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Freshman Academy: Transitioning Ninth Grade Students Through the Academic and Social Rigors of the High School Experience and the Students', Parents' and Teachers' Perceptions

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by

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Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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Freshman Academy in Mobile County is an ever growing concept. Although the school in this study no longer houses a freshman Academy, the research reveals valuable information that is very useful in assisting schools and school systems in deciding whether or not to implement this type of transitioning program. In addition to the data, the students', parents', and teachers' perceptions of the program are invaluable. This study revealed that students, parents, and teachers have positive perceptions about the academic and social interest areas of freshman students and negative perceptions about the structural interest area. This study also revealed, there is no statistically significant relationship between the perception of males and females of the freshman transition academy. In addition, there is no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents of the freshman transition academy's ability to properly transition into high school.

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August 2012

DEDICATION

This dissertation and Ph.D. is not mine alone, but to the many of you who gave of your time, selves, words of encouragement, strength, prayers, support, and love, I share and dedicate it to you all. In loving memory of my parents, Delores Presley and Robert Israel West, I will continue to believe, that "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" Philippians 4:13.

Thank you first of all to the most high and powerful God. Without Him sacrificing His only son Jesus for me this would be impossible. The second year of the program my mother suddenly passed. I didn't think I could finish. Then on the day of my comps my dad was placed in Hospice care, I didn't want to take the comps, but knowing my dad and his perseverance, I sat for comps and I passed! He lived for 3 more weeks and then passed. I felt as if I could not continue. That roadblock slowed me down, but I eventually regained speed and continued this journey. Thank you God, for allowing me the opportunity to experience the love, compassion, and support that a mother can only distribute to a child, for 42 years of my life, from Delores P. West. Without her early presence and wisdom, I would not have become the strong woman that I am. Without her heart of gold, I would not know how to love unconditionally and help all mankind. Thanks daddy, Robert I West. I am and truly was, "Daddy's little girl." You taught me how to love, laugh and live life to the fullest. You also taught me how to work hard, never give up and never settle for anything less than what I desired and deserved. My plans were to obtain this degree before you left me, well, I was too slow; however, I

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background Information

As American students progress through the K–12 educational system, they encounter several key transition points. These transitions generally coincide with the commencement of a new level of schooling: the beginning of elementary school, the move to the middle school, and the start of the high school years. Transitions in schooling are moments of great promise for children, holding the potential for personal growth, new learning, and greater independence and responsibility (Neild, 2009). At the same time, any parent who has ever watched a child disappear through the schoolhouse door for the first time realizes that school transitions are moments of peril. Students who do not successfully navigate a school transition face the possibility of personal and academic turmoil which will lead to decreased promotion and graduation success (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

The entrance to ninth grade marks one such critical juncture in American schooling. For 80% of ninth graders attending public schools in the United States, the eighth to ninth grade move is not only an emotional one but a physical one involving the switch from an elementary or middle school to a high school with a 9–12 grade structure. Regardless of whether a change of school occurs, ninth grade is widely understood to mark the beginning of the high school years and to usher in a new set of academic expectations (Neild, 2009). From states' high school diploma standards, which typically assume that the task of earning course credits toward graduation begins in ninth grade, it can be inferred that the K–12 educational system views ninth grade as a new level of schooling. The entrance to ninth grade may also serve as a social marker, signaling to

parents that the young person deserves greater independence and to peers that the student is worthy of inclusion in the social activities of older adolescents. Entering ninth grade, then, may be thought of as a transition to a new stage in the course of life as much as a transition to a new school (Neild, 2009).

The high schools that serve the majority of American students in grades 9 to 12 have long been aware of the anxiety and confusion associated with starting ninth grade. In response, they have sought to make ninth graders more comfortable by organizing programs and activities that will help freshmen find their way around an unfamiliar school building, tackle more challenging academic material, and negotiate the more complex adolescent social scene (Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, & Sanchez, 2000). Many students adjust to ninth grade with only minor difficulty and steadily earn course credits toward graduation. For some students, high school provides an academic and social experience that is a vast improvement over the middle grades. Academically, among students who received grades of mostly C or lower on their eighth grade report cards, attending a high school with fewer classmates from eighth grade is associated with higher freshman grades, suggesting that there may be some benefit to starting anew with a different set of peers and teachers (Neild, 2009). For example, socially ninth grade can mark the point at which some students begin to establish a personally fulfilling social identity (Reyes et al., 2000).

Researchers have found that many young people at the threshold of secondary school are hopeful about the potential of their new status, school, friends, and education (Graham & Hill, 2003). Kirkpatrick (2004) reported that students look forward to this fresh start and are adept at making new friends for positive academic and social purposes,

and some students report coping better than expected, enjoying new freedoms, and involving themselves in extra-curricular activities (Akos & Galassi, 2004). A contradiction exists, however; although many students look forward to this transition, many students also express anxiety about the transition. For a number of students, these transitions apparently are difficult to negotiate. For example, the middle school to high school transition has been found to be associated with a variety of negative consequences for some students including achievement loss and dropping out shortly after they enter high school or falling behind and failing to graduate on time. Poor and immigrant youth state that they expected things to be easier than they actually were (Graham & Hill, 2003). An emotional paradox exists at this transition point, as it does at many life junctures. Students are both excited and anxious, both doubtful and hopeful. The most pervasive source of anxiety is the loss of status at precisely the time when they are moving toward adulthood (Graham & Hill, 2003; Hargreaves & Earl, 1990; Tilleczek, 2006). Dips in self-perception and learner identities are pervasive (Silverhorn, DuBois, & Crombie, 2005). Given the importance of status to adolescents, the social and academic implications are obvious.

Academic concerns such as homework, pressure to perform, and potential drops in achievement are paramount for students and parents (Akos & Galassi, 2004). The aspect most troubling in relation to school work was the increase in homework (Graham & Hill, 2003). Social concerns such as getting lost at school, bullying, and making friends are prevalent, perceived risks (Schumacher, 1998). Beyond the negotiation of the transition, structural concerns are imagined and/or experienced by students. Of concern are the size and layout of secondary schools, the timetable, complicated schedules, being

bullied, not knowing anyone, getting lost at school, and having multiple teachers (Graham & Hill, 2003; Schumacher, 1998). Kirkpatrick (2004) has reported that students often feel that the time for relaxation is over after the initial adjustment phase to secondary school. In the same vein, Kirkpatrick (2004) reported, at later phases, academic issues take precedence over social and procedural issues, leading students to express dissatisfaction and disappointment in the secondary experience, more students fail ninth grade than any other grade level.

According to MacIver (1990), when middle school students participated in high school transition programs with a variety of different articulation activities, fewer students were retained in ninth grade. Ideally, these transition programs include activities that provide students and parents with current information about the new school, provide students with social support and opportunities for peer interaction during the transition, provide opportunities for parent involvement, and bring middle school and high school personnel together to learn about one another's curriculum, special programs, requirements, and expectations (MacIver, 1990). School leaders can ease students' transition into high school by implementing transition programs that address the needs of students and their parents and that facilitate communication between middle school and high school teachers and support staff.

Given the contradiction and inherent risks of transitioning, how have educators worked to facilitate successful transitions? Researchers have found that students have more positive transitions into schools that modify social cultures to increase a sense of belonging and care than did students in schools that did not (Keating, 1996). In an effort to facilitate transitions for immigrant adolescents, Lucas (1996) studied exemplary

programs and developed a *family of schools* transition model. Lucas concluded that these programs generally make schools function as communities which build bridges between students, parents, teachers, and communities. The application of a *family of schools* model to bridge school cultures looks promising.

Riddle (2004) reviewed the literature on another promising program, *Freshman Academy* and concluded that it is a comprehensive program that strives to provide each ninth grade student with a nurturing and academic environment of the successful transition from middle school to high school. The academy strives to ensure the academic success of all students, improve attendance rates of students, and reduce discipline (Riddle, 2004).

School transitions have been a frequent topic in both the research and practice literature in recent years (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). It is essential that educators understand how students think and feel as they make the complex transition from middle to high school. This is a transition that involves real differences in organizational structure as well as real or perceived changes in academic rigor, social interactions, and availability of support. Although there are programs designed to familiarize students with the similarities and differences in the academic, social, and organizational structures of the schools, the schools rarely collect information about how students, parents, and teachers view the transition period.

For a number of students, these transitions apparently are difficult to negotiate. For example the middle school to high school transition has been found to be associated with a variety of negative consequences for some students including achievement loss and dropping out shortly after they enter high school or falling behind and failing to

graduate on time. Lower attendance rates, more common for ninth graders than students in other grade levels (Fields, 2005), are a direct predictor of academic performance (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). Additionally, students in the ninth grade have the highest number of discipline incidents because they sometimes engage in risk taking behavior (Strauch, 2003), which can lead to detentions and suspensions (more time out of school). Further, ninth graders have the highest retention rate of any other grade (Chmelynski, 2003), and most significantly, about 30% of students nationwide fail one or more classes in the ninth grade (McIntosh & White, 2006). Therefore, further research is needed in order to learn more about the transition from middle to high school and provide necessary programs that will dictate success for ninth grade students.

During the 2008-2009 school year, a large urban school district in the southern area of the United States decided to pilot a freshman transition program in three of the high schools in the system. The program was designed to isolate the incoming freshmen from the upperclassmen and then provide the students with individualized attention, remediation, and intervention. The students in the freshman transition program also wear different colored uniforms than the remainder of the school population. The implementation of different uniforms was effective because the freshmen were easily identified. The most convincing concept of the program was the no failure option which is also called Response to Instruction (RTI). Students are provided the support needed to pass, and furthermore, they were provided with every opportunity to pass. Teachers are required to teach, and reteach if necessary, in order for the students to experience success. The RTI program was facilitated by an administrator and a guidance counselor assigned

to work closely with the students to prevent failure. The teachers in the academy established a common system of class rules, procedures, and expectations (ABHS, 2009).

The transition program that the superintendent and the assistant superintendents decided to implement utilized portions of a program that was developed through the expertise of the Southern Regional Educational Board entitled *High Schools that Work* (HSTW) MCPSS (2008-2009). Prior to its implementation, the number of dropouts was steadily increasing, the number of discipline referrals continued to increase, number of failures was rising, and attendance was plummeting. The system decided that something had to be done.

Like the implementation of any new program, there were both advantages and disadvantages to implementing the freshman transition program. Advantages included increased attendance, decreased number of discipline referrals, and improved graduation rates. Disadvantages of the program included costs and negative teacher perceptions of the follow-up support assistance provided by the team. In addition, funding issues were a concern. Program support assistance was led by the HSTW team and cost the system approximately $250,000.00 MCPSS (2008-2009). Because of its success rate in other states and cities around the country, the superintendent and board agreed that to develop a freshman transition program under the guidance of the High School That Work team. The team's assistance included professional development for each school, some materials, and follow- up as needed. The program was impressive on paper; however, teachers reported that the professional development constantly removed them from their classes and the training became redundant. After attending two to three professional development sessions, teachers complained they began to receive a repeat of previous

information. Teachers voiced their concerns with the administrators and the central office staff in the school district. Funding for the staff of the freshman transition program was also an issue. Although it is thought to be a splendid idea, it could not be implemented as originally designed because there were no available funds to staff the academy with its own principal and counselor. This funding crisis is consistent within the literature researched with the majority of high school transition programs and mandates in the system and nation (Smith, 2007).

Statement of Problem

As of the date of this study, no studies regarding the effectiveness of school district's freshman transition academy have been completed. The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of this transitional program as measured by variables, such as attendance, course mastery, and discipline referrals. In addition, this study examined the perceptions of students', teachers', and parents' of the participating school district's freshman transition academy implemented at the participating high school and its ability to properly transition students into a high school. Although only portions of the program could be implemented due to cost restraints, the participating school district allocated additional funds to create a program that would increase attendance, decrease drop-out rates, and improve graduation rates. Furthermore, federal requirements of No Child Left Behind which was passed by Congress and President George Bush in 2001, stipulates the use of research-based methods and materials and, therefore, research on this transition program is needed. As this study examined the program's effectiveness, it provided documentable evidence and guidance regarding decisions made by the participating school district with regard to RTI and the Freshman Academy.

Research Questions

This study examined the perceptions of students', parents', and teachers' in reference to a freshman transitional program.

1. Student attendance decreased as a result of freshman academy.
2. The number of students failing one or more courses decreased as a result of freshman academy.
3. Discipline referrals did not decrease as a result of freshman academy.

Null Hypotheses

The study will contain the following null hypotheses:

1. There is no statistically significant relationship between the perception of males and females of the transition academy.
2. There is no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents of the freshman transition academy's ability to properly transition into high school.

Definition of Terms

Ninth grade students - Students not retained at any point before the ninth grade year and are between the ages of 14-15 (SREB, 2002).

Transition - To move from one period in life to the next (Neild, 2009).

Freshman Academy - A systematic program that offers specific transition programs related to curriculum and social interventions. The students are isolated from the upper class population for core courses (SREB, 2002).

Academic concerns - Issues that ninth grade students have that pertain to the curriculum or the students' grades such as homework concerns, failures in core classes, and difficult assignments (Neild, 2009).

Social Concerns - Issues that ninth grade students are concerned with about making friends, being bullied, fitting in, and self-esteem (Neild, 2009).

Structural Concerns - Issues that ninth grade students experience that include the layout of the building, the size of the building, population of students, having multiple teachers and complicated schedules, and getting lost (Neild, 2009).

Delimitations of the Study

The following are delimitations of this study:

1. Data only collected from one public high school in the Mobile County Public School System.
2. Archival data collected from the 2007-2008, 2008-2009, and 2009-2010, and the school years.
3. Data only collected from the freshmen and sophomores from the 2011-2012 school year.
4. Data only collected from the freshman and sophomore teachers from the 2010-2012 school year.

Assumptions of the Study

1. The archival data is accurate.
2. All students, parents, and teachers completed the questionnaire accurately and truthfully.

Justification of the Study

This information is extremely useful to school counselors, school psychologists and other school personnel. It can assist them in developing intervention programs that will assist students in being successful in their first year as ninth graders. The existence of a study pertaining to the transition from elementary to middle school has been completed; however, there has not been extensive research on students transitioning from middle to high school. The existing literature revealed that there are numerous concerns about this transitional period. The literature also indicated success of students who participates in transitional programs and freshman academy. This study provided more data and research about transitional programs and the academic and social success they provide for students.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theoretical Framework

Definitions of stages of growth in childhood come from many sources. Theorists such as Piaget (1929), Vygotsky (1978), Erikson (1950), Maslow (1954), Bandura (1977), and Kohlberg (1973) have provided a foundation which allows one to more fully understand human growth and development. Moreover, recent research has provided important information regarding the specific nature of that development.

Piaget (1929) was best known for his research on children's cognitive development. He studied the intellectual development of his own children and his theory described stages that children pass through in the development of intelligence and formal thought processes. The theory describes four stages: (a) the sensori-motor stage; (b) the preoperational stage; (c) the concrete operational stage; and (d) the formal operations stage. Piaget identified the sensori-motor stage as the period from birth to two years of age. During this time, Piaget (1929) suggested that children develop an understanding of their environment as result of actions. During the pre-operational stage (ages 2-7), Piaget proposed that the child begins using symbols to represent his or her environment. The concrete operational stage (ages 7-11) is characterized by the child's ability to mentally reverse actions that are in his or her environment. Finally, Piaget (1929) proposed the formal operations stage which ranged from age 11 to adulthood.

Vygotsky's (1978) social development theory argued that social interaction precedes development. Vygotsky theorized that consciousness and cognition is the end product of socialization and social behavior. Vygotsky was a Russian theorist who lived

during the Russian Revolution. His work was largely unknown to the Western countries until it was published in 1962. Vygotsky focused on the connections between people and the socio-cultural context in which they act and interact in shared experiences (Crawford, 1996). According to Vygotsky (1978), humans use tools that develop from a culture, such as speech and writing, to mediate their social environments. Initially, children develop these tools to serve solely as social functions, ways to communicate needs. He believed that the internalization of these tools led to higher order thinking skills, which are expected to be mastered in today's educational settings (Vygotsky, 1978). Many schools have traditionally held a *transmissionist* or *instructionist* model in which a teacher or lecturer transmits information to students. In contrast, Vygotsky's theory promotes learning contexts in which students play an active role in learning. Roles of the teacher and student are, therefore, shifted, as a teacher should collaborate with his or her students in order to facilitate meaning construction in students. Learning then becomes a reciprocal experience for the students and the teacher (Vygotsky, 1978).

Erikson (1950) developed a widely and highly regarded psychosocial theory. As with any concept there are critics, but generally Erikson's theory was considered fundamentally significant. Erikson was able to incorporate *cultural and social aspects* into Freud's (Erikson, 1950) biological and sexually oriented theory because of his strong interest and compassion for people, especially for young people (Friedman, 1999). Erikson's research was carried out among human societies far removed from the more inward-looking world of the psychoanalyst's couch. Erikson's (1950) eight stages theory was considered to be a tremendously powerful model. It was very accessible, and obviously relevant to modern life, from several different perspectives, for understanding

and explaining how personality and behavior develops in people. This being said, Erikson's theory is useful for teaching, parenting, self-awareness, managing and coaching, dealing with conflict, and generally for understanding self and others (1950). Erikson's first and arguably most important book, *Childhood and Society*, was published in 1950, when he first explained his eight stage theory of human development, and established the concept of the *identity crisis* in adolescence (Erikson, 1950).

Around the middle of the 20th Century, Maslow (1954) developed the *Hierarchy of Needs Theory*. *The Hierarchy of Needs Theory* remains valid today for understanding human motivation, management training and personal development. Maslow's hierarchy of needs five-stage model is clearly and directly attributable to Maslow; later versions of the theory with added motivational stages were not so clearly attributable to Maslow. According to Maslow's (1954) five-stage model, each person is motivated by needs. The basic needs are inborn, having evolved over tens of thousands of years. Maslow's (1954) Hierarchy of Needs helps to explain how these needs motivate humans. Maslow (1954) stated that we must satisfy each need in turn, starting with the first, which deals with the most obvious need- the *need for survival* itself (Osterman, 2000). Only when the lower order needs of physical and emotional well-being are satisfied are we concerned with the higher order needs of influence and personal development. Biological and physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness, and love needs. Esteem needs and self-actualization needs are the five original aspects of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. Research by Felner (1993), reported that students had more positive middle and high school transition experiences as reflected by academic, socio-emotional, and behavioral measures in schools that had modified their social environments to increase a *sense of belonging* than

in schools that had not. Along the same lines Osterman (2000), has identified *positive relationships* between students' need for belonging and peer acceptance in school on the one hand and academic achievement, a positive orientation toward school, class work, and teachers on the other hand.

There is a need in high schools for students to feel a sense of belongingness and love and safety. Belongingness and love as well as safety needs are two concerns that students have when transitioning from middle to high school. According to Maslow (1954), the individual must satisfy each need in turn. So in order to reach those two needs, the students must satisfy all of the needs. Furthermore, Osterman (2000) noted that typically there are a few opportunities for interaction among students during the school day. As such, building students' sense of community through interventions such as small group activities during orientation, team building, cooperative learning, and other modifications that result in smaller and more intimate learning environments would appear to hold promise as methods for helping students to negotiate both the social and academic aspects of school transitions successfully. These types of reforms are evident in the movement to smaller learning communities, with academy, schools within a school, and house structures for ninth grade (Paige, Neuman, & D'Amico, 2001). A *safe and secure school environment* is essential to the learning process. An important ingredient in achieving safe and secure schools centers on levels of alertness. Safety is achieved when an atmosphere exists in which students are comfortable talking with adults about their concerns which leads to the fulfillment of student's feeling safe and establishing a sense of belonging (Paige et al., 2001).

In 1960 the social learning theory proposed by Bandura (1977) became perhaps the most influential theory of learning and development. While rooted in many of the basic concepts of traditional learning theory, Bandura believed that direct reinforcement could not account for all types of learning (Ormrod, 1999). His theory added a social element, arguing that people can learn new information and behaviors by watching other people. Known as *observational learning* (or modeling), this type of learning can be used to explain a wide variety of behaviors.

In addition to influencing other psychologists, Bandura's social learning theory has had important implication in the field of education (Ormrod, 1999). Today, both teachers and parents recognize the importance of modeling appropriate behaviors. Other classroom strategies such as encouraging children and building self-efficacy are also rooted in social learning theory (Ormrod, 1999). According to research by Ormrod (1999), social learning theory has numerous implications for classroom use. Firstly, students often learn a great deal simply by observing other people. Secondly, describing the consequences of behavior can effectively increase the appropriate behaviors and decrease inappropriate ones. This can involve discussing with learners about the rewards and consequences of various behaviors. Thirdly, modeling provides an alternative to shaping for teaching new behaviors. Instead of using shaping, which is operant conditioning; modeling can provide a faster, more efficient means for teaching new behavior. To promote effective modeling a teacher must make sure that the four essential conditions exist; attention, retention, motor reproduction, and motivation. In addition, teachers and parents must model appropriate behaviors and make sure they do not model inappropriate behaviors. Moreover, teachers should expose students to a variety of other

models. This technique is especially important to break down traditional stereotypes. Additionally, students must believe that they are capable of accomplishing school tasks. Thus it is very important to develop a sense of *self-efficacy* for students. Additionally, teachers can promote such self-efficacy by having students receive confidence-building messages, watch others be successful, and experience success on their own and finally teachers should help students set realistic expectations for their academic accomplishments.

An outstanding example of furthered research in the Piagetian tradition was the work of Kohlberg (1973). Kohlberg (1973) focused on moral development and proposed a stage theory of moral thinking which goes well beyond Piaget's initial formulations (Crain, 1985). In Kohlberg's stage 1 the child assumes that powerful authorities hand down a fixed set of rules which he or she must unquestionably obey (Colby, Kohlberg, Gibbs, & Lieberman, 1983). He calls this stage *preconventional* because children do not yet speak as members of society. Instead children see morality as something external to themselves, as that which the older adults say they must do. At stage 2 children recognize that there is not just one right view that is handed down by the authorities (Colby et al., 1983, p. 25). Different individuals have different viewpoints. Stage 3 represents children who are by now usually entering their teens and they see morality as a more complex issue. During this stage, individuals believe that people should live up to the expectations of the family and community and behave in good ways. In stage 4, subjects make moral decisions from the perspective of society as a whole, they think from a full-fledged member of society perspective (Colby et. al., 1983, p. 27). Stage 4 is characterized by the desire to keep society functioning. However, a smoothly functioning

society is not necessarily a good one. During stage 5, people begin to think about society in a very theoretical way, stepping back from their own society and considering the rights and values that a society ought to uphold. They then evaluate existing societies in terms of these prior considerations (Colby et. al., 1983, p. 22). In stage 6 people are less concerned with maintaining society for its own sake, and more concerned with the principles and values that make for a good society, and they define the principles by which agreement will be most just.

Stages of Childhood

Based upon the work of these theorists and others, researchers have been able to define childhood by distinct stages of childhood are defined culturally by the social institutions, customs, and laws that make up a society. For example, while researchers and professionals usually define the period of early childhood as birth to 8 years of age, others in the United States might consider it ending at age 5 because it coincides with entry into the cultural practice of formal schooling (Gulotta, Adams, & Markstrom, 2000). There are three broad stages of development: early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence. The definitions of these stages are organized around the primary tasks of development in each stage, although the boundaries of these stages are malleable. Societys' ideas about childhood shift over time, and research has led to new understandings of the development that takes place in each stage (Gulotta et al., 2000). A thorough examination of the stages of childhood is critical to the understanding and success of students who are entering the next transitional stage of their lives.

The Early Childhood Stage

Early childhood is a time of tremendous growth across all areas of development. The dependent newborn grows into a young person who can take care of his or her own body and interact effectively with others. For these reasons, the primary developmental task of this stage is skill development (Allen & Marotz, 1989). Physically, between birth and age three a child typically doubles in height and quadruples in weight. Bodily proportions also shift, so that the infant, whose head accounts for almost one-fourth of total body length, becomes a toddler with a more balanced, adult-like appearance. Despite these rapid physical changes, the typical three-year-old has mastered many skills, including sitting, walking, toilet training, using a spoon, scribbling, and sufficient hand-eye coordination to catch and throw a ball (Allen & Marotz, 1989). Between three and five years of age, children continue to grow rapidly and begin to develop fine motor skills. By age five most children demonstrate fairly good control of pencils, crayons, and scissors. Gross motor accomplishments may include the ability to skip and balance on one foot. Physical growth slows down between five and eight years of age. The time from birth to eight years is a critical period in the development of many foundational skills in all areas of development. Increased awareness of, and ability to detect, developmental delays in very young children has led to the creation of early intervention services that can reduce the need for special education placements when children reach school age (Allen and Martoz, 1989). For example, earlier detection of hearing deficits sometimes leads to correction of problems before serious language impairments occur. Also, developmental delays caused by premature birth can be addressed through

appropriate therapies to help children function at the level of their typically developing peers before they begin school (Allen & Marotz, 1989).

An increased emphasis on early learning has also created pressure to prepare young children to enter school with as many prerequisite skills as possible. In 1994 federal legislation was passed in the United States creating Goals 2000. The first goal states that *all children will enter school ready to learn* (U. S. Department of Education, 1998). While the validity of this goal has been debated, the consequences have already been felt. One consequence is the use of standardized readiness assessments to determine class placement or retention in kindergarten. Another is the creation of transition classes (an extra year of schooling before either kindergarten or first grade). Finally, the increased attention on early childhood has led to renewed interest in preschool programs as a means to narrow the readiness gap between children whose families can provide quality early learning environments for them and those whose families cannot (Allen & Marotz, 1989).

The Middle Childhood Stage

Historically, middle childhood has not been considered an important stage in human development. Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory labeled this period of life the *latency* stage, a time when sexual and aggressive urges are repressed. Freud suggested that no significant contributions to personality development were made during this period (Collins, 1984). However, more recent theorists have recognized the importance of middle childhood for the development of cognitive skills, personality, motivation, and inter-personal relationships. During middle childhood, children learn the values of their societies. Thus, the primary developmental task of middle childhood

could be called *integration*, both in terms of development within the individual and of the individual within the social context (Collins, 1984).

Perhaps supporting the image of middle childhood as a latency stage, physical development during middle childhood is less dramatic than in early childhood or adolescence (Newman & Newman, 1997). Growth is slow and steady until the onset of puberty, when individuals begin to develop at a much quicker pace. The age at which individuals enter puberty varies, but there is evidence of a secular trend. The age at which puberty begins has been decreasing over time. In some individuals, puberty may start as early as age eight or nine. Onset of puberty differs across gender and begins earlier in females (Newman & Newman, 1997).

As with physical development, the cognitive development of middle childhood is slow and steady. Children in this stage are building upon skills gained in early childhood and preparing for the next phase of their cognitive development (Collins, 1984). Children's reasoning is very rule based. Children are learning skills such as classification and forming hypotheses. While they are cognitively more mature now than a few years ago, children in this stage still require concrete, hands-on learning activities. Middle childhood is a time when children can gain enthusiasm for learning and work, for achievement can become a motivating factor as children work toward building competence and self-esteem (Collins, 1984).

Middle childhood is also a time when children develop competence in interpersonal and social relationships. Children have a growing peer orientation, yet they are strongly influenced by their family. The social skills learned through peer and family relationships, and children's increasing ability to participate in meaningful interpersonal

communication, provide a necessary foundation for the challenges of adolescence. Best friends are important at this age, and the skills gained in these relationships may provide the building blocks for healthy adult relationships (Newman & Newman, 1997).

For many children, middle childhood is a joyful time of increased independence, broader friendships, and developing interests, such as sports, art, or music. However, a widely recognized shift in school performance begins for many children in third or fourth grade (age eight or nine). The skills required for academic success become more complex. Those students who successfully meet the academic challenges during this period go on to do well, while those who fail to build the necessary skills may fall further behind in later grades (Newman & Newman, 1997). Recent social trends, including the increased prevalence of school violence, eating disorders, drug use, and depression, affect many upper elementary school students. Thus, there is more pressure on schools to recognize problems in eight to eleven-year-olds, and to teach children the social and life skills that will help them continue to develop into healthy adolescents.

The Adolescent Years

Adolescence can be defined in a variety of ways: physiologically, culturally, and cognitively. Each definition suggests a slightly different definition. For the purpose of this study, according to Wolman (1998), adolescence is defined as a culturally constructed period that generally begins as individuals reach sexual maturity and ends when the individual has established an identity as a context. In many cultures, adolescence may not exist, or may be very short, because the attainment of sexual maturity coincides with entry into the adult world. In the current culture of the United

States, however, adolescence may last well into the early twenties. The primary developmental task of adolescence is identity formation (Wolman, 1998).

The adolescent years are another period of accelerated growth. Individuals can grow up to four inches and gain eight to ten pounds per year. This growth spurt is most often characterized by two years of fast growth, followed by three or more years of slow, steady growth. By the end of adolescence, individuals may gain a total of seven to nine inches in height and as much as 40 or 50 pounds in weight. The timing of this growth spurt is highly unpredictable and varies by gender. In general, females begin to develop earlier than do males (Gulotta et al., 2000).

Sexual maturation is one of the most significant developments during this time. Like physical development, there is significant variability in the age at which individuals attain sexual maturity. Females tend to mature at about age 13 and males at about the age of 15. Development during this period is governed by the pituitary gland through the release of the testosterone (males) and estrogen (females). There has been increasing evidence of a trend toward earlier sexual development in developed countries. The average age at which females reach menarche dropped three to four months every year between 1900 and 2000 (Gulotta et al., 2000).

Adolescence is also an important period for cognitive development as well, as it marks a transition in the way in which individuals think and reason about problems and ideas. In early adolescence, individuals can classify and order objects, reverse processes, think logically about concrete objects, and consider more than one perspective at a time. Developmentally, adolescents benefit more from direct experiences than from abstract ideas and principles. As adolescents develop more complex cognitive skills, they gain

the ability to solve more abstract and hypothetical problems. Evidence of this type of thinking may include an increased ability to think in hypothetical ways about abstract ideas, test hypotheses systematically, and increase the ability to think and plan about the future, and one's meta-thoughts (Gullotta et al., 2000).

As individuals enter adolescence, they are confronted by a diverse number of changes all at one time. Not only are they undergoing significant physical and cognitive growth, but they are also encountering new situations, responsibilities, and people. Entry into middle school and high school thrusts students into environments with many new people and expectations. While this transition can be frightening, it also represents an exciting step toward independence. According to Erikson (1950), adolescents are trying on new roles, new ways of thinking and behaving, and they are exploring independence in this framework of life-span development, by a conflict between identity and role confusion. During this period, individuals evolve their own self- peer context. In their attempts to become more independent, adolescents often rely on their peer group for direction of what is normal and accepted. They begin to pull away from reliance on their family as a source of identity and may encounter conflicts between their family and their growing peer-group affiliation (Wolman, 1998).

With so many intense experiences, adolescence is also an important time in emotional developmental characteristic of adolescence. While often attributed to hormones, mood swings can also be understood as a logical reaction to the social, physical, and cognitive changes facing adolescents. There is often a struggle with issues of self, as individuals search for identity they confront the challenge of matching who they want to become with what is socially desirable. In this context, adolescents often

exhibit bizarre and/or contradictory behaviors. The search for identity, the concern adolescents have about whether they are normal, and variable moods and low self-esteem produce wildly fluctuating behavior (Wolman, 1998).

The impact of the media and societal expectations on adolescent development has been far reaching. Young people are bombarded by images of violence, sex, and unattainable standards of beauty. This exposure, combined with the social, emotional, and physical changes facing adolescents, has contributed to an increase in school violence and teen eating disorders. The onset of many psychological disorders, such as depression, other mood disorders, and schizophrenia, is also common at this time of life (Wolman, 1998).

The implications of development during this period for education are numerous. Teachers must be aware of the shifts in cognitive development that are occurring and provide appropriate learning opportunities to support individual students and facilitate growth. Teachers must also be aware of the challenges facing their students in order to identify and help to correct problems if they arise. Teachers often play an important role in identifying behaviors that could become problematic, and they can be mentors to students in need (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007).

School Transition

School transitions are the conversions students go through as they change schools throughout their lives. These transitions play a major role in the development of young people's decisions and serve as a milestone which can direct them in a number of ways (Neild, 2009). Academic transition has been defined as *a process during which institutional and social factors influence which students' educational careers are*

positively or negatively affected by this movement between organizations (Schiller, 1999, pp. 216-217). The two definitions are congruent in many ways. They both reference social factors and movement of the students from middle to high school. They both point to a shared responsibility of middle school and high school personnel for guiding young adolescents through this major educational transition.

According to a dissertation by Pipier Smith-Mumford (2004), the transition from eighth to ninth grade is a critical time in a young person's educational career. This transition is characterized by both academic and social concerns. Academic concerns entail issues with homework, pressure to perform, and drops in achievement. Social concerns encompass anxiety regarding getting lost at school, bullying, student's feeling that teachers and administrators just do not care about them and their well being or how well they do in high school, and making friends. Many times, ninth graders are faced with new peers and a new social structure when transitioning from middle to high school, which some find problematical (Riera, 2004). For example, freshmen frequently face a more diverse population when entering a large high school to which they are unaccustomed. Students can become overwhelmed with the new population of students, as they do not have experience in managing a large group of people. When a student is challenged with new social pressures, he or she is less likely to focus on school-related material, more likely to be at risk to make poor ethical decisions, and more likely to pay attention to the social aspect of school (Kellough & Kellough, 2008). Friends are very important to ninth graders. While they may desire adults' connections, ninth grade students are interested in fitting in with a new group of peers at school (Wood, 2007). Cognato (1999) found that students who participated in a number of different interactions

including meetings, letter-writing, and picnic-with older students received fewer failing grades and missed fewer days of school than students who did not participate in such programs. The social interactions in this program included ninth grade students meeting with eighth graders to dispel some of the misconceptions about high school, eighth graders shadowing a ninth grade student, and eighth-grade students writing to a ninth grade buddy.

Over the last 10 years, researchers have investigated ninth grade programs and the use of separate buildings in order to facilitate an effective transition into high school. These findings were consistent throughout the literature on the transition to high school and further supported the idea that high school transition is a critical time in an individual's life.

Perceptions of Transitions

Some studies have been completed to obtain the perceptions of stakeholders regarding transition. Research surrounding ninth grade teachers' perspectives validated that high school transitions are crucial to students' lives (Smith-Mumford, 2004). Research has demonstrated that parents and teachers can be a significant source of help during the transition, yet a child's view is not always perceived accurately by people in the child's environment (Akos, 2002; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). School transitions have been a frequent topic in both the research and practice literature in recent years (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000).

A study of perceptions of students', parents', and teachers' found that both primary and secondary students were most excited about new friends, new academic subjects, new teachers, and new routines. Parents also mentioned extracurricular

activities and learning challenges. Students were less concerned with academic matters and more concerned about bullying, getting lost in the school, and peer relationships at their new school. The most frequent responses from parents also included bullying and peer relationships. Findings suggested that teachers focused on transition as a problem to be solved by the school (Zeedyk, Gallacher, Henderson, Hope, Husband, & Lindsay, 2003).

Akso and Galassi (2004) perceptions study found that students look forward to making new friends, having more freedom, and attending school events as they transition to high school. Students' greatest concerns revolved around the amount of homework, class difficulty, and organizational issues such as getting lost. Conversely, parents were concerned that their children would feel negative peer pressure in both academic and social realms. The study also indicated teachers' concerns that students would feel pressure to do well in class, experience challenging courses, and have difficulty making new friends. Teachers' perceptions were found to be different from students' perceptions in regard to worries about homework. Therefore, if transition programs are oriented purely around the teacher assessments of student worries, efforts may be misdirected.

Studies that specifically included students' thoughts and feelings about moving into high school revealed that eighth-grade students are both excited and concerned about going to high school. The limited research on student perceptions suggests that students approach normative school transitions with both concern and excitement as they are presented with challenges as well as opportunities (Akos, 2002). They look forward to more freedom, more choice, the opportunity to participate in more extracurricular activities, and the opportunity to develop friendships. However, they also admit to being

nervous and scared about older students teasing them, getting lost in their larger unfamiliar school, and making bad grades (Cognato, 1999; Maute, 1991; Mizelle, 1999; Phelan & Davidson, 1994; Wells, 1996). Students are concerned that high school teachers will be stricter and that teachers will give them much more and much harder work than they had in middle school. However, once young adolescents make the transition into high school, many find that some of their initial fears are unfounded and that some of their opportunities carry a great deal of responsibility (Cognato, 1999; Mizelle, 1999). For example, Mizelle completed a study in late fall of 1995 which examined students' freshman year. The young adolescents in Mizelle's transition study described high school as different from what they had expected and different from middle school. Contrary to their fears, the older students did not bully freshmen or stand around laughing at them. There was some teasing, but older students were willing to help and befriend them. With this type of mentoring behavior, students' perceptions of the school changed and the school did not seem nearly as large or difficult to get around in as they had feared. Transitioning students realized some of their fears were unfounded. While they liked being able to choose their classes and extracurricular activities, they were concerned about how difficult the classes were and how to manage their time when they became involved in extracurricular activities. School seemed a lot more difficult and demanding than it had in middle school. Major student concerns centered on how to study and how to manage their time once these young adolescents made the transition into high school. The specific transition concerns they experienced as well as the intensity of their concerns may have varied as a function of the timing of the transition

(middle or high school) and other variables such as the contextual aspects and characteristics of the sending and receiving school (Akos, 2002).

In 2009, research from the Principals Partnership and Union Pacific Foundation listed several steps to take to assure that eighth graders make a successful transition to ninth grade. The study revealed that effective high school transition programs address the following key areas: provide parents and students with information about the new school; provide opportunities for peer interaction and social support; provide opportunities for parent involvement; provide opportunities for communication between middle and high school teachers and support staff; and provide academic support for incoming ninth graders. These steps are consistent with other findings.

Smith, Feldwisch, & Abell (2006) completed a study in a large public school district in the Midwest. This study also examined students' and parents' perceptions of the transition from middle school to high school. Mean comparisons of student and parent responses to the survey revealed similarities and differences in academic, social, and organizational areas (Smith et al., 2006). According to the study, students looked forward to making new friends and having a voice in selecting academic courses. Parents were concerned about social and safety issues, while students worried about too much homework and organizational issues such as getting lost. Everyone's perceptions were warranted and taken seriously.

Parental Involvement and High School Transition

Research has documented that in order for adolescents to be successful in high school transition, parents involvement is crucia. The National PTA Board of Directors has adopted a parent involvement position that promotes parent participation in *every*

facet of the education and development of children from birth to adulthood. This position further recognizes that parents are the principle influence in children's lives. Parent involvement, according to the PTA, takes many forms. Parents are a key component in the field of education, and their roles range from shared responsibilities in decision-making regarding their individual child's education, health and well-being to parent participation in organizations that address community-based needs for all children.

The single most significant factor in predicting whether a child will be successful in his or her educational process is the level of involvement of his or her parents in that process. According to research from the National PTA, the Center on Families, Communities, Schools and Children's Learning, the Parent Institute, and the U. S. Department of Education, when parents play a positive role in their child's education, their child does better in school. Children whose parents are involved in their education are more motivated to learn. Motivated students tend to be more involved in class, more concerned about homework, and more successful academically.

Parents must understand and be actively involved in the decisions their students will make pertaining to classes in ninth grade. Parents need to understand students' options and the long-term effects of the course decisions. Parent involvement in young adolescent students' transition from middle to high school is critical. Studies have indicated that when parents are involved in students' transition to high school, they tend to stay involved in their child's school experiences. When parents are involved in their child's high school experiences, students achieve more (Linver & Silverberg, 1997; MacIver, 1991; Paulson 1994; Paulson, Marchant, & Rothlisberg, 1998). In addition, Hartos and Power (1997) reported that students are better adjusted and Horn and West

(1992) indicated that students are less likely to drop out of school. However, research has indicated that parental involvement in young adolescent's school related activities decreases during the transition from middle school to high school, unless schools and teachers work to encourage their involvement (Epstein, 1995).

Falbo, Lein, and Amador (2001) found that students whose parents monitored their activities and intervened positively in schoolwork, peer networks, and direct participation at the school were more likely to have a smooth transition from middle school to high school. It was also noted by Feuerstein (2000) that increased school contact with parents typically resulted in reciprocal parent contact and improved overall communication between the schools and families. Falbo et al. (2001) interviewed 26 parents to understand the ways in which they helped their children during the transition to high school. The major themes that emerged included monitoring activities, evaluating academic experiences, and being involved in the school work, peer networks, and direct participation at the school. A review of the literature consistently revealed that parent involvement in the transition process to high school should be encouraged through a variety of activities (Epstein, 1995).

Early Research/History Regarding High School Transitions Programs

The ninth grade is a pivotal year where suddenly students find themselves struggling to navigate throughout large, impersonal, and competitive environments. This major transition year creates a holding tank otherwise known as the ninth grade bulge where 25% of students that fail the ninth grade are held back for another year (Black, 2004). Several strategies to improve student performance and decrease retention rates have emerged over the last four decades. One strategy to decrease non-promotion and

dropout rates is implementing Ninth grade Academies or Freshman Academies that provide incoming ninth grade students with additional resources and personalized support to overcome transitional obstacles. A number of models (including Talent Development, Career Academy, and High Schools That Work) have been created with the goal of improving academic success (Cook, Fowler, & Harris, 2008). Ninth graders are adolescents undergoing the difficult transition from middle school to high school. As they face the social, emotional, physical and intellectual challenges of this stage of development, it is easy for them to feel overwhelmed, confused and alone. Subsequently, over the last 30 years the national average for ninth grade non-promotion has more than tripled from approximately four percent to thirteen percent. This retention creates the *ninth grade bulge* and *tenth grade dip* as fewer students are promoted to the next grade. State-wide data indicates the non-promotion rate for North Carolina students in 2004–2005 was 14% which was a significant leap from 8.4% 30 years ago. The increasing number of non-promoted ninth grade students both nationally and locally has become a critical focus point among all educators. Additionally, statistics indicate the importance of creating Ninth grade Academies. Schools with operational transition programs reflect a dropout rate of only 8% on average compared to schools without transition programs which reflect a drop-out average of 24% which is three times higher (National High School Center, 1998).

With the number of non-promotions and dropouts on the rise, educators desperately seek alternative strategies to ease transition challenges that leave too many students behind. The most obvious of these challenges is the physical environment. During the past 40 years, the average size of high schools has increased drastically,

creating more support for smaller school settings. Recent literature on the social organization of secondary schools and on high school restructuring provides insight into practices that may increase student engagement and achievement. By focusing on the distinction between bureaucratic and communal school organization, researchers have identified practices that may help create a sense of community within a school, leading to less student alienation and lower dropout rates (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Lee, Bryk, & Smith, 1993; Lee & Smith, 1995). In this study, small learning communities were the basis of the Ninth grade Academes models. The innovative models used in this study were based on the concept of Ninth grade Academy. Ninth grade Academy is defined here as, a year long, uniquely designed school program that provides ninth graders with the resources and support they need (Cook et al., 2008).

The literature revealed that North Carolina public schools utilized High Schools that Work (HSTW), Career Academy, and Talent Development. The HSTW model was developed from the Southern Regional Education Board initiative that is dedicated to obtaining 85% of career bound high school students to complete a rigorous course of study and to meet or exceed the HSTW performance goals in mathematics, reading and science (SREB, 2002). While the model was developed for the entire high school population, several schools are using HSTW as a framework for implementing ninth grade academies. The HSTW model was designed to revolve around ten research-based practices that include high expectations, challenging career technical studies, rigorous academic studies, challenging programs of study, work-based learning, teacher collaborations, actively engaged students, guidance, additional help, and keeping score of progress (SREB, 2008).

Career academies are defined as schools within schools that connect students with peers, teachers and community partners in a controlled environment which fosters academic success and improved mental and emotional health. The career academy concept encompasses three key elements which include small learning communities, a college preparatory curriculum with a career focus, and collaborations with employers, community members and higher education facilities (Dedmond, Brown, & La Fuci, 2006). Small learning communities are very important to students' successful transition to ninth grade. Students are provided an opportunity to connect themselves to individuals for support and teachers are also provided an opportunity to connect themselves to students who demonstrate areas of weaknesses and or areas of strength.

A college preparatory curriculum is very important for students who are interested in or has the ability to be successful in the college setting. It affords students the opportunity to research interested careers. This information allows students to research the career and college and assure themselves that what they need is offered. Finally the need to communicate with community leaders, stakeholders and higher education facilities is a vital piece in this puzzle. Collaboration between the teachers and the community members is important in preparing students with the necessary skills to be successful in the next transition of their lives.

The talent development model is designed to transform school facilitation and structure by providing a revised plan for management, organization, and curriculum and to provide professional development for faculty. The model is a solution for schools that have problems with student attendance, discipline, achievement scores and dropout rates (Balfanz, Legters, & Jordan, 2004). The results from the study showed positive

implications. From 2001–2007 non-promotion rates decreased for schools with ninth grade academies. Ninth grade academies have a non-promotion rate of 15% in comparison to the 22% state average. Dropout rates have also indicated a significant change. The dropout rate in ninth grade academies was 6.6% compared to a state average of 12.5%, almost double that number. The dropout and non-promotion numbers indicate a positive change for ninth grade academies.

In addition to the type of transition program, another key feature that research has linked to successful ninth grade performance is school size. High schools tend to be much larger than middle schools. This sudden shift to a larger and more complex social environment can be incredibly stressful for ninth graders, typically 14 or 15 years old, for whom *fitting in* with peers is of paramount importance. As they try to find their social grounding, ninth graders can be seriously distracted from their studies (Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, & Smith, 2000). Additionally, large schools tend to be more diverse than smaller schools, further complicating students' social lives. Ninth graders may need to make some adjustments to their attitudes, behaviors, and appearance if they are going to get along with people who are different from them (Elias, Gara, Ubriaco, Rothbaum, Clabby, & Schuyler, 1986).

Home/School/Community Connection

Research has indicated that increased communication between all stakeholders establishes the foundation for successful transition. When students and parents are provided with information about the new school they are more readily prepared for a smoother transition. In order to accomplish this, schools must provide high school tours, small-group sessions with high school counselors, request that high school teachers trade

places with eighth-grade teachers for one day, provide a summer camp for rising ninth graders, implement a pen pal program with band, student government, athletes and other groups that are common to both grades (Epstein, 1995). In addition, schools should create newsletters and websites dedicated to providing information to incoming students and develop a scheduling system that allows extensive collaboration with parents and middle school staff. Providing opportunities for peer interaction and social support can be accomplished by sponsoring open house hosted by current ninth graders, supervised attendance by incoming eighth graders at ninth grade social functions, planning a new comers festival a few weeks before school starts, assigning buddies to incoming ninth grade classes, separating lunch schedule by grade level to decrease interaction with older students, and providing a ninth grade only phone line to an assistant principal so parents have easy access to assistance should social problems arise. It is imperative that opportunities are provided for parent involvement. This can be done by actively seeking parent volunteers and involving volunteers in the day-to-day activities of the school. Quarterly phone calls by teachers, counselors, or advisors and designate a staff member to simulate an attempt to contact the school to assure that lines of communication are indeed open are also good ideas (Epstein, 1995).

Professional collaboration is crucial. Providing opportunities for communication between middle and high school teachers and support staff can be accomplished by creating a transition team of teachers, counselors, parents and students from the middle and high schools that meets regularly to identify issues and propose transition activities and improvements. Research indicates that schools should invite teachers from the middle school to visit team or department meetings from the high school, and vice versa,

on a regular basis (National High School Center, 2008). In addition, research encourages the annual scheduling of a joint faculty meeting with feeder schools to identify common concerns and opportunities.

Providing academic support for incoming ninth graders is also a pivotal component of a successful transition program. Schools should create a support class that meets on a regular basis for all ninth graders which addresses transition issues, counseling, and academic expectations (MacIver, 1990). In addition, schools can assign each incoming ninth grader an adult advocate/advisor mentor who assists the student with transition and attends to each student's academic progress and social adjustment. Furthermore, schools can create tutorials and other academic support activities, using teachers, adult volunteers and older students to help struggling ninth graders. To further support these findings, one British researcher estimated that 10% of students suffered serious problems after the transfer to secondary school (Youngman, 1986). MacIver (1990) found that fewer students were retained in the transition grade when middle school students experienced a high school transition program with several diverse articulation activities. In a study of 56 Georgia and Florida high schools, Hertzog and Morgan (1999) found that schools with extensive transition programs have significantly lower failure and dropout rates than schools that provided students few articulation activities. Articulation activities or courses are defined as activities or courses where middles school students receive credit for middle grades (California Department of Education, n.d.). Algebra or geometry is one of the issues that teams discuss in articulation meetings between middle and high school content specialists. Currently many middle grades students must repeat courses such as algebra or geometry since they

do not receive high school credit needed for college applications. According to the California Department of Education, there are also instructional materials and articulation targets questions such as the following: Do the middle grades texts match those used at the high school to prepare students for the next step in learning? Standards-based skills focus on questions like this: Do middle grades students have research skills required by ninth grade teachers? Do they know how to follow guidelines for writing ninth grade term papers? Homework expectations may focus around questions such as: Do middle grades teachers know enough about high school homework expectations to prepare students to meet them? The Mobile County Public School System has already implemented credit articulation for middle school students who take algebra, Spanish and computer technology (MCPSS, 2010).

High school drop-out rates are significantly lower in school districts that have explicit middle school to high school transition programs (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001; Smith, 1997). Effective programs address curriculum issues, safety and discipline issues, and provide accurate information regarding organization and logistics (MacIver, 1990). These aforementioned steps are very crucial and viable to a successful transition for eighth graders transitioning to ninth grade and were considered when developing the freshman transition academy at the local school. To accomplish a successful transition for students, hard work is required on the parts of the administration, faculty and staff of both middle and high schools. If educators are not willing to dedicate themselves to the cause of promoting success for students then they are in the wrong business.

Successful Transition Programs

MacIver (1990) concluded that the best transition programs were those that included a variety of activities such as counseling, school visits, and special summer courses to help students understand their new school (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). It is of critical importance for middle school practices to assist students in transition to ninth-grade. The average middle level school used only three to four articulation practices (significantly fewer than they used with incoming students) to bridge their students' transition into high school. Furthermore, many young adolescent students still do not experience a smooth and successful transition into high school, even though there is compelling research about appropriate articulation practice. Educators need to understand that articulating young adolescents' transition into high school involves the total middle school program as well as specific articulation practices at the time of the transition. Results from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS) 1988 (NCES, 2002) show that students from different middle schools attending the same high school and participating in full or partial transition programs (Schiller, 1999; Catterall, 1998; Smith, 1997) transition with ease from middle school to high school. Although this information is pertinent and valuable it is gathered from a database that is over 20 years old.

Additional current research shows that students experience a decrease in achievement from middle school to high school (Alspaugh, 1998a; Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). This achievement loss may represent the first time high-achieving students experience grades lower than an A. In addition to academic struggles, behavior problems in the form of suspensions and expulsions appear to increase significantly early in the

ninth grade year (Graber & Brooks-Gunn, 1996). Another study showed that middle grades students identified academic ability as especially important to making it in secondary school (Zeedyk et al., 2003). After entering high school, students in the study added time management, ability to stay on task, social skills, and behavior as essential elements in success. Social matters such as bullying, getting lost and establishing peer relationships at secondary school overshadow concerns about academics.

According to Black, ninth graders found within traditional high school have struggled to attain high levels of academic achievement. During the mid-1990s, high schools had a 70% attendance rate, student apathy and unruliness, and high numbers of academic failures. Administrators and teachers began to rethink the design of high schools that encompassed grades 9 through 12 and are second-guessing the wisdom of subjecting 14-year-olds to the more intense academic and peer pressures of high school.

In 1993, Kinney found that expanded social experiences in high school represent a new opportunity for students who experienced exclusion in middle school. He described social networks in middle school as being limited to a dichotomy of popular students versus the rest of the student body. Students in high school were able to establish new social networks or cliques that did not exist in their respective middle schools. Starkman, Scales, and Roberts (1999) found data that indicated a strong relationship between academic success and social competence, and the ability of students to adapt to various environments. Ninth grade academies must be able to provide an atmosphere of emotional caring along with intellectual challenge. This led some researchers to conclude that student progress on social competence, even more than

intellectual measures, could be the best primary measure of academic success (Starkman et al., 1999).

Research thus far acknowledges that transition programs are a crucial and vital part to successful transitioning for students from eighth- to ninth grade. Throughout the review of literature, themes surrounding the social and academic concerns have surfaced and are the same. Alspaugh's (1998a) research shows that in general, the fewer educational transitions, the better students perform. Students enrolled in school districts where they attended a K-8 school and then transitioned into a 9-12 environment consistently outperformed students from similar demographic backgrounds who attended a distinct middle school. Recently, some school districts have introduced freshmen centers as an organizational structure to combat poor performance in ninth grade. One major tenet of the freshmen center model is to create a sense of community often absent in a large high school and to ease the academic and social transition from middle school to high school. Freshmen centers tend to operate more like middle schools than traditional high school, including the use of teaming, where the larger student body is arranged in houses or teams that share a set of teachers. The idea is that by having ninth grade teachers who are focused solely on the academic and social development of one grade level, individual students will not get lost which is a fear of ninth grade students and parents (Alspaugh, 1998b).

A study conducted by Styron and Peasant (2010), in six Mississippi schools proved that student achievement of those enrolled in 9th grade academies did prove to be higher when compared to student achievement of 9th graders enrolled in traditional high school settings. The study noted that the purpose of the 9th grade academy was to

increase academic achievement for students during the critical transitional year from middle to high school. It was also designed to provide adolescent students with the attention and support needed to get through this difficult period without the competition of peer pressure from older students found in the traditional high school setting. This is evident in the freshman transitional program in the Mobile County Public School System's schools who have implemented a freshman transition program. Research also agrees that the academies are very beneficial not only to increase student achievement but to decrease discipline referrals; increase the number of student graduates, and decrease the dropout rate. Underlying successful high school transition programs are activities that bring middle school and high school administrators, counselors, and teachers together to learn about the programs, courses, curriculum, and requirements of their respective schools (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). Several factors were named in the activities that create a mutual understanding of curriculum requirements at both levels develop a high school transition program to meet the particular needs of their students.

There are numerous studies pertaining to transitions from middle to high school, activities to assist with this transition, perceptions of students, teachers and parents. Lena Morgan, co-chair of the Center for Transition Studies at Augusta State University and the State University of West Georgia, recommends that a transition program include visits to eighth graders by the ninth grade counselors and teachers, visits to high school by eighth grade teachers, students, and parents, professional development of young adolescents for high school teachers; and a high school design where freshmen can stay with the same group of teachers and remain somewhat separate from older high school students.

There are several large cities that have had success with this process. They include Baltimore, Philadelphia, Detroit, Chicago and even a school in the state of Mississippi. Research has shown that interventions, even for students who are just below average, have an impact on high school graduation rates (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). These ninth grade interventions vary in terms of structure, and each program depends on available resources and community acceptance. Each intervention is designed to address at least one of the following developmental factors of the ninth grader: social, emotional, environmental, physical, and academic (Hertzog, Morgan, Diamond & Walker, 1996). Hertzog et al., (1996) found that schools with transition programs and interventions had significantly fewer student failures and lower dropout rates than schools without transition and interventions programs.

The pioneer in the academy movement, however, was Patterson High School in Baltimore, Maryland. This inner-city school was plagued with problems before it divided itself into four career academies and a freshman academy in 1996. By the following year, success was readily apparent (Riddle, 2004). Patterson made the greatest strides in increasing the number of ninth grade students who earned promotion to tenth-grade. The Talent Development High School with Career Academies has significant positive effects on school climate, student attendance and promotion-graduation rates when these outcomes are compared to previous years at Patterson, as well as to other non-selective high schools in Baltimore. After implementation, teacher ratings about the seriousness of tardiness, student fights, vandalism, absenteeism, student apathy, drug use, physical and verbal abuse of teachers, student lack of career focus or lack of knowledge about college, and class cutting all decreased dramatically at Patterson, but not at a comparison school.

Teacher attitudes about student misbehavior and school discipline became dramatically more positive at Patterson, but not at the comparison school. Most teachers believe that their school climate is somewhat better or much better at Patterson. Student perceptions of climate are also much better, compared to student perceptions in the comparison school. Significant improvements in student attendance occurred at Patterson, far exceeding any improvements in attendance occurring at the comparison school. The promotion rate at Patterson at the end of the 1995-96 school year exceeded the promotion rate of the comparison school. Patterson made its greatest strides in increasing the numbers of ninth graders who earned promotion to the tenth grade (National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students (1998).

In Philadelphia, the nation's eighth-largest school district, high school reform has emerged as an urgent and visible priority. The Philadelphia school district is comprised of 210,000 students more than 80% of the students are of color. There are 47,000 high school students, 45 regular high schools, and 16 charter high schools. Five Philadelphia inner-city high schools witnessed great results from the use of the talent development high school model. The schools implementing the model for two or more years have seen their ninth grade attendance improve by 15 or more percentage points, while the number of student with 90% or more attendance has doubled. The number of students to reach the eleventh grade in the first two schools to implement talent development has nearly doubled. Across all five schools, course pass rates are up while suspensions, fires and arrest are down and a substantial number of students have begun to close achievement gaps in both reading and math. Nearly a third of the ninth graders, for example, have gained at least two years in math (Smith, 2007).

Uneven performances on statewide tests and recent public concern over school dropouts have added to the school district's desire to strengthen the performance of students throughout high school. Some ninth grade transition initiatives are being introduced into the city's high schools. One high school in particular has, for the past seven years, been following a model program addressing many of the transition issues identified in the research (Smith, 2007). Thomas A. Edison High School, a comprehensive high school, also located in Philadelphia, serves a low-income, largely Hispanic population, and uses the ninth grade success academy, a component of the talent development high school program and a reform strategy developed by the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR) at Johns Hopkins University. The full talent development model is currently being replicated in a number of cities nationwide (Smith, 2007).

The success academy, perhaps the most critical element of the talent development program, reflects a number of assumptions about how to make the ninth grade transition successful. Many entering students have deficient basic skills, particularly in English and mathematics, which must be addressed using well-designed curricula and high-quality instruction. Furthermore, students need added structure and extra personal support and attention as they make their way through ninth grade. Ninth grade teaching staff needs opportunities to collaborate, both on their teaching and their support for students (Smith, 2007). The success academy is a school-within-a-school with a number of features specifically designed to help ninth graders make a successful transition. The academy is physically separate from the rest of the school, in its own wing of its own floor. It has its own entrance and ninth graders have few opportunities to interact with upper-class

students. Teachers and staff greet students at the front door in the morning as they arrive. The aim is to make personal connections with the students, minimize distractions, promote a small but structured community environment, and enhance opportunities for students and teachers to interact. The students know the rules will be enforced (Smith, 2007). The Success Academy stands as a thoughtfully designed strategy for increasing successful ninth grade transitions.

At Edison, the Academy gets high grades from teachers and students who believe its supportive structure measurably enhances the learning environment and eases the move into high school. Edison's administration has demonstrated its commitment in a special way: three years ago it created a Tenth Grade Academy, modeled on the Success Academy, to extend and reinforce the benefits and momentum of the ninth grade model (Smith, 2007). For a number of students, these transitions apparently are difficult to negotiate. For example, the middle to high school transition has been found to be associated with a variety of negative consequences for some students including achievement loss and dropping out shortly after they enter high school or falling behind and failing to graduate on time. Because ninth grade students have been identified as a group that require extra attention due to their unique developmental qualities and the recognized importance placed on the ninth grade year, many schools across the nation have developed transition interventions focused on personalization aimed at addressing one or more developmental concerns of ninth grade students (McIntosh & White, 2006). This is clearly an indication of a need for extra support for the ninth grade student.

Implementation of New Programs and No Child Left Behind

In 1969, F. F. Fuller initiated research in new program implementation. Based upon that research, Hall, Wallace, & Dossett (1973), developed a concerns-based adoption model (CBAM) of new program implementation. Research in new program implementation is crucial to the success of a program. The implementation of the Freshman Academy Program has been researched and because of the degree of research it will possibly be a successful program.

Concerns theory emerged during the 1960s through 10 years of work and measurement by Frances Fuller and others. Hall and Hord (1987) reported that concerns theory assumes that change is a process that follows a seven-stage developmental sequence regarding the concerns that teachers have when an innovation is adopted. Based on these premises, Hall et al., (1973) developed the CBAM, which emphasized the teacher and the innovation as the main focus. One of the dimensions of the CBAM is the Stages of Concern (SoC) which teachers indicate when involved in the implementation of an innovation. Three stages of concern were expanded into seven dimensions of concerns that can vary in intensity. Self-concerns consist of three stages: stage 0-awareness; stage 1-informational; stage 2-personal; stage 3-task concerns; stage 4-management and impact concerns; stage 5-consequence; and stage 6-collaboration; and stage 7-refocusing. This model suggested that interventions and professional development should address the specific expressed concerns of the teachers. Research indicated that expressed concerns permit the identification of acceptance or adoption of the innovation on the part of teachers. As concerns at the four sequential, non-adopter stages of awareness, informational, personal, and management are reduced, users begin to

express higher concerns at the three adopter stages of consequence, collaboration, and refocusing. According to Hall et al., (1973), if teachers do not have their concerns first reduced at the non-adopter stages, they will not move on to the adopter stages.

According to Honig, Kahne, and McLaughlin (1999), a theory of action approach is increasingly being used in youth development and other initiatives to focus program development, implementation, and evaluation in ways that build on program strengths and improve the overall quality of youth development work. Generally, it requires performance of the following two tasks: explicitly state the often invisible assumptions, on which programs are based, and the conditions, procedures/resources and agreements on which their success depends, while critically examining whether these assumptions make sense: Is there data and other evidence to support the belief that the chosen strategy is the best or correct one? Do the conditions, procedures/resources, and agreements necessary for success exist? Is the program being evaluated according to criteria that are fair, given available resources and other conditions? Is the entire program not working or are there strong elements which, given more favorable conditions, might lead to success (Honig et al., 1999).

Often the best programs and plans fail because the conditions on which success depends are not met. This is particularly true in youth development organizations where a variety of unforeseen factors can greatly affect program implementation and success. The daily demands of youth work may mean that, day to day, the program isn't implemented as planned. Similarly, partnerships or interorganizational groups which often govern/advise youth development programs can become dysfunctional due to a variety of reasons such as conflicting ideas regarding the best strategies for achieving

goals, lack of shared understanding of the conditions required for success, and failure to commit the necessary time and resources (Honig et al., 1999).

A theory of action approach requires program designers to clearly identify why the chosen strategies can lead to the targeted goals. This means asking questions such as: why do we believe an after-school program will lead to improvements in school performance? Given the particular needs and strengths of our youth, is a job readiness program the best approach to career education? Similarly, a theory of action approach means clarifying the conditions under which a particular strategy may be successful (Honig et al., 1999). For example, was attendance at the after-school program low because the program didn't meet youth's needs or was it for other reasons? Since participation in the program required regular attendance early on a Saturday morning, were there barriers related to time? Did the interested youth have alarm clocks or other ways to wake up on time? Did travel to the program require youth to cross gang boundaries? Did the Saturday bus schedule enable youth to reach the field? Since participation in the program required membership in the organization, were there barriers to that membership? Could interested youth afford the $5.00 membership fee? Did membership require parental consent that might be difficult for some youth to acquire? And finally, even though the sports program was offered at a field easily accessible by public transportation, were the youth able to travel across town to the main office to apply for membership? Of course, it is impossible to monitor and control all the factors that might contribute to a program's success or failure if youth workers and their partners are to have a good chance of achieving their goals. It is vitally important to continuously

clarify those conditions that may directly impact the program's chance of success (Honig et al., 1999*)*.

Federal law mandates student success. The development of these two models coincides with No Child Left Behind. Although there are numerous suggestions for school reform and new program implementation, American high schools in general have changed little since the 1950s. The 21st century was inaugurated with the passage of George W. Bush's *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act in 2001*. The executive summary of *NCLB* disclosed the fact that the federal government was spending $120 billion a year on programs that have not been documented by research to positively affect the individualized needs of the local school or produce positive results in student achievement (Bush, 2001, p. 1). The priorities of *NCLB* included increasing accountability, requiring the use of research-based programs and practices, increasing state and local flexibility in spending federal funds, and empowering parents through improved communication and transfer options from low- to high-performing schools (Bush, 2001, p. 2). NCLB also mandates that districts show a minimum prescribed level of growth in student achievement by the 2013-2014 school year (U. S. Department of Education, 1998). *NCLB* became the first legislation to increase public school accountability by rewarding states that exhibit significant educational progress and implementing sanctions such as withholding federal funding from states that fail to exhibit such progress (Bush, 2001, p. 26).

The most recent federal legislation was passed by Congress in 2009 under the direction of President Barack Obama and was entitled the *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)*. The *ARRA* was designed as a short-term investment to

facilitate the struggling economy and advance education in order to establish long-term economic stability within the U. S. (U. S. Department of Education, 2008). Although the ARRA does not increase school accountability requirements, it does require that the additional funding be accounted for and expects these funds to be used to improve education. An overview of *ARRA* provided on the U. S. Department of Education website provides examples of ways this additional funding can be utilized. Uses may include, but are not limited to, purchasing and implementing programs that are important to the success of all students and providing the training teachers need to address academic deficits within the classroom (U. S. Department of Education, 2008). Although the benefits of the *ARRA* have not developed to fruition, additional federal funding earmarked to improve education should surely assist in addressing the needs of our national educational system.

Summary

A thorough review of the literature revealed that theorists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, Erikson, Kohlberg, and Maslow have influenced our understanding of human growth and development. Specific research in the area of high school transition has indicated the importance of providing students with positive experiences during that transition. Previous research has also revealed that many freshman academy programs are effective and positively improve academic performance and reduce social concerns. Furthermore, the research has revealed positive perceptions of these programs by students, teachers, and parents. Due to the lack of research on the freshman transition program in the Mobile County Public School System, the need for research was imperative to the literature, and was examined through this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

The purposes of this study determined if attendance, failure rate, and discipline were affected by the implementation of the freshman transition academy, and also determined the perceptions of students and teachers who participated in the program as well as the perceptions of the parents of students who were enrolled.

This information is extremely useful to school counselors, school psychologists, and other school personnel. It assists them in developing proactive intervention programs that will assist students and their families to navigate the new school environment successfully and minimize problems that may arise from their changing circumstances. The comparative archival data provided descriptive information regarding several research questions. Does implementation of a freshman transition academy increase the attendance rate of students? Does implementation of a freshman transition academy decrease the number of failed courses per semester? Does implementation of a freshman transition academy decrease the number of student discipline referrals?

Student attendance is very critical to the success of students. If students are not present daily, they find themselves left behind when they return to school. Students' presence and attentiveness in class decreases the number of failed courses by students. The freshman academy transition program provides all of these elements to assist students in reaching success. Students who are made to believe that teachers really do care about them and the consistency of all teachers will also contribute to the decrease of the number of discipline referrals.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in this study was one of participant observer. According to Kemp (2001), the role of the participant observer can be described as these individuals who interconnect their professional work and research interest into the role of an experienced researcher. As an administrator in a Title I high school in south Mobile County, the range of professional roles and responsibilities have included the following opportunities: organize activities for students, teachers and parents; conference with parents; participate in collaborative data meetings and department meetings; plan professional development for teachers; and analyze student performance data as a member of the local School Action for Excellence (SAE) committee. Kemp (2001) continues by stressing that even though the extent of participation may vary significantly by researcher, it is essential that the researcher minimize any persuasion upon the outcome of the phenomena being studied.

School District

The Mobile County Public School System is located in the state of Alabama in the county of Mobile. Mobile County is located in the southwest corner of Alabama. According to the Mobile County Public School System's website, the Mobile County Public School System (MCPSS) has an enrollment of over 66,000 students and employs approximately 8,500 employees. The MCPSS has over 100 buildings and utilizes a budget of over $770,000.00. According to the Alabama State Department of Education website, the MCPSS consistently educated a higher percentage of low-income students (as defined by qualifying for free or reduced lunch) than the state average (ASDE, n.d.a).

Design

The research study primarily consisted of quantitative components. Quantitative components included archival data such as attendance, course failure rate, and number of discipline referrals of Alma Bryant freshmen the year prior to the implementation of the Freshman Academy as well as the year following the program's implementation. Quantitative data included information obtained from questionnaires regarding student, teacher and parent perceptions regarding the freshman transition program at the local school. Student, parent and teacher attitudes were measured by an average score obtained from a questionnaire designed by the researcher utilized a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Students, parents, and teachers were given an opportunity to make comments regarding the Freshman Transition Academy at the end of the questionnaire. There were no responses reported.

Although not the primary focus of the study, the following demographic data were collected: ethnicity, as measured by the percentage of students, teachers and parents who are White, Black, Hispanic or Asian; and gender as measured by the percentage of students, teachers and parents who are male or female. Level of education of parents and teachers was collected, the teachers' years of experience were collected, and level of education of both parents and teachers was collected.

Study Participants

The study participants included some 2010-2011 Freshmen students, all 2011-2012 freshmen students, 2010-2012 Freshmen teachers, and parents of the 2010-2012 students. The defined student population is roughly estimated to include approximately 300-500 students. The school in the study is the only high school geographically located

in south Mobile County. It is one of the few high schools in the MCPSS that has an inclusive feeder pattern for student enrollment.

Additional study participants included certified personnel in grades 9-10 who were employed at the local school during the 2011-2012 school year. For the purposes of this study, it was decided to obtain data from certified personnel in grades 9-12 in order to collect a more comprehensive impression of teachers' perceptions and their satisfaction regarding the 2008-2009 implementation of the freshmen transition academy.

Instrumentation

A questionnaire, based on a perceptions' survey by Akos, was developed to determine the perceptions and attitudes of students, parents, and teachers participating in the Freshman Transition program at the local school. The questionnaires were initially designed using a focus group consisting of a student, a teacher, a parent, and the researcher (Appendixes A, B, C). An initial draft of the questionnaires was developed by the focus group that identified specific areas of interest and the specific variables to be measured. The initial questionnaires consisted of no more than 35 items with responses being measured by a 5-point Likert type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Each questionnaire was designed to reveal an overall *attitude* score consisting of the mean of the combined responses. Statistical analyses of the questionnaires were also designed to reveal an average attitude score in each major interest area (i.e. academic concerns, social concerns, structural concerns, etc…). The questionnaires were designed to collect demographic data about the survey participants. In addition, the questionnaires provided space for participants to provide qualitative data in the form.

The questionnaires were piloted by an expert panel consisting of students, parents, and teachers who worked with or participated in the freshman transition academy during the 2010-2011 school years. The expert panel reviewed the questionnaire drafts to ensure face validity and content validity. The initial draft of each questionnaire, the attached information letter, and the return envelope were copied on brightly colored paper. An attached cover letter explained the study and the questionnaire piloting process (Appendix D). Each student, parent, and teacher who participated on the expert panel and returned the draft research questionnaire with the validity questionnaire was entered in a drawing to win a $25.00 Wal-Mart gift card for their time and effort. There was no need to refine the questionnaires.

The researcher met with the statistician to complete Cronbach's Alpha to determine internal consistency and reliability. The teacher survey was piloted by the 9th grade teachers of school year 2010-2011. The students and parents were piloted by 9th graders 10-11 and parents of those 9th graders 10-11. The Cronbach's Alpha scores revealed reliability and variability and therefore did not have to be refined. Reliability of the parent questionnaire was calculated in each area and revealed a Cronbach's Alpha of .702 in the academic area, .799 in the social area and .804 in the structural area indicating the instrument was very reliable. Reliability of the teacher questionnaire was calculated in each area and revealed a Cronbach's Alpha of .724 in the academic area, .791 in the social area and .751 in the structural area indicating the instrument was very reliable. Reliability of the student questionnaire was calculated in each area and revealed a Cronbach's Alpha of .719 in the academic area, .720 in the social area and .773 in the structural area indicating the instrument was very reliable. However, it should be noted

that although the questionnaires were very reliable some of the questions were reversed to ensure participants were reading each item and considering their responses.

The final questionnaires were administered in February to all participating freshmen students, parents, and teachers at the local school. An interview was conducted with the administrator of the Freshman Transition Academy and the former principal of the local school during the birthing stage of implementation.

Procedures

After receiving parental consent by returned permission forms (Appendix E), the students' surveys were administered in homeroom during the months of February and March. Parents' surveys were sent home in sealed envelopes with students. The completed parental surveys were returned to the homeroom teacher and placed in an envelope. Individual prizes were distributed randomly to those students who returned parental surveys. The homeroom class who returned all parent and student surveys were given a pizza party. The researcher surveyed all teachers since they had instructed students who previously participated in the program. The data was entered into SPSS and subjected to statistical analyses.

Prior to submitting an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application, permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Superintendent of the Mobile County Public School System, Dr. Roy Nichols (Appendix F). An IRB application was submitted (Appendix G). While waiting to obtain IRB approval, the researcher met with the principal and teachers assigned to the freshman transition academy program to discuss the data collection procedures. The study was explained and the principal and teachers were given the opportunity to ask questions. As soon as IRB approval was obtained, the

questionnaire was piloted by 2010-2011 freshman students, their parents, and teachers at the local school who did not participate in the actual study. Once the instruments were determined valid and reliable, a packet containing the questionnaires with attached cover letters were given to the students, their parents, and teachers (Appendix H). Each teacher was asked to read a letter from the researcher introducing the study at a designated time in February and March (Appendix I). Informed consent was also addressed in the letter and indicated that the completion of the questionnaire would be considered consent for participation in the study. Each participating student, parent, and teacher was entered in a drawing to win $50.00 as an incentive to participate and to thank them for their time and effort.

The archival data was obtained from the freshman transition academy administrator. He agreed to obtain the archival data, remove the last names of students, and then forward the data to the researcher for coding and analyses in order to ensure confidentiality.

Once IRB approval was given and the data were obtained, the researcher entered it into SPSS. During the study, the data was kept in a locked filing cabinet in the office at the local school. Only administrators and the researcher had access to the data. An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was completed on the data to determine of gender affected students' perceptions of freshman transition academy. The data was analyzed to determine if differences in deed existed and whether they were statistically significant. In addition, an ANOVA was completed to determine if any statistically significant differences existed between the perceptions of teachers, parents and students. All data,

including completed questionnaires, were shredded when the study was completed to ensure confidentiality. The data analyses were completed by April, 2012.

Summary

This study provided information regarding the concept of freshman transition academies in high school and whether it is a program that is truly worth implementing in high schools. It also provided information regarding the students', parents' and teachers' perceptions of freshman transition academy.

The study contained the following Null Hypotheses:

1. There is no statistically significant relationship between the perception of males and females of the freshman transition academy.
2. There is no statistically significant relationship between the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents of the freshman transition academy's ability to properly transition into high school.

Limitations of the Study

Factors that occur outside of the researcher's control may have affected data collection (Charles, 1995). The findings of this study may be limited by the following factors:

1. The researcher recognizes that many factors may influence students', parents' and teachers' perceptions of the Freshman Transition Academy, the ethnicity of students, parents and teachers, the past academic history of students, the expectations of parents and teachers and past academic experiences of both students and parents.

2. The researcher recognizes there are many other programs that can impact students' successful transition to ninth grade.
3. The researcher cannot require participation. Thus the study used voluntary responses from students, parents, and teachers.
4. The researcher assumed the answers from the students, parents and teachers were accurate and truthful.

Data Analyses

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and a MANOVA were completed on the data to determine if gender before and after the program was implemented was statistically significant and whether statistically significant differences were noted by group. Research questions 1-3 were answered using descriptive statistics.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

All students enrolled in ninth grade at A local high school during the 11-12 and school years were included in the study. A total of 470 questionnaires were distributed to the parents of the 9th grade participants. Return of the parent survey and the signed consent form yielded a total of 121 completed parental surveys and 134 student surveys. Sample size included 134 students which approximated an even split in the population based on gender and freshman academy participation, 121 parents, and 45 teachers. Socioeconomic levels were not included as a variable in the study since the local school is a Title I schools which is defined by 51% of the student population receives free or reduced lunch. Ethnicity was not included as a variable in the study since most of the targeted schools in south Mobile County have a high enrollment of Caucasian students. English Language Learner (ELL) status was also excluded from the study. However, it should be noted that Bryant does have a high percentage of students from Asian descent (Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian).

Although based on an established questionnaire by Akos, student, parent, and teacher questionnaires were created and piloted within the school by a committee of students, teachers, and parents who participated in the freshman academy program during school years 2008-2010. There were no changes made to the questionnaire before administration.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic) Variables of Teachers (N=45)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Teacher Gender		
Female	35	77.8
Male	10	22.2
Teacher Grade		
9th	15	33.4
10th	6	13.3
Other	24	53.3
Teacher Race		
White	40	88.8
Black	4	8.9
Hispanic	1	2.2
Asian/Other	0	0.0
Teacher Highest Level of Education		
Bachelor's Degree	16	35.6
Master's Degree	29	64.4
Specialist's Degree	0	0.0
Doctoral Degree	0	0.0
Other	0	0.0

Table 1 (continued).

Teacher Years of Experience		
0 - 5	8	17.8
6 - 10	7	15.6
11 - 15	7	15.6
16 - 20	8	17.8
21 +	15	33.3

Table 1 reveals the demographic data on the teacher group as well as the frequency and percentage of grade level taught, highest academic degree, race, and years of experience. The gender of the participating teachers was 77.8% female and 22.2 % male. According to the table, 33.4 % of the teachers taught 9th grade, 13.3 % taught 10th grade and 53.3% taught other grades and/or subjects, which included electives. The participating teachers' races were 88.8 % White and 8.9% Black, and 2.2% other races participating. Approximately 35.6% of the participating teachers had obtained a Bachelor's Degree, 64.4% possessed Master's Degrees, and there were no teachers who possessed Specialists or Doctoral Degrees. Years of experience were also evenly distributed. Participants having 21+ years experience exhibited the highest participation rate 33.3%, followed by participants having 0-5 years and 16-20 years at 17.8%, and the least participation rate in the 11-15 years and 6-10 years at 15.6%.

The results of the teachers' perceptions regarding the individual components of the freshman academy are contained in Table 2. Overall, teachers exhibited a positive perception and level of satisfaction regarding the academic component of the freshman

academy with a mean of 3.31 and standard deviation of .35. Teachers also exhibited positive perceptions in the social component with a mean of 4.01 and standard deviation of .42. Teachers' perception was somewhat negative in the structural component with a mean of 2.97 and standard deviation of .59. Means and standard deviations for individual factors on the questionnaire are also displayed in Table 2. Generally speaking, means indicated a positive attitude toward the program; however, all standard deviations were considered to be lower than expected indicating less variability. Although space was provided for teachers to provide feedback and/or comments, none were provided.

Table 2

Results of Teachers' Responses (N=45)

	Questions	Mean	Standard Deviation
Academic		3.31	.35
1.	I expect my students to do well in my class.	4.67	.56
2.	I set realistic and reasonable expectations for my students.	4.73	.49
3.	I do not expect my students to do well in my classes.	1.29	1.20
4.	My classes are harder than I expected for my students.	2.43	.95
5.	My classes require students to do a lot more work.	3.24	2.79

Table 2 (continued).

6.	My classes are easier than expected.	2.27	.88
7.	I understand why schools require students to take certain classes.	4.27	1.48
8.	The school should not require students to take certain classes.	2.71	1.18
9.	My students are required to do more homework than expected.	2.33	1.34
10.	My students have less homework than they expected.	2.80	.42
Social		4.01	.42
11.	I care about my students.	4.89	.38
12.	I listen to what my students have to say.	4.76	.48
13.	My students are important to me.	4.91	.28
14.	I know more about my students than his or her grades.	4.18	.87
15.	Many of my students' friends go to her school.	3.74	.89

Table 2 (continued).

16.	I feel comfortable because my students' friends are with them.	3.44	.93
17.	It is important to my students to be with friends at school.	3.37	.85
18.	The move from middle to high was difficult for my students.	3.21	.99
19.	The move from middle to high school was easy for my students.	2.77	.93
20.	I expect my students to get good grades.	4.46	.67
21.	I do not care how well my students do in school.	1.23	.66
22.	I am worried about my students being bullied.	3.38	1.17
23.	I worry about my students being around upperclassmen.	3.27	1.10
Structural		2.97	.59
24.	The size of my high school makes my students feel uncomfortable.	3.02	1.13

Table 2 (continued).

25.	I worry about my students getting lost because of school size.	2.85	1.17
26.	The size of my high school does not bother my students.	3.19	.91
27.	I do not understand my schools discipline procedures.	2.00	1.05
28.	I think my students' high school discipline procedures are fair.	3.41	1.14
29.	My students understand how they are to behave in high school.	3.76	1.03
30.	I like that my students are isolated from the upperclassmen.	3.81	1.11
31.	I worry about my students going to lunch without a teacher.	1.98	1.21
32.	I worry about my students being late for class.	3.39	1.37
33.	I worry about my students getting lost.	2.38	1.29

Table 3

Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Variables of Parents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Parent Gender		
Female	98	81.0
Male	21	17.4
Missing	2	1.6
Grade level of child		
9th	117	96.7
10th	3	2.5
Other	1	.8
Parent race		
White	98	81.0
Black	10	8.3
Hispanic	2	1.7
Asian	8	6.6
Other	2	1.7
Missing	1	.8
Parent Level of Education		
Diploma	57	47.1

Table 3 (continued).

Associate Degree	18	14.9
B.S.	9	7.4
Master's Degree	8	6.6
Specialist Degree	3	2.5
Doctorate	1	.8
Other	21	17.4
Missing	4	3.3

Table 3 displays the frequency and percentage of the participating parents, parent gender, parent race, their students' grade level, and parent's highest academic degree. The gender of the participating parents was 81.7% female and 17.4 % male. According to the table, 96.7 % of the participating parents' students were enrolled in the 9th grade, 2.5 % of participating parents' students was classified as 10^{th} graders and .8% of the participating parents' students were in a grade other than 9^{th} or 10^{th}. The participating parents' race was 81.0 % White, 8.3% Black, 6.6% Asian, and 1.7% other. Furthermore, 47.1% of the participating parents graduated from high school with a diploma, 14.9% of the participating parents obtained an Associate's Degree, 7.4% of the participating parents earned a Bachelor's Degree, 6.6% of the participating parents possessed a Master's Degree, 2.5% received a Specialist Degree, .8% earned a Doctorate Degree and 17.4% of participating parents held some other level of education.

Table 4

Results of Parents' Responses (N=121)

	Questions	Mean	Standard Deviation
Academic		3.32	.37
1.	The teachers expect my child to do well in his or her class.	4.31	.77
2.	The teachers' expectations are realistic and reasonable.	4.13	.84
3.	The teachers do not expect my child to do well in his or her class.	1.79	1.13
4.	My child's classes are harder than I expected.	2.54	1.19
5.	My child's classes require him or her to do a lot more work.	2.94	1.22
6.	My child's classes are easier than I expected.	2.79	1.19
7.	I understand why the school requires my child to take certain courses/classes.	3.81	1.13

Table 4 (continued).

8.	The school should not require my child to take certain classes	2.43	1.29
9.	My child has a lot more homework than I expected.	2.61	1.22
10.	My child has a lot less homework than I expected.	2.92	1.31
Social		3.35	.50
11.	My child's teachers care about them.	3.64	1.08
12.	My child's teacher listens to what he or she has to say.	3.43	1.12
13.	My child is important to his or her teachers.	3.58	1.07
14.	My child's teacher knows more about him or her than about his or her grades.	2.84	1.20
15.	Many of my child's friends go to his or her school.	4.03	1.02

Table 4 (continued).

16.	I feel comfortable because my child's friends are with them at school.	3.73	1.04
17.	It is important to me for my child to be with his or her friends at school.	3.40	1.14
18.	The move from middle to high school was difficult for my child.	2.44	1.32
19.	The move from middle to high school was easy for my child.	3.56	1.33
20.	I expect my child to get good grades.	4.55	.94
21.	I do not care how well my child does in school.	1.53	1.15
22.	I am worried about my child being bullied.	2.75	1.50
23.	I worry about my child being around upperclassmen.	2.28	1.30
Structural		2.64	.64

Table 4 (continued).

24.	The size of my child's high school makes me feel uncomfortable.	2.19	1.28
25.	I worry about my child getting lost because of the size of the school.	2.03	1.28
26.	The size of my child's high school does not bother me.	3.70	1.40
27.	I do not understand my child's schools' discipline procedures.	2.33	1.31
28.	I think my child's high school discipline procedures are fair.	3.72	1.13
29.	My child understands how they are to behave in high school.	4.31	1.05
30.	I miss the teams' concept in middle school.	2.67	1.16
31.	I like that my child is isolated from the upperclassmen.	3.00	1.23
32.	I worry about my child going to lunch without a teacher.	1.98	1.32
33.	I worry about my child being late	2.62	1.43

Table 4 (continued).

34.	I worry about my child getting lost.	1.93	1.34

The results of the parents' perceptions regarding the individual components of the freshman academy are contained in Table 4. Overall, parents exhibited a positive perception and level of satisfaction regarding the academic component of the freshman academy with a mean of 3.32 and standard deviation of .37. Parents also exhibited positive perceptions in the social component with a mean of 3.35% and standard deviation of .50. Parents' perception was somewhat negative in the structural component with a mean of 2.64 and standard deviation of .64. Means and standard deviations for individual factors on the questionnaire are also displayed in Table 4. Once again, standard deviations were lower than expected indicating low variability in the data.

Table 5

Frequencies and Percentages of Demographic Variables of Students (N=134)

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Student Gender	66	49.3
Female	67	50.0
Male		
Student Grade	130	97.0

Table 5 (continued).

10th	6	3.0
Other	24	53.3
Student Race		
White	106	79.1
Black	10	7.5
Hispanic	3	2.2
Asian	11	8.2
Other	4	3.0

Table 5 reveals the frequency and percentage of participating students, the grade in which student is enrolled, gender, and race. According to the table, 97.0 % of the participating students' were enrolled as 9th graders, and 3.0% was 10th graders. The gender of the participating students' was 49.3% female and 50.0 % male indicating an even participation rate by gender. The participating students' race was 79.1 % White, 8.2% Asian, 7.5% Black, 3.0% Other, and 2.2% Hispanic.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics of Students by Gender by Component

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation
Academic		
Female	3.45	.53

Table 6 (continued).

Male	3.53	.48
Social		
Female	2.99	.56
Male	2.93	.49
Structural		
Female	2.13	.64
Male	2.18	.69

The results of the students' perceptions regarding the individual components of the freshman academy are contained in Table 6.

Table 7

Results of Students' Responses (N=133)

Questions	Mean	Standard Deviation
Academic	3.50	.52
1. My teachers expect me to do well in my classes.	4.34	.75
2. My teachers' expectations are realistic and reasonable.	3.97	.88

Table 7 (continued).

3.	My teachers do not expect me to do well in my classes.	1.69	1.08
4.	I make time to finish all of my assignments.	3.79	.99
5.	My classes are harder than I expected.	3.10	1.17
6.	My classes require me to do a lot more work.	3.43	1.15
7.	My classes are easier than I expected.	2.78	1.25
8.	I understand why the school requires me to take certain classes.	3.25	1.29
9.	The school should not require me to take certain classes.	3.03	1.41
10.	I have a lot more homework than I expected.	3.09	1.29
11.	I have a lot less homework than I expected.	2.52	1.23
Social		2.96	.52
12.	My teachers care about me.	3.91	2.94

Table 7 (continued).

13.	My teacher listens to what I have to say.	3.49	1.07
14.	I am important to my teachers.	3.24	1.16
15.	My teachers know more about me than my grades.	2.64	1.19
16.	Many of my friends go to my school.	4.17	1.13
17.	I feel more comfortable because my friends are with me at school.	4.14	1.14
18.	It is important to me to be with my friends at school.	4.17	1.14
19.	The move from middle to high school was hard for me.	2.24	1.29
20.	The move from middle to high was easy for me.	3.81	1.27
21.	My family/community expects me to get good grades.	4.31	1.09
22.	My family/community does not care how well I do in school.	1.72	1.26

Table 7 (continued).

23.	I am worried about being bullied.	1.88	1.17
24.	Being around upperclassmen scares me.	1.68	1.15
25.	I worry about fights.	1.89	1.28
26.	I worry about nothing at all.	3.08	1.53
Structural		2.163	.66
27.	The size of my high school makes me uncomfortable.	1.94	1.27
28.	I feel lost in my high school because of its size.	1.76	1.13
29.	The size of my high school does not bother me.	3.99	1.37
30.	I do not understand my schools' discipline procedures.	2.33	1.32
31.	I think my high school discipline procedures are fair.	3.40	1.16
32.	I understand how I am to behave in high school.	4.18	1.05
33.	I miss the teams we had in	2.74	1.48

Table 7 (continued).

	middle school.		
34.	I like being isolated from upperclassmen.	2.32	1.24
35.	I worried about going to lunch without a teacher.	1.52	1.08
36.	I worry about being late for class.	2.57	1.46

The results of the students' perceptions regarding the individual components of the freshman academy are contained in Table 7. Overall, students exhibited a positive perception and level of satisfaction regarding the academic component of the freshman academy with a mean of 3.50 and standard deviation of .51. Students also exhibited positive perceptions in the social component with a mean of 2.96% and standard deviation of .52. Students' perceptions were somewhat negative in the structural component with a mean of 2.16 and standard deviation of .66.

Table 8

Results of Statistical Analyses by Component

	F	df	Error	Sig	Partial Eta Squared

Table 8 (continued).

Component	21.745	6	882	0001	.129
Academic	9.002	2	x	001	.039
Social	61.322	2	x	001	.217
Structural	24.499	2	x	001	.100

Statistical Results

Hypotheses

The study contained the following null hypotheses:

1. There is no statistically significant relationship between the perceptions of males and females of the freshman academy.

   Decision: Reject the null hypothesis

   Statistical Findings: $F(3,129) = .653$, $p = .583$

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was performed to determine whether a statistically significant relationship existed between males and females of the freshman academy. The analysis revealed there was no statistically significant relationship by gender. (See Table 8)

2. There is a statistically significant relationship between the perceptions of students', teachers', and parents' of the freshman academy's ability to properly transition into high school.

   Decision: Reject the null hypothesis

   Statistical Findings: $F(6,590) = 27.35$, $p < .001$, partial eta squared $= .218$

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was completed and revealed a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents toward the freshman transition academy's ability to properly transition into high school. (See Table 8)

Since statistically significant differences were revealed, post hoc testing was conducted using Tukey's HSD to determine exactly where those differences existed. Statistical significant differences were noted between groups in the interest areas, academic, social and structural. In the academic area, the students' perceptions were greater than the parents' and teachers' perceptions. The social area revealed the teachers having greater perceptions than parents and students' and the parents having greater perceptions than the students'. For the structural area, teachers' perceptions were greater or more positive than the parents' and students'.

Table 9

Results of Descriptive Statistics by Group

Components	Mean	Standard Deviation
<u>Academic</u>		
Parents	3.36	.46
Teachers	3.11	.26
Students	3.50	.51

Table 9 (continued).

Social		
Parents	3.17	.56
Teachers	3.80	.34
Students	2.96	.52
Structural		
Parents	2.40	.68
Teachers	2.60	.26
Students	2.16	.66

These findings are further supported by analysis of descriptive statistics which further indicated that in the academic interest area parents' mean was 3.364, and the standard deviation of .46, students' mean was 3.50 and the standard deviation was .51 and the teachers' mean was 3.16 and the standard deviation was .51. The social area revealed the mean of 3.99 and a standard deviation of .403for teachers, a mean of 3.17 and standard deviation for parents and a mean of 2.96 and standard deviation of .524 for students. Table 9 also displays the structural mean 2.97 and a standard deviation of .59 for teachers, a mean of 2.40 and standard deviation of .68 for parents and a mean of 2.16 and a standard deviation of .66 for students.

Archival data consisted of attendance, discipline referrals, and course failures for the school year prior to implementation, year of implementation and the year after the implementation of the freshman academy.

Table 10

Attendance Percentage

2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
90	88	88

Student attendance is displayed in Table 10. Student attendance did not increase as a result of freshman academy implementation. Data shows that there was actually a decrease in attendance during the year of implementation and the following year. Table 10 shows that there was actually a decrease in attendance during the year of implementation and the following year.

Table 11

Results of Discipline by Percentage

Disposition	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
Administrator/St./Parent/Conference	42.6	73.3	67.0
Detention	39.1	52.8	86.7
Retract	36.6	33.0	38.5

Table 11 (continued).

Suspension	43.6	40.6	50.5
Total	41.4	53.9	61.1

Table 11 revealed an increase in *A* infraction referrals during the year of implementation. There is also an increase in detention assignments, which includes a combination of a repeat *A* infraction's offender and a *B* infraction which is slightly more serious. However, there was a decrease in the *C*, and *D* infractions, which are the more serious infractions that requires a disposition of detention, retract or suspension. *A* infractions are included in the administrator/student/parent conferences.

Table 12

Number of students failing one or more courses 1st semester

2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
83	73	93

Table 12 shows a decrease in the number of students who failed courses during the implementation of the freshman academy. During the first semester of implementation year, 73 students failed courses as compared to 83 students in 07-08; however, in 09-10, the number of failures increased by 20 to a total of 93.

Table 13

Number of students failing one or more courses 2nd semester

2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010
103	82	97

Table 13 shows that second semester, eighty-two student's failed one or more courses, during the year of implementation. The year prior to freshman academy 103 students failed one or more chore. In the year following initial implementation 97 students failed at least one course. Although an increase of 15 students is revealed for the year following implementation, there was still a decrease compared to the year prior to implementation.

Even though there were no responses to the comment section of the questionnaire, an interview with the, principal of Freshman Academy, was conducted. He reported that when freshman academy was truly and fully implemented as written, it had a positive effect on students. He also stated that it is imperative to have the right people in place, and on your team in order for positive implementation. Lastly, he added that administrative support is critical. An interview with the former principal of the local high school was also conducted. He provided the administrative support needed for successful implementation of the program.

As far as the archival data in concerned, there was minimal changes due to the freshman academy implementation. However, there are great explanations for the minimal changes. The statistical data provides results of positive perceptions from

teachers, students and parent. The explanations along with the questionnaire data provide a positive implication of the overall freshman transition academy.

Summary

In summary, it should be emphasized that even though differences were found regarding structural interest area, all satisfaction ratings were well above the 2.5 average on the Likert scale which indicated that teachers, parents and students had more positive perceptions of the freshman academy transitional program, as compared to either neutral or negative ratings.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Background Information

Summary

The purposes of this study determined if attendance, failure rate, and discipline were affected by the implementation of the freshman transition academy and also determined the perceptions of students' and teachers' who participated in the program as well as the perceptions of the parents of students who were enrolled. It also revealed the perceptions of males and females about the freshman transition academy's ability to properly transition into high school.

Research findings revealed a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents associated with the freshman transition academy by questionnaire interest area (academic, social, and structural). Furthermore, the statistical analyses revealed no statistically significant difference between the perceptions of male and female students enrolled in the freshman transition academy. Descriptive statistics revealed a variety of useful information in the three interest areas. Archival data confirmed prior research and also questioned some of prior research findings. Overall, the descriptive results of the questionnaire data indicated that parent, teacher, and student perceptions of the freshman transition academy were positive.

Conclusion

A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was completed and revealed a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of students, teachers, and parents of the freshman transition academy's ability to properly transition into high

school. Post hoc testing was conducted using Tukey's HSD to determine exactly where those differences existed. Post hoc testing, $F(6,590) = 27.35$, $p < .001$, partial eta squared=.218, revealed statistically significant differences between parents and students as well as teachers and students in both academic and structural areas, but no differences were noted between teachers and parents in those same areas. However, post hoc testing revealed statistically significant differences between all three groups; parents and teachers, parents and students, as well as teachers and students in the social area.

Students' greatest concern in the academic area was that they do not understand why school requires them to take certain classes. Students', parents', and teachers' had the same perception of expecting students to do well. Furthermore, the results revealed that parents feel their students' classes were harder than what was expected.

Students' greatest concern in the social area is that the teacher cares about them. As noted in the literature review, students possessing a sense of belonging and knowing that adults care about them are a much needed component to the success of any program, definitely middle to high school transitioning programs. Positive responses included the move from middle to high school was not hard and that family and community expected students to make good grades. Parents demonstrated concern with teachers knowing more about students' grades than the students themselves.

Many assumed that teachers and parents would be concerned about their students being around upperclassmen, but that was not the case. In addition, many assumed that students would be worried about bullying, fighting, and being around upperclassmen. However, due to the location of the freshmen building, students are not in close proximity to upperclassmen for an extended amount of time. These are items from the structural

area. Parents, teachers, and students disagreed about students getting lost within a new, unfamiliar environment; however, the results did not support that assumption. Teachers exhibited major concerns regarding students being late to class.

Gender did not show a statistically significant relationship to perceptions, and these results were considered surprising and interesting. Considering the fact that a great deal of research has indicated different thought processes and processing skills, one may hypothesize that females exhibit a completely different perception of education, schools, homework, class work, and course selection. However, Collins, Kenway, and McLeod, (2000) concluded that concern about gender patterns of participation, performance, and outcomes is justified because certain differences do convert into certain disadvantages, but it shows that the ways in which this happens may be more subtle and varied than the research has indicated. The study also noted an argument that there are gender differences in perceptions of the relevance and purposes of schooling, although such arguments are limited with regard to girls because they imply that girls do not connect their schooling to their future paid work. Moreover, the evidence suggested that girls' extended time at school is very much connected to their post-school opportunities. Girls typically attend to personal and social relevance and boys to utility. (Collins et al., 2000).

The freshman academy program was implemented in 2008-2009, but there was no sustainability. The idea had great potential. The concept was even greater, but with budget cuts and new administrators it was just one more innovation that appeared as a great way to assist students in passing all courses, encouraging and motivating students to attend school on a regular basis, and finally requiring them to behave appropriately. The plan was in place and although teachers and administrators worked diligently during the

year of implementation, the program just could not maintain sustainability. The archival data was a tool used in determining the success of the freshman transition academy. The initial year of implementation revealed some unusual information. As the attendance rate decreased, the number of discipline referrals increased, and the number of students failing course(s) decreased. During the year following implementation, the attendance rate remained the same just as the number of students failing a course(s) continued on the downward path.

Explanation for the decrease in attendance is not known. However, the freshman academy principal stated that the increase in discipline referrals appeared to be contributed to the fact that the program required students to make up assignments or tests during the school day or in the after school extended program. However, it should also be reported there was an increase in the newly enrolled freshman class than from the previous year which could have also had an effect on the data.

The discipline referrals increased considerably. Why this copious amount of referrals? He contributed this increase in discipline referrals to the established common system of class rules, procedures, and expectations that were created and established by the faculty of the academy. He further explained that the reason for this influx of referrals is that all faculty members were consistently holding students accountable for all actions, and he would log in all referrals. The majority of the referrals were for tardies and uniform violations, (which unless the student was a repeat offender) a conference would be held with the parent and student. Although administrator/student and administrator/student/parent conferences increased considerably the number of detention, in-school school suspension, and out-of-school suspensions decreased.

The number of students failing a course or courses also decreased. This improvement could solely be contributed to the fact that in freshman academy, teachers worked more closely with the freshman students, the *no failure option* allowed teachers to reteach and retest students while maintaining consistency in daily routine and procedures. Research shows that positive results may not become visible in the first year of implementation, but years two and above will begin to produce positive outcomes (Useem, Neild, & Morrison, 2001). The second year results documented gains in both reading and math with low achieving students reflecting the largest gains (Useem et al., 2001). The findings from this study followed a similar pattern. Course failures by students decreased and discipline increased; however, there was reasonable explanation for the increase and student attendance actually decreased.

In a study by Bowen (2006), the most pronounced improvements in third grade student performance across all proficiency levels were not exhibited until year 6 of implementation. This finding appeared to be consistent with the research indicating that the most pronounced effects of new program implementation may not be observed until the program has been in place for several years. In addition, this finding also supported that implementation timelines may vary according to individual student and school characteristics.

Ladnier-Hicks (2010), conducted a study that included all six elementary schools that eventually feed into the local high school in south Mobile County. Since all six schools are the local high school's feeder schools, the population exhibited very similar demographical information. The study showed improvement in test scores after one year of implementation, in spite of the fact that statistical significance was not revealed.

Additional studies are currently being conducted to determine if these improvements continued throughout the second year of implementation as well. The findings of this study are consistent with Ladnier-Hicks (2010). Although the archival data shows a change during the year of implementation, the following year did not present a change. However, a study conducted in the Philadelphia inner – city schools saw improvement in attendance, discipline rate and course failure rate within two or more years after implementation (National Institute on the Education of At-Risk Students, 1998).

As noted earlier, Patterson High School in Baltimore, Maryland, saw success the following year of implementation (NIEARS, 1998). This certainly was not the case for the school in this study. According to the former principal of the local high school, the first year's impact of the program was that a positive environment for students was established. However, the discipline referrals increased significantly but there was minimal decrease in the number of suspensions. He stated that this increase in discipline referrals may have been a result of the focus on student behavior and higher expectations of appropriate behavior. Academically he states that the student success rate was positively impacted but not to the point that there was an obvious increase caused by the freshman academy. He remained principal during the second year and a more marked positive impact on discipline and grades surfaced. The success of the freshman academy relies heavily on the attitude of the administrator, and after the second year of implementation a new administrator, with a different vision, was assigned to the local high school.

The results of this study are also congruent with literature. The students', teachers', and parents' perceptions in the academic, social and structural areas were

positive. Previous literature provided evidence that transition programs, such as the freshman transition academy are necessary in ensuring an increase in student achievement, decrease in discipline referrals, and an increase in attendance (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). Overall, parents' and teachers' perceptions appeared to agree on what students perceived to be the specific challenges and opportunities that school transitions present to them. At the same time, their views were not identical. It is suspected that this difference reflected their different vantage points on the school transition experience and the different roles that they play in it. The three groups, however, did not perceive that transitions were as equally difficult for students. Teachers and parents perceived it as significantly more difficult as students did. Interestingly, students in this study perceived both transitions as somewhat easy. Parents and teachers did not perceive that the school's discipline procedures were fair whereas students did perceive them as fair.

As I reviewed my findings coupled with those of previous transition research, it appeared that for both research and practice, school transitions can be most usefully conceptualized as temporal phenomena that pose both challenges and opportunities to students in three major areas — academic, social, and structural. Adjustment to a school transition is affected not only by a variety of individual (student) and contextual (e.g., the sending and receiving school, the level of the school) considerations, but also by the focus (i.e., academic, social, procedural) of the transition (Akos, 2002).

The study has a variety of implications for understanding transition issues in this school and across similar school settings within the southern region. The results of this study indicated the need to further implement and evaluate the freshman transition academy throughout the district and the state. Further research is needed on freshman

academy and must be tracked over several years in an effort to establish concrete and extensive data. However, continued implementation of the program must be funded. Possible grant opportunities should be researched by local administrators or even district administrators and secure grants or supplemental funding from outside sources. Continued examination of the students' parents, and teachers' perceptions of transition can provide other districts the necessary data to make informed decisions regarding the development and implementation of transition programs in their respective school.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations to this study do exist. There are population limitations, and data collection limitations. Although this study exhibited adequate sample size (N=300), all participants were associated with one school located in the rural part of the county. The study was sufficient for the purpose of collecting data for the one school. However, the research would have been able to service more schools in the district had it included at least two other schools who were implementing freshman academy. The variable of socioeconomic status as measured by free/reduced lunch was omitted from the questionnaire. The variable of ethnicity was also excluded due to the high percentage of enrollment of Caucasian students. Had it been included in data collection, the researcher could have examined how different socio-economic status affected program implementation and determine if there was a difference in perceptions by race and also by group. Another limitation that occurred was that fact that teachers did not follow directions in distributing and collecting the parent and student questionnaires, teachers were also absent and the substitute was not aware of the directions either. Finally, the fact that the school no longer has a freshman academy is a great limitation. With the

programs no longer in existence, additional research on the researched school's freshman transitional program is virtually impossible. However, there are schools within the district that are in full implementation of the freshman academy; therefore, continued research is a possibility.

Recommendations for Policy or Practice

This study should be used to provide data regarding year one implementation of the freshman academy in a high school in south Mobile County. Limitations should be considered by researchers and administrative personnel while reviewing this study. Policy decisions should not be made based on this study alone, but additional research should be encouraged by the district in order to provide a more accurate portrayal of student achievement outcomes throughout the implementation process. Although the study provided evidence that there is a significantly statistical difference in students, parents, and teachers perceptions of the freshman academy, and there was not a difference in male and female perceptions, prior research conducted by Akos (2002) did confirm that freshman transitions programs were also viewed positively be students, parents and teachers. Student achievement increased but the increase in overall discipline and decrease in attendance did not prove the expected effectiveness of the freshman transition program, but prior literature and studies do demonstrate the increased success rates of the schools in which transitional programs were implemented. In addition, the results of this study should be shared with the system, specifically study participants to provide professional development regarding the implementation process and expected outcomes. This is only one of many studies; there are other studies that are included in the literature review section that demonstrates the positive benefits of a freshman

transition program. Philadelphia city schools witnessed positive results in all areas to include, discipline, attendance and course passage rate (Smith, 2007). Finally, MacIver (1990) found that fewer students were retained in the transition grade when middle school students experienced a high school transition program.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is a lack of research on the effectiveness comprehensive transition programs and long range planning in terms of the actual differences they may make in students' success in and out of school. Therefore, the researcher recommends that this study be replicated to generate longitudinal data and clearly measure what works best for the future of our students.

Follow-up studies with similar population samples should be conducted to reveal specific improvements in student achievement in the students who transition from middle to high school. Both formative and summative assessment data should be analyzed for many more years to determine if any statistically significant difference is revealed. Both increased variety and amount of student outcome data will be available in the near future to not only system administrators, but to instructional personnel due to the district's implementation of the Data Warehouse program which contains all student assessment data in one easily accessible location. Follow-up studies should also be conducted using ethnicity, ELL and socioeconomic status as independent variables. Because of the many myriad directions that freshman transition has taken and because numerous variables are involved, it is evident that more research is needed. In conclusion, future studies including both rural and urban students should be conducted to make the results more generalizable to a variety of populations.

APPENDIX A

FRESHMAN TRANSITIONING ACADEMY QUESTIONNAIRE

PARENT

Please circle the response that reflects your perception of the Freshman Academy Transitioning program, the following terms have been used: Strongly Agree (SA=5); Agree (A=4); Neither Agree nor Disagree (N=3); Disagree (D=2); Strongly Disagree (SD=1).

(Strongly Agree) (Strongly Disagree)

Academic

1. The teacher expects my child to do well in his or her class.

   5 4 3 2 1

2. The teachers' expectations are realistic and reasonable.

   5 4 3 2 1

3. The teacher does not expect my child to do well in his or her class.

   5 4 3 2 1

4. My child's classes are harder than I expected.

   5 4 3 2 1

5. My child's classes require him or her to do a lot more work.

   5 4 3 2 1

6. My child's classes are easier than I expected.

   5 4 3 2 1

7. I understand why the school requires my child to take certain courses/classes.

   5 4 3 2 1

8. The school should not require my child to take certain classes.

   5 4 3 2 1

9. My child has a lot more homework than I expected.

5 4 3 2 1

10. My child has a lot less homework than I expected.

5 4 3 2 1

Social

11. My child's teachers care about him or her.

5 4 3 2 1

12. My child's teachers listen to what he or she has to say.

5 4 3 2 1

13. My child is important to his or her teachers.

5 4 3 2 1

14. My child's teacher knows more about him or her than his or her grades.

5 4 3 2 1

15. Many of my child's friends go to his or her school.

5 4 3 2 1

16. I feel more comfortable because my child's friends are with him or her at school.

5 4 3 2 1

17. It is important to me for my child to be with his or her friends at school.

5 4 3 2 1

18. The move from middle school to high school was difficult for my child.

5 4 3 2 1

19. The move from middle school to high school was easy for my child.

5 4 3 2 1

20. I expect my child to get good grades.

5 4 3 2 1

21. I do not care about how well my child does in school.

5 4 3 2 1

22. I am worried about my child being bullied.

5 4 3 2 1

23. I am worried about my child being around upperclassmen.

5 4 3 2 1

Structural

24. The size of my child's high school makes me uncomfortable.

5 4 3 2 1

25. I worry about my child lost getting lost because of the size of the school.

5 4 3 2 1

26. The size of my child's school does not bother me.

5 4 3 2 1

27. I do not understand my child's schools discipline procedures.

5 4 3 2 1

28. I think my child's high school's discipline procedures are fair.

5 4 3 2 1

29. My child understands how he or she is to behave in high school.

5 4 3 2 1

30. I miss the team's concept in middle school.

5 4 3 2 1

31. I like that my child is isolated from the upperclassmen.

5 4 3 2 1

32. I worry about my child going to lunch without a teacher.

5 4 3 2 1

33. I worry about my child being late for class.

5 4 3 2 1

34. I worry about my child getting lost.

5 4 6 2 1

<u>* Please add any additional comments you would like to share regarding the Freshman Transitional Academy on the back of this questionnaire.</u>

The following demographic information will be coded and used for the purpose of statistical analyses only.
Please check the appropriate response:

A. My child is in the following grade:

1.____ninth 2.____tenth 3. ____other

B. My highest level of education is:

1._____diploma 2._____associate degree 3.____B. S 4.___master's

5. _____Specialist 6._____doctorate 7.___other

C. My gender is

1.____female 2.____male

D. My race is

1._____White 2. _____Black 3._____Hispanic 4._____Asian 5._____other

Please note: By turning in a completed questionnaire, you are agreeing to participate in a voluntary study designed to obtain information regarding teachers' perceptions of the Freshman Transitional Program Your responses will be anonymous and completely confidential.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Yulanda Clinton at 251-635-8605.

APPENDIX B

FRESHMAN TRANSITIONING ACADEMY QUESTIONNAIRE

PARENT

Please circle the response that reflects your perception of the Freshman Academy Transitioning program, the following terms have been used: Strongly Agree (SA=5); Agree (A=4); Neither Agree nor Disagree (N=3); Disagree (D=2); Strongly Disagree (SD=1).

(Strongly Agree) (Strongly Disagree)

Academic

1. The teacher expects my child to do well in his or her class.

   5 4 3 2 1

2. The teachers' expectations are realistic and reasonable.

   5 4 3 2 1

3. The teacher does not expect my child to do well in his or her class.

   5 4 3 2 1

4. My child's classes are harder than I expected.

   5 4 3 2 1

5. My child's classes require him or her to do a lot more work.

   5 4 3 2 1

6. My child's classes are easier than I expected.

   5 4 3 2 1

7. I understand why the school requires my child to take certain courses/classes.

   5 4 3 2 1

8. The school should not require my child to take certain classes.

   5 4 3 2 1

9. My child has a lot more homework than I expected.

   5 4 3 2 1

10. My child has a lot less homework than I expected.

    5 4 3 2 1

Social

11. My child's teachers care about him or her.

5 4 3 2 1

12. My child's teachers listen to what he or she has to say.

5 4 3 2 1

13. My child is important to his or her teachers.

5 4 3 2 1

14. My child's teacher knows more about him or her than his or her grades.

5 4 3 2 1

15. Many of my child's friends go to his or her school.

5 4 3 2 1

16. I feel more comfortable because my child's friends are with him or her at school.

5 4 3 2 1

17. It is important to me for my child to be with his or her friends at school.

5 4 3 2 1

18. The move from middle school to high school was difficult for my child.

5 4 3 2 1

19. The move from middle school to high school was easy for my child.

5 4 3 2 1

20. I expect my child to get good grades.

5 4 3 2 1

21. I do not care about how well my child does in school.

5 4 3 2 1

22. I am worried about my child being bullied.

5 4 3 2 1

23. I am worried about my child being around upperclassmen.

5 4 3 2 1

Structural

24. The size of my child's high school makes me uncomfortable.

5 4 3 2 1

25. I worry about my child lost getting lost because of the size of the school.

5 4 3 2 1

26. The size of my child's school does not bother me.

5 4 3 2 1

27. I do not understand my child's schools discipline procedures

5 4 3 2 1

28. I think my child's high school's discipline procedures are fair.

5 4 3 2 1

29. My child understands how he or she is to behave in high school.

5 4 3 2 1

30. I miss the team's concept in middle school.

5 4 3 2 1

31. I like that my child is isolated from the upperclassmen.

5 4 3 2 1

32. I worry about my child going to lunch without a teacher.

5 4 3 2 1

33. I worry about my child being late for class.

5 4 3 2 1

34. I worry about my child getting lost

5 4 3 2 1

<u>* Please add any additional comments you would like to share regarding the Freshman Transitional Academy on the back of this questionnaire.</u>

The following demographic information will be coded and used for the purpose of statistical analyses only.
Please check the appropriate response:

A. My child is in the following grade:

1.____ninth 2.____tenth 3. ____other

B. My highest level of education is:

1._____diploma 2._____associate degree 3.____B. S

4. ___ master's 5. _____Specialist 6._____doctorate 7.___other

C. My gender is

1.____female 2.____male

D. My race is

1.____White 2. ____Black 3.____Hispanic 4._____Asian 5.____other

Please note: By turning in a completed questionnaire, you are agreeing to participate in a voluntary study designed to obtain information regarding teachers' perceptions of the Freshman Transitional Program Your responses will be anonymous and completely confidential.
If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Yulanda Clinton at 251-635-8605.

APPENDIX C

FRESHMAN TRANSITIONING ACADEMY QUESTIONNAIRE

TEACHER

Please circle the response that reflects your perception of the Freshman Academy Transitioning program, the following terms have been used: Strongly Agree (SA=5); Agree (A=4); Neither Agree nor Disagree (N=3); Disagree (D=2); Strongly Disagree (SD=1).

(Strongly Agree) (Strongly Disagree)

Academic

1. I expect my students' to do well in my class.
   5 4 3 2 1
2. I set realistic and reasonable expectations for my students.
   5 4 3 2 1
3. I do not expect my students to do well in my classes.
   5 4 3 2 1
4. My classes are harder than I expected for my students.
   5 4 3 2 1
5. My classes require students to do a lot more work.
   5 4 3 2 1
6. My classes are easier than expected.
   5 4 3 2 1
7. I understand why the school requires students to take certain courses/classes.
   5 4 3 2 1
8. The school should not require students to take certain classes.
   5 4 3 2 1
9. My students are required to complete a lot more homework than he or she expected.
   5 4 3 2 1
10. My students have a lot less homework than they expected.
    5 4 3 2 1

Social

11. I care about my students.
5 4 3 2 1

12. I listen to what my students have to say.
13.
5 4 3 2 1

14. My students are important to me.
5 4 3 2 1

15. I know more about my students than their grades.
5 4 3 2 1

15. Many of my student's friends go to her school.
5 4 3 2 1

16. I feel more comfortable because my students' friends are with them at school.
5 4 3 2 1

17. It is important to my students to be with their friends at school.
5 4 3 2 1

18. The move from middle school to high school was difficult for my students.
5 4 3 2 1

19. The move from middle school to high school was easy for my students.
5 4 3 2 1

20. I expect my students to get good grades.
5 4 3 2 1

21. I do not care about how well my students do in school.
5 4 3 2 1

22. I am worried about my students being bullied.
5 4 3 2 1

23. I am worried about my students being around upperclassmen.

5 4 3 2 1

Structural

24. The size of my high school makes my students feel uncomfortable.

5 4 3 2 1

25. I worry about my students getting lost because of the size of the school.

5 4 3 2 1

26. The size of the school does not bother my students.

5 4 3 2 1

27. I do not understand my school's discipline procedures.

5 4 3 2 1

28. I think my students' high school's discipline procedures are fair.

5 4 3 2 1

29. My students understand how they are to behave in high school.

5 4 3 2 1

30. I like that my students are isolated from the upperclassmen.

5 4 3 2 1

31. I worry about my students going to lunch without a teacher.

5 4 3 2 1

32. I worry about my students being late for class.

5 4 3 2 1

33. I worry about my students getting lost.

5 4 3 2 1

<u>* Please add any additional comments you would like to share regarding the Freshman Transitional Academy on the back of this questionnaire.</u>

The following demographic information will be coded and used for the purpose of statistical analyses only.
Please check the appropriate response:

I teach the following grade:

A. 1. ____ninth 2.____tenth 3. ____other

My highest level of education is:

B. 1____B. S 2.___master's 3.___specialist
4. _____doctorate 5._____other

My gender is:

C. 1.____female 2.____male

My race is:

D. 1._____White 2. _____Black 3._____Hispanic 4._____Asian
5._____other

Please note: By turning in a completed questionnaire, you are agreeing to participate in a voluntary study designed to obtain information regarding teachers' perceptions of the Freshman Transitional Program Your responses will be anonymous and completely confidential.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact Yulanda Clinton at 251-635-8605.

APPENDIX D

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

CERTIFIED PERSONNEL COVER LETTER

Freshman Academy: Transitioning ninth grade students through the academic and social rigors of the high school experience. Students', parents', and teachers' perceptions.

Dear Participant,

Certified instructional personnel are being asked to complete the attached questionnaire regarding your perception of the *Freshman Academy*. Your participation is ***strictly voluntary*** and is in no way related to your employment status. You have the right to decline or discontinue participation at any point without penalty, prejudice, or consequence. Completion of the questionnaire should take no longer than 10 minutes. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous. All questionnaires will be shredded when the study is completed to ensure confidentiality.

By completing this questionnaire, you are giving consent as a participant for this information to be used for the purposed described above.

If you choose to participate, please place your completed questionnaire in the large envelope that your administrator has placed in your box. In order to thank you for your time and effort, participants may enter a drawing for a $50.00 Wal-Mart gift card. A registration slip is attached to the end of the questionnaire and may be completed and returned with your questionnaire to your administrator.

Should you have any additional questions regarding this study, please contact me at **yclinton@mcpss.com**. I truly appreciate your support of my research efforts.

Sincerely,

Yulanda Clinton, Ed.S.

This project has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, Mississippi 39406-001, (601) 266-6820.

APPENDIX E

MINOR CONSENT FORM

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

RESPONSIBLE RESEARCHER: Yulanda W. Clinton

TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT: Freshman Academy: Transitioning ninth grade students through the academic and social rigors of the high school experience: Students', parents', and teachers' perceptions.

Your son/daughter/guardian is invited to participate in a research study that is investigating Freshman Academy at the local high school.

I understand that:

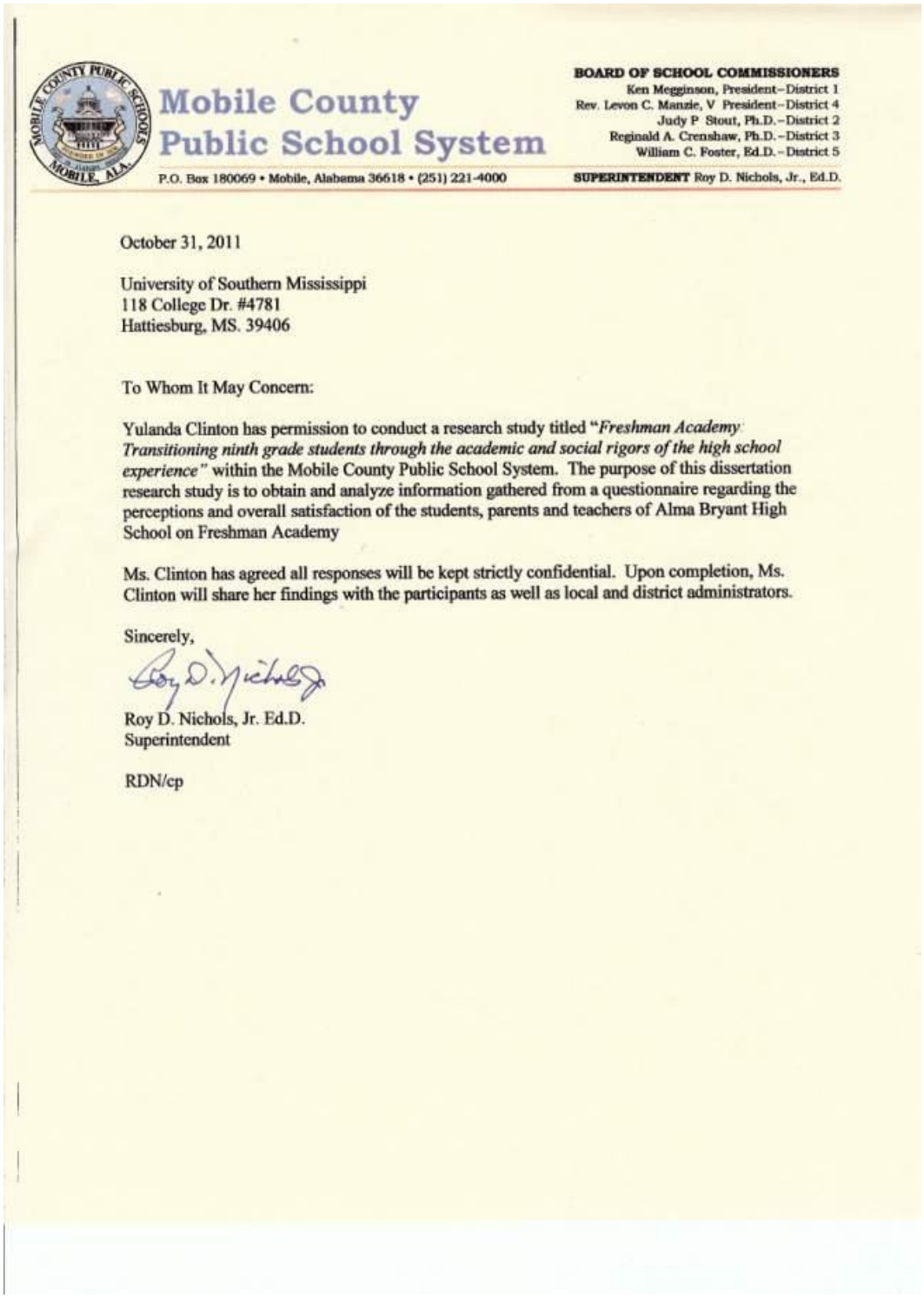
1. My son/daughter/guardian will be asked to read and answer a questionnaire in writing. The questionnaire will take about 15 minutes to complete. The questionnaire will be administered at my child's school, during the homeroom period. No time will be taken away from instruction..
2. No physiological risks are anticipated.
3. There are no discernible benefits to my child, although the results of this study will help expand our knowledge of students' thoughts and perceptions of the Freshman Academy.
4. Although alternative procedures may be used, the present procedure is the most efficient, economical and least time consuming to my son/daughter/ guardian.
5. The collective results of this study may be published, but any information from this study that can be identified with my son/daughter/guardian will remain confidential and anonymous. All published results will be pooled. General results from the individuals participating in the study may be obtained by contacting Yulanda Clinton @ 251-635-8605.
6. My consent is given voluntarily without being coerced. My son/daughter/guardian may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study, and I may withdraw my consent at any time, without prejudice to my relation or my child's relation with USM and the local high school.
7. My son/daughter/guardian may decline to answer any question. He/she may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice to my child's relationship with his or her school/center or future involvement with USM.
8. I have received a copy of this consent form for my file.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE, I HAVE MADE A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT MY SON/DAUGHTER/GUARDIAN MAY PARTICIPATE. MY SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT <u>MY SON/DAUGHTER/GUARDIAN MAY PARTICIPATE</u> AND <u>IS WILLING TO PARTICIPATE</u>.

_____	_____	_____
Date	Print Parent's/Guardian's Name	Print Child's Name
	_____	_____
	Parent's/Guardian's Signature	Child's Signature
	_____	_____
	Relation to Child	Researcher's Signature

APPENDIX F

PERMISSION GRANTED TO CONDUCT STUDY



Mobile County Public School System

P.O. Box 180069 • Mobile, Alabama 36618 • (251) 221-4000

BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS
Ken Megginson, President–District 1
Rev. Levon C. Manzie, V President–District 4
Judy P Stout, Ph.D.–District 2
Reginald A. Crenshaw, Ph.D.–District 3
William C. Foster, Ed.D.–District 5

SUPERINTENDENT Roy D. Nichols, Jr., Ed.D.

October 31, 2011

University of Southern Mississippi
118 College Dr. #4781
Hattiesburg, MS. 39406

To Whom It May Concern:

Yulanda Clinton has permission to conduct a research study titled "*Freshman Academy Transitioning ninth grade students through the academic and social rigors of the high school experience*" within the Mobile County Public School System. The purpose of this dissertation research study is to obtain and analyze information gathered from a questionnaire regarding the perceptions and overall satisfaction of the students, parents and teachers of Alma Bryant High School on Freshman Academy

Ms. Clinton has agreed all responses will be kept strictly confidential. Upon completion, Ms. Clinton will share her findings with the participants as well as local and district administrators.

Sincerely,

Roy D. Nichols, Jr. Ed.D.
Superintendent

RDN/cp

APPENDIX G

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
118 College Drive #5147 | Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
Phone: 601.266.6820 | Fax: 601.266.4377 | www.usm.edu/irb

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits. The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.
- Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: **12011201**
PROJECT TITLE**: Freshman Academy: Transitioning Ninth Grade Students Through the Academic and Social Rigors of the High School Experience and the Students', Parents', and Teachers' Perceptions**
PROJECT TYPE**: Dissertation**
RESEARCHER/S**: Yulanda Clinton**
COLLEGE/DIVISION**: College of Education & Psychology**
DEPARTMENT: **Educational Administration**
FUNDING AGENCY: **N/A**
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION**: Expedited Review Approval**
PERIOD OF PROJECT APPROVAL: **02/07/2012 to 02/06/2013**
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D., Institutional Review Board Chair

APPENDIX H

PARENT COVER LETER

Dear Parent,

I am currently enrolled in the doctoral program at The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg, Ms., and am in the process of conducting research for my dissertation. The study is entitled Freshman Academy: Transitioning ninth grade students through the academic and social rigors of the high school experience: Students', parents' and teachers' perceptions. This study has been approved by Dr. Roy Nichols, superintendent of Mobile County Public School System and the principal of the local high school. Your son or daughter is also invited to participate in this study.

I am requesting your written consent to allow your son or daughter/guardian to participate. All freshmen will anonymously complete a 2-page questionnaire. The questionnaire will be completed during homeroom and the survey process should take no longer than 15 minutes.

Due to the nature of the study, I am also requesting your voluntary participation. The participation of the student, parent or guardian would benefit this research. Your participation would involve the anonymous completion of a 3-page questionnaire, to be completed in your own home, and should take no longer than 20 minutes.

The *individual* results of this study will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous to all parties, including myself, and child's academic institution. The *pooled* data results will be utilized for this dissertation only. The school/center administration has granted permission for this study. Neither the school nor the individual participants will incur any costs.

Your approval to allow your son, daughter, or guardian to participate, along with your consent to participate in the study will be greatly appreciated. There are two forms that require your signature, a minor consent form and a parent consent form. I have provided two copies of each form. Please sign one copy of each and return them by your student. The second copy is for your records. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or require additional information at 251-635-8605 or yclinton4@bellsouth.net.

Sincerely,

Yulanda W. Clinton, Ed.S.

APPENDIX I

ORAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Dear Participant,

My name is Yulanda West Clinton, and I am employed at Alma Bryant High School in Irvington, Alabama. Under the supervision of Dr. Rose McNeese of the University of Southern Mississippi, I am completing a doctoral dissertation entitled ***Freshman Academy: Transitioning ninth grade students through the academic and social rigors of the high school experience and the students', parents' and teachers' perceptions.***

This study is designed to determine if the failure rate decreased, attendance rate increased and the number of discipline referrals decreased as a result of the implementation of the Freshman Academy at a local high school, attempt to identify predictors that may improve future student performance, and obtain and analyze information obtained from a questionnaire regarding the perceptions and overall satisfaction of the students', parents and teachers involved.

Students, parents and teachers of a local high school are being asked to complete a short questionnaire regarding the *Freshman Academy*. Participants should have had some experience, or acquired some knowledge, regarding Freshman Academy. Your participation is strictly voluntary. You have the right to decline or discontinue participation at any point without penalty, prejudice, or consequence. Completion of the questionnaire should take no longer than 15 minutes. All of your individual responses will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous.

The analyzed data collected from the questionnaire will be shared with the participants and interested local and district administrators. The results of the data analyses may also potentially be shared with the Alabama State Department of Education officials. In addition, the results of the study may be submitted for presentation at a conference and/or publication in a professional journal. By completing this questionnaire, you are giving consent as a participant for this information to be used for the purposes described above.

If you choose to participate, please place your completed questionnaire in the large envelope that your reading coach has placed by the door. Each participating teacher is eligible to enter their name in a drawing to win a $50.00 Wal-Mart gift card as an incentive to participate and to thank them for their time and effort. Participants can enter the drawing by listing their name and contact information on the slip of paper attached to the end of the questionnaire and return it to the Title one facilitator.

I would like to thank you in advance for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Yulanda W. Clinton, Ed. S.

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