FRESHMAN ACADEMIES:
THE IMPACT THEY HAVE ON STUDENT TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

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The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the impact of freshman academies on student's transition to high school and the beliefs and perception of the communities of teachers and administrators.   The data was collected through one holistic interview with each individual participant. The participants for this study included one executive principal, two academy principals, and three classroom teachers of an urban high school in the southern part of the United States. The two major findings of this study that influenced the positive impact on the freshman academy transition program was the implementation and communication of the school-wide discipline policy and the summer bridge program. Parental communication and student attendance were two areas that were identified through this study that need additional support.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

Middle and high schools across the country are collaborating and analyzing data to address issues that all students will face as they matriculate through the educational system. Students entering ninth grade will face social, academic and environmental changes that will play a major role impacting grade promotion and graduation rates. In March 2010, President Barack Obama indicated that the United States had a 68% high school completion rate and more than 30% of America's children drop out of high school. As of the 2014-2015 school year, the high school graduation rate in the U.S. had reached an all-time high of 83% marking the fifth straight record setting year (Kamenetz & Turner, 2016).

The progression from middle school to high school is a huge transition for many students entering ninth grade. Since 1990, educators have debated on how to restructure high schools to meet the needs of young adolescents entering ninth grade. The U.S Department of Education reported that 70% of high school students attended schools with a population exceeding 1000. School districts do not have the financial support to build smaller high schools; however, the development of smaller learning environments is at the forefront of school reform. One such smaller learning environment is the freshman academy. Across the U.S., freshman transition programs are being implemented to support first time ninth graders entering high school (Habeeb, 2013).

Metro Nashville Public School (MNPS) is one of many districts that began to reconstruct and redesign its high schools nine years ago; they approached the task with the "end in mind." The board of education asked themselves, "What do we want our graduates to possess when they

leave high school? What skills do they need to become successful community members?'
RIGOR, RELEVANCE, RELATIONSHIPS, AND READINESS are the four characteristics that
drive the framework of the Academies of Nashville. MNPS has heavily embedded Small
Learning Communities (SLCs) throughout their 12 zoned high schools. The Academies of
Nashville have over 278 signed business partners who successfully assist each thematic
academy. The business partners have donated more than 9.2 million dollars to 12 schools and
accumulated more than 17,556 volunteer hours providing strategic and effective leadership and
support. The community partnerships provide students and teachers an opportunity to engage in
career focused internships, job shadowing experiences, teacher-focused externships and industry
and professional certification opportunities ("2014-2015 Academies of Nashville Annual Report
by BevFlatt - issuu," n.d.).

The main educational institution of this research is XYZ High School located in the
Southeastern part of the United States. XYZ High School's Freshman Academy is a transitional
academy assisting students' emotional and academic growth as they develop and progress from
the middle school concepts to the centralized standards of high school. Following a block
scheduling format, the academy model consists of an assistant principal, an instructional team
lead, two interdisciplinary teams, four teachers, and 180 students. The academy team
collaborates, monitors, and identifies various trends and behaviors that may be hindering
students' success. The academy's goal is to ensure that students transition smoothly from middle
school to high school while providing a rigorous and nurturing environment.

Research Problem

While school leaders and districts vary because of training and experience, the research
points to specific aspects of smaller teaching communities that yield high achievement outcomes.

Schools that do not implement smaller learning communities (e.g., Freshmen Academies) have an adverse effect on student achievement, attendance, and discipline (Walsh, 2002). Smink and Schargel (2004) recommend that school leaders focus on the overall culture of the school, building strong community relationships, providing academic interventions earlier, and embracing the classroom instruction to improve attendance, dropout rates, and truancy. Additionally, instructional leaders are tasked with identifying which reform efforts are positively impacting students' overall performance in high school and ensuring that students graduate with the necessary skills to be college prepared and career ready.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of all schools is to build a strong school culture that produces positive change and stimulates intellectual growth and commitment through interpersonal, environmental, and academic connectedness. Felner, Brand, Adan, Mulhall, Flowers, Sartain, & DuBois (1993) studied a high school transition program which served to restructure the ecology of the school. The initial implementation of the School Transitional Environment Project (STEP) targeted a large urban high school where students were mostly from low socio-economic homes and/or minority backgrounds. The study's findings revealed that students that participated in the project yielded academic growth, improved attendance and positive student-teacher relationships. More importantly and similar to STEP, the purpose of this research was to determine the perceptions of teachers and administrators on how XYZ's Freshmen Academy program impacted ninth grade students' academic performance, attendance and discipline. The current study represented an opportunity to inform leaders and teachers how transitional programs increase students' success.

Assumptions

After reviewing pertinent literature on SLCs, the researcher made the following assumptions regarding this study:

1. All stakeholders (i.e. administrators, teachers, parents, etc.) are an active member of an ongoing professional learning community who are committed to continuous improvement.

2. All SLCs are designed to improve teacher and student relationships and expectations.

3. All SLCs have a common goal, which is to increase student achievement, attendance rates, and promote positive behavior.

4. All SLCs are designed to help students transition successfully through high school resulting in increased graduation rates, postsecondary school enrollment and employment readiness.

Research Questions

1. What are the beliefs of the community of Freshman Academy teachers in terms of:

    a. How the transition program at XYZ High School impacts ninth grade students' attendance?

    b. How the transition program at XYZ High School impacts ninth grade students' discipline?

    c. How the transition program at XYZ High School impacts ninth grade students' academic performance?

2. What are the beliefs of the community of administrators of the Freshman Academy in terms of:

    a. How the transition program at XYZ High School impacts ninth grade students' attendance?

b. How the transition program at XYZ High School impacts ninth grade students'

discipline?

c. How the transition program at XYZ High School impacts ninth grade students'

academic performance?

3. How well aligned are the beliefs of the teachers and the administrators?

a. Are there major differences? Similarities?

b. How does this alignment help or hinder the work of the community as a whole?

Hypothesis

a. The Freshman Academy community will believe that the transition program will

increase student attendance.

b. The Freshman Academy community will believe that the transition program will

decrease student discipline.

c. The Freshman Academy community will believe that the transition program will

positively impact students' grades.

d. The administration community will believe that the transition program will

increase student attendance.

e. The administration community will believe that the transition program will

decrease student discipline.

f. The administration community will believe that the transition program will

positively impact students' grades.

g. The beliefs of the teachers and administrators will be similar.

h. The alignment of the beliefs of the community as a whole will positively impact the

goals of the Freshman Academy transition program.

Theoretical Framework

Communities of Practice (CoP) theory was first introduced in 1991 by well-known theorists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger whom defined CoP as "groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Lave & Wenger, 1998). Theorist Etienne Wenger added to the concept and incorporated the theory into a variety of fields such as business, organizational design, government, education, professional associations, development projects, and civic life which all thrive in the areas of problem solving, communication, experience, and logistics (Wenger, 2006).

A CoP is developed around three essential characteristics—the domain, community and practice—which creates and nurtures the overall community. To be effective, the presence of all three elements must be present.

- The domain: It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.

- The community: Individuals of a specific domain engage and interact in organized activities and discussions that support the overall goals and objectives of the community. Members establish strong relationships with one another, which creates an environment for individuals to learn from each other.

- The practice: Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems. This takes time and sustained interaction. The development of a shared practice may be more or less self-conscious (Wenger, 2006).

The Communities of Practice Theory framework aligns to this study of Freshman Academies due to the three characteristics that drive this theory. The Freshman Academy is a school within a school model that houses students that are first time ninth graders entering a 9th - 12th grade high school system. The faculty and staff that will oversee the Freshman Academy are solely responsible for the academic progress and support of these students.

Rationale of the Study

Literature and studies related to small learning communities, Freshman Academies and student transition to high school are very scarce. Ninth grade is a key academic year for all students regardless of race, gender or socio-economic status. It is important to identify if transition programs are meeting the needs of the students and ensuring students are prepared for the next three school years. This study, along with earlier studies, utilized the qualitative method to capture the perception of teachers on how Freshman Academies impact ninth graders' transition to high school. However, this study includes the administrators' perceptions on how they view the school's transition program.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions clarify the terminology used in this study:

1. Freshman Academy – References an academy or program designed to deliver social, emotional, and academic support to students entering ninth grade for the first time (Holland & Mazzoli, 2001).

2. Discipline Referral – References a consequence rendered to a student by an authority figure after committing an act that was against the rules and expectations of the school. Disciplinary consequences may include but are not limited to detention, in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, or expulsion.

3. Ninth grade bulge - References the enrollment count of ninth graders compared to the previous school year; implying that retention rates increase during the students ninth grade year. (Haney et al., 2004).

4. Small Learning Community (SLC) - Refers to the collapsing of large schools and structuring more intimate smaller learning environments that support academic rigor, positive relationship building, and teacher-student collaboration (Steinberg & Allen, 2002).

5. School-Within-A-School - Refers to a large school that is divided into several smaller populations; however, they remain housed in the large school building (Steinberg & Allen, 2002).

6. Transition - Refers to moving from one environment, location, situation, etc. to another (Neufeldt, 1990). This study focuses on the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade.

Limitations of the Study

The present study has two limitations with respect to internal and external validity:

1. The study is limited to those variables chosen for the study;

2. The study is limited to the 2019 cohort that entered XYZ High School as a first-time freshman during the 2014-2015 school year.

Summary

This dissertation uses the traditional five-chapter structure to explore the impact of principals' leadership behaviors on school and student achievement. Chapter one provides the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, assumptions, research questions, definitions of terms, limitations, and a summary. Chapter two provides a comprehensive review of the literature relevant to small learning communities and the impact they have on student transition to high school. In Chapter three, a

description of the research methodology outlines the research design, population and sample, research questions, procedures for data collection, and analysis of data. Chapter four presents the results of the data analysis. Chapter five offers the broader implications of the research study through discussions and findings, recommendations for further practice and future research, and conclusions.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Across the United States, data show that the graduation rate is less than 84% suggesting that 16% of America's students are not obtaining a high school diploma ("Condition of Education - Elementary and Secondary Education - Student Effort, Persistence and Progress - Public High School Graduation Rates - Indicator May (2016)," 2016). Jimerson, Ferguson, Whipple, Anderson, and Dalton (2002), identified various characteristics that are present in students who are not successful in school. Their longitudinal study of rates of retention determined that poor academic performance and social adjustment were two main characteristics that hinder success. Small Learning Communities have shown to positively increase student daily attendance, behavior and graduation rates (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999).

Literature Review

Webster's Dictionary (2017) defines transition as a movement, passage, or change from one position, state, stage, or concept to another. Safety, information and connection are three elements that are required and constant among various other transitional components (Campbell & Jacobson, 2008). In the field of education, the term transition is defined and interpreted differently. For example, Akos, Queen, and Lineberry (2005) define it as an isolated set of activities sponsored by programs, families, and children that take place at the end of a school year. Arowsafe and Irvin (1992) suggest that a transition can last up to half of the school year. Despite the numerous definitions, transitions are being studied and identified as critical periods for students as they matriculate throughout the educational system (Queen & Algozzine, 2005). Irrespective of the tier level, all educational settings are focused on refining the transition of students throughout their educational career. However, a small number of schools provide

incoming and outgoing students an opportunity to participate in transitional events (Kagan & Neuman, 1998). Studies have concluded that students who encounter a large number of transitions, regardless of the tier level, are likely to struggle academically and become high school dropouts (Alspaugh, 1998).

School Transitions

In the beginning stages of transitional research, the deterioration in student academics was not the focus; however, many educational studies put a focus on the students who were frightened, apprehensive, or motivated about the transition. A large majority of the reasons why students at all tier levels experience transitional difficulties can be found in two major categories: 1) they are deficient in the skills and knowledge needed to adapt to a new educational setting, and 2) their capability to execute the requested task are hindered due to the change in settings (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993). An overwhelming number of students expressed that they were apprehensive about attending high school due to the size of the building, fear of becoming a victim of bullying, and meeting new friends (Akos, 2002).

Seidman, Aber, LaRue, and French (1996) acknowledged that as students transition from various tier levels, they will face double jeopardy when they enter middle school from elementary school and then when they enter high school from middle school. Because of the disjointed transitions, students tend to have a more negative point of view of regarding the transition from middle school to high school. The more disjointed the two school environments are, the greater psychological, academic, and social disruption there will be (Blyth, Simmons, & Carlton-Ford, 1983). There is less of a disruption when a student perceives less change in their environment, the school perceptions, self-perceptions, and academic performance (Gillock & Reyes, 1996).

School transitions can be difficult for all students resulting in not only academic disconnectedness but social and emotional concerns (Hirsch & Rapkins, 1987). Numerous students face insecurities about their position in a new school hierarchy, which increases psychological distress, lowered self-esteem, and a decline in academic performance (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007). Robinson, Garber, and Hilsman (1995) completed a two-year study involving 400 sixth grade students focused on direct and stress-moderating effects of attributional style and global self-worth on depressive and other symptoms. Robinson et al. (1995) research indicated that students enduring a school transition will display signs of extreme stress, particularly students with a negative attribution style and low self-esteem. The study also determined that school transitions can increase depression levels in younger students. Kazdin (1993) performed a study that concluded that adolescent females that display signs of depression and eating disorders have complications related to school transitions and attempted and successful suicides increased during puberty due to the lack of ability to adjust to a new school environment.

Alspaugh (1998) noted that the number of transitions and the school size are common factors related to achievement. Alspaugh and Harting (1995) concluded that students who experience two transitions have obtained the coping skills that are required to have a smooth transition to high school. Crockett, Petersen, Graber, Schulenberg, and Ebata (1989) analyzed and studied single and double transition groups, and their study revealed that students who transitioned more than once throughout their educational career displayed lower academic performance than their peers who underwent one school transition.

Crockett et al. (1989) completed a study involving 253 students that concluded a high number of student transitions in middle school and entering ninth grade highly impacted the students' GPA and attendance. Poverty and life stressors are common transitional factors

regardless of an individual's gender and ethnicity (Seidman, 1996). Midgely, Feldhaufer, and Eccles (1989) discussed in their findings that low achieving students have long lasting effects when it comes to transitioning to a new school.

School transitions are often accompanied with an increase in teacher control and authority, structure and discipline, and less one-on-one attention from the teachers (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). According to Ferguson and Fraser (1998), students associate their academic deterioration to the lack of teacher-student interactions. In addition, the distinctive characteristics of the school structure, such as the overall student body enrollment count, quality of instructors, and the existence of specific transition programs influence the transition and ensuing achievement (Smith, 2006). As it relates to these concerns, Weiss and Bearman (2007) discovered various student benefits to transitioning to a new school environment. Students are awarded a fresh start in a new learning environment that doesn't focus on their past peer relationships, school involvement, and academic progress. Seidman, Aber, Allen, and French (1996) added to the above research and discovered that students described an increase in social and emotional support, along with the opportunity to become involved in extracurricular activities which allows for additional peer to peer engagement.

Transition from Middle School to High School

Ninth grade is a vital year and often times is the defining moment that will determine if a student will successfully complete high school (Chute, 1999). The advancement from middle school to high school is a developmental challenge that adolescents must face as they progress through life (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). Cotterell's (1992) results recognize that students experience various forms of anxiety, isolation, and confusion as they transition to high school. Failure to monitor students throughout the transition year could result in an anti-school attitude

(Brown & Armstrong, 1982). If a student demonstrates academic, social and emotional success their freshman year, they will most likely have continued success throughout their high school career (Minaya, 2007). However, students who earn low achievement scores during their freshman year of high school have established a pattern that could cause negative educational outcomes, which will increase the possibility of becoming a high school dropout (Weiss & Bearman, 2007). First year students account for the largest number of students with poor attendance, tardiness, and discipline referrals within a school building (Queen, 2002).

According to Neild (2009), 80% of middle school students in the United States will transition to a high school much larger and more impersonal than their previous learning environment. The transition to high school demands students to experience new educational requirements, rules and expectations, and instructors all while going through puberty (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Mizelle's (2005) investigation discovered that these influences can cause students to become detached from the overall school environment, decrease student-centered learning opportunities, and create a competitive learning culture. The researcher also stated that freshman students sense that teachers in the ninth grade have higher learning expectations and require more student engagement than their previous eight grade teachers (Mizelle, 2005).

The transition to high school is often times a challenge for students that are not academically prepared for the rigor and college readiness curriculum that will be taught during the ninth-grade year (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006) or for students having trouble adapting to the massive and rigid learning environment of a traditional high school (Lee & Smith, 2001). According to Eccles, Midgley, & Adler (1984), a large number of adolescents will experience an environment that is academically competitive and impersonal which is much different than what they were accustomed to in middle school. Researchers that referred to

students' opinions and feedback about the transition into high school divulged that rising ninth graders are both eager to and apprehensive about entering high school. Students are excited about having more independence, more student ownership, the ability to engage in a variety of extracurricular activities, and develop healthy relationships amongst their peers. However, students are apprehensive and concerned about being teased, being unable to navigate a much larger school building, and making low scores on their report card (Mizelle, 1995). Dickey (2004) concluded in his study a decrease in the overall support of the school culture, which included teacher-student relationships in and outside the classroom and academic support. They stated that their middle school instructors failed to hold them accountable for their own academic progress and failed to increase the academic rigor as they progressed through the curriculum, which resulted in them being underprepared and the transition to high school more stressful (Mizelle, 1998).

Blyth, Simmons, and Cartlon-Ford (1983) studied school transition and discovered that it is challenging for all students, regardless of their academic performance level to enter high school and sustain or improve the preceding year's grades and attendance. Those individuals that have been assessed and qualify for the exceptional education program geared towards gifted students in middle school have an especially difficult time making the transition from middle school to high school (Mizelle, 1998). However, students that have a history of maintaining or exceeding yearly academic growth have been found to be better prepared to make the high school transition (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2007).

Academic achievement is the main focus in secondary schools and very little attention is given to the social and emotional needs of the students (Osterman, 2000). Whole class instruction and departmentalized instruction can create a competitive atmosphere that students

have not experienced throughout their educational career (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). The overall instructional environment can impact a students' self-esteem, affecting student engagement and achievement (Osterman, 2000). Isakson and Jarvis (1999) completed a short-term longitudinal study analyzing teenagers' changes during the transition to high school. The results spotlighted decreases in students' overall GPA, attendance, and involvement in school sponsored extra-curricular activities. According to Piaget's cognitive–stage theory, the above results could be the cause of adolescents' incapability to obtain an equilibrium between adaptation and accommodation. They are able to learn and obtain new information however, the students lack the social and emotional skills to be successful (Grossniklaus, Smith & Woods, 2001).

Ninth Grade Bulge

The ninth-grade year is the peak of the highest risk of high school students becoming drop outs than any other grade level. Neild and Farley (2004) completed a study in 1996-1997 utilizing a cohort of rising freshman students in a traditional high school located in the Philadelphia School District. The data concluded that 45.8% of the 3,115 dropouts were still classified as ninth graders when they decided to drop out, and 33.5% dropped out during their 10th grade year. Texas Dropout Report in 1994-1999 stated that 58.6% of 17,218 dropouts reported that education related stressors such as low academic grades and truancy were main concerns as to why they quit going to school (Texas Education Agency, n.d.)

Johns Hopkins University researchers Balfanz and Legters (2004) compared enrollment numbers from eighth grade to ninth grade and realized that ninth grade enrollment numbers were much higher than in previous years. In the 1970's, the data showed that first time ninth graders were 4% higher than students enrolled in eighth grade; in the 1980's the numbers increased by

approximately 4%; and at the turn of the 21st century the percentage range had grown between 10% to 14%. During the 2001 school year, analysts reported that 13% more students were enrolled in ninth grade compared to the previous year's eighth grade enrollment. However, student progress from ninth to tenth grade has decreased by 12% nationally since 2001. This decline in academic promotion is called the "ninth grade bulge" (Wheelock & Miao, 2005). State-level enrollment data from 1984-1985 to 2000-2001 showed in 1985, a small number of states that were addressing "bulges" greater than 10%; however, at the turn of the 21st century, almost 50% of the states were looking at "bulges" greater than 10% (Haney, Madaus, Abrams, Wheelock, Miao & Gruia, 2004).

Haney et al. (2004) completed a study that determined that the ninth-grade bulge was impacted by the implementation of high stakes testing policies; which were established to ensure a fair and comparable state-wide accountability system that governed the school system. The policy is derived of content standards, cumulative assessments, personalized performance targets, and incentives (rewards and sanctions) (Haney et al., 2004). Out of the 21 states with the largest number of students dropping out before completing 10th grade, 17 reported having some form of high-stakes testing policies and had the highest percentage of bulges (Haney et al., 2004). High-stakes testing and school level accountability have definitely impacted the attrition rates of first time freshman.

At-Risk Population Transition

Assisting and supporting students that have been identified as at-risk is one of the main focuses of implementing Freshman Academies in the SLC. School officials have identified early warning signs that all stakeholders should be monitoring throughout the year (Baker & Sansone, 1990). Cauce, Hannan, and Sargeant (1992) stated that minority students that reside in

impoverished communities are subject to an increase in anxiety levels throughout the transition phase to high school. Mac Iver (1990) stated that school systems do not have additional funds to financially support transitional programs due to the growing number of families living at or below the poverty level enrolling in the free and reduced lunch program. However, the issues surrounding school transitions continue to negatively impact every aspect of the educational system. Dodge (1983) believed that low–income minority students will absorb and learn various habits from their peers despite the positive or negative outcome. Quinton, Pickles, Maughan, and Rutter (1993) related individuals raised in adverse environments characterized as unfortunate and /or at risk, spend a large amount of time influencing one another. The opportunity to embrace a new atmosphere and become involved in positive and constructive behaviors is not provided in the transition to high school. Quinton et al. (1993) stated that, the combination of immaturity and peer-pressure increases negative or positive behaviors, because group conformity is at an all-time high during this stage of puberty. According to Ramey and Ramey (1994), as children age and become aware of their environment and personal circumstances, the reality impacts one's self-esteem and outlook on life.

The Carnegie Council on Adolescent Behavior (1995) reported during the adolescent years students begin to display negative behaviors that could include their peers, mental health concerns, or a mixture of the above concerns. Of all young people in the United States between the ages of 10 and 17, an estimated 25%-50% will have their education impacted by their involvement in high-risk behaviors and activities that include but not limited to violence, cutting school, and low academic performance. Academic loss and social and emotional growth are negatively impacted by the many risk factors that students face daily (Richardson, 2002). Mullins and Irvin (2000) reported a decline in student motivation to attend school regularly and

follow school rules and expectations, remain engaged in the learning environment and continue forward progress in core subject areas. Testerman (1996) stated that students that display at-risk characteristics will oftentimes go unnoticed by the classroom teacher resulting in the student displaying negative behavior to gain the attention of the administrative staff. Midgely et al. (1989) determined from their study that at-risk students have failed numerous times at their previous school due to the lack of understanding the curriculum, lack of prerequisite skills, or the inability to develop positive relationships with teachers and peers within the building. At-risk or academically deficient students will often times continue along this path without being noticed and will never receive the assistance to be successful (Tomlinson, 1995).

Foundations of Effective Transition Programs

The transition to high school is the perfect time for parents and schools to engage with students to ensure they stay motivated and decrease the percentage of students dropping out of high school (Reents, 2002). Black (2004) revealed that an overwhelming number of schools fail to offer academic, social, and emotional support to assist new students in becoming acclimated to high school. This is such a critical year and all students deserve an equal opportunity to be successful and accomplish their high school goals (Supporting Successful Transition to Ninth Grade, 2005).

Student and family factors, the overall school structure such as student body count (Schiller, 1999), teacher quality (Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002), and the implementation of themed focused transition programs (Smith, 1997) directly influence the transition which impacts achievement. Mizelle and Irvin (2000) reported that schools that have an all-encompassing transition program have considerably much lower failure and dropout rates than schools that have chosen not to provide a transition program for incoming students. According to Mac Iver

(1990), administrators viewed transitional programs that offered various activities to prepare students for the upcoming school year. These programs included activities that (a) provided students and parents information about the new school, (b) provided social support throughout the school year, and (c) provided middle school and high school instructional leaders an opportunity to learn about one another's curriculum and requirements. Also, transitional programs that offer diverse activities have shown to increase the pass rate of ninth graders (Mizelle, 1998). Students who enroll in a high school that offers a structured transitional program are more likely to have a successful freshman year as compared to those students that do not participate in a program (Smith, 1997). Morgan and Hertzog (2001) discovered that districts that required transitional programs that focused on curriculum rigor, school facilities, school safety, and teacher and administrator's morale noticed a decline in high school dropout rates.

School transition programs must look at the incoming student's academic achievement level and determine if the transition program meets the needs of the student. Many school interventions concentrate on academic deficits in the child and not once look at the environment from which they are transitioning (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1993). The school can be a great asset to the overall transition program by utilizing quality assessment data and developing an academic support team to ensure an individualized plan for each student (Beane, 1986). Ensuring that all stakeholders are equipped to address the frequent stressors that students and parents encounter will establish a strong foundation for social, emotional and academic support to take root in a supportive environment (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

Akos and Galasso (2004) studied the overall perception of the transition from middle school to high school from the lenses of students, parents, and educators. The survey utilized a

four-point Likert scale that asked participants to rate the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade. Additionally, the educators were asked to complete three open-ended questions centered around the program structure and timeframe. The results indicated that eighth grade students need to be exposed to a more rigorous middle school curriculum (29%), become familiar with a number of study skills at the middle school level (24%), and additional professional development pertaining to the new state adopted curriculum (24%). High school teachers recommended academic remediation during the incoming summer months (24%) and additional study skill classes throughout the transition year (12%). Overall, the study concluded that teachers are heavily concerned regarding the incoming student's academic performance (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

According to Wilcock (2007), the level of motivation displayed by the student and parents is a direct indication of whether or not the student will have a successful transition to high school. Research shows that parents are actively engaged in their child's education during the elementary school years (Mizelle, 2005). When parents are involved in their students' transition to high school, they tend to stay involved in their child's high school experiences which results in an increase in academic achievement (Mac Iver, 1990). When parents are involved in their child's high school experiences, students achieve more (Paulson, 1994), are better adjusted and are less likely to drop out of school (Horn & West, 1992). Wilcock (2007) discovered that often time's parents do not feel comfortable offering assistance to their students due to rigorous curriculum and updated teaching strategies. Furthermore, a number of parents associate the transition to high school with young adulthood and the beginning phase of their child's ability to express their own voice and choice (Wilcock, 2007). Neild (2009) discovered that as student's age and move into adolescent years, parents become less involved and allow

their children to experience more freedom, which leads to negative peer pressure, poor academic performance and an increase in discipline infractions. A variety of activities focused around high school transition should be offered regularly to increase parent involvement (Epstein, 1995).

Small Learning Communities

Many school districts across the United States are moving away from traditional comprehensive high schools and creating Small Learning Communities (SLC) that focus on career pathways. The U. S. Department Education (2001) and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 supported the implementation of The Small Learning Community (SLC) model to improve the academic achievement of first time ninth grade students. SLCs operate under a variety of structures depending on the school's overall goals. The most popular structures consist of thematic academies which provide a career-driven curriculum within a large school, house plans which divides large numbers of students into small cohorts according to grade level or by last name, and a magnet school which hand selects students across the school district according to the school's academic specialty (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

The small school reform focuses on student-centered curriculum and instruction. The 2004 National Academy Foundation survey concluded that 4,800 high schools reported having a career academy and several had more than one operating on campus. In addition to the above numbers, the federal SLC grants continued after 2004, which has added to the overall number of schools that offer career academies on their campuses. As of 2010, there are nearly 7,000 career academies in the country meeting the needs of approximately one million high school students in grades 10th -12th (Dayton, Raby, & Stern, 2010).

Decreasing the size and organization of secondary high schools allows for a more personalized learning structure that will yield and support other instructional strategies that have

proven to increase student academic achievement. A small learning environment is the perfect initiative to be introduced in a small school setting. As Wood (1992) documented in *Schools That Work,* constructing smaller learning environments is the initial step toward improving overall school and student outcomes. SLC structure begins with interdisciplinary teaching and learning teams. Teams are organized according to the student's career choice that was selected prior to the current school year. Students remain in the cohort for more than two years, which has shown a positive impact on student-teacher relationships and academic success. Cross-curricular learning in SLCs allows teachers to demonstrate how subjects that are normally taught in isolation relate to one another in the real world.

Freshman Academies

The restructuring methods of high schools to make them feel smaller were frequently accomplished by using new scheduling practices, organizing students into teams, using more flexible approaches to instructional groupings and creating schools-within-schools (George & McEwin, 1999). In a 2002-2003 study involving 119 educational institutions receiving federal grant funds for implementing small schools, 38% established a Freshman Academy at the beginning of the 2001-2002 school year, and 55% at the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year. According to the United States Department of Education's Implementation Study of Smaller Learning Communities (Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008) survey results indicated that the Freshman Academy model was the most popular amongst other SLCs.

Freshman Academies have several key components that have been identified and implemented in all success studies. According to Sergiovanni (2001), school administrators at effective schools utilize the appropriate leadership style, know their staff, collaborate with all stakeholders when making decisions, and build cohesiveness within the community. A number

of freshman academies are molded from Breaking Ranks' (Lachat, 2001) research, which integrates and supports the data analyzation of the following: student academic performance, mobility and attendance, discipline infractions, and dropout rates. All of these components allow stakeholders to make data-informed decisions concerning students and instructional needs.

Attendance and Academic Achievement

 Attendance

Stakeholders across the U.S. are continuously searching for solutions that will reform public education and establish an educational system that will yield a quality education for all students (Edwards, 2002). Student attendance, mobility and socioeconomic status are major areas that instructional leaders monitor in order to improve student achievement (Applegate, 2003).

Cotton (1996) examined and analyzed over 100 documents (e.g., studies, evaluations, reviews, and syntheses) investigating the correlation between the school culture, environment and overall school size. Cotton discovered that 16 of the SLCs showed a pattern of increasing student attendance. A study conducted in North Carolina focused on the success of Freshman Academies and their role in decreasing student dropout rates. Their reports show that student attendance increased due to the implementation of the Freshman Academy model (Osler & Waden, 2012). Allensworth and Easton (2007) conducted a study utilizing the Chicago Public School System to analyze the relationship between student absences in ninth grade and the probability of graduating with their cohort. The study revealed that students have an 87% chance of graduating with their cohort if they remain under four absences. Students missing 20-24 days unfortunately have only a 10% chance of graduating in four years. The study found that students collecting 40 plus absences have 0% chance of graduating on time with their cohort. These

studies demonstrate the importance of attending school and increasing graduation rates (Allensworth & Easton, 2007).

Achievement

Cotton (1996) noted that over 50% of small learning community studies discover no significant difference in academic achievement compared to a traditional high school setting. However, Freshman Academies focus on assisting students that enter high school with various deficits that hinder one's ability to be successful in a more rigorous learning environment. A large number of Freshman Academies are structured to utilize block scheduling to allow teachers an opportunity to plan as a team and provide intensive skill recovery to ensure students have every opportunity to be successful in high school (Smith, 2002).

Summary

The importance of creating a smaller learning environment for rising ninth graders has a direct impact on student achievement. The Freshman Academy structure allows all stakeholders to collaborate and provide the necessary support during the critical transition year from middle to high school. Teachers and parents are able to monitor students' academics, discipline records, and attendance, which are all primary issues that hinder students' success when neglected. Research has proven that students who are enrolled in a Freshman Academy have fewer attendance issues, an increase in student performance, and a decrease in discipline referrals.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter three includes sections discussing the methodology used in this study. The first section is the research design which emphasizes a qualitative method approach. The next section details the qualitative method approaches consisting of the participants, setting, consent procedures, data collection process, and analysis procedures. The chapter concludes with a summary and a preview of what is featured in chapter four.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine Freshman Academy teachers' and administrators' perceptions of the Freshman Academy transition model at XYZ High School. This study utilized a phenomenological approach to study the same phenomena as it is experienced by multiple participants within the study (Tashakkori & Teddie, 1998). Phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that is inspired and recommended when the goal of the study is to understand a human experience (Creswell, 1998) and to research concepts from different and renewed perspectives (Sanders, 1982). Data was analyzed using qualitative analyses (e.g.., interviews) to capture valuable feedback from the interviewees' observed and lived experiences (Siedman, 2006).

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this inquiry were:

1. What are the beliefs of the community of the Freshman Academy teachers in terms of how the transition program at XYZ High School impacts ninth grades students' academic performance, discipline, and attendance?

2. What are the beliefs of the community of administrators of the Freshman Academy at
   XYZ High School in terms of how the transition program at XYZ High School impacts
   ninth grades students' academic performance, discipline, and attendance?

3. How well aligned are the beliefs of the teachers and the administrators?

   a. Are there major differences? Similarities?

   b. How does this alignment help or hinder the work of the community as a whole?

Qualitative Method Approach

Qualitative research is a type of social science research methodology that collects and
works with non-numerical data to examine a targeted population or place (Crossman, 2017).
Seidman's (1998) *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* is focused in the tradition of three
different, thematic interviews intended to examine the meanings of lived experiences. Seidman
understood that interviewing provided access to the context of individual's behavior and thereby
provides opportunities for researchers to understand the meaning of one's behavior. He
furthermore recognized the idea that:

> a basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make
>
> of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience . . . Interviewing
>
> allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action.
>
> (p. 128)

Role of the Researcher

One of the primary goals of this study was to understand the impact Freshman Academies
have on a first-time freshman's transition to high school. The researcher developed the interview

questions and collected and analyzed all data in a self-contained setting. The one-on-one interview format provided the researcher an opportunity to ask follow-up questions to gain clarification. Data collected during the interview process will be divided into thematic categories.

Setting

Regarding the Freshman Academy transition program impacting ninth grade students' performance, the researcher gathered the perceptions of ninth grade teachers and administrators within XYZ High School, an urban institution located in Middle Tennessee and performing within the bottom 15% according to state assessments. During the 2014-15 school year, the school serviced 761 students (i.e., 85% African American, 13% Caucasian, and 2% Hispanic) that included 182 Freshman Academy students.

Participants

The purposive sampling technique was utilized to select the teachers and administrators in this study. Purposive sampling is a subjective sampling that relies on the researcher to select the study population. The participants for this qualitative study were members of the 2014-15 Freshman Academy Team, which consists of five teachers (i.e., interdisciplinary team) and four administrators (i.e., three assistant principals and one executive principal). The teachers and administrators were selected using purposive sampling because of the participant's knowledge of the population (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). Additionally, phone calls were made to confirm the participants. After receiving permission from XYZ High School's executive principal, the researcher emailed the participants to schedule an interview time as well as allowing the participants to select an alternative location for comfort and anonymity.

Informed Consent and Permission Procedures

The researcher sought approval from Carson-Newman University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Creswell (1998) asserted that IRB approval protects participants and the approval committee from harm. After the IRB approval, the researcher was granted permission by the school district to conduct the study at XYZ High School. The approval letter by the executive principal is included as appendix A. The participants received an informed consent letter that explained the study and was given adequate time to read, review, and asked clarifying questions before consent. The participant consent form is included as appendix B. Once the participants agreed, the form was signed by all members.

Assurance of Confidentiality

According to Fraenkel & Wallen (2000), the voluntary participants should feel confident that all data obtained from the study will remain confidential. The data collected throughout the study was not linked to the participant's names however, each participant was identified by a character to record the interviews. (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000).

Data Collection

Comprehensive interviewing is the main focus of qualitative research. Interviewing is critical to (a) gaining a better understanding of an individual's perception and thinking, (b) providing clarity to various concerns, (c) developing descriptive data points, and (d) inquiring about the background and framework of the topic (Rossman & Rollis, 2003). As a result, comprehensive interviewing is the appropriate method of collecting data for this study to gain a better understanding of the teachers' and administrators' perception of student transitions. The researcher conducted one holistic interview with each individual participant at a location of their

choice. The data analyzed from the interview will provide a deeper understanding of the impact transition programs have on students attending XYZ High School.

Interview Procedure

The teachers who taught in the Freshman Academy during the 2014-2015 school year and building level administrators were interviewed. Standardized open-ended interviews were conducted and fixed questions were asked, allowing all participants an opportunity to respond openly and freely (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

For the purpose of this study, the primary open-ended questions for the teachers were:

1. Discuss the impact of behavior of students that are members of a Freshman Academy.

2. Discuss the impact of attendance of students that are members of a Freshman Academy.

3. Discuss the impact of academic performance of students that are member of a Freshman Academy.

4. Discuss the support and resources available for the Freshman Academy transition program.

5. Discuss the role of the parent in relationship to the transition program.

6. Discuss the strengths of the Freshman Academy transition program.

7. Discuss the weaknesses of the Freshman Academy transition program.

The executive principal was asked the following questions:

1. Discuss the impact of behavior of students that are members of a Freshman Academy.

2. Discuss the impact of attendance of students that are members of a Freshman Academy.

3. Discuss the impact of academic performance of students that are member of a Freshman Academy.

4. Discuss the support and resources available for the Freshman Academy transition program.

5. Discuss the role of the parent in relationship to the transition program.

6. Discuss the strengths of the Freshman Academy transition program.

7. Discuss the weaknesses of the Freshman Academy transition program.

8. Discuss the type of professional development that are offered to teachers in the Freshman Academy.

The assistant principals were asked the following questions:

1. Discuss the impact of behavior of students that are members of a Freshman Academy.

2. Discuss the impact of attendance of students that are members of a Freshman Academy.

3. Discuss the impact of academic performance of students that are member of a Freshman Academy.

4. Discuss the support and resources available for the Freshman Academy transition program.

5. Discuss the role of the parent in relationship to the transition program.

6. Discuss the strengths of the Freshman Academy transition program.

7. Discuss the weaknesses of the Freshman Academy transition program.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data coding was used to analyze the data. Coding is the formal representation of categorizing and thematic analysis. The most important requirement of coding categories is that the categories must adequately reflect the investigator's research questions (Holsti, 1969). Rossman & Rallis (2003) suggest coding the data multiple times to find the true phenomena. At the conclusion of the interviews, the data was categorized in a systematic way which allowed the researcher to identify and organize evidence for each category. After dissecting the survey questions, the researcher created a color scheme that permitted like responses to be classified and a thematic theme was created to formulate the categories. A peer debriefer was used periodically throughout the analysis to ensure that the themes were well supported by the data. The peer in

this researcher is a high school English teacher that holds a doctoral degree in administration and supervision. Several member checks were also completed to ensure that the themes were consistent with the views of the participants. Once the six themes were identified, the researcher compared and contrasted each theme looking for similarities, differences and gaps. Data was reviewed nine times to uncover any possible outcomes of these similarities or differences. Finally, a summary of the beliefs of the community as a whole was constructed and reported based on the emerging themes from all three research questions.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the research methodology for exploring the impact Freshman Academies have on student transition to high school. Phenomenology qualitative data included the interview responses from open-ended questions asked of the administrators and teachers. The results of the interview responses were coded and presented according to the various themes.

Chapter IV

Results of Data Findings

Introduction

Chapter IV presents the results of Freshman Academies and the impact they have on student transition to high school. This chapter will follow the methodology, research design, and hypotheses described in Chapter III. Data was collected in an urban high school located in Middle Tennessee. The participants for this case study consisted of one executive principal, four academy principals, and four Freshman Academy teachers. The data collection procedure consisted of six comprehensive one-on-one interviews which were audio recorded and scribed by the researcher. The researcher read and listened to the transcripts of the interviews multiple times and began to categorize the responses into thematic categories. The results of the findings were reported according to the hypothesis and in response to the research questions. This case study was conducted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the beliefs of the community of the Freshman Academy teachers in terms of how the transition program at XYZ High School impacts ninth grades students' academic performance, discipline, and attendance?

2. What are the beliefs of the community of administrators of the Freshman Academy at XYZ High School in terms of how the transition program at XYZ High School impacts ninth grades students' academic performance, discipline, and attendance?

3. How well aligned are the beliefs of the teachers and the administrators?

   a. Are there major differences? Similarities?

   b. How does this alignment help or hinder the work of the community as a whole?

Summary of Participants

Purposeful sampling focused on the members of the 2014 -2015 Freshman Academy team based on their knowledge and involvement with student transition to high school. The results of the phenomenological study were established through data collected from six one-on-one interviews with teachers and administrators who volunteered to participate in the study. The sample of three females and three males ranging in ages from 34 to 51 proved to be a blend of both demographics and work experience. Four of the participants identified as African American and two identified as Caucasian. The participants collectively have been in the educational system for 62 years. The sample involved teachers and administrators with a diverse range of experience and expertise.

Interview Procedure with Teachers and the Administrative Team

In this case study, there were nine participants interviewed; one executive principal, two administrators and three Freshman Academy teachers. The executive principal's interview consisted of eight open-ended questions, the two academy principals' interviews consisted of seven open-ended questions, and the three Freshman Academy teachers' interviews consisted of eight open-ended questions. The executive principal's interview questions are included as Appendix E. The academy principal's interview questions are included as Appendix D. The Freshman Academy teachers' interview questions are included as Appendix C. The interviews ranged from 34 minutes to 56 minutes based on the participants' responses. All participants in each category were asked the same questions; however, some follow-up questions were asked when more clarification was needed.

Participant Narratives

Comprehensive interviewing allowed the researcher an opportunity to engage in one-on-one in-depth conversations with the participants to gain an understanding of how they perceive the impact of Freshman Academies on first time ninth grade students. The following summaries are intended to assist the reader gain a better understanding of the participants' perceptions and overall experience working within a Freshman Academy.

Participant A, the executive principal, is a 52-year-old African American male, who has been in the education field for 17 years. He has been the executive principal of the research school for six years. When the school district introduced Freshman Academies, he was one of nine assistant principals that would oversee the first class of freshmen introduced to small learning communities. He strongly believes in implementing small learning communities within a comprehensive high school setting. He feels that rising ninth graders lack the maturity level to handle the autonomy given to high school students. He knows and understands that many students entering his building are reading on a fourth or fifth grade level. He stated that 22% of his student body have an individualized educational plan. He feels that the Freshman Academy structure allows for students to become acclimated to high school and the new environment without the feel of a big school.   He stated that many students find themselves overwhelmed with the amount of homework and the introduction to new technology embedded within the lessons. Also, students struggle with managing their time and adjusting to transitioning between classes. He has designated one hallway within the school building that is assigned to the Freshman Academy. He encourages his teachers to create a culture of support and teach social and emotional strategies to assist the rising ninth graders during this transition. He believes that students must take ownership of their education and begin to advocate for themselves as they

matriculate through high school in order to be successful. Student discipline was once an issue at XYZ High School before the implementation of a school wide discipline policy. The discipline policy was very black and white, and it was communicated to all stakeholders at the beginning of the school year. He admits that the Freshman Academy transition program hasn't been executed to his satisfaction. He did mention that the middle school principal along with other administrators within the XYZ cluster need to provide opportunities that allow the staffs to collaborate more frequently.   He stated that he designates $2,000.00 from the general school budget to be used for a Freshman Academy transition program. This program is overseen by the assigned Freshman Academy principal. He expressed that over the past two years, the five-day camp only serviced approximately 45 students. He is unsure as to why rising ninth graders are not taking advantage of this awesome opportunity to engage in hands on instruction with their new teachers. He mentioned that he would like to see the Freshman Academy team sponsor parent nights more frequently throughout the school year. He expressed that the administrative team meets to discuss the impact of the transition program and review the feedback reports from the participants' families. He stated that he reviews the attendees' attendance, academic performance, and discipline at the end of the first semester to gauge if the student was able to make a smoother transition to high school. He stated he often times will meet with the campers throughout the first semester to check–in and answer any questions or listen to their concerns. He indicated that the parents of the campers are not involved in the transition process, but he would love to see an increase in parent participation not only during the transition season, but throughout the students' four years of high school. He understands that the school has one of the highest mobility rates within the district. He has collaborated with metro transit to increase the number of pick-up and drop-off times for students that need additional transit opportunities. He

claims that he fully supports and believes in his assigned academy principal and that he allows that individual to govern the Freshman Academy as he/she sees fit. He stated that all teachers school-wide received in-house professional development along with the opportunity to register for professional development courses outside of the school building. He asserted that teachers are also encouraged to reach out to the alumni association to obtain additional supplies or monetary funds to support their classroom instruction.

Overall, he stated that the Freshman Academy provides rising ninth graders an opportunity to transition to high school within a small community of teachers and students. Students and teachers have the opportunity to build strong meaningful relationships that foster a respectful culture. He also added that teachers are able identify and work to overcome students' weaknesses and assist with closing the achievement gaps within a shorter time frame. He sees value in the Freshman Academy teachers having a common planning period three days a week throughout the school year. He added that teachers use this time to meet with parents concerning their students' progress, discuss assessment data, celebrate and award positive student behavior and academic progress, and to collaborate regarding standards based instruction and grading.

Participant B, is a 46-year-old, African American female academy principal, who has been in the educational field for 15 years. She has a passion for working with the rising ninth graders and ensuring they transition to 10th grade prepared academically, but more importantly socially and emotionally. She strongly feels that middle school doesn't prepare rising ninth graders for a diverse culture and the increase of voice and choice that high school allows. She believes that the middle school educational environment should mimic that of XYZ High School. She expressed that teachers need to understand the culture of the school and the background of the school community in which the students live. She also mentioned that throughout the

summer teachers have the opportunity to attend culturally responsive teaching workshops that assist in helping teachers gain a better understanding of the students that enter XYZ High School. She also added, during monthly faculty meetings, teachers are allowed to request specific professional development that the entire staff can benefit from. The participant describes parent participation at the school as nonexistent. She went on to say that parents are normally seen at the school when their child has received a discipline infraction or being checked out for early dismissal. She explained that the transition program provided transportation for the students to eliminate various barriers to attendance that were noted on previous feedback forms. Having transportation provided to and from the program eliminated the requirement for parents to come to the school and meet their child's prospective teachers. Participant B would like to see the middle school and the Freshman Academy create a bridge program that provides mentors and tracks students' progress during the second semester of the students eighth grade year until the conclusion of their freshman year. She also stated that the community stakeholders should be heavily invested in supporting the students' social and emotional needs through various programs. Parents of students that attended the camp relied on their student to communicate important information, which often times never was communicated. She advocates for the Freshman Academy and small learning communities and feels that the Freshman Academy allows student an opportunity to attach and belong to a small group within a big organization. She explains that students become overwhelmed and begin to stress about the daily routines and normal business of high school. She believes having a core group of teachers on the same hallway allows students and teachers to build a positive learning environment that supports students' academic progress. She expounds on the possibility for teachers to co-teach and share instructional strategies based on a students' individualized needs. She states that students all

have the same Math, Science, History, English, and Freshman Seminar instructor.   She believes

that the Freshman Academy needs to communicate with parents more frequently and provide

various opportunities that solicits parent support and engagement. She also added that student

voice and choice is limited due to the Freshman Academy structure within the school. She

explains that she reviews the students' past discipline record, academics, and attendance and

compares them to the students' current behavior after the first semester of high school.   She

stated that she makes an effort to recognize those students who have made a smooth transition

and have shown growth in attendance and behavior.

Participant C, is a 39-year-old, Caucasian male academy principal, who has been in the

educational field for 12 years. He believes that positive relationships are the key to a successful

freshman year.   He explains that students must first trust and know that the teacher and

administration have their best interest at heart. He expressed that students need to have good

study habits, effective communication skills, and be able to manage time in order to be

successful in high school. He stated that XYZ High School has created a structured environment

that informs students of the expectations and rules of the school. A school-wide discipline plan

sets the stage for this learning institution. He stated that very little support is specifically

dedicated to the Freshman Academy team. However, Participant C believes that teachers receive

the needed professional development to become an effective team for the students despite having

the financial or parental support. He expressed that there was very little parental involvement,

but this is a school-wide concern. He explains that parents have various barriers, one being the

location of the school, which keeps them from being able to support their child at school. He

believes that the Freshman Academy provides a strong support system for first time ninth

graders. For many students, being in an unfamiliar environment causes anxiety and unwanted

stress. He stated that the Freshman Academy team has created a family-like culture that embraces all students regardless of race, social economic status, or academic level. He strongly believes that positive relationships are the key ingredient to the students' success. He suggests that the administration provide opportunities for the Freshman Academy team to conduct visits to the homes of parents and students that were not able to attend the Freshman Academy transition program. He believes this will assist in addressing the distance between the school and the community it serves. He also mentioned that the feeder schools need to collaborate with the Freshman Academy team throughout the final year of middle school to ensure students are prepared for the transition to high school. He also stated that the guidance counselors from all feeder schools play a major role in communicating with parents and ensuring the students are equipped with the necessary skills to transition effectively. He made mention that he would like for the Freshman Academy to sponsor additional transitional programs for rising freshmen.

 Participant D, is a 35-year-old, Caucasian male Freshman Academy teacher, who has been in the educational field for 7 years. He served as a Freshman Academy lead teacher for the past 3 years. He strongly supports the school wide discipline policy and states that the policy assisted him in holding his students accountable throughout the day. Participant D believes that parental support is lacking, however, he has found multiple free electronic resources to engage his parents in his students' education. He stated he refuses to work diligently with a student and not have some parental support to assist him at home. He stated that the students within his classroom had a clear understanding of his expectations and how important it was to become active participants within their education. He stressed that the students who attended the summer bridge program were ten steps ahead of those that chose not to attend. He also added that these students continue to have attendance concerns, but this is a common concern each year. He

Commented [TMH1]: Which students is he referring to? Those that attended or those that did not? This part is a little unclear.

discovered that the students who attended the camp had adapted to his rules and discipline policy and understood his expectations on the first day of school. He added that it normally takes a first time ninth grader until December to make the necessary adjustments from eighth grade to ninth grade. He strongly believes that the eighth-grade teams from the feeder schools need to collaborate with the Freshman Academy team throughout the summer, to plan lessons and identify gaps between the tiers. He also mentioned that he would like to spearhead a summer bridge program and additional learning workshops throughout the school year that provide monetary stipends to the attendees. He believes this will increase student and parent buy-in and also eliminates the barrier of students choosing to work in various community eateries versus preparing for their high school career. He also stated that the district provides professional development opportunities that are catered towards small learning communities, however he feels that the team needs tools that can address the social and emotional needs of the students.

Participant E, is a 37-year-old African American female Freshman Academy teacher, who has been in the educational field for nine years. She is currently on the school-wide leadership team. She has been a part of the bridge program for the past three years and strongly believes in the impact it has on a students' discipline and overall transition to high school. She went on to say that students who attended the program had very few discipline referrals the first semester and adapted to the expectations quite easily. Students who attended the program were able to speak with rising sophomores about their freshman year experience. In addition to meeting current students at XYZ High School, they also received mentors that guided and supported them throughout their first year of high school. She stated that the summer bridge program should be an ongoing program throughout the school year. She believes that student and parental involvement would increase if students and parents were given the opportunity to

engage in a variety of mini sessions throughout the year. Participant E mentioned that the feeder schools within the cluster need to come together more frequently to ensure that the bridge program is effective and providing the necessary skills needed for students to make a smooth transition.

Participant F, is a 34-year-old African American female Freshman Academy teacher, who has been in the educational field for two years. She believes that the student behavior is a direct reflection of the students' academic performance. She feels that the freshmen students entering a ninth–twelfth grade high school doesn't have the maturity level needed to adjust without support. She fully supports the school-wide discipline policy and the impact it has on students' decision-making skills. She went on to say that the bridge program gives students an opportunity to preview the upcoming educational material in a nontraditional classroom setting. During Cobra Camp, she mentioned students are given the opportunity to complete collaborative projects and develop personal goals and objectives for the day. She also stated that the students who attended the camp often times were not a behavioral concern, however attendance was and continued to be a concern throughout the school year for a few campers. She believes this is due to the relationships that were built during the camp and knowing the expectation of the teachers and administrators at XYZ School. Students and parents are given a copy of the behavioral discipline plan and are allowed to ask questions to ensure they understand the discipline policy. She would like to see the feeder school's eighth grade team collaborate with the Freshman Academy team more regularly to ensure that students are not only academically prepared, but socially and emotionally as well. She would like to see the district provide professional development days that teachers can use to collaborate with other schools within the cluster. She explained in detail that the students who participated in the Cobra Camp transition program were

Commented [TMH2]: This is the first time this is discussed here. Do you need to introduce it more?

taught social and emotional skills that assisted in their transition to the culture at XYZ High School which impacted their academic performance. She went on to say that the relationships that were built during the camp were genuine and often times those teachers became a safe place for the students. She also stated that the location of the school has a major impact on the students' attendance and parental involvement. She mentioned that several parents made mention that the school was either too far from their house or they were unable to get transportation to the school due to the lack of owning their own vehicle. She made mention that she has made various home visits to either pick up or drop off a student and found value in having the opportunity to meet the parents/guardians. Although students are provided transportation to the camp, it still remains a barrier to the families of those students attending. She expressed that providing additional opportunities for parents throughout the school year will increase student and parental engagement and assist in building a team of individuals working together with the student. She also mentioned that the school needs to look at multiple ways to communicate and advertise school news. She stated on numerous occasions, parents didn't know about the camp or wasn't informed before the registration deadline.

Data Coding

Each individual's response to the study questions was analyzed nine times to determine common statements within each participant's response. The researcher created a storyline that was based on the impact of Freshman Academies and the impact they have on a student's transition to high school. Once the researcher identified the concepts of the study, she proceeded to identify and assign a color to the following coding categories: Freshman Academy, attendance, discipline, parents, community, and support.   During the initial analyzation of the interview responses the researcher highlighted all of the statements that mentioned the key words

or phrases. During the second and third analyzation the researcher underlined phrases that were identical to two or more participant's responses. During the fourth reading of the interview responses, the research circled responses that were unique and isolated from the coding categories. These responses created a miscellaneous coding category. The fifth reading was the final reading of the responses as a whole as it relates to the categories being created. Following the fifth reading, the researcher studied the various codes and categories and identified themes that were similar that could be combined into one theme. At the conclusion of this phase, the researcher had identified the following 7 themes that were significant to the study: (a) feeder school collaboration, (b) professional development, (c) school location, (d) accessibility, (e) Cobra Camp, (f) discipline (g) resources. The researcher, analyzed the seven themes and their responses and highlighted the phrases or statements within those themes that required action during the eighth analyzation of the data responses. On the last and final analysis, the researcher reviewed each theme and its statements or phrases to ensure they were accurately placed in the correct location. At the conclusion of this phase, 42 participants' statements were acknowledged as significant to the study. The 42 statements were reviewed and organized into six coded category themes as it relates to Freshman Academies and the impact they have on student transition to high school. The six themes that evolved from the data were: (a) feeder school collaboration (b) school location and accessibility; (c) professional development; (d) effective communication; (e) programs (f) discipline.

Theme One: Feeder School Collaboration,

All participants find value in collaborating with the district appointed feeder schools. However, XYZ High School hasn't established a working relationship with the other two tiers. The participants believe that this is a significant component to the success of the transition

program at the high school. The essence of this theme related directly to the alignment of the middle and high school curriculum and social and emotional programs. The executive principal added value to this by stating:

> "The value of having a working relationship with the feeder school provides ongoing communication concerning rising students' academic and social and emotional data. Being able to speak with individuals that have prior knowledge of a student's background and are able to provide strategies that have worked leading up to the student's transition."

The participants also mentioned the importance of creating a support system for the students and the timing of the bridge program as it relates to providing support for rising ninth graders. Participant B suggested:

> The middle school and the Freshman Academy need to create a bridge program that provides mentors and tracks students' progress during the second semester of the student's eight grade year until the conclusion of their freshman year.

All three of the academy teacher participants shared that often times two teachers' daily school schedules do not align, and the meetings do not take place. They also expressed that the line of communication between middle and high school teachers is lacking and would like to see more collaborative teaming between the content area teachers on both tier levels. Participant F offered:

> She would like to see the feeder school eighth grade team collaborate with the Freshman Academy team more regularly to ensure that students are not only academically prepared, but socially and emotionally as well. She explained in

detail that the students who participated in the Cobra Camp transition program were taught social and emotional skills that assisted in their transition to the culture at XYZ High School which impacted their academic performance.

Theme Two: School Location and Accessibility

Four of the six participants expressed that a large population of their school community is bused and resides approximately 15 minutes from the school. One academy principal stated that he has expressed this concern on numerous occasions, but it hasn't been addressed. Participant B shared:

> The transition program provided transportation for the students to attempt to eliminate various barriers that were noted on past parent and student feedback forms. The administrative staff thought camp attendance would increase if round trip transportation was provided to the bridge program. We were under the impression that transportation was the major reason why students were not attending the program.

Two of the academy teachers voiced that although the students are not attending a neighborhood school, they have on numerous occasions participated in home visits and have offered to provide rides for students to participate in the transition program. Participant F offered:

> The location of the school has a major impact on the student's attendance and parental involvement. I have spoken with several parents and they have mentioned that the school was either too far from their house or they were unable to get transportation to the school due to the lack of owning their own vehicle. After hearing those statements, I realized I must go into the community in which I

serve. I have picked up and dropped off a number of Cobra Camp attendees. I

find that I'm able to meet the parents/guardians of my future students.

The executive principal added:

For two years, I pushed for the city to establish a metro transit bus stop on school

grounds. I have seen a major increase in student's attendance and after school

activities due to their being a city bus stop on school grounds.

Theme Three: Professional Development

Professional development was mentioned in all of the interviews as a strength of the

Freshman Academy transition program. All of the participants believe that the building

leadership provides numerous hours focused on data analysis and building strong relationships

through culturally responsive teaching.

All three teachers spoke about a professional development session offered by the district

that focused on highly effective teaming and how they were able to establish Freshman Academy

norms and expectations as a team. Participant D expressed the following:

The district provides professional development opportunities that are catered

towards small learning communities, however he feels that the team needs tools

that can address the social and emotional needs of the students.

However, two of the teachers and one academy principal believe that the feeder schools

should have an opportunity to plan and assist in building the transition program that supports the

goals and objectives of the Freshman Academy. Participant F's assertion added value to this

theme when she said:

She would like to see the feeder school eighth grade team collaborate with the

Freshman Academy team more frequently to ensure that students are not only

academically prepared, but socially and emotionally as well. She would like to

see the district provide professional development days that teachers can use to

collaborate with other schools within the cluster.

Theme Four: Effective Communication

During all of the interviews, excluding two, participants indicated that the main source of

communication inviting rising freshmen to the Cobra Camp is through school mail. One

academy principal states that too often the information in the system is outdated and there is no

way to contact the parents or students. The executive principal stated:

 "The school community in which he serves has a high mobility rate which impacts

student geographical information. Parents change telephone numbers and addresses so

frequently that students and parents fail to update the child's records. This is an ongoing

issue which hinders our day to day operation within the school."

One of the six participants feel that the guidance counselors play a major role in ensuring that the

rising ninth graders receive the necessary information for Cobra Camp. Participant C added to

this them by stating:

"Communication to the parents is key if you want parents to reinforce what is taking

place within the classroom. I feel that the guidance counselors are the first line of

communication with the parent and school. The first individual that the students meet

from XYZ High School is the guidance counselor during their eighth-grade registration

day. During this time the guidance counselor should be informing parents and students

of the various bridge programs that are offered throughout the summer months."

Theme Five: Programs

Across the board, all of the participants stated they would like to sponsor more transitional events throughout the school year in addition to the five-day summer bridge program that is currently taking place in July. The executive principal captured this theme when he stated:

> I'm an advocate for providing a strong bridge program that addresses the needs of the students attending XYZ High School. I would like to see the Freshman Academy host quarterly events that are catered to not only students' needs but also their parents' needs. We must equip the parents with the necessary skills to reinforce the instruction or social and emotional support that is being provided at school.

Two of the teachers and an academy principal expressed that they feel it's very important to begin building trust amongst students and teachers prior to the student entering ninth grade. Participant F mentioned:

> Sponsoring additional transitional support days throughout the school year would increase parent and student attendance. This would also allow all stakeholders to progress monitor and address any issues within a timely manner.

Most of the participants expounded on various ideas they would like to see such as: a student and teacher social, family workshops throughout the school year, and freshman orientation. Participant D suggested:

> I would like to see the Cobra Camp program offer a stipend to all campers that attend the camp with a 95% attendance rate. I believe this would eliminate the

> barrier of students having to choose between a part-time job and their education
> and increase daily attendance of the bridge program.

Theme Six: Discipline

Four of the six participants perceived that the school-wide discipline policy plays a major role in the impact of the Freshman Academy discipline data. The executive principal laid the foundation for this theme with the support of participants C, D, and F. Participants shared that the discipline policy was clear and that all stakeholders are informed of the school-wide discipline policy o at the beginning of the school year. The executive principal stated:

> XYZ High School was run by the students before my appointment to transform
> the school and create an institution of learning that was safe for stakeholders. The
> summer leading into my first year as the executive principal I collaborated with
> my administrative team and we developed a school-wide discipline policy that
> addressed the major infractions indicated by the discipline data. This policy
> allowed for the administration team to be consistent and fair with all students
> when working with students that have received a discipline referral. I strongly
> believe that teachers can teach, and students can learn when they feel safe and
> supported by their leaders.

Participants found that students being informed of the discipline policy during Cobra Camp assisted in the preparation of what to expect during their freshman year. Students were given the opportunity to ask questions and speak with former Freshman Academy students about the academy structure and discipline policy. Participant E described her perception of how the discipline policy assisted in the students' transition into high school:

Commented [TMH3]: unclear

The Cobra Camp attendees seem to make a smoother transition to high school and had fewer discipline referrals than their peers that chose not to attend the camp. This is mainly due to the attendees being given the opportunity to become acclimated to the rules and expectation of not only the Freshman Academy, but the school administration.

Hypothesis Connection to Research

Each of the hypotheses were derived from the research questions and was examined from the lens of the community of the Freshman Academy teachers and administration. Each individual hypothesis is an important component for a Freshman Academy transitional program to be successful. The implantation of the Freshman Academy allows for a small learning community to be established that caters to the needs of the rising ninth graders as it relates to the students' attendance, discipline and academic performance.

Research Questions Response

For this case study there were three research questions. The first research question for this case study asked, what are the beliefs of the community of the Freshman Academy teachers in terms of how the transition program at XYZ High School impacts ninth grade students' academic performance, discipline, and attendance? Through this case study it was found that the teachers believe that the Freshman Academy transitional program has a positive impact on the students' academic performance and discipline. The summer bridge program that is sponsored by the Freshman Academy team was mentioned several times by the teachers as being a major factor in the success of students that attended the program. The Freshman Academy teachers also expressed that the Freshman Academy structure allows for students to receive the necessary academic support and address any social and emotional concerns that would impede

the student from being successful. When it comes to students' attendance, the Freshman Academy infrastructure didn't have a positive impact on the students' attendance.

The second research question was what are the beliefs of the community of administrators of the Freshman Academy at XYZ High School in terms of how the transition program at XYZ High School impacts ninth grades students' academic performance, discipline, and attendance? The administrators believe that the school-wide discipline policy is a major factor in why student discipline has decreased over the years and academic progress has increased. Another factor that contributes to the success of the Freshman Academy is the Cobra Camp bridge program. This program allows for students to become acclimated to their new high school prior to the start of the upcoming school year. The administrators believe in holding students accountable for their actions and education. However, the administration believes that parental support is a key factor in the Freshman Academy addressing its attendance issue. They believe with increased parental support the students' transition would be a success.

The third research question was how well aligned are the beliefs of the teachers and the administrators? Are there major differences? Similarities? How does this alignment help or hinder the work of the community as a whole? The community of the teachers and administrators both believe that the school-wide discipline plan has a positive impact on the students discipline and is communicated effectively to all stakeholders. Both communities believe in the positive impact the bridge program has on the attendees' transition to high school. They would like to see the school sponsor more programs throughout the school year. The communities are aware of the attendance concern and the impact it has on students' academic progress. They both strongly believe that an increase in parental support will assist in decreasing the overall student attendance rate.

Chapter V

Findings, Implications, and Recommendations

This chapter is segregated into four sections to allow the researcher to report on the findings of the study in detail according to subcategories. The first section addresses the findings as it relates to the three research questions. The second section explains the conclusion drawn during the case study. The third section addresses the limitations discovered during the study. The fourth section speaks on the recommendations for future research based on the information found in this study. The final section of this chapter summarizes the study.

Research Questions

The researcher studied the questions below from a communities of practice perception, as it relates to Freshman Academies and student transition to high school:

1. To what extent do the community of Freshman Academy teachers perceive how the transition program at XYZ High School impacts ninth grade students' academic performance, discipline, and attendance?

2. To what extent do Freshman Academy administrators perceive how the transition program at XYZ High School impacts ninth grade students' academic performance, discipline, and attendance?

3. How well aligned are the beliefs of the teachers and the administrators? Are their major differences and similarities? How does this alignment help or hinder the work of the community as a whole?

Findings

The research questions were answered by an executive principal, two academy principals, and three teachers in the freshman academy in a structured one-on-one interview environment.

The interviews were scribed and recorded to ensure all responses were accurate and included in the study. All responses from the participants were coded nine times to ensure common themes amongst the participants were identified. Below is a brief synopsis of the study findings as it relates to the interview questions.

Student Discipline

The initial interview question raised to all participants referred to the student transition program and the impact it has on student discipline within the Freshman Academy. The responses were all centered around the ability to establish Freshman Academy expectations, communicate them effectively to all stakeholders, and holding students and parents accountable. It was found that the executive principal had established a school-wide discipline policy that addressed common infractions that were communicated to all stakeholders via mail, website, and visibly posted around the school building. The Academy teachers were given autonomy to govern and establish classroom norms and expectations as they deemed necessary.

It was found that the five-day Cobra Camp offers students an opportunity to see first-hand the school-wide discipline policy and hear from rising sophomores about their freshman year experiences and how the teachers held them accountable for their behaviors. The teachers reported that students who attended the Cobra Camp adjusted to the transition of high school as it relates to rules and expectations of the Freshman Academy with little or no concern. The teachers suggested that the students' transition went so smoothly due to the relationships and trust that were built during Cobra Camp. This time also allowed students an opportunity to navigate the school building without being bombarded by large crowds. The Freshman Academy teachers supported and appreciated the implementation of a school-wide discipline policy which two of the three Freshman Academy teachers used as their classroom rules and expectations. The

teachers however do find it important that elective teachers and other building level personnel that will teach rising ninth graders be involved in the transition program.

Attendance

The responses received regarding student attendance seemed to vary, however they all agreed that students that attended the five-day Cobra Camp had attendance issues before enrolling at XYZ High School. The teachers reported that many of the students that attended the camp missed an average of two days of the five-day camp. The participants of the study understand the various barriers that their school community faces, however, the administration allocated funds to remove the obstacle of transportation. The teachers found that the attendance of the attendees of Cobra Camp was below the district average and there was no significant difference between the attendance average of those that didn't attend Cobra Camp.

Academic Performance

According to the teachers, the researcher found that the students that attended the five-day Cobra Camp adjusted to the academic expectations a lot better than the students that failed to attend the camp. The academy teachers and principal implemented the "Teach One; Reach One" peer tutoring program for the students that attended Cobra Camp. The students were paired with a rising sophomore and received tutoring and academic support throughout the first semester of the student's high school experience. The Freshman Academy principal would conduct academic chats with the pair of students to ensure the program was being done with fidelity and addressed any concerns. Through teacher observation and formative assessments, the academy teachers agreed to continue the program through the second semester. The teachers found that this support and intervention program assisted the students that frequently missed school due to various reasons. The teachers develop the Cobra Camp curriculum to ensure that the activities

were academically focused and geared toward teaching pre-requisite skills that are needed for ninth grade. Students are given a skill based assessment to allow all study participants to identify a student's strengths and area of improvement in Math and English. The teachers and administration used the test data results as a key component in their first quarter student centered data chat.

Parental Support

The interview question that asked the participants to discuss how involved parents are in the transition program shaped a very interesting finding. All of the participants agreed that a key component to students having a successful freshman year is having a parent or guardian actively participating throughout this process. The teachers, also stated that they invited the parents to attend an informational meeting concerning Freshman Academy and Cobra Camp and a small number of parents attended. At the conclusion of the camp, parents were also invited back to allow their child to showcase their work; however, a small number of parents supported this student led event. All of the study participants would like to see the parents become more involved during the transition phase of their child entering ninth grade. Most of the participants would like to identify a number of ways to communicate with parents/guardians outside of the school mailing letters home.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

</div>

Student Discipline

Establishing structure and order within the Freshman Academy allows all stakeholders to understand the students' expectation and how one should govern themselves while at school. Creating and posting the school-wide discipline policy informs students of their consequences before an act takes place and assists the administration in being fair and consistent when

rendering discipline. Informing students of the school-wide discipline policy before the student's transition to high school allows students and parents an opportunity to ask clarifying questions and ensures all parties are on the same page. The Freshman Academy at XYZ high school should contemplate developing academy classroom expectations that incorporate the school-wide discipline plan that all Freshman Academy teachers are implementing.

Attendance

It's was very evident and clear that the entire Freshman Academy community needs to address the attendance rate of the incoming freshman and not just those that attended the transition program. With a large population of incoming freshman not on grade level academically and the attendance rate being below the district average all stakeholders need to develop an attendance policy for students wanting to attend Cobra Camp.

Academic Performance

All participants understood the importance of identifying students' areas of strength and weakness early on to prevent the achievement gap from widening. The Cobra Camp focused on English and Math throughout the week-long program. The skills based assessment that was administered to every camper allowed the teachers to individualize lessons and create small group sessions to assist students in various areas of concern. The teachers and the Freshman Academy principal were very pleased with the impact the "Teach One; Reach One" program had on the students' transition to high school.

Additionally, the researcher concluded that the teachers and the Freshman Academy administrator were able to build positive relationships with the students that attended Cobra Camp which assisted in students feeling connected to the school and feeling empowered to complete the required steps to be successful in the Freshman Academy.

Support and Resources

The executive principal supports and provides a financial budget for implementation of the Cobra Camp program. The Freshman Academy team is knowledgeable and has the ability to academically support the incoming freshmen attending XYZ High School. However, the researcher concluded that the teachers needed additional support in assisting the students socially and emotionally as they transition to high school. The teachers and administration need to collaborate with outside resources that are experts in the areas of adolescent development and personal identity.

Parental Support

The researcher concluded that the parental role has not been defined due to the lack of parental involvement during the transition process. The parents are only being invited and informed about school events through letters mailed to the students address on file. The Freshman Academy teachers and administration need to identify other ways to effectively communicate with the parents or guidance counselors of rising ninth graders. Furthermore, the Freshman Academy team needs to provide parental support sessions that will assist in informing the parents of the various programs that are available prior to the students entering ninth to ensure the student has a smooth transition and a successful first year of high school.

<div align="center">Connections to Theoretical Framework</div>

The Communities of Practice Theory was selected as the theoretical framework for this case study. It was evident that the administration and the Freshman Academy team are seeking to establish a transition program that assists rising ninth graders as they transition into XYZ High School. The Freshman Academy team identifies and plans structured lessons and activities for the transition program that will enhance their learning skills, while addressing identified Math

and English deficits. The Freshman Academy team and the Freshman Academy administrator are frequently communicating and sharing data concerning students and their academic progress. The collaborative data chats and meetings provide the executive principal a summary of the impact of the transition program and the overall Freshman Academy.

Limitations

There was one limitation in this research study. The population of the research study participants was the only limitation of this study. The study was limited to one executive principal, 2 academy principals and three freshman academy teachers. Only using three freshman academy instructors could have impacted the perception of the overall outcome of the transition program.   Also, the interview questions were created by the researcher which limited the overall study.

Recommendations for Future Research

To provide a transition program for rising ninth graders that will impact student achievement, discipline and attendance, there must be additional studies focused on how to bridge the gap between middle school and high school. Studies have been conducted and focused on Freshman Academies, however, research is limited when it comes to how middle school personnel and Freshman Academy teams bridge the gap and provide support for all stakeholders.

Additionally, studies need to focus on increasing parental engagement on the high school level and its impact on student success. Identifying and implementing an effective program that engages and encourages parents and allows them to participate in their child's education will enhance the Freshman Academy overall program.

Summary

The implementation of Freshman Academies is a common transitional structure adopted by high schools across the nation, due to data showing the positive impact small learning communities have on student academic progress, discipline and students overall transition to high school. The development of a school-wide discipline plan and offering a five-day summer bridge program isn't enough to achieve the desired results set forth by the professionals of the Freshman Academy and administrators.   It takes the work of all communities within the school to ensure the needs of the academy and student issues are being addressed on a daily basis to increase student attendance and minimize discipline infractions which impacts academic performance.

APPENDICES
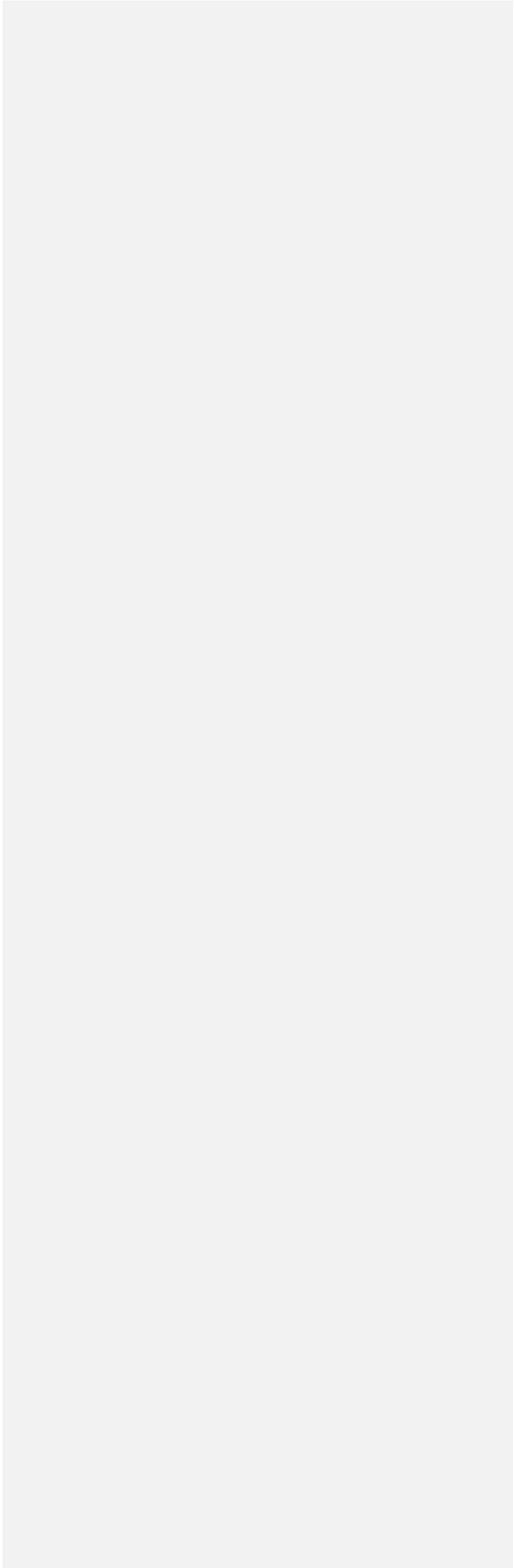
Appendix A

District Approval for Research

METRO
NASHVILLE
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS
Exceeding Great Expectations
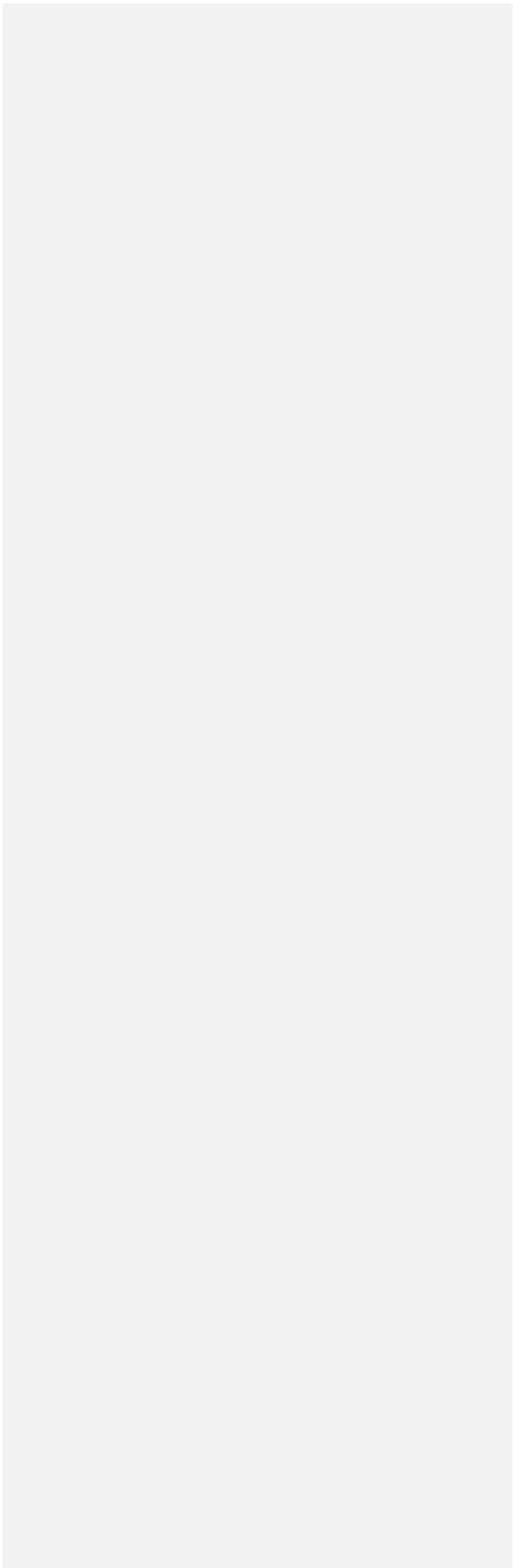
September 20, 2017

To whom it may concern:

As the executive principal of ██████████████, Karen Beard has my permission to use school -wide and grade level data to complete her study on Freshman Academies. MNPS employees during the 2014-2015 school year have been granted permission to participate in the study. However, the school name or student information cannot be used or identified in the study for her doctoral studies at Carson Newman University.

Sincerely,

James K. Bailey III

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form
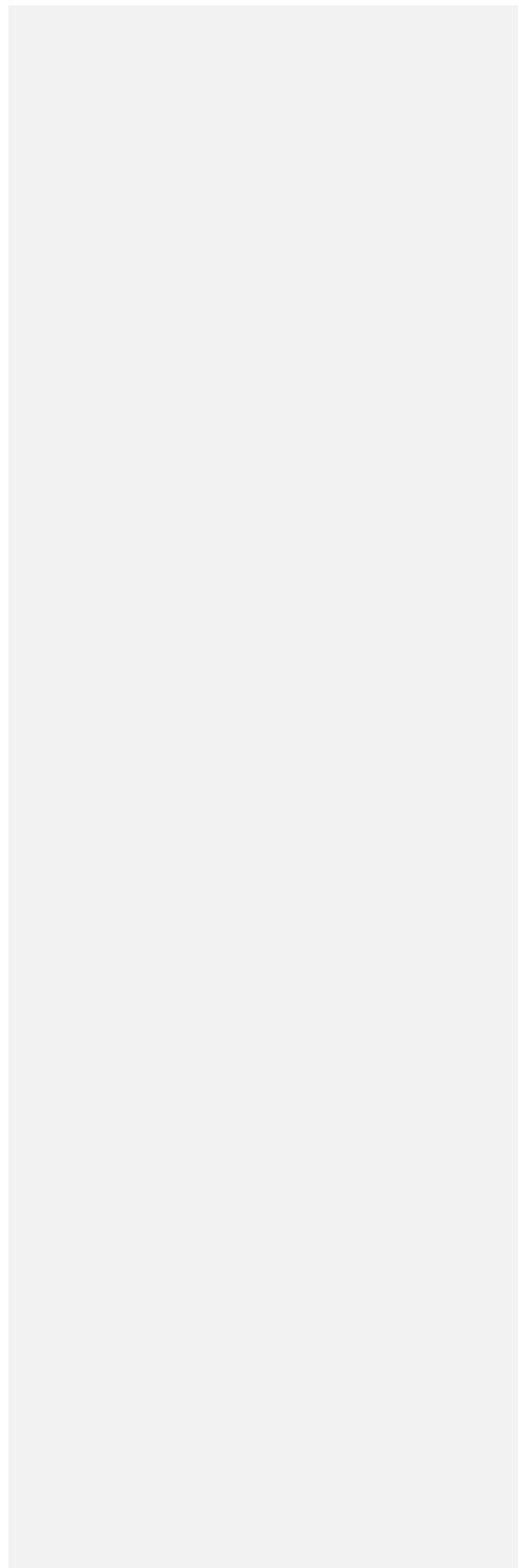
Appendix B
Informed Consent Form

Research Title:

FRESHMAN ACADEMIES:
THE IMPACT THEY HAVE ON STUDENT TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL

Please read the below information carefully before consenting to participate in this study.

Purpose of the research study:

The purpose of this study is to determine if Freshman Academies have an impact on student transition to high school through the lens of the teacher and administrator communities.

Participants Requirements:

You will be asked to participate in a one- on- one holistic interview with the researcher and answer open-ended questions pertaining to freshman academies. The interview process will allow for the participant or the researcher to ask follow up questions if necessary.

Confidentiality:

Your identity will remain anonymous. Your response to the interview questions will be assigned a character for coding purposes only. All information collected during this research study will be destroyed after a calendar year.

Voluntary participation:

As a volunteer participant in this study, you can elect to discontinue participation at any time. All prior information shared with the researcher prior to your decision to discontinue the study will be a part of the study and will be destroyed.

After carefully reading and understanding the above information, I wish to participate in the above study. A signature will indicate agreement to participate in the research study and will be remain an official document with the researcher.

Participant's Name: (Print) _____

Signature _____ (Date) _____
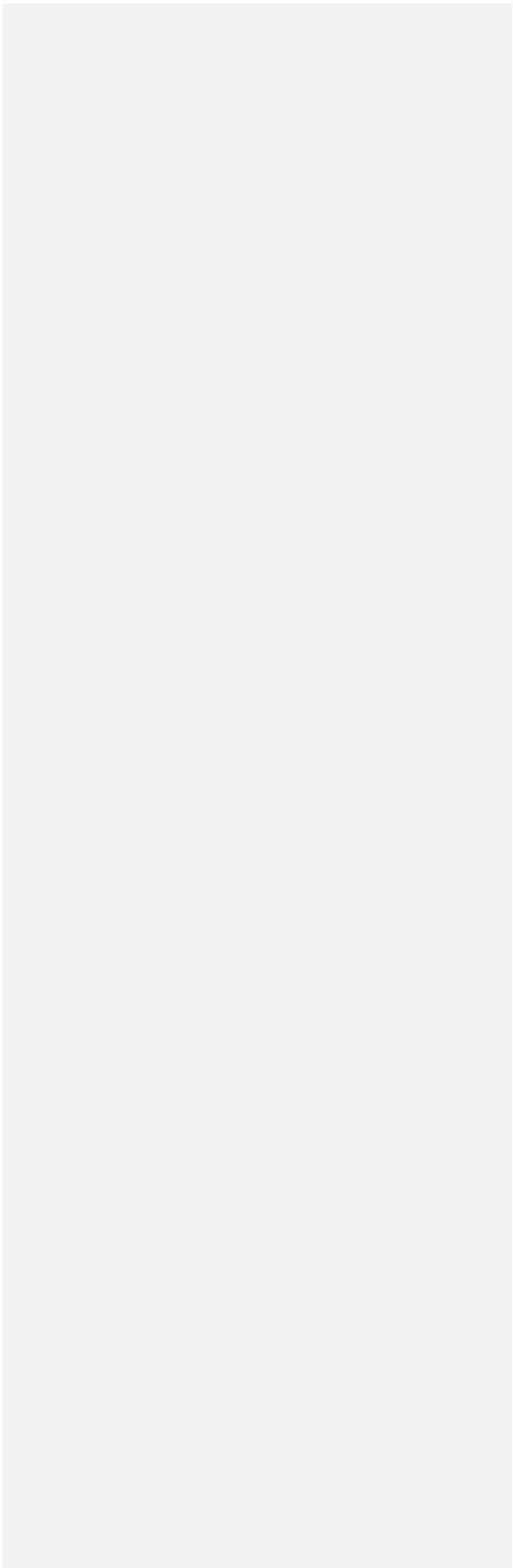
Appendix C

Teacher Interview Guide
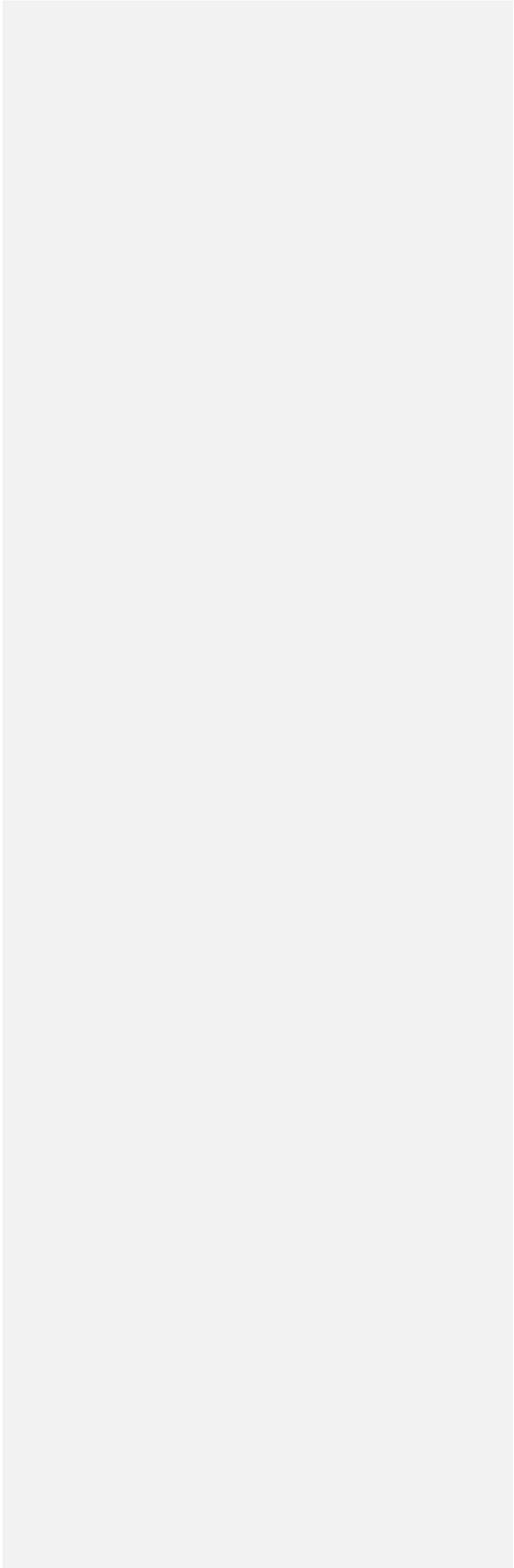
Appendix C

Teacher Interview Questions

1. Discuss the impact of behavior of students that are members of a Freshman Academy.

2. Discuss the impact of attendance of students that are members of a Freshman Academy.

3. Discuss the impact of academic performance of students that are member of a Freshman

Academy

4. Discuss the support and resources available for the Freshman Academy transition program

5. Discuss the role of the parent in relationship to the transition program?

6. Discuss the strengths of the Freshman Academy transition program.

7. Discuss the weaknesses of the Freshman Academy transition program.

Appendix D
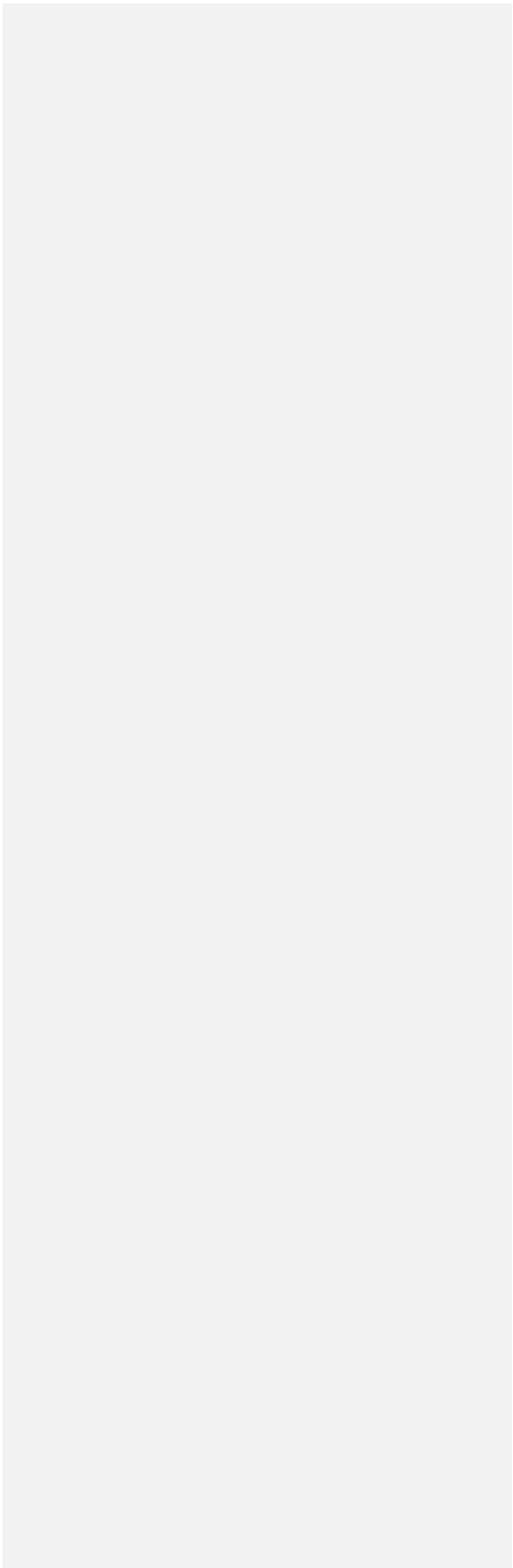
Assistant Principal Interview Guide

Appendix D

Assistant Principal Interview Questions

1. Discuss the impact of behavior of students that are members of a Freshman Academy.

2. Discuss the impact of attendance of students that are members of a Freshman Academy.

3. Discuss the impact of academic performance of students that are member of a Freshman

Academy

4. Discuss the support and resources available for the Freshman Academy transition program

5. Discuss the role of the parent in relationship to the transition program?

6. Discuss the strengths of the Freshman Academy transition program.

7. Discuss the weaknesses of the Freshman Academy transition program.

Appendix E

Executive Principal Interview Guide

Appendix E

Executive Principal Questions

1. Discuss the impact of behavior of students that are members of a Freshman Academy.

2. Discuss the impact of attendance of students that are members of a Freshman Academy.

3. Discuss the impact of academic performance of students that are member of a Freshman Academy.

4. Discuss the support and resources available for the Freshman Academy transition program

5. Discuss the role of the parent in relationship to the transition program?

6. Discuss the strengths of the Freshman Academy transition program.

7. Discuss the weaknesses of the Freshman Academy transition program.

8. Discuss the type of professional development that are offered to teachers in the Freshman Academy.

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