for 2014-2015 were significantly different between 26-50% and 51-25% FRL. Mean yearly attendance rates for both 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 were significantly different between 26-50% and 76-100% FRL. These specific results allowed the researcher to fail to reject H_0.

H_0 Students attending high schools offering freshman transition programs do not have fewer major discipline incidents than other students when comparing high schools with similar percentages of students eligible for free and/or reduced price lunches.

Mean results for major discipline incidents for both 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 are significantly different between 0-25% and 26-50% FRL as well as 0-25% and 51-75% FRL. Mean results for major discipline incidents for 2014-2015 were significantly different between 0-25% and 76-100% FRL. These specific results allowed the researcher to fail to reject H_0.

Conclusions

According to Wilks' Lambda, the data indicated there was a non-significant interaction between freshman transition programs and free and/or reduced price lunch percentages. Mean EOC scores tended to be higher in English II and Algebra I for schools offering freshman transition programs. Mean results tended to be lower for attendance rates and higher major discipline incidents for schools offering freshman transition programs. Though there was a non-significant interaction, further results of the Absolute MANOVA showed no statistical significance between schools offering freshman transition programs and those that do not offer these opportunities as it relates to academic, attendance, and major discipline incidents.

Mean EOC scores for English II and Algebra I tended to be lower as free and/or reduced price lunch percentages increased. Mean results for both attendance percentages and major discipline incidents tended to be lower as free and/or reduced price lunch percentages increased. Though there is a non-significant interaction, further results of the Absolute MANOVA showed no statistical significance between schools offering freshman transition programs and those not as percentages of free and/or reduced price lunch populations increased.

Based on the findings and the data presented during this study, the researcher concludes that freshman transition programs do have some beneficial outcomes that may not be apparent in the category of statistical significance. EOC test scores for both English II and Algebra I were better in years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 for schools offering freshman transition programs. Regardless of significance, mean scores were higher. This may indicate that freshman transition programs do make a positive impact in high schools when it comes to academics. Attendance and discipline were not as favorable with schools offering freshman transition programs. Further researcher on different aspects of freshman transition programs will definitely be recommended.

Based on the data, the researcher also concludes there is a non-significant interaction between results of freshman transition programs and free and/or reduced price lunch populations. The researcher also concludes the results of increased free and/or reduced price lunch percentages have a negative impact the higher the free and/or reduced price lunch percentages are. Though not significant in the data analysis, mean numbers indicate free and/or reduced price lunch percentages do affect the results.

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study allowed the researcher to analyze data between high schools offering freshman transition programs or not. Post hoc data also allowed the researcher to analyze data from specific at-risk categories with increasing free and/or lunch percentages. Recommendations for future research based on the findings include:

1. Survey teachers of schools offering freshman transition programs to gain an understanding of specific training or curriculum guidelines for such programs.
2. Narrow down school districts with extended years of freshman transition program offering.
3. Conduct a detailed study of specific aspects of freshman transition programs such as study skills, relationship building, emotional wellbeing, and mentorships.
4. Survey at-risk students in an attempt to determine if they believe freshman transition programs are beneficial in high school.
5. Further break down mean data to determine results for males versus females.

Implications for Education

As presented in the review of literature, many students will become disadvantaged academically and personally in high school due to the difficulty of navigating the transition to the ninth grade (Geltner, et. al., 2011). Freshman transition programs added to high schools continue to evolve as a successful approach to help meet the needs of at-risk students (Legters & Kerr, 2001). The results of this study allowed the researcher to compare data from a large selection of Missouri high schools to attempt to determine if freshman transition programs were successful for at-risk students. Many public Missouri

high schools had freshman transition programs included in their curriculum, but many did not. Though the data indicated many results were insignificant, mean scores for most of the results were better for schools offering freshman transition programs.

Results of this study showed public Missouri high schools with freshman transition programs in place were making an impact on student achievement scores in the areas of Algebra I and English II for the school years 2014-2015 and 2015-2016, but not attendance rates, or reduction in major discipline incidents. Mean assessment scores were higher for schools having freshman transition programs in place. Attendance rates were lower while major discipline incidents were higher for school offering freshman transition programs. The difficulty transitioning to high school affects students who may already struggle with attendance issues, negative school discipline, and poor academic success (Bornsheuer et al., 2011). The results of this study should cause administrators across Missouri to review their freshman transition programs to determine the success or not when looking at overall building data. These results should also cause administrators to review their freshman transition programs for core relationship building with students. Relationships are valuable to the success of all students and can specifically help at-risk students want to be in school. This data further instill the need for administrators and educators to look at the identifiers of at-risk students and build programs meeting their needs. Public Missouri schools high in at-risk populations and not offering freshman transition programs should look closely at this research to determine if their building would benefit from this intervention. Following the researchers recommendations, freshman transition programs may be strengthened or started to increase results.

The data also indicated there was a non-significant interaction between increased percentages of at-risk students and results. Schools having higher at-risk populations in attendance tend to have lower assessment scores in reading and math (Olivares-Cuhat, 2011). Having low achievement is connected to negative emotions and poor learning behavior, which in turn enforces failure among students (Hagenauer & Hascher, 2014). The researcher found higher populations of at-risk students also tended to have increased absenteeism and discipline problems. These findings, however, did not improve with freshman transition programs in place. Building principals may use this research when determining interventions needing to take place in their schools.

Summary

The researcher focused on the effectiveness of freshman transition programs throughout students' high school careers in the areas of academics, attendance, and discipline to determine if the programs are effective at helping students, specifically at-risk students with academics as measured by English II EOC and Algebra I EOC test scores, attendance rates, and major discipline incidents. Students in Missouri are considered at-risk by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education if they are eligible for free and/or reduced price lunch. Some high schools within Missouri have implemented at least some aspects of freshman transition programs, as an attempt to assist freshmen during this transition. The transition of students from the eighth grade into their freshman year can be a time where students begin to fall short academically, attend school less, and promote actions leading to increased discipline occurrences.

This transition to high school can be even more troublesome when students are deemed at-risk. Though this study did not show significant results with freshman

transition programs and at-risk students in Missouri high schools, mean results were better for many academic areas. The case can be made for schools to review their freshman transition programs for increased effectiveness.

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Appendix

The researcher will have a survey consisting of three questions.

1. Does your school have a Freshman Transition program?
2. If you answered yes to question one, in what school year did the program begin?
3. What is the percentage of students in your school that are eligible for free and/or reduced price lunches?