Administrators', Counselors', and Teachers' Opinions Regarding the Impact of Freshman Academies, Schools-Within-Schools, and Ninth Grade Schools as It Relates to Effective Transitioning

Robyn Suzanne Killebrew

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ADMINISTRATORS’, COUNSELORS’, AND TEACHERS’ OPINIONS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF FRESHMAN ACADEMIES, SCHOOLS WITHIN SCHOOLS, AND NINTH GRADE SCHOOLS, AS IT RELATES TO EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONING

by

Robyn Suzanne Killebrew

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate School and the Department of Educational Leadership and School Counseling at The University of Southern Mississippi in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

ADMINISTRATORS’, COUNSELORS’, AND TEACHERS’ OPINIONS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF FRESHMAN ACADEMIES, SCHOOLS WITHIN SCHOOLS, AND NINTH GRADE SCHOOLS, AS IT RELATES TO EFFECTIVE TRANSITIONING

by Robyn Suzanne Killebrew

August 2016

The purpose of this study was to determine whether administrators, counselors, and teachers believe that implementing freshman academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools is an effective way to transition ninth graders into high school. This study included an introduction and a review of literature that discussed the following: adolescent years, transition from 8th to 9th grade, drop-out prevention, school reform in secondary education, professional learning communities, the freshman academy, and a conclusion. This study was also comprised with a methodology section, research results, conclusions, recommendations for policy makers and practitioners, and recommendations for future research.

The questionnaire for this study was developed by the researcher. The questionnaire focused on the areas of demographics, academics, attendance, discipline, school culture, transitioning, socio-economic status, and instructional staff. Data was collected from seven different schools in Mississippi who currently house freshman academies, school-within-schools, and ninth grade schools. A total of 85 questionnaires were completed with 10 of those being administrators, 12 being counselors, and 63 comprised of teachers.
This study specifically examined administrators’, counselors’, and teachers’ opinions regarding the impact freshman academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools as it relates to effective transitioning. Results illustrated that there was a significant difference in the opinions of administrators, counselors, and teachers in the areas of academic performance, reduced discipline referrals, school culture, transitioning from eighth to ninth grade, and the morale on the staff of the school. However, this study yielded a non-significant relationship among the opinions of administrators, counselors, and teachers concerning the implementation of a freshmen academy on the drop-out rate and improving students from a low socio-economic class. Policymakers and practitioners were encouraged to look at freshman data, collaborate with middle school and high school teachers, and place their best teachers in the ninth grade to ensure a smooth transition for all freshmen.
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DEDICATION

I would like to start by thanking God for allowing me this opportunity. Without His strength and will to succeed, this would not have been possible. To all of my close friends, Kayla Cooley, Alison Wiggers, and Leann Williams, who have understood me to say, “I can’t! I have to work on my dissertation this weekend,” thank you for believing in me and supporting me on this fanatical journey. I love you all. To Cathy Broadway, the one who gave me a chance in administration, thank you for allowing me the opportunity of a lifetime, for always being my number one supporter, and putting things in place to help me strive. To Meridith Bang, you have helped mold and shape me to the person I am today. Thank you for giving me a chance to work alongside you, to be an ear in times of frustration, and a voice in times of need. I am a better person because of you.

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And last but certainly not least, I dedicate this to my mom and dad. Mom, you are the reason I went into education. I personally witnessed the lives you touched on a daily basis. I can only hope to make the same difference in the lives of my students. Dad, you used your passion and love for sports to teach me the meaning of work ethic, the will to never quit, and the understanding of how to handle and persevere through pressure. Both of you have always inspired me to be the best that I can be. I love you so much and will always be blessed to call you mom and dad.
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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

More and more pressure is being placed on schools, teachers, and students to produce higher graduation rates. According to the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) website, the definition of a graduation rate is “the number of students who graduate in four years from a school with a ‘regular high school diploma’ divided by the number of students entered four years earlier as first-time ninth graders, with adjustments of deaths, emigration, and transfers in and out” (Mississippi Public Schools Accountability Standards, 2014). A “regular high school diploma” is the standard diploma that is fully aligned with the state’s academic and content standards. Exceptions are not made for those students on occupational diploma, certificate of attendance, GED, etc. MDE is currently challenging schools to increase the number of students on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) who graduate with a regular high school diploma within four years (Mississippi Public Schools Accountability Standards, 2014).

According to Fulk (2003), the ninth grade year is a pivotal year where students often find themselves lost and in survival mode. During the ninth grade year students begin to earn Carnegie units towards graduation (Fulk, 2003). The courses ninth grade students are required to take tend to be some of the toughest and most rigorous courses a student takes in high school (Smith, Akos, Lim, & Wiley, 2008). Smith et al. (2008) conclude that unlike what they experienced in middle school, students also have the pressure of passing state mandated tests and other exit examinations required to graduate.

Fritzer and Herbst (1996) claim that ninth grade students have the lowest grade point average, resulting in the majority of failing grades and the highest number of discipline referrals. According to Black (2004), 25% of students who fail their ninth
grade year are retained for another year. This is the reason ninth grade has the highest enrollment in high schools (Fritzer & Herbst, 1996). Kennelly and Monrad (2007) reported a study conducted at John Hopkins University that concluded 40% of ninth graders who are enrolled in schools with the highest dropout rates not only repeat the ninth grade, but only 10 to 15% of those students complete graduation requirements. Therefore, freshman statistics are of great concern for most high schools.

McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) claim that Freshman Academies can be unique and can come in many physical forms. The most common are centers, separate wings, schools-within-schools, houses, or a separate ninth grade school. Regardless of their physical form, all Freshman Academies have the same goals, which are to separate the freshman from the upperclassman, to help ease the transition to high school, and to produce more successful ninth grade students (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010).

Because of the separation, students involved in Freshman Academies have more structure allowing for more individual attention from their teachers. Those students who are involved in a Freshman Academy have a better chance of acquainting themselves with the rigor of the high school curriculum and maturing more quickly than those students who are not involved in a Freshman Academy (Reents, 2002).

Positives of the Freshman Academy include higher attendance rates, lower discipline referrals, increased teacher morale, and greater parental involvement. Students also see an increase in academic success and scores on standardized tests, a decrease in failure rates, and fewer expulsions (McIntosh & White, 2006). Another positive aspect includes implementing a mission that focuses on the philosophy of the academy alone which helps to meet the unique needs of the freshman class (Clark & Hunley, 2007).
Clark and Hunley (2007) indicated that administrators and counselors need to develop a creative schedule in order to have a successful Freshman Academy. One reason creativity in scheduling is needed is to allow teachers within the academy the flexibility to collaborate during a common planning time once a week to discuss upcoming activities, projects, curriculum, student concerns, and state test preparation (Clark & Hunley, 2007). Ensuring the curriculum is interesting and relevant is another key element in developing a smooth transition for incoming freshman (Cook, Fowler, & Harris, 2008).

The Freshman Academy model has been proven to be effective and successful when a positive culture in the school is created (Jerald, 2006). Jerald (2006) states that when one walks into a positive school environment, the exciting and vibrant atmosphere can be felt immediately. Jerald further claims that students feel confident in such an environment which in turn enables them to produce better results. When the culture is positive, teachers feel less stress and gain more respect from their students. Jerald writes that a positive school culture not only decreases discipline referrals, gang involvement, and violent behaviors but also develops a set of values to guide students and teachers to one common purpose — student success.

Many Freshman Academies have reported great success. An example is the Philadelphia Public School System. According to Useem, Neild, and Morrison (2001), prior to the implementation of the Freshman Academy, the Philadelphia Public School System had only 40 to 50% of their students graduating in four years. These poor results were alarming and, consequently, created an opportunity to create a Freshman Academy. The goal for the administrative team was to develop a group of individuals who were
committed to their students’ growth both academically and personally. The staff’s first and main goal was to increase attendance rates. Within two years of implementing the Freshman Academy, the school attendance rate improved by 15%. Additionally, the school had significant decreases in arrests and suspensions (Useem et al., 2001).

A high school in Scott County, Kentucky, revealed that 45% of their incoming freshmen failed at least one ninth-grade class (Smith et al., 2008). To resolve this problem, the school decided to implement a freshman academy by providing the freshmen with more attention and their own space. The school found positive results. Smith et al. (2008) reported students’ test scores on the National Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills increased by six points in math per student, which was above the national average. Furthermore, the school’s freshmen failures declined from 17% to 6%, and their discipline referrals also declined (Smith et al., 2008).

Reents (2002) reported the Aldine School District in Houston, Texas (enrollment 53,000 students) created four ninth grade centers. The reason for the centers was to help ensure that incoming freshmen would not get lost in their enormous high schools. (In 1999, the high schools in the Aldine School District reported 1,900 to 2,300 students in tenth through twelfth grades.) The superintendent of the Aldine School District, Nadine Kujawa, conveyed that ninth grade students became more familiar with the rigors of the curriculum due to the separation from the upperclassmen. Reents also claimed that more students were earning credit towards graduation; as a result, they were promoted to tenth grade. The superintendent declared that discipline referrals decreased, attendance rates increased, and their state test scores rose resulting in a “recognized” rating from the Texas Education Agency (Reents, 2002).
Scott (2006) stated that the majority of Freshman Academies are successful. However, some students feel that a negative component comes with a Freshman Academy. Scott proclaims that most of the concerns focus on social aspects such as sports activities and school dances. Freshman students may feel isolated from upperclassmen and even relate that feeling of isolation to still being in middle school (Scott, 2006).

Scott (2006) reported that the Sarasota School District in Florida experimented with Freshman Academies but decided to eliminate them. This district stated that students were experiencing two freshman years, one in the Academy and the other during their tenth grade year. The other negative component the district discovered was that rivalries were developing among the teachers. The district found that ninth grade teachers were committed to only the ninth grade and not the entire school (Scott, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

More and more pressure is being placed on Mississippi public high schools to increase graduation rates. Currently, the Mississippi Department of Education and the Office of Accreditation and Accountability states that in the school year 2015-2016, graduation rates will represent 20% of the total accountability model – 200 points, out of a possible 1,000 points (Mississippi Public Schools Accountability Standards, 2014, p. 24). Therefore, it is critical for public high schools to put an emphasis on reducing dropout rates and increasing graduation rates. Statistics conducted by McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) proclaim that freshman have the lowest grades, the lowest attendance rate, and the highest number of discipline referrals than any other high school grade level. The Mississippi State Board of Education and the Accountability Task Force had set a
goal to reduce the dropout rate by 13% in the year 2015 (Mississippi Public Schools Accountability Standards, 2014, xi). Currently, the Mississippi State Board of Education has established the following vision:

To create a world-class education system that gives students the knowledge and skills to be successful in college and the workforce and flourish as parents and citizens. To do so, the state must provide leadership through the development of policy and accountability systems so that all students are prepared to compete in the global community (Mississippi Public Schools Accountability Standards, 2014, xi).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to determine whether principals, counselors, and teachers believed Freshman Academies or schools-within-schools are an effective way of transitioning ninth graders into mainstream high school. A quantitative research design was used to understand the differences in beliefs of principals, teachers, and counselors. The supporting research questions for this study targeted academics, attendance, and discipline. Other areas considered were school culture, transitioning from eighth to ninth grade, socio-economic status, teacher isolation and teacher moral. In order to explore this study and the variables identified, the following research questions were examined:

1. Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve academics and increase subject area test scores?

2. Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will increase attendance rates?
3. Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce ninth grade discipline referrals?

4. Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will encourage a positive school culture?

5. Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy is an effective way of transitioning students into ninth grade?

6. Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve those who come from a low socio-economic status?

7. Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce teacher isolation and increase teacher morale?

Research Hypotheses

The hypotheses related to the research questions were as follows:

H1: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve academics and increase subject area test scores.

H2: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will increase attendance rates.
H3: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce ninth grade discipline referrals.

H4: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will encourage a positive school culture.

H5: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy is an effective way of transitioning students into ninth grade.

H6: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve those who come from a low socio-economic status.

H7: Administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce teacher isolation and increase teacher morale.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used extensively in the course of this study and are defined particularly for the context of this research.

Accountability – results in the classroom, such as student growth and achievement (Mississippi Public Schools Accountability Standards, 2014).

A Nation at Risk – in 1983, Ronald Reagan and Secretary of Education T.H. Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education to conduct research and investigate the quality of education in the United States (Center for the Study of Mathematics Curriculum, 2005). The document they produced, A Nation at Risk: The
*Imperative for Educational Reform* proclaimed that the United States’ educational system was at risk and all children, regardless of race or economic background, deserved to receive a high quality education (Burdick, 2012).

*At-risk* – a student who is likely to fail or drop out of high school based on academic failure or discipline problems (Hawkins & Weis, 1985).

*Collaboration* – teachers working together to share information about respective schools, classes, and core curriculum (Hertzog, Morgan, Diamond, & Walker, 1996).

*Drop out* – a student who does not graduate from high school (Mishel & Roy, 2007).

*Freshman Academy* – centers, separate wings, schools within schools, houses, or separate ninth grade schools. Goals are to separate the freshman from the upperclassman, to help ease the transition to high school, and to produce more successful ninth grade students (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010).

*Low Socioeconomic* – students who come from poor backgrounds.

*Middle School* – student’s in sixth-eighth grade.

*Ninth grade* – a student’s first year of high school.

*Ninth Grade School* – a school all to itself, housing only ninth graders.

*No Child Left Behind* – this act was created to close the achievement gaps among students, make schools more responsible for their students’ education (Randolph & Wilson-Younger, 2012), hold schools responsible for hiring highly qualified teachers, and producing school improvement plans for their state boards of education (Beaver, 2004).
**Parental Involvement** – parents who are actively involved in their child’s education (Mac Iver, 1990).

**Professional Learning Community** – a group of professional educators who work together to bring about change to their school (Teague & Anfara, 2012).

**School-within-a-school** – a high school that separates ninth graders in a building or separate wing of the school.

**Transition** – “process during which institutional and social factors influence which students’ educational careers are positively or negatively affected by a movement between organizations” (Schiller, 1999, pp. 216-217).

**Vertical Alignment Team** – a group of educators consisting of administrators, counselors, and teachers who collaborate to measure and align the curriculum (Mizelle, 2005).

**Delimitations of the Study**

There were several delimitations to this study. Participants for this particular study were limited to administrators, counselors, and teachers who work in the state of Mississippi. Also, the only schools that participated currently work within a ninth grade academy or schools that isolate freshmen from the high school population.

**Assumptions of the Study**

It was assumed that all participants in this study answered questions accurate and honest while completing the questionnaire. It was assumed that all participants in the study have a good understanding of Freshman Academies or schools-within-schools. Finally, it will be assumed that participants will complete the questionnaire without fear of potential retaliation for their responses.
Justification of the Study

Effective ways of transitioning ninth graders into high school have been researched for many years. Researchers have sought to determine the positives and negatives of isolating freshman from the remaining high school population. This information in this study is exceptionally pertinent because it provided an insight as to whether administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their opinions that isolating freshman in a Freshman Academy or schools-within-school improves freshman performance in areas such as academics, attendance, discipline, school culture, effective transitioning, teacher isolation, and teacher morale. This study allowed for all three groups to understand and see one another’s beliefs of a Freshman Academy. This study allowed for other school districts who are implementing a Freshman Academy to learn from the data provided as to the effectiveness of the Freshman Academy.
CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of literature concerning perceptions regarding the impact of Freshman Academies, Schools-Within-Schools, and Ninth Grade Schools will be divided into several distinct sections. The first section will discuss problem behaviors encountered during students’ middle school years. The second section will discuss the transition process from 8th to 9th grade. In this section, academic and environmental transitions are discussed along with transitional support programs and students’ perceptions. The third section of the literature review will reveal a history of the dropout crisis in the United States, early warning signs of who drops out of high school and why, dropout prevention strategies to prevent students from dropping out, and the cost to the United States in lost wages, taxes, and productivity. The fourth section will discuss school reform strategies. In this section, the reader will find reasons school reform is necessary along with different reform models and strategies. The fifth section of the literature review will address the definition and purpose of a professional learning community (PLC). In this section, the reader will become familiar with the roles administrators, teachers, families, and communities play in a PLC. Barriers of PLCs, along with a study from an Ohio High School, are also discussed. The final section will expose the reader to a ninth grade academy. In this section, statistics are reported, along with the positives and negatives of the implementation. The goal of this chapter is to provide an overview of the many components to consider regarding freshman academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools.
Adolescent Years

Problem Behavior

Problem behaviors during adolescence have become a national concern (Dryfoos, 1990). According to Dryfoos (1990), 31.5% of eighth graders have used alcohol, 26.2% have smoked cigarettes, and 44.2% have participated in a physical fight within the last year. Many eighth graders have also been involved in truancy, bullying, theft, and vandalism (Dryfoos, 1990). Although students who come from low income homes and those with dysfunctional families are at great risk, a considerable number of adolescents eventually engage in some sort of problem behavior which places them at risk for not performing well in school (Feldman & Elliot, 1990).

Behavior problems for adolescents are correlated with a host of health concerns and social outcomes such as school failure, jail time, addiction, sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, injury, and death (Feldman & Elliott, 1990). These problems are extremely rare prior to middle school but increase dramatically during adolescence when the child reaches middle school (Simons-Morton, Crump, Haynie, & Saylor, 1999). Bachman et al. (2008) revealed that less than 10% of sixth graders have used tobacco, but 30% of eighth graders and 70% of eleventh graders have participated in tobacco use. They also found that only 5% of sixth graders had consumed alcohol, and the percentage increased to over 30% by eighth grade. These statistics reveal significant changes in delinquent behavior from ages 10-14 (Bachman et al., 2008).

Several modifiable risk factors for problem behaviors exist. These factors include poor social skills, failure in school, lack of parental guidance, and negative attitudes (Steinberg, 2007). Peer affiliation can also be a risk factor as young adolescent behavior
is often consistent with that of their friends (Kandel, Simcha-Fagan, & Davies, 1986). Adolescents whose families set high expectations, are supportive, and are involved in their lives are at a lower risk of engaging in problem behaviors than those whose parents do not set high expectations, are not supportive, and are not involved in their lives (Steinberg, 2007).

A lack of parental involvement combined with low academic achievement by students compounds the problem adolescents face as they transition from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school. Students who are academically and socially deficient encounter challenges as they transition as well (Seidman, Allen, Aber, Mitchell, &Feinman, 1994). That is, the transition is notably difficult for those students who have a hard time socializing, have organization and skill deficiencies, and do not participate in extracurricular activities. Often times, these are the same students who rebel against school rules, show disrespect to those in authority, struggle academically, and stay in discipline trouble (Simons-Morton et al., 1999).

Other than school, very few programs are designed for middle school students. Participation in youth sports and other extracurricular programs usually decline after elementary school (Smith, 1991). Therefore, the school may be the main source of opportunity outside the family where adolescents can be directed and shaped. Consequently, becoming involved in academic and extracurricular school activities, increasing motivation for learning, and decreasing student misconduct are great innovations that middle schools should consider implementing (Simons-Morton et al., 1999). Adolescents who get off to a difficult start in middle school are often at high risk
for not succeeding academically and becoming discipline problems once they enter high school (Hawkins & Weis, 1985).

**Transition from 8th to 9th Grade**

*Academic and Environmental Transitions*

The transition from middle school to high school can be very emotional and academically challenging for students (Reents, 2002). Reents (2002) stated that without proper transition programs in place, schools risk ninth grade students plummeting academically. Even though ninth graders look forward to their high school experience, they often wonder if other students will make fun of or badger them, if they will get lost in their new school, if their class work and homework will be more rigorous and challenging, and if their teachers will take time and assist them as they may need (Mizelle, 2005). On a positive note, Mizelle (2005) claims that students are excited about the possibility of making new friends, warranting more choices and freedom, and participating in extracurricular activities that are associated with high school.

School transitions can play a major role in the development of students’ decision making and can serve as a milestone which can direct them in a number of ways (Clinton, 2012). According to Schiller (1999), academic transition is 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” (pp. 216-217). These two statements are similar in many ways. Both statements reference the social factors and movement of students from middle school to high school while implying the shared responsibility in ensuring a smooth transition from eighth to ninth grade (Clinton, 2012).
Along with a smooth transition, Donegan (2008) claimed that a student’s ninth grade year is crucial in terms of academic achievement and the adjustment to the high school culture. He stated there are more failures in ninth grade than any other year, ninth graders have the highest number of discipline referrals and number of absences, and the dropout rate peaks between the eighth and ninth grade year (Donegan, 2008). Statistics from Kaufman, Alt, and Chapman (2001) asserted that 5% of high school ninth graders will drop out of school each year, and 10% will drop out if they are from low-income families. If this trend does not change, one in seven students will not graduate from high school (Children’s Defense Fund, 2004). Therefore, successful transition programs may be the key to a ninth grader having a more successful year.

Students who have the opportunity to experience a full transition program from eighth to ninth grade are less likely to drop out of school as opposed to those students who experience no transition period at all (Smith, 1997). Kerr (2002) concluded that there was little support available for incoming freshmen who enter large high schools. He determined that in most large high schools incoming freshman get lost in the shuffle and have to fend for themselves. This challenge is even more difficult for ninth grade students who are enrolled in school districts that encompass a variety of elementary and middle school buildings (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005).

Donegan (2008) conducted a study that revealed that the lowest student-to-teacher ratio was among the 12th grade classes and the highest student-to-teacher ratio was among the ninth grade classes. According to Donegan, this should ring an alarm bell if the ninth grade is the make or break year for students. He found that the reason for this was due to the seniority system, “the longer you’re in the building, the better students you get”
(Donegan, 2008, p. 56). He also asked several principals to identify the top ten teachers in their building. He found that a high number of these teachers were teaching upperclassmen or honors classes (Donegan, 2008). If the freshman year is the make or break year for students, why are the best teachers educating older and more advanced students? If the ninth grade is the linchpin year, administrators should rethink their teacher assignments and place some of their best teachers within the ninth grade (Donegan, 2008).

*Transitional Support Programs*

Successful transition programs from the eighth to ninth grade do not occur overnight, within a week, a month, or even through a single program. The transition requires redesigning the culture in high schools and classrooms (Donegan, 2008). Transition programs are likely to work well if administrators have complete support from the staff itself. This support begins with the teachers (Smith, 1997). Teachers who are clear in explaining their expectations to students, who genuinely care, who are easy to relate to, and who can differentiate the curriculum are more likely to have success in teaching ninth grade students (Butts & Cruzeiro, 2005). Butts and Cruzeiro (2005) also suggest that these teachers, with the help of the administration, should collaborate to find ways to make classes interesting so that students will want to attend school. The administration should assist in providing professional development to teachers to ensure effective instruction. Collaborating and peer coaching among teachers are additional examples of ways to improve instruction (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2004). In order to ensure freshman success, principals need to bridge the rigor gap in addition to assigning top teachers to educate ninth grade students.
Belcher and Hatley (1994) state that a more demanding and supportive middle school experience is critical in ensuring a smooth transition for ninth grade students. “Students understand intuitively and from experience that middle school teachers often cut them too much slack, neither challenging them to meet high standards nor teaching them how to study on their own” (Mizelle, 1995, p. 57). Research found by Mizelle (2005) states that when middle school students are challenged, they will respond in such ways that positively affect both their middle school and high school performance. Mizelle reported that the staff at George Fox Middle School in Maryland implemented a special curriculum to serve 44 eighth graders who were failing or at risk of failing. The implementation was to help better prepare their students for high school. The staff integrated math and science for one period and language arts and social studies for another period. They incorporated project based learning along with reading and writing into the curriculum. The administration at the middle school noticed an increase in test scores on the eighth grade state assessments and decreased discipline referrals. The principal at the district’s high school confirmed the success of the program by stating that the incoming freshmen were the most well-prepared ninth graders his faculty had ever observed (Mizelle, 2005).

Effective transition programs are also a critical element in ensuring ninth graders’ success. These programs are designed to help keep students in school and on track to graduate with their cohort group (Mizelle, 2005). Information such as providing students with policies and procedures about the high school, demonstrating ways parents can get involved in the high school, offering student support options, and furnishing opportunities for teachers at the middle school and high school to vertically align the
curriculum are important ways to ensure students are successful in high school (Mac Iver, 1990).

Parental involvement is often another crucial element for high school success. Students have a greater chance of being successful when parents are active in their transition from middle school to high school (Mac Iver, 1990). According to Cooper (1999), parent involvement leads to higher grades, improved test scores, better attendance, more positive attitudes and behavior, and higher graduation rates. He concludes that parents tend to be less involved in their child’s education once they reach the ninth grade. Consequently, it is critical for the middle school and high school to work together to keep parents involved in both the transition process and their child’s high school career (Cooper, 1999). High school educators can make this possible by inviting parents and students to meet with the counselors to discuss schedules and graduation tracks, to set up an appointment for the parent and student to visit and tour the high school, to invite them to come and spend a day at the high school and experience student life, and to educate parents in ways they can be involved in developing transition activities for incoming freshman (Mizelle, 2005).

Collaboration among middle school and high school administrators and teachers is another crucial component to ensure a smooth transition from eighth grade to ninth grade. These individuals must work together and share information about their respective schools, classes, and core curriculum (Hertzog et al., 1996). Mizelle (2005) suggested that the vertical alignment team, consisting of teachers, counselors, and administrators, meet to measure and align the curriculum. This gives members from both schools a
better understanding of what is being taught at and the expectations of each level (Mizelle, 2005).

Student Perceptions

Ninth grade students have reported that teachers at the high school level demand higher expectations and give more homework than their middle school teachers (Letrello & Miles, 2003). Therefore, decisions students make with regard to what courses to take and what extracurricular activities to be involved in will impact their future decision making about college (Mizelle, 2005). Hertzog et al. (1996) claim that due to ninth graders’ lack of experienced decision making, the high school environment may cause these students to develop a more negative view of themselves. That is, they may feel less competent to handle the academic and social demands of high school. Likewise, although they understand the importance of managing their time wisely, ninth grade students have a hard time studying effectively (Hertzog et al., 1996). Furthermore, these struggling students may not feel that high school teachers are available to help them (Hertzog et al., 1996). Mizelle (2005) acknowledged that “in school settings where students continue to feel stressed, alone, and incompetent, their sense of self-worth may plummet, their grades may drop, and they may stop attending school regularly and eventually drop out” (p. 56).

Despite the negative feelings some ninth graders may have towards high school, it is possible for these adolescents to succeed. According to Mizelle (2005), it takes a team of administrators, teachers, parents, and students – not just a short freshman orientation prepared by most high schools – in order to ensure ninth grade success. Support
programs that specifically address the transition period throughout students' middle school careers are needed (Mizelle, 2005).

Hertzog and Morgan (1999) discuss five transition activities which function as support programs that middle school students find most beneficial:

Spring orientation – the administration team from the high school meets with the incoming ninth graders and their parents to discuss high school procedures and answer any questions.

Student shadowing – eighth graders are allowed to shadow the ninth graders at the high school for one day.

Student visitations – students are allowed to spend a day getting a tour of the high school and are allowed to ask questions about any concerns they may have.

Beginning of school orientation – all incoming freshman receive their schedules and have an opportunity to tour their classes.

Study skills or time management classes – students are allowed to take classes offered during the summer before their ninth grade year. (p. 37)

Students’ need for support should not end with the beginning of the school year but should continue throughout the year. Monthly meetings with the administration and freshman study skills programs are ways to help freshmen transition during the school year (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). Cushman (2006) interviewed ninth grade students after they had attended one month of high school, and the students gave four suggestions that could have made their transition into ninth grade more comfortable. The first suggestion shared was to have high school students speak to eighth graders and discuss the expectations of the ninth grade. These students also suggested that the high school
students could write letters to each eighth grader and discuss some of the expectations of high school (Cushman, 2006).

The second suggestion was to integrate skills for high school success in the middle school (Cushman, 2006). For example, Cushman (2006) stated by giving eighth grade students more tasks, responsibilities, and expectations, the students are encouraged to become more mature. This establishes a foundation and understanding of what is expected of them as a high school student (Cushman, 2006).

The third suggestion was to teach and encourage ninth grade students to make better connections with adults (Cushman, 2006). Students expressed that middle school teachers like to use a “scare” tactic when discussing high school rather than just stating the facts: high school students have a heavier work-load, and the content is possibly a little harder than middle school (Cushman, 2006). By connecting with a teacher about the realities of high school, upcoming freshmen replace fear with knowledge.

The fourth and final suggestion was to provide summer bridge programs for all eighth grade students (Cushman, 2006). These programs may include involving freshmen in summer athletic practices, summer school classes, or even clubs and organizations around the school (Cushman, 2006). According to the interview by Cushman (2006), implementing the previous four suggestions will enable ninth graders to feel more comfortable in their first year of high school which, in turn, will ensure a more productive year.

The middle school to high school transition can be a major turning point for students. While some students may continue to face academic struggles, others will rise to the new challenges set before them if the proper transition programs are put into place
(Mizelle, 2005). Mizelle (2005) reminds educators to understand that a successful transition to high school starts at the middle school level. If the middle school and high school collaborate, incoming freshmen’s start to high school can be an enormous success (Mizelle, 2005).

Drop-Out Prevention

*The Drop-Out Crisis*

Every year, United States high school educators combat a dropout crisis (Sparks, Johnson, & Akos, 2010). Recent studies show that only seven out of ten students in the United States will graduate with a high school diploma (Stillwell & Hoffman, 2008; Swanson, 2007). The remaining students who do not graduate face increasingly higher unemployment rates, incarceration rates, and overall lower lifetime earnings (Sum, Khatiwada, Mclaughlin, & Palma, 2009). In addition, many dropouts rely on food stamps, housing assistance, and Medicaid to survive (Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2007). A report conducted by the Alliance for Education Excellence (2006) indicated that 75% of inmates in state prisons, 59% of inmates in federal prisons, and 69% of local jail inmates were high school dropouts.

Mishel and Roy’s (2007) findings were similar to those indicated by Stillwell and Hoffman (2008) and Swanson (2007). As previously stated, one third of students in America will not graduate from high school. Three-fourths of the White population will graduate, but only one-half of African Americans and Hispanics will graduate from high school (Mishel & Roy, 2007). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2001) discovered that 21% of students who drop out do so before the 9th grade, 17% between the 9th and 10th grade, 23% between the 10th and 11th grade, and 39% between
the 11th and 12th grade. The NCES research also indicated that 56% of high school dropouts were employed, 11% were unemployed, and 33% had never been assigned to the workforce. These numbers are quite alarming since the Educational Testing Service predicted in 2006 that 80% of all new jobs would require a college education (Cooney, Moore, & Bottoms, 2002).

**Identifying High School Drop-Outs and Why**

Sparks et al. (2010) concluded that in order for schools to identify possible dropouts, school staffs must know who will drop out and why. Many times, demographic factors are used to identify those students who are potential dropouts. Sparks et al. stated that demographic observations, though useful, have a potential to lead to stereotyping, delivering improper services, and rejecting opportunities for certain students. Even though it is well known that African-American and Hispanic students are more likely to drop out, many additional factors play a key part (Sparks et al., 2010). The 2004 Dropout Prevention Act has identified students with poor attendance, low grade point averages, low standardized test scores, low reading and math scores, special program placements, grade retentions, discipline referrals and suspensions, low socioeconomic status, high mobility, teen parenthood, and single family homes as having high risk signs of potentially dropping out of high school (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). While qualifiers of students who drop out are evident, researchers are less aware of the casual factors that lead up to students dropping out (Tyler & Loftstrom, 2009). Data is vital in identifying what those factors are (Sparks et al., 2010).

Student dropout problems are not only educational problems, as they are also social problems. Research indicated that students who drop out may have low self-
esteem issues, may use drugs, and may become a financial burden to society (Mensch & Kandel, 1988). Blount (2012) stated that many at risk students have faced environmental challenges at the age of 14 or 15 that no student should ever have to encounter. Blount (2012) also identified several potential dangers to look for to help prevent students from dropping out of school. These potential dangers include low family income, high mobility, and disengagement.

Blue and Cook (2004) found that students who reside in low socioeconomic neighborhoods are more likely to drop out of high school than those students who live in more prosperous neighborhoods. South, Baumer, and Lutz (2003) conducted a study that found that the socioeconomic status of a student’s neighborhood was more closely associated with the possibility of the student dropping out than the student’s delinquent behavior and attachment to school and parent and the parents’ control over the student’s behavior. South et al. (2003) also concluded that students from these low socioeconomic areas believe that the completion of school provided little to improve their quality of life in their neighborhood. Furthermore, family income, socioeconomic status, and parents’ educational attainments are also large factors in predicting future dropouts (Blue & Cook, 2004). Blue and Cook (2004) claimed that a student’s family history is viewed as one of the most important predictors of student achievement. High school students from families within the lowest 20% income range were six times as likely to drop out of high school as those students whose families reside in the upper 20% income distribution (Blue & Cook, 2004). It is crucial that those students whose families reside in the lower 20% income persevere through the challenges of dropping out of high school and seek help through school interventions and school counselors. Students who come from low
socioeconomic backgrounds may also face numerous challenges such as personal and psychological issues. Thus, students’ counselors should be aware of the social, economic, and psychological factors of potential dropouts (Blount, 2012).

In addition to living in low socioeconomic areas, students with a high mobility rate are also at risk of dropping out. A study by Rumberger (2003) stated that students who moved twice within their high school years were twice as likely to drop out as those students who had consistent enrollment. This mobility prevents consistent parental communication that may be gained through the community, social networks, and the school (Sun, 1999).

According to Hupfeld (2007), “there is no single risk factor that can be used to accurately predict who is at risk of dropping out” (p. 1). Dropouts usually occur because of a long chain of events with multiple factors and domains that interact with each other (Hupfeld, 2007). Blount (2012) stated that teachers and counselors need to recognize the importance of student engagement. Students who are not engaged in school tend to have high discipline referrals; consequently, their attendance starts to decrease (Blount, 2012). Early recognition of disengaged students in middle school is critical; however, interventions before middle school are highly recommended as powerful strategies to prevent students from dropping out. These early interventions may prevent student disengagement (Hupfeld, 2007).

Although interventions are important, it is also crucial to know statistics as to why students are dropping out. A research study conducted by researchers for Civic Enterprises on behalf of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation involved diverse youth ranging from the ages of 16 to 25 who had dropped out of high school. Azzam (2007)
reported these findings and stated that 47% of students dropped out because they were bored, 43% dropped out because they had excessive absences and could not catch up on their work, 42% dropped out because their peers were not interested in high school, 38% stated they had too much freedom and no rules to live by, and 35% stated they dropped out because they were failing. Of these students, 70% stated they could have graduated if they had tried harder and if their teachers had demanded that they work harder (Azzam, 2007).

Drop-Out Prevention Strategies

If students have a positive experience in school, take classes that motivate them, and have teachers who encourage them to participate in school activities, they will be more likely to stay in school (Hardre & Reeve, 2003). Teachers who maintain their students’ interest rather than try to control their behaviors are more likely to elicit better performance; therefore, these students are less likely to drop out (Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989; Vallerand & Bissonnette, 1992; Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997). Once students feel cared for and supported in the classroom, motivation can then become an internal resource that guides students to want to stay in school (Khalkhali, Rouhollah, & Nikyar, 2013).

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), the self-determination theory can be used as an outline to comprehend the motivational theories underlying students’ intent to stay in school versus their intent to drop out. Self-determination theory, when applied to students, is about fostering an interest in learning, a value of education, and a confidence in personal capabilities (Khalkhali et al., 2013). Hardre and Reeve (2003) elaborate on this by stating that, with this theory, students become connected to their education when
the classroom teacher attempts to acknowledge their skills and thereby fosters the students’ self-worth making school more exciting and relevant to students’ lives.

Though Azzam’s (2007) study reported that students blame themselves, not their school or teachers, for dropping out, teachers should take steps to connect with students, especially those who are at-risk of dropping out. Azzam’s (2007) report listed five actions that these dropouts stated could have improved their chances of graduating.

Make school more meaningful by relating it to real-world experiences. Make a connection between school and work.

Allow support for struggling learners by hiring better teachers, reducing class sizes, designing curriculum with more individualized instruction, and offering more one-on-one tutoring opportunities.

Improve the school climate by providing a safe environment for everyone.

Improve school discipline and classroom supervision to protect students from violent behavior.

Be sure each student has at least one advocate in the school to whom he or she can turn in order to assist him or her with school problems.

Increase communication between parents and schools. Contacting parents will produce the likelihood of success for students who are on their way to dropping out of high school (p. 91-92).

High school counselors also play an integral part in preventing students from dropping out of high school. Brown and Trusty (2005) stated that school counselors’ responsibilities are to design, coordinate, implement, manage, and evaluate the school programs to ensure students’ success. School counselors should carefully design and
implement well-planned interventions targeted at increasing academic achievement for all of their students (Brown & Trusty, 2005). The school counselor’s purpose should be to work with those students who are at risk and identify and intercede before students become self-destructive (American School Counselor Association, 2007).

Costs Associated with High School Drop-Outs

Due to the fact that dropouts cost the nation over 260 billion dollars in lost wages, lost taxes, and lost productivity, the school staff should develop interventions and strategies to help students become productive citizens (Martin & Halperin, 2006).

Somers, Owens, and Piliawsky (2009) state that dropout prevention is a significant area of study because of the cost society is paying for each individual who drops out. A study conducted by Bridgeland, DiLulio, and Morrison (2006) discovered that the average high school dropout earns approximately $9,200 less per year than a high school graduate and approximately $1 million less over a lifetime than a college graduate. Swanson (2007) concludes that students who drop out of high school earn approximately $19,400, which is below the federal poverty level of $19,971 for a family of four. He also found that students who graduate from high school with no other form of education or training earn approximately $27,500 per year. These individuals usually find blue-collar jobs, manual labor or service industry positions, as opposed to white-collar jobs such as professional, managerial, and administrative positions (Swanson, 2007).

Wise (2008) noted that one million high school students drop out each year and that the United States ranks 13th in the world in the number of high school dropouts. These dropouts usually pay fewer taxes, use governmental assistance, and commit crimes (Wise, 2008). Society’s cost for each dropout is over $200,000 annually (Wise, 2008).
Clearly, dropout prevention is a crucial area of study because of the cost to society. Each year, the estimated cost incurred due to students dropping out is into the billions of dollars (Somers et al., 2009).

School Reform in Secondary Education

A Nation at Risk

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, there was “widespread public perception that something was seriously remiss in our educational system” (Center for the Study of Mathematics Curriculum, 2005, p. 7). The United States was falling behind the rest of the world in terms of education and needed effective assistance in its schools and universities. Along with the school systems, the United States’ businesses and industries were also being challenged by other countries that were producing high quality products at lower costs. Many Americans believed the reason for falling behind was the education system. The education system in place was not teaching the necessary skills to keep the economy fluid (Center for the Study of Mathematics Curriculum, 2005).

In 1983, Ronald Reagan and Secretary of Education T.H. Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education to conduct research and investigate the quality of education in the United States (Center for the Study of Mathematics Curriculum, 2005). The document they produced, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform, proclaimed that the United States educational system was at risk and all children, regardless of race or economic background, deserved to receive a high quality education (Burdick, 2012). Scott (2011) stated that the impact of A Nation at Risk was impossible for educators to ignore. According to Burdick (2012), colleges and universities were accused of graduating future educators who were not ready to take on
the responsibility of teaching. The blame for the education system failing was not
directly placed solely on the school system but included society and the lack of parental
involvement as well (Burdick, 2012).

No Child Left Behind

In 2001, under President George W. Bush, Congress passed the No Child Left
Behind Act (NCLB). NCLB (2001) was a reauthorization of the Elementary and
Secondary Education Act of 1965. This Act was created to close the achievement gaps
among students and make schools more responsible for their students’ education
(Randolph & Wilson-Younger, 2012). The Act attempts to hold schools responsible for
hiring highly qualified teachers and producing school improvement plans for their state
boards of education each year (Beaver, 2004). Linn, Baker, and Betebenner (2002) state
that

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 substantially increases the testing
requirements for states and sets demanding accountability standards for schools,
districts, and states with adequate yearly progress (AYP) objectives for all
students and subgroups of students defined by socioeconomic background, race –
ethnicity, English language proficiency, and disability (p. 3).

According to NCLB, those schools receiving federal funding must administer some form
of state standardized tests for graduation. The purpose of the state assessments is to
ensure that each student is meeting the core standards and objectives required by the
state. The goal of NCLB was for all students, by the year 2013-2014, to score proficient
or advanced on the standardized state assessment test (Randolph & Wilson-Younger,
2012).
The four performance levels a student can score on any subject area test in the state of Mississippi are: advanced, proficient, basic, and minimal. According to the Mississippi Subject Area Testing Program (2011), the general performance level descriptors established by the State Board policy are as follows:

Advanced – students at the advanced level consistently perform in a manner clearly beyond what is required to be successful in a more advanced course in the content area.

Proficient – students at the proficient level demonstrate solid academic performance and mastery of the knowledge and skills required for success in a more advanced course in the content area.

Basic – students in the basic level demonstrate partial mastery of the knowledge and skills in a course and may experience difficulty in a more advanced course in the content area.

Minimal – students at the minimal level are below basic and do not demonstrate mastery of the knowledge and skills required for success in the course in the content area (p. 7).

Reform Models and Strategies

Edmonds (1982) reported that characteristics of schools and academic achievement go hand-in-hand. Since 1978, schools have been concentrating on the importance of school improvement programs. Edmonds concluded that effective schools share similar characteristics. In his study, he reported five characteristics that must be implemented in every school to ensure school effectiveness. The characteristics were:
The leadership of the principal and the attention he or she pays to quality instruction.

A widespread instructional focus.

An environment that is safe and conducive to learning.

Teachers who understand that all students must produce at least minimum mastery.

Student achievement used as a basis for program evaluation. (Edmunds, 1982, p. 4)

Throughout the United States, schools and communities have partnered to better prepare students for the increasing demands for technological skills and a competitive global economy (Visher, Teitelbaum, & Emanuel, 1999). Visher et al. (1999) reported a study that was originally conducted by the U.S. Department of Education. In this study, seventeen sites were selected representing only secondary schools. The schools’ staffs were asked to explore “innovative strategies that combine career and academic preparation in environments designed to motivate all students and improve their prospects for success in both the classroom and their careers” (p. 7). The strategies, when put into place, had positive outcomes in the areas of school attendance, grades, graduation rates, and college and career readiness. The 10 improvement strategies for these high schools were:
Raise academic standards and expectations.

Create small learning environments enabling students and teachers to work together.

Structure learning around careers and students’ interests.

Promote student achievement by enhancing educators’ professional development.

Link students’ out-of-school learning experiences to classroom learning.

Provide counseling to encourage in-depth college and career awareness.

Reorganize the school day into flexible, relevant segments.

Assess students’ progress by what they are capable of doing.

Forge partnerships with two and four year postsecondary institutions.

Forge active student support alliances involving educators, employers, parents, and communities. (Visher et al., 1999)

**Mississippi State Teacher Appraisal Rubric**

In the year 2013-2014, public schools across the state of Mississippi will be implementing the Mississippi State Teacher Appraisal Rubric (M-STAR). This rubric will analyze the performance levels of all teachers (Gilbertson, 2012). This evaluation system, developed with the assistance of Vanderbilt University, examines five domains: planning, assessment, instruction, learning environment, and professional responsibilities (Mader & Kieffer, 2013). “The Mississippi teacher performance standards are designed to provide a shared and focused understanding of the priorities, values, and expectations of Mississippi teachers in their work of educating students” (Mississippi State Teacher Appraisal Rubric [M-STAR], 2012). Teachers will be rated on a scale from one to four with one being unsatisfactory, two being emerging, three being effective, and four being
distinguished. M-STAR (2012) will include several methods of evaluation in order to understand each teacher’s strengths and weaknesses. The process includes two formal observations, with one being conducted in the fall and the other in the spring, five informal classroom walk-throughs, two pre-conferences, two post-conferences, and a student survey (M-STAR, 2012).

The Mississippi Department of Education has listed several goals designed to improve the professional performances of all educators. The goals are:

To provide formative assessment information about the performance of the individual teachers to help highlight areas of strength and identify areas of growth.

To serve as a guide for teachers as they reflect upon their own practices.

To provide shared understanding regarding priorities, goals, and expectations of quality practice.

To serve as a tool to help structure principal instructional leadership and feedback (M-STAR, 2012, p. 2).

The collaboration among teachers and administrators will increase teachers’ performances in the classroom which, in return, will produce higher quality learning for students.

Professional Learning Communities

*Definition and Purpose*

Professional learning communities (PLCs) is a common term being used throughout public K12 education. A PLC is a group of educators who work together to bring about change within their school (Teague & Anfara, 2012). Not only do schools
utilize PLCs to implement change, but they also use them for sustainable improvement across the school’s curriculum (DuFour, 2007). McLaughlin and Talbert (2006) define PLCs as “organizational structures in which teachers work collaboratively to reflect on their practice, examine evidence about the relationship between practice and student outcomes, and make changes that improve teaching and learning for the particular students in their classes” (pp. 3-4). Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) concur that PLCs are “groups of people who share a common concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4).

One of the main concepts within a PLC is the belief that it is not sufficient to simply provide instruction to students. Teachers must also make certain that students are achieving and learning (DuFour, 2004). Increasing the capacity of all members of the school to ensure that students are achieving success academically is the work of an effective PLC (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Furthermore, trust, shared practice, and mutual respect among teachers and students are foundations to a solid professional learning community (Wenger et al., 2002).

In order to understand the concepts of a PLC, one must look at its starting place and how the term derived (Teaque & Anfara, 2012). This concept has roots that can be traced back to the work of Judith Little (2006). One concept of a PLC is that of school improvement. Little studied the relationship between school improvement and that of a PLC. She concluded that ongoing professional development is successful when teachers collaborate on successful practices used within their classroom; when administrators observe teachers and provide feedback about their teaching; when teachers plan, research,
and prepare together as a team; and when teachers teach others their way of teaching. She stated the importance of collaboration and reinforced the idea that teacher isolation is not favorable for student improvement. All of these are foundational aspects of a productive PLC (Little, 2006).

**Roles of Administrators and Teachers**

PLCs start with those who have the ability to lead and direct (Teague & Anfara, 2012). School administrators play an essential role in developing the structure of a PLC (Rosenholtz, 1989; Teague & Anfara, 2012). Administrators, who consider themselves as visionary leaders, can integrate the PLC model to improve communication and understanding, to increase problem solving abilities, and to develop a process for change to build a family in the organization of the school (Huffman & Jacobson, 2003). Administrators can do this by courageously taking risks and implementing new thinking strategies. Shared values and vision between teachers and administration will guide schools toward common goals (Senge, 1990).

A study conducted by Rosenholtz (1989) found that collaboration among teachers is very beneficial in schools. Rosenholtz studied 78 elementary schools in Tennessee and classified them as either high-consensus or low-consensus schools. The research found that in high-consensus schools, there was confirmation of collaboration, shared purpose, and goal implementation in developing guidelines and procedures for teacher and student performance. Collaboration in problem solving was extremely evident in the students’ everyday culture. Rosenholtz (1989) concluded that low-consensus schools lacked teacher collaboration. The isolation of teachers led to protected barriers within the walls of their classroom (Rosenholtz, 1989).
Administrators and teachers working together can create a powerful PLC. Hord (2008) stated five dimensions that should be embedded in every professional learning community. These dimensions are:

- Shared values and vision.
- Shared and supportive leadership.
- Collective learning and application to practice.
- Shared personal practice.
- Supportive conditions that encompass both relationships and structures. (Hord, 2008, p. 11)

An organization will not work without a shared vision (Senge, 1990). This vision is more than a statement handed down from leaders within an organization. Pankake and Moller (2007) believe that schools should collectively develop and implement a vision of ensuring high levels of achievement for teachers and students and focus on student learning. Collaboration among staff members to develop a vision is a true PLC (Pankake & Moller, 2007). Schools will incorporate change much better when teachers and principals share the belief in providing a quality education for their students (Printy & Marks, 2006). This shared responsibility will go a long way in motivating teachers and administrators to maintain the belief of quality education and trust for increasing student achievement (Teague & Anfara, 2012).

Shared and supportive leadership is vital in developing school improvement. Teague and Anfara (2012) indicate that “administrators in schools with effective PLCs participated in a nurturing relationship with the school that allowed for shared leadership, shared power, shared authority, and shared responsibility” (p. 61). Administrators who
are active in PLCs are very powerful in that they have the capability of building teacher
capacity and turning that capacity into improving student achievement (Sergiovanni, 
1990). Communicating clear expectations to teachers is the key ingredient that
administrators must possess in order to ensure student improvement (Teague & Anfara, 
2012).

Collective learning and application to practice involves seeking out results of
what students need to learn, explaining how they will learn the material, and identifying
how educators will respond when students are struggling (Cohen & Hill, 2001; DuFour, 
2004). When integrating collective learning within a staff, the ability for instruction
among the team must be encouraged (Teague & Anfara, 2012). The PLC must function
as a unit that allows debate among its team members resulting in understanding and
knowledge (Hord, 1997). Hord (1997) also states that when educators collaborate
together, new skills and strategies evolve resulting in the search of the best possible
knowledge and practice. In other words, educators should open their classroom doors
and welcome other educators to partake of one another’s knowledge.

In fact, shared personal practice demonstrates respect and the development of
trust (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). An important component of a PLC is teachers
participating in peer observations, sharing feedback, and coaching or mentoring their
colleagues (Teague & Anfara, 2012). Shared practice also allows teachers to assume
certain roles such as “mentor, mentee, coach, specialist, advisor, and facilitator”
practice allows team members to share what has traditionally been known to be private.
Supportive conditions are crucial in any professional learning community. Huffman and Hipp (2003) state that supportive conditions are the glue that holds all other dimensions within a professional learning community together. Supportive conditions contain what Hord (2008) describes as both supportive relational conditions and supportive structural conditions. Relational conditions consist of trust, admirations, caring relationships, appreciation, risk taking, and communication (Hord, 1997). Structural conditions consist of time and space for discussion among team members (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Other supportive conditions include consideration of teacher’s schedules, common planning times, and the relationships among the teachers. All of these impact the success of a professional learning community (Teague & Anfara, 2012).

Roles of the Families and Communities

Teamwork among families and communities is believed to be fundamental to students’ academic achievement. Parental involvement can be defined as organized participation in the decision making and classroom instruction processes within a school (Mannathoko & Mangope, 2013). Epstein (2010) claimed if schools simply view children as students, it is likely that the school will not have any parental involvement. However, if the schools view the students as children, there is a much greater possibility that parental involvement will be evident (Epstein, 2010). William and Cutler (2000) state that “ignoring the home greatly increases the chances of failure because children spend far more time with parents who could easily counteract the school’s influence” (p. 134). Therefore, it is crucial that teachers reach out to parents and use their knowledge to help better understand their children.
Schools should inform parents of the expectations, goals, and visions (Mannathoko & Mangope, 2013). Research conducted by McNerney and Herbert (2001) stated that there is a strong correlation between the success of students and parents who are actively involved in their children’s education. They found that parents influence their children by exposing the children to “intellectually stimulating experiences,” helping to teach, and monitoring assignments (p. 201).

Schools can provide multiple methods that involve parents in their child’s education. McNerney and Herbert (2001) stated the importance of having parent-teacher conferences, open houses, and PTA meetings as effective approaches to draw parents into schools. These approaches will open the door for collaboration regarding problematic issues that may arise, for communication regarding academic performance, and for school parental involvement such as fundraisers for the school. The New York City Department of Education (2012) listed four distinct ways parents can become involved with their child’s schools:

Parenting: assist families in creating a home-like environment.

Volunteering: recruit parents to take the time to help students at school and at home.

Decision making: give parents and community members the right to participate in decisions made about how the school operates.

Collaboration with the community: utilize community resources to help strengthen the school. (New York City Department of Education, 2012, p. 49)
Barriers to Professional Learning Communities

Although research has shown that PLCs can change the performance level of a school, some drawbacks can hinder their implementation. Proper implementation of PLCs requires significant changes that must be made in schools (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2010). Wells and Feun (2007) conclude that developing PLCs requires change in the classroom; thus, student success can be compromised due to the amount of work and time involved in ensuring cultural change is taking place. Fullan (2006) states that support is essential for a professional learning community to be successful. If districts or central offices do not support the implementation of the professional community, it may not be successful.

Maloney and Konza (2011) found that teachers did not always feel comfortable speaking out, voicing their opinion, and challenging dominant groups such as administration and central office personnel. Therefore, the teachers did not buy into the implementation of a PLC. If the team concept and sense of family is absorbed by all members, schools have a better chance of success with the professional learning community (Teague & Anfara, 2012).

Study of Findlay High School in Ohio

A group of educators at Findlay High School found success by implementing PLCs within their high school. McIntosh and White (2006) studied this school and concluded that the team concept advocated through PLCs has opened doors for teachers to collaborate regarding pedagogy, student behavior, and academic performance. Team meetings have allowed teachers to reflect on the best teaching practices and have alleviated the feelings of isolation among one another. The administrators also
implemented time during the school day for teachers to collaborate. Administrators use this time to train teachers and offer professional development opportunities when needed (McIntosh & White, 2006). At the same time, the school has involved collaborative action teams, along with stakeholders, to implement certain goals. Teachers from all grade levels work in teams to answer three critical questions:

What is it we expect students to learn?

How will we know when they have learned?

How will we respond when they do not learn?

The school found that aligning the curriculum to state standards, analyzing student data, writing common assessments, and developing interventions for students was imperative in order to answer these three questions. This Ohio high school PLC allowed for teachers to join and share information every Thursday morning by eliminating homeroom and incorporating a delayed start time. (McIntosh & White, 2006).

The Freshman Academy

One strategy to improve the ninth grade retention rate is implementing a Freshman Academy. Cook, Fowler, and Harris (2008) state that “Freshman Academies provide incoming ninth grade students with additional resources and personalized support to overcome transitional obstacles. A number of models have been created with the goal of improving academic success” (p. 1).

According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there were 128 ninth grade schools in operation in 1999 to 2000 (Reents, 2002), 154 ninth grade schools in operation in 2004 to 2005 (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007), and 185 schools in operation in 2005 to 2006 (Wheelock & Miao,
Cook et al. (2008) reported that in 2004, North Carolina schools that were currently operating a ninth grade academy reflected a dropout rate of only eight percent as opposed to a 24 percent dropout rate of those schools that do not have a transition ninth grade program (Cook et al., 2008).

Conclusion

Overall, a ninth grade academy can be a success if the administrators, teachers, students, and parents have a vision for success (White, 2008). White (2008) concludes that moving students to a separate building or wing is not the solution. Chmelynski (2004) proclaimed that Freshman Academies should be built around a philosophy, not just a location. The key is finding a group of committed teachers who enjoy teaching and working with ninth graders and are sold on the philosophy of helping them transition into high school. Freshman Academies that are built solely because of overcrowding schools will not have the same impact or chance for success (Chmelynski, 2004).
CHAPTER III - METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter III provided information on the research design related to the proposed study. This study investigated Administrators’, Counselors’, and Teachers’ opinions regarding the impact of Freshman Academies, Schools-Within-Schools, and Ninth Grade Schools, as it relates to effective transitioning. This chapter included an outline of the research questions and hypotheses statements. Also outlined in this chapter are participant information, data collection procedures, and methods for statistical evaluation for data analysis.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve academics and increase subject area test scores?
2. Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will increase attendance rates?
3. Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce ninth grade discipline referrals?
4. Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will encourage a positive school culture?
5. Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy is an effective way of transitioning students into ninth grade?

6. Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve those who come from a low socio-economic status?

7. Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce teacher isolation and increase teacher morale?

The study was guided by the following research hypotheses:

H1: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve academics and increase subject area test scores.

H2: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will increase attendance rates.

H3: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce ninth grade discipline referrals.

H4: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will encourage a positive school culture.
H5: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy is an effective way of transitioning students into ninth grade.

H6: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve those who come from a low socio-economic status.

H7: Administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce teacher isolation and increase teacher morale.

Participants

The participants in this study included administrators, counselors, and teachers who currently work in a Freshman Academy, School-Within-A-School, or separate Ninth Grade School. All participants held a valid teaching license issued by the Mississippi Department of Education. The procedure for selecting participants included schools in Mississippi that currently house a Freshman Academy. The researcher issued questionnaires across the entire state of Mississippi to reach a diverse group of administrators, counselors, and teachers from small to large districts, which allows more generalization of results. To ensure power of the study, approximately five different school responses were required.

The participants from each school had an opportunity to receive a $25 gift card for completing the questionnaires. To ensure the results remained anonymous, those from each school that completed the questionnaires wrote their name on a ticket and placed it in an envelope, along with the questionnaire. Once all questionnaires had been
collected from that particular school, a drawing took place. The prizes included but were not limited to one $25.00 gift card from Wal-Mart, Target, and Books-A-Million.

Methodology

The methodology of this study was conducted via a paper and pencil survey. Approval to conduct this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Southern Mississippi (Appendix D). The researcher obtained permission from Superintendent’s across the state of Mississippi for principals, counselors, and teachers to participate in the study. Upon approval, the researcher mailed the questionnaires to each participant and/or school. Each participant was provided with a Consent Document indicating his or her consent in the research (Appendix E). Upon completion of the questionnaires, each participant implied informed consent. Administrators, counselors, and teachers returned their questionnaires to the school’s designee for the researcher to retrieve. Because of distance, some schools mailed questionnaires to the researcher.

Instrument

The intent was to conduct the questionnaires via paper and pencil, and the instrument was 32 questions, inclusive of demographics. A validity questionnaire was distributed to a panel of three experts to validate the content of the instrument. A pilot test was conducted to ensure the reliability of the instrument.

The survey instrument, developed by the researcher, required content validity and reliability to be established. Permission to pilot the study had been obtained from a local school district. The instrument included eight parts. Part one, questions 1-9, included demographic information such as gender, age, level of teaching, current certification,
current working capacity, type of school in which the participant worked, years of experience in ninth grade school or school-within-a-school, and ninth grade population.

Part two, questions 10-14, pertained to academic performance with-in a Ninth Grade Academy. Part three, questions 15 and 16, referred to attendance and drop-out rates within the Ninth Grade Academy. Part four of the questionnaire, questions 17-20, included ninth grade discipline referrals and intervention of at-risk behavior. Part five of the questionnaire, questions 21-23, pertained to school culture within a Ninth Grade Academy. Part six of the questionnaire, questions 24-26, referred to transitioning from middle school to high school. Part seven of the questionnaire, questions 27-29, included those students within the Ninth Grade Academy who are considered low socio-economic status. Last, part eight of the questionnaire, questions 30-32, referred to the instructional staff within the Ninth Grade Academy.

The researcher created a panel of three experts to ensure the instruments content validity. The team ensured questions were valid, content related to the research questions, questions were clear and understandable, deleted unnecessary items, and added any additional items to ensure the research questions were answered (Appendix H). Once the panel of experts completed the survey, revisions were made and final approval was obtained from the panel. The panel included an administrator, counselor, and teacher, all of whom have several years of experience working within a Ninth Grade Academy. All three panelists ensured the following questions or statements were accurate during their review. First, did the questionnaire contain language that was understood by administrators, counselors, and teachers who have experience in freshman academies, schools-within-schools, or ninth grade schools? Second, did the questionnaire address
specific and appropriate issues in the statements, as it related to the impact of freshman academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools? Third, were there any questions that were offensive or obtrusive to the participant? Fourth, were there any questions that should be excluded from the survey? Finally, were there any other statements that should be included that were not part of the questionnaire?

Once validity had been determined, the researcher chose 12-15 administrators, counselors, and teachers at random to ensure instrument reliability. These participants did not partake in the research study. They assisted with ensuring questions were understandable and organized.

Part one of the instrument used descriptive statistics to determine the capacities in which the participants currently worked within the Ninth Grade Academy. Part two determined the participants’ perceptions with regards to academics, attendance, discipline, school culture, transitioning, socio-economic status, and instructional staff within their Ninth Grade Academy. Once all data was collected the researcher then compared the different perceptions among the three categories of participants.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyze demographic questions 1 through 9 of the instrument. A One-Way ANOVA was used to answer all hypotheses questions. The dependent variables were the opinions in each category determined by the administrators, counselors, and teachers. The independent variables were the actual positions, consisting of administrators, counselors, and teachers.
Summary

This study examined administrators’, counselors’, and teachers’ opinions regarding the impact of freshman academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade school, as it relates to effective transitioning. There were seven research questions and seven research hypotheses the researcher studied. The researcher utilized a panel of experts to ensure the instrument’s content validity. The pilot study consisted of three administrators, two counselors, and thirteen teachers who did not participate in the actual research. The procedure included gaining permission from at least five schools that have a freshman academy, school-within-a-school, or a separate ninth grade school. The study was conducted using a paper/pencil questionnaire. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was requested upon successful proposal of this research project. Once the study was completed, the data was analyzed using SPSS to obtain descriptive statistics and multiple regression data.
CHAPTER IV – RESEARCH RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine whether administrators, counselors, and teachers believe Freshman Academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools are an effective way of transitioning ninth graders into mainstream high school. A quantitative research design was used to understand the differences in beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers. The supporting research questions for this study targeted academics, attendance, and discipline. Other areas considered were school culture, transitioning from eighth to ninth grade, socio-economic status, teacher isolation and teacher morale. The questionnaire titled, “Administrators’, Counselors’, and Teachers’ Opinions Regarding the Impact of Freshman Academies, Schools-Within-Schools, and Ninth Grade Schools as They Relate to Effective Transitioning,” was given to participants across the entire state of Mississippi to reach a diverse group of teachers from small to large districts which allows more generalization of results. The researcher mailed the questionnaire to seven school districts that included the participation of twelve different schools within those districts. Participants consisted of administrators, counselors, and teachers who taught in a Freshman Academy, School-Within-A-School, or separate Ninth Grade School. All participants were required to hold a valid teaching license issued by the Mississippi Department of Education. The procedure of selecting participants included schools in Mississippi that currently have a Freshman Academy. Participants were asked to complete an eight-part instrument. Part One consisted of Teacher Demographics; Part Two consisted of Academics; Part Three focused on Attendance; Part Four of the instrument focused on Discipline; Part Five focused on
School Culture; Part Six focused on Transitioning; Part Seven focused on Socio-Economic Status; and the last section focused on Instructional Staff. Out of the seven school districts, eighty-five surveys were completed with ten of those being administrators, twelve being counselors, and sixty-three being teachers.

Descriptive Data

Descriptive statistics and frequencies for the collected data are presented in the table below. Table 1 contains the number of males and females who participated in the survey. There were 20 male participants and 65 female participants. The percentage of males was 23.5% and females 76.5%.

Table 1

*Frequencies and Percentages of Gender (N=85)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 contains the frequencies and percentages of the participants’ age. The largest portion of participants’ age ranged from 30-39 (39.3%), the next highest portion of participants’ age ranged from 40-49 (35.7%), followed by the age range of 50+ (16.7%), and last the age range of 20-29 (8.3%).
Table 2

*Frequencies and Percentages of Age (N=84)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants reported their years of experience in education. The largest group of participants had 11-20 years of experience (39.3%), followed by 6-10 years of experience (31%), 1-5 years and 21-30 years tied for third (13.1%), and last 30+ years of experience (3.6%). Table 3 presents the frequencies and percentages for this data.

Table 3

*Frequencies and Percentages of Experience in Education (N=84)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience in Education</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>39.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants were asked what type of certification they currently hold. Choices were a bachelor’s, master’s, specialist, or doctoral degree. The highest percentage were those with a master’s degree (58.8%), followed by a bachelor’s degree (24.7%), then a specialist degree (12.9%), and last a doctoral degree (3.5%). Table 4 provides the frequencies and percentages of this data.

**Table 4**

*Frequencies and Percentages of Area of Certification (N=85)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Certification</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question five under demographics asked the participants to state the capacity they are currently working in education. Choices were principal/assistant principal, counselor, or teacher. The highest percentage of participants were teachers (74.1%), followed by counselors (14.1%), and last principals/assistant principals (11.8%). Table 5 provides the frequencies and percentages of this data.
Table 5

*Frequencies and Percentages of Job Capacity (N=85)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job Capacity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal/Assistant Principal</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselor</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>74.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants reported the number of years they have been working in their current job capacity. The largest group of participants had 11-20 years of in their current capacity (32.9%), followed by 6-10 years (30.6%), 1-5 years came in third at (28.2%), followed by 21-30 years (4.7%), and last 30+ years (3.5%). Table 6 presents the frequencies and percentages for this data.

Table 6

*Frequencies and Percentages of Current Job Capacity (N=85)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current Job Capacity (Years)</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-20</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participants were asked in question seven what type of school best describes their freshmen academy. The choices were school-within-a-school or a separate ninth grade school. The highest percentage were those who worked in a school-within-a-school (70.6%) followed by a separate ninth grade school (29.4%). Table 7 presents the frequencies and percentages for this data.

Table 7

*Frequencies and Percentages of Type of Freshmen Academy (N=85)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Freshmen Academy</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School-Within-A-School</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>70.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate Ninth Grade School</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were asked in question eight how many years their school-within-a-school or ninth grade school had been in place. The choices were 0-5 years, 5-10 years, or 11+ years. The highest percentage was 0-5 years (41.3%), followed by 11+ years (30.8%), and last 5-10 years (7.7%). Table 8 presents the frequencies and percentages for this data.

Table 8

*Frequencies and Percentages Years Academy Has Been In Place (N=83)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Academy Has Been In Place</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>41.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11+</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the last question of the demographic section, participants were asked what most accurately describes their ninth grade population. The choices were 1-100 students, 101-199, 200-299, 300-399, 400-499, and 500+. The highest percentages were those who had a population of 101-199 and 200-299 students (28.2%), followed by 400-499 students (25.9%), and last 300-399 students (17.6%). The population range of 1-100 reported 0%. Table 9 presents the frequencies and percentages for this data.

Table 9

*Frequencies and Percentages of Ninth Grade Population (N=85)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ninth Grade Population</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-199</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200-299</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300-399</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400-499</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The researcher-developed questionnaire instrument, which had a total of thirty-two items, included demographics, academics, attendance, discipline, school culture, transitioning, socio-economics, and instructional staff. The thirty-two Likert-scale questions yielded quantitative data for the research. After gathering the results from the pilot study, the researcher input the data into SPSS and used a Cronbach’s alpha test to check for reliability of the survey. The overall Cronbach Alpha for the study was .97, which included all of the survey items excluding the demographic section. The .97 surpassed the .70 that is generally required for academic research. The subscale
Academics yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .87, which is above the recommended .70 for reliability. The subscale Attendance yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .85, which is above the recommended .70 for reliability. The subscale Discipline yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .91, which is above the recommended .70 for reliability. The subscale School Culture had a Cronbach’s alpha of .85, which is above the recommended .70 for reliability. The subscale Transitioning yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .92, which is above the recommended .70 for reliability. The subscale Socio-Economic Status yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .95, which is above the recommended .70 for reliability. The subscale Instructional Staff yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .89, which is above the recommended .70 for reliability. The data generated from the research were examined, and the researcher recorded the results. See Table 10 for these results.

Table 10

*Reliability Statistics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscales</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>.91</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Culture</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transitioning</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-Economic Status</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Staff</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Descriptive Statistics for Hypothesis

Following the Demographics section on the first part of the instrument, the questionnaire was divided into seven different sections: Academics, Attendance, Discipline, School Culture, Transitioning, Socio-Economic Status, and Instructional Staff. These sections of the survey used a five-point Likert-scale focused on opinions of administrators, counselors, and teachers. The Likert-scale ranged in the choices of (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree.

The second section of the instrument consisted of five questions pertaining to administrators’, counselors’, and teachers’ beliefs about academics. This section was used to answer the Research Question 1, “Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve academics and increase subject area test scores?” The participants were asked to choose the response that best supported their opinion about academics pertaining to a freshman academy. The Likert Scale ranged in the choices of (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. Item 14, “The isolation of the freshmen population provides early identification and intervention in academics” had the highest mean (M = 4.13, SD = .99) out of the items in this section. Item 11, “The isolation of the freshmen population improves academic performance (grades)” had the second highest mean (M = 3.96, SD = 1.05). Item 13, “The isolation of the freshmen population decreases the retention rate of ninth-grade students” had the lowest mean (M = 3.56, SD = 1.20). Table 11 provides the items, means, and standard deviations for this data.
Table 11

Descriptive Statistics for Academics (N=84)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population provides early identification and intervention in academics.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population improves academic performance (grades).</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population improves scores on state assessments.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population increases the high school’s graduation rate.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population decreases the retention rate of ninth grade students.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The next section of the instrument contained two questions regarding administrators’, counselors’, and teachers’ opinions pertaining to attendance. This section of the instrument was utilized to answer the Research Question 2, “Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will increase attendance rates?” The participants were asked to choose the response that best supported their beliefs about attendance. The Likert Scale ranged in the choices of (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. Item 16, “The isolation of the freshmen population decreases the school’s
drop-out rate” had the highest mean (M = 3.88, SD = .84) out of the items in this section. Item 15, “The isolation of the freshmen population improves attendance rates” had the second highest mean (M = 3.73, SD = 1.02). Table 12 provides the items, means, and standard deviations for this data.

Table 12

*Descriptive Statistics Attendance (N=84)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population decreases the school’s drop-out rate.</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population improves attendance rates.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fourth section of the instrument contained four questions related to administrators’, counselors’, and teachers’ opinions pertaining to discipline. This section of the instrument was utilized to answer the Research Question 3, “Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce ninth grade discipline referrals?” The participants were asked to choose the response that best supported their opinion about discipline. The Likert Scale ranged in the choices of (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. Item 19, “The isolation of the freshmen population provides early identification and intervention of at-risk behavior” had the highest mean (M = 4.05, SD = 1.03) out of the items in this section. Item 18, “The isolation of the freshmen population
increases positive behavior” had the second highest mean (M = 3.83, SD = 1.08). Item 20, “The isolation of the freshmen population decreases student tardiness” had the lowest mean (M = 3.44, SD = 1.11). Table 13 provides the items, means, and standard deviations for this data.

Table 13

*Descriptive Statistics for Discipline (N=84)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population provides early identification and intervention of at-risk behavior.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.05</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population increases positive behavior.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population decreases discipline referrals.</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population decreases student tardiness.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The fifth section of the instrument contained three questions related to administrators’, counselors’, and teachers’ opinions pertaining to school culture. This section of the instrument was used to answer the Research Question 4, “Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will encourage a positive school culture?” The participants were asked to choose the response that best supported their perception about their knowledge
of school culture. The Likert Scale ranged in the choices of (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. Item 23, “The isolation of the freshmen population increases class identity and cohesiveness” had the highest mean (M = 4.14, SD = 1.02) out of the items in this section. Item 22, “The isolation of the freshmen population establishes positive connections with incoming ninth grade students with a specific set of teachers” had the second highest mean (M = 4.08, SD = 1.08). Item 21, “The isolation of the freshmen population encourages student involvement and participation in school activities and functions” had the lowest mean (M = 3.76, SD = 1.10). Table 14 provides the items, means, and standard deviations for this data.

Table 14

*Descriptive Statistics for School Culture (N=84)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population increases class identity and cohesiveness.</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population establishes positive connections with incoming ninth grade students with a specific set of teachers.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population encourages student involvement and participation in school activities and functions.</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sixth section of the instrument contained three questions related to administrators’, counselors’, and teachers’ opinions pertaining to an effective way of
transitioning students into the ninth grade. This section of the instrument was used to answer the Research Question 5, “Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy is an effective way of transitioning students into ninth grade?” The participants were asked to choose the response that best supported their opinion regarding if the freshmen academy is an effective way of transitioning students into the ninth grade. The Likert Scale ranged in the choices of (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. Item 26, “The isolation of the freshmen population eases the transition from middle school to the high school” had the highest mean (M = 4.19, SD = 1.15) out of the items in this section. Item 24, “The isolation of the freshmen population establishes positive transitions for incoming ninth grade students with a specific set of teachers” had the second highest mean (M = 4.11, SD = 1.13). Item 25, “The isolation of the freshmen population aids with social transition to the high school environment” had the lowest mean (M = 4.01, SD = 1.23). Table 15 provides the items, means, and standard deviations for this data.
Table 15

*Descriptive Statistics for Transitioning* *(N=84)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population eases the transition from middle school to high school.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population establishes positive transitions for incoming ninth grade students with a specific set of teachers.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population aids with social transition to the high school environment.</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The seventh section of the instrument contained three questions related to administrators’, counselors’, and teachers’ opinions pertaining to performance of students with a low socio-economic background. This section of the instrument was used to answer the Research Question 6, “Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve those who come from a low socio-economic status?” The participants were asked to choose the response that best supported their opinion regarding if the freshmen academy is an effective way of improving academics, attendance, and discipline from students who come from a low socio-economic status. The Likert Scale ranged in the choices of (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. Item 29,
“The isolation of the freshmen population improves the behavior of low socio-economic students” had the highest mean \((M = 3.62, \ SD = 1.04)\) out of the items in this section. Item 27, “The isolation of the freshmen population improves the academic success of low socio-economic students” had the second highest mean \((M = 3.60, \ SD = 1.02)\). Item 28, “The isolation of the freshmen population improves the attendance rate of low socio-economic students” had the lowest mean \((M = 3.55, \ SD = 1.00)\). Table 16 provides the items, means, and standard deviations for this data.

Table 16

Descriptive Statistics for Socio-Economic Status\((N=84)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population improves the behavior of low socio-economic students.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>3.62</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population improves the academic success of low socio-economic students.</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population improves the attendance rate of low socio-economic students.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final section of the instrument contained three questions related to administrators’’, counselors’, and teachers’ opinions pertaining to the instructional staff. This section of the instrument was used to answer the Research Question 7, “Do
administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce teacher isolation and increase teacher morale?” The participants were asked to choose the response that best supported their opinion regarding if the freshmen academy is an effective way to improve teacher isolation and teacher morale. The Likert Scale ranged in the choices of (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neutral, (4) agree, and (5) strongly agree. Item 32, “Implementing a freshmen academy increases a collective responsibility for student success” had the highest mean (M = 3.74, SD = 1.18) out of the items in this section. Item 31, “Implementing a freshmen academy increases teacher satisfaction and morale” had the second highest mean (M = 3.48, SD = 1.15). Item 30, “Implementing a freshmen academy reduces teacher isolation” had the lowest mean (M = 3.37, SD = 1.15). Table 17 provides the items, means, and standard deviations for this data.

Table 17

*Descriptive Statistics for Instructional Staff (N=84)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementing a freshmen academy increases a collective responsibility for student success.</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing a freshmen academy increases teacher satisfaction and morale.</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing a freshmen academy reduces teacher isolation.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Hypotheses Results

Hypothesis 1

Hypothesis 1 stated: “Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve academics and increase subject area test scores.” A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in the opinions of administrators, counselors, and teachers that a freshmen academy improves academics and increases subject area test scores. Based on the results of the one-way ANOVA, there was a significant difference in the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshmen Academy will improve academics and increase subject area test scores, $F(2, 82) = 5.25, p < .05$. Question 10 showed a significant difference between the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that “the isolation of the freshmen population improves scores on the state assessments”, $F(2, 82) = 4.44, p < .05$. Question 11 also showed a significant difference between the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that “the isolation of the freshmen population improves academic performance (grades)”, $F(2, 82) = 3.64, p < .05$. Question 13 showed a significant difference between the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that “the isolation of the freshmen population decreases the retention rate of ninth grade students”, $F(2, 82) = 8.44, p < .05$. However, Question 14 did not show a significant difference between the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that “the isolation of the freshmen population provides early identification and intervention in academics”, $F(2, 82) = 2.04, p > .05$. A homogeneity of variance was conducted for questions 10-14. Question 10 violated the assumption, $F(2, 82) = 3.65, p < .05$, and Question 13 also violated the assumption, $F(2,
82) = 4.31, \( p < .05 \). Questions 11 and 14 were not significant and, therefore, did not violate.

Because the homogeneity of variance was violated, a robust tests of equality of means were run, and the Welch F tests revealed that questions 10 and 13 violated the assumptions: Question 10, \( F(2, 21.62) = 6.71, p < .05 \); Question 13, \( F(2, 22.73) = 21.28, p < .05 \).

Because questions 10, 11, and 13 showed a significant difference in the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshmen Academy will improve academics and increase subject area test scores, post hoc tests using the Bonferroni error correction were conducted. The Bonferroni error correction test revealed that teachers and administrators differed in their beliefs on question 10 that the isolation of the freshmen population improves scores on the state assessments \( (p = .02) \), teachers and counselors did not differ in their beliefs \( (p = .33) \), and administrators and counselors did not differ in their beliefs \( (p = 1.00) \). For question 11, the Bonferroni error correction test revealed that teachers and administrators did differ in their beliefs that the isolation of the freshmen population improves academic performance (grades) \( (p = .03) \), but teachers and counselors did not differ in their beliefs \( (p = .79) \), as well as, administrators and counselors \( (p = .66) \). For question 13, the Bonferroni error correction test revealed that teachers and administrators did differ in their beliefs that the isolation of the freshmen population decreases the retention rate of ninth grade students \( (p = .01) \), administrators and counselors also differed in their beliefs \( (p = .00) \), but teachers and counselors did not differ in their beliefs \( (p = .10) \). These tests resulted in the researcher accepting the hypothesis that stated: “Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ
in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve academics and increase subject area test scores.”

Hypothesis 2

Hypothesis 2 stated: “Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will increase attendance rates.” A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in the opinions of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will increase attendance rates. Based on the results of the one-way ANOVA, there was not a significant difference in the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshman Academy would increase attendance rates, \( F(2, 82) = 2.22, p > .05 \). Question 15, “the isolation of the freshmen population improves attendance rates”, revealed a non-significant result, \( F(2, 82) = 2.46, p > .05 \), and Question 16, “the isolation of the freshmen population decreases the school’s drop-out rate”, revealed a non-significant result, \( F(2, 82) = 1.44, p > .05 \). These tests resulted in the researcher rejecting the hypothesis that stated: “Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will increase attendance rates.”

Hypothesis 3

Hypothesis 3 stated: “Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce ninth grade discipline referrals.” A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in the opinions of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce ninth grade discipline referrals.
Based on the results of the one-way AVOVA, there was a significant difference in the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshmen Academy will reduce ninth grade discipline referrals, \( F(2, 82) = 3.51, p < .05 \). Question 17, “the isolation of the freshmen population decreases discipline referrals”, resulted in a significant difference between the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers, \( F(2, 82) = 4.23, p < .05 \). Question 18, “the isolation of the freshmen population increases positive behavior”, did not result in a significant difference, \( F(2, 82) = 3.19, p = .05 \). Question 19, “the isolation of the freshmen population provides early identification and intervention of at-risk behavior”, did not result in a significant difference \( F(2, 82) = 1.80, p > .05 \), and Question 20, “the isolation of the freshmen population decreases student tardiness”, did not result in a significant difference \( F(2, 82) = 2.33, p > .05 \). A homogeneity of variance was conducted for questions 17-20. Question 17 violated the assumption, \( F(2, 82) = 5.19, p < .05 \). Questions 18-20 were not significant and, therefore, did not violate. Because the homogeneity of variance was violated, a robust tests of equality of means were run, and the Welch F tests revealed that question 17 violated the assumption: Question 17, \( F(2, 24.92) = 14.24, p < .05 \).

Because question 17 resulted in a significant difference in the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the isolation of the freshmen population will reduce ninth grade discipline referrals, post hoc tests using the Bonferroni error correction were conducted. The Bonferroni error correction test revealed that teachers and administrators differed in their beliefs on question 17 that the isolation of the freshmen population decreases discipline referrals \( p = .01 \), teachers and counselors did not differ in their beliefs \( p = 1.00 \), and administrators and counselors did not differ in
their beliefs (p = .11). These tests resulted in the researcher rejecting the hypothesis that stated: “Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce ninth grade discipline referrals.”

Hypothesis 4

Hypothesis 4 stated: “Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will encourage a positive school culture.” A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in the opinions of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshmen Academy will encourage a positive school culture. Based on the results of the one-way AVOVA, there was a significant difference in the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will encourage a positive school culture, $F(2, 82) = 4.02, p < .05$. Question 21, “the isolation of the freshmen population encourages student involvement and participation in school activities and functions”, resulted in a non-significant difference between the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers, $F(2, 82) = .74, p > .05$. Question 22, “the isolation of the freshmen population establishes positive connections with incoming ninth grade students with a specific set of teachers”, resulted in a significant difference between the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers, $F(2, 82) = 5.10, p < .05$, as well as, question 23, “the isolation of the freshmen population increases class identity and cohesiveness”, $F(2, 82) = 4.88, p < .05$.

A homogeneity of variance was conducted for questions 21–23. Question 21 violated the assumption, $F(2, 82) = 6.45, p < .05$. Questions 22-23 were not significant and, therefore, did not violate. Because the homogeneity of variance was violated, a
robust tests of equality of means were run, and the Welch F tests revealed that question 21 did not violate the assumption: Question 21, $F(2, 21.41) = 1.19, p > .05$.

Because questions 22 and question 23 resulted in a significant difference in the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will encourage a positive school culture, post hoc tests using the Bonferroni error correction were conducted. The Bonferroni error correction test revealed that teachers and administrators did not differ in their beliefs on question 22 that “the isolation of the freshmen population establishes positive connections with incoming ninth grade students with a specific set of teachers” ($p = .06$), teachers and counselors did differ in their beliefs ($p = .05$), and administrators and counselors did not differ in their beliefs ($p = 1.10$). For question 23, the Bonferroni error correction test revealed that teachers and administrators did differ in their beliefs that “the isolation of the freshmen population increases class identity and cohesiveness” ($p = .03$), teachers and counselors did not differ in their beliefs ($p = .12$), and administrators and counselors did not differ in their beliefs ($p = 1.00$). These tests resulted in the researcher accepting the hypothesis that stated: “Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will encourage a positive school culture.”

Hypothesis 5

Hypothesis 5 stated: “Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy is an effective way of transitioning students into ninth grade.” A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in the opinions of administrators, counselors, and teachers that implementation of a Freshman Academy is an effective way of transitioning
students into the ninth grade. Based on the results of the one-way AVOVA, there was a significant difference in the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshmen Academy is an effective way of transitioning students into the ninth grade, $F(2, 82) = 6.54, p < .05$. Question 24, “the isolation of the freshman population established positive transitions for incoming ninth grade students with a specific set of teachers”, resulted in a significant difference between the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers, $F(2, 82) = 5.84, p < .05$. Question 25, “the isolation of the freshmen population aides with social transition to the high school environment,” resulted in a significant difference between the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers, $F(2, 82) = 5.72, p < .05$, as well as, Question 26, “the isolation of the freshmen population eases the transition from middle school to high school”, $F(2, 82) = 5.26, p < .05$.

A homogeneity of variance was conducted for questions 24-26. Question 24 violated the assumption, $F(2, 82) = 4.36, p < .05$. Questions 25 violated the assumption, $F(2, 82) = 8.80, p < .05$. Question 26 violated the assumption, $F(2, 82) = 9.02, p < .05$. Because the homogeneity of variance was violated, a robust tests of equality of means were run, and the Welch F tests revealed that question 24 violated the assumption: $F(2, 27.51) = 11.99, p < .05$. Question 25 violated the assumption: $F(2, 28.42) = 12.75, p < .05$. For question 26, a robust test of equality of means could not be performed because at least one group had a zero variance.

Because questions 24, 25, and 26 resulted in a significant difference in the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshman Academy is an effective way of transitioning students into ninth grade, post hoc tests
using the Bonferroni error correction were conducted. The Bonferroni error correction test revealed that teachers and administrators did differ in their beliefs on question 24 that “the isolation of the freshmen population establishes positive transitions for incoming ninth grade students with a specific set of teachers” (p = .04), teachers and counselors also differed in their beliefs (p = .03), and administrators and counselors did not differ in their beliefs (p = 1.00). For question 25, the Bonferroni error correction test revealed that teachers and administrators did differ in their beliefs that “the isolation of the freshmen population aides with social transition to the high school environment” (p = .03), teachers and counselors did not differ in their beliefs (p = .05), and administrators and counselors did not differ in their beliefs (p = 1.00). These tests resulted in the researcher accepting the hypothesis that stated: “Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy is an effective way of transitioning students into ninth grade.”

**Hypothesis 6**

Hypothesis 6 stated: “Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve those who come from a low socio-economic status.” A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in the opinions of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve those who come from a low socio-economic status. Based on the results of the one-way AVOVA, there was not a significant difference in the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshmen Academy will improve those who come from a low socio-economic status, $F (2, 82) = 2.89$, $p > .05$. Question 27, “the isolation of the
freshmen population improves the academic success of low socio-economic students”, resulted in a non-significant difference between the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers, \( F(2, 82) = 2.16, p > .05 \). Question 28, “the isolation of the freshmen population improves the attendance rate of low socio-economic students,” resulted in a significant difference between the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers, \( F(2, 82) = 4.13, p < .05 \). Question 29, “the isolation of the freshmen population improves the behavior of low socio-economic students,” resulted in a non-significant difference between the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers, \( F(2, 82) = 2.64, p > .05 \).

A homogeneity of variance was conducted for questions 27-29. Question 27 did not violate the assumption, \( F(2, 82) = 1.03, p > .05 \). Questions 28 did not violate the assumption, \( F(2, 82) = 1.55, p > .05 \). Question 29 did not violate the assumption, \( F(2, 82) = 2.16, p > .05 \).

Because questions 28 resulted in a significant difference in the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve those who come from a low socio-economic status, post hoc tests using the Bonferroni error correction were conducted. The Bonferroni error correction test revealed that teachers and administrators did not differ in their beliefs on question 28 that “the isolation of the freshmen population improves the attendance rate of low socio-economic students” (\( p = .08 \)), teachers and counselors also did not differ in their beliefs (\( p = .12 \)), and administrators and counselors did not differ in their beliefs (\( p = 1.00 \)). These tests resulted in the researcher rejecting the hypothesis that stated: “Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the
implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve those who come from a low socio-economic status.”

_Hypothesis 7_

Hypothesis 7 stated: “Administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce teacher isolation and increase teacher moral.” A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference in the opinions of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce teacher isolation and increase teacher moral. Based on the results of the one-way AVOVA, there was a significant difference in the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshmen Academy will reduce teacher isolation and increase teacher moral, _F (2, 82) = 6.73, p < .05_. Question 30, “implementing a freshmen academy reduces teacher isolation,” resulted in a significant difference between the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers, _F (2, 82) = 4.28, p < .05_. Question 31, “implementing a freshmen academy increases teacher satisfaction and morale,” resulted in a significant difference between the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers, _F (2, 82) = 5.50, p < .05_. Question 32, “implementing a freshmen academy increases a collective responsibility for student success,” also resulted in a significant difference between the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers, _F (2, 82) = 6.56, p < .05_.

A homogeneity of variance was conducted for questions 30-32. Question 30 did not violate the assumption, _F (2, 82) = 1.23, p > .05_. Questions 31 did not violate the assumption, _F (2, 82) = .74, p > .05_. Question 32 violated the assumption, _F (2, 82) = 8.65, p < .05_. Because the homogeneity of variance was violated, a robust tests of
equality of means were run, and the Welch F tests revealed that question 32 violated the assumption: \( F(2, 27.59) = 19.80, p < .05. \)

Because question 30, 31, 32 resulted in a significant difference in the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce teacher isolation and increase teacher morale, post hoc tests using the Bonferroni error correction were conducted. The Bonferroni error correction test revealed that teachers and administrators did differ in their beliefs on question 30 that “implementing a freshmen academy reduces teacher isolation” (\( p = .01 \)), teachers and counselors did not differ in their beliefs (\( p = 1.00 \)), and administrators and counselors did not differ in their beliefs (\( p = .19 \)). For question 31, Bonferroni error correction test revealed that teachers and administrators did differ in their beliefs that “implementing a freshmen academy increases teacher satisfaction and morale” (\( p = .00 \)), teachers and counselors did not differ in their beliefs (\( p = 1.00 \)), and administrators and counselors did not differ in their beliefs (\( p = .16 \)). For question 32, Bonferroni error correction test revealed that teachers and administrators did differ in their beliefs that “implementing a freshmen academy increases a collective responsibility for student success” (\( p = .00 \)), teachers and counselors did not differ in their beliefs (\( p = .31 \)), and administrators and counselors did not differ in their beliefs (\( p = .40 \)). These tests resulted in the researcher accepting the hypothesis that stated: Administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce teacher isolation and increase teacher morale.
Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine whether administrators, counselors, and teachers believe Freshman Academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools are an effective way of transitioning ninth graders into mainstream high school. This study consisted of administrators, counselors, and teachers from seven different school districts in the state of Mississippi who currently work in a Freshman Academy, School-Within-A-School, or separate Ninth Grade School. All participants were required to hold a Mississippi teaching license.

The researcher-developed questionnaire included demographics, academics, attendance, discipline, school culture, transitioning, socio-economic status, and instructional staff. The thirty-two Likert-scale questions yielded quantitative data for the research. After gathering the results from the pilot study, the researcher input the data into SPSS and used a Cronbach’s alpha test to check for reliability of the questionnaire. The overall Cronbach Alpha for the pilot study was .98. For the actual study, the Cronbach’s Alpha for the whole instrument was .97, which is above the recommended .70 for reliability. The subscale Academics had a Cronbach’s alpha of .87, which is above the recommended .70 for reliability. The subscale Attendance had a Cronbach’s alpha of .85, which is also above the recommended .70 for reliability. The subscale Discipline also had an acceptable Cronbach’s alpha of .91. The subscale School Culture had a Cronbach’s alpha of .85, which is above the recommended .70 for reliability. The subscale Transitioning also had an acceptable Cronbach’s alpha of .92, as well as, Socio-Economic Status with a Cronbach alpha of .95, and the subscale Instructional Staff
yielded a Cronbach’s alpha of .89. The data generated from the research were examined, and the researcher recorded the results.
CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine whether administrators, counselors, and teachers believe Freshman Academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools are an effective way of transitioning ninth graders into mainstream high school. The questionnaire titled “Administrators’, Counselors’, and Teachers’ Opinions Regarding the Impact of Freshman Academies, Schools-within-Schools, and Ninth Grade Schools, as it Relates to Effective Transitioning” was given to participants in five school districts. The schools all housed freshmen academies, schools-within-schools, or ninth grade schools. The questionnaire was given in booklet form and completed using paper and pencil. Participants in this study consisted of ninth grade administrators, ninth grade counselors, and ninth grade teachers who work in freshmen academies, schools-within-schools, or ninth grade schools in the state of Mississippi. Chapter V includes a summary of the procedures, major findings and discussion of the results, limitations of the study, recommendations for policy makers and practitioners, and recommendations for future research on this subject.

Summary of Procedures

The data gathered in this study was comprised from 85 completed questionnaires. The researcher developed an eight-section questionnaire that included demographics, academic performance, attendance and drop-out rates, discipline referrals, school culture, transitioning from middle school to high school, low socioeconomic status, and instructional staff. A panel of experts — comprised of a high school principal, a school
counselor, and a ninth-grade teacher — reviewed the instrument for clearness and validity.

Once the validity of the questionnaire had been established, the researcher asked permission from superintendents of freshman academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools to conduct research in their school districts. Once permission was granted, the researcher contacted principals with a cover letter asking for permission to survey their school personnel. Once permission was granted from the superintendents, the researcher asked for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the University of Southern Mississippi to conduct research in the five Mississippi school districts.

Once permission was granted from the IRB, a pilot study took place. This pilot study involved 19 participants from an approved school district. Along with the questionnaire booklet, the cover letter contained information explaining the purpose of the study, the anonymity and confidentiality of the questionnaire, and emphasized that participant’s participation in the questionnaire was voluntary. Once the pilot study was completed, the pilot study results were entered into SPSS. A Cronbach’s alpha test was used to determine reliability of the survey. The overall Cronbach Alpha for the study was .97, which included all of the survey items excluding the demographic section. The .97 surpassed the .70 that is generally required for academic research.

Once the pilot study was completed, the researcher mailed the questionnaires to each participant and/or school. Each participant was provided with a Consent Document indicating his or her consent in the research. Upon completion of the questionnaires, each participant implied informed consent. Administrators, counselors, and teachers
returned their questionnaires to the school’s designee for the researcher to retrieve. Because of distance, some schools mailed questionnaires to the researcher. The research produced 85 completed questionnaires from participants. The data from the complete questionnaires was entered into an Excel spreadsheet and input into the SPSS program. Then, the data was examined using descriptive statistics and a one-way ANOVA.

Major Findings and Discussion of Results

To comprehend the effect of the isolation of the freshmen academy, the researcher collected and analyzed demographics, academics performance, attendance rates, discipline, school culture, transitioning, socioeconomic status, and instructional staff. The participants in this study derived from schools in Mississippi that housed a freshmen academy. Out of 85 participants surveyed, most were female and most ranged in age from 30-39 years. The majority of participants had 11-20 years of experience, and the highest percentage of participants held a master’s degree.

Research Question 1 asked: Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve academics and increase subject area test scores? This research question was answered by testing Hypothesis 1: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve academics and increase subject area test scores. By using a one-way ANOVA, Hypothesis 1 showed a statistical difference between administrators’, counselors’, and teachers’ opinions that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve academics and increase subject area test scores. In analyzing the descriptive statistical information for the subscale for academics, administrators and counselors did not differ in their opinion that the isolation
of the freshmen population improves scores on state assessments. Both administrators and counselors agree that the isolation of the freshmen population does improve test scores; however, teachers have a neutral stance that the isolation of the freshmen population improves tests scores. Descriptive analysis also revealed that administrators strongly agreed and counselors agreed that the isolation of the freshmen population improves academic performance. Once again, the data revealed that teachers had a neutral stance verging on agreeance that the isolation of the freshmen population improves academic performance. This could easily contribute to the fact that counselors and administrators are data driven and are always comparing test scores and academic performance from year to year. Teachers do the same; however, they feel their students are going to perform at their best regardless of whether the freshman are isolated or not. In addition, the mean scores revealed that administrators, counselors, and teachers were split in opinion concerning the isolation of the freshmen population decreases the retention rate of ninth grade students. Administrators strongly agreed, whereas teachers felt neutral that the isolation of the freshmen academy decreased the retention rate of ninth grade students. On the other hand, counselors disagreed that the isolation of the freshmen academy decreased the retention rate of ninth grade students. Blount (2012) stated that many at risk students have faced environmental challenges at the age of 14 or 15. He also mentioned that low family income, high mobility, and disengagement are factors to look for to help prevent students from dropping out of school. Counselors work hard to develop relationships with students and their families; therefore justifying why it is a much deeper understanding of why ninth grade students are retained. Just isolating them to one class is not enough.
Research Question 2 asked: Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will increase attendance rates? This research question was addressed by testing Hypothesis 2: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will increase attendance rates. A one-way ANOVA test was performed and it indicated that Hypothesis 2 showed no statistical difference in the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers regarding that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will increase attendance rates. In analyzing the descriptive statistical information for attendance, administrators, counselors, and teachers did not differ in their beliefs that the implementation of the freshman academy will increase the attendance rates. According to the data, administrators, counselors, and teachers did agree that the isolation of the freshman population improves attendance rates. The data also displayed that administrators, counselors, and teachers also agreed that the isolation of the freshman population decreases the school’s drop-out rate. This could possibly contribute to the fact that by providing a smooth transition and isolating the freshman, they feel they are part of a family. Donegan (2008) stated that there are more failures in ninth grade than any other year due to the number of absences from students. However, Smith (1997) revealed that students who have the opportunity to experience full transition programs when moving from the eighth to ninth grade are less likely to drop out of school.

Research Question 3 asked: Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce ninth grade discipline referrals? This research question was analyzed by testing Hypothesis 3: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation
of a Freshman Academy will reduce ninth grade discipline referrals. By using a one-way ANOVA, Hypothesis 3 showed a statistical difference between administrators’, counselors’, and teachers’ opinions that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce ninth grade discipline referrals. In analyzing the descriptive statistical information for the subscale for discipline, administrators strongly agreed that the isolation of the freshmen population decreases discipline referrals, increases positive behavior, and decreases student tardiness. However, both counselors and teachers had a neutral opinion that the isolation of the freshmen population decreases discipline referrals, increases positive behavior, and decreases student tardiness. The difference of opinions between administrators and counselors/teachers could be attributed to the fact that administrators are the people at school who handle the discipline problems and have a broader spectrum concerning discipline; administrators are also the people who are in the office monitoring tardies and running reports by grade level to determine which class has the most discipline and tardies. Teachers are limited in their dealings with discipline and tardies with the exception of their own classroom or duty posts. Counselors attempt to establish a non-disciplinary rapport with students to establish trust; therefore, they also are limited in their dealings with discipline. Cushman (2006) suggests that eighth grade students should be given more tasks, responsibilities, and expectations so students are more mature. He stated this establishes a foundation and understanding of what is expected of them when they come to high school. He also encourages students to make better connections with adults. By connecting with a teacher about the realities of high school, upcoming freshmen replace fear with knowledge (Cushman 2006). Students are known to perform and their best when they feel accepted, valued, and safe.
Research Question 4 asked: Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will encourage a positive school culture? This research question was analyzed by testing Hypothesis 4: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will encourage a positive school culture. By using a one-way ANOVA, Hypothesis 4 showed a statistical difference between administrators’, counselors’, and teachers’ opinions that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will encourage a positive school culture. In reviewing the descriptive statistical information for the subscale for school culture, administrators and counselors did not differ in their opinion that the isolation of the freshmen population encourages student involvement and participation in school activities and functions. Teachers revealed a neutral opinion. Descriptive analysis also revealed that administrators and counselors strongly agreed that the isolation of the freshmen population establishes positive connections with incoming ninth grade students with a specific set of teachers. The data revealed that teachers agreed, as well, just not quite as high as administrators and counselors. In addition, the mean scores revealed that administrators and counselors strongly agreed and teachers agreed that the isolation of the freshman population increases class identity and cohesiveness. Donegan (2008) conducted a study that determined that the lowest student to teacher ratio was among the 12th grade classes and the highest student-to-teacher ratio was among the ninth grade classes. If the ninth grade year is the make or break year this should alert administrators and counselors. In a study, Donegan surveyed principals and asked them to identify their best teachers in their building. He found that the majority of these teachers were teaching upperclassmen and honors classes (Donegan, 2008). In
order to increase positive school culture within ninth grade academies, it is suggested that the best teachers should be teaching freshman. Having those teachers who go above and beyond and care about the all-around student will increase participation in school activities and will help develop positive connections and class identity.

Research Question 5 asked: Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy is an effective way of transitioning students into the ninth grade? This research question was analyzed by testing Hypothesis 5: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy is an effective way of transitioning students into the ninth grade. By using a one-way ANOVA, Hypothesis 5 showed a statistical difference between administrators’, counselors’, and teachers’ opinions that the implementation of a Freshman Academy is an effective way of transitioning students into the ninth grade. In examining the descriptive statistical information for the subscale for transitioning, administrators and counselors strongly agreed on all three questions that the isolation of the freshmen population establishes positive transitions for incoming ninth grade students with a specific set of teachers, aides with social transition to the high school environment, and eases the transition from middle school to high school. Teachers, however, had a strong neutral opinion on all three questions. Mizelle (2005) reminds us that effective transition programs are a critical element in ensuring ninth graders’ success. Collaboration among middle school and high school administrators and teachers is another crucial component to ensure a smooth transition from eighth grade to ninth grade. These individuals must work together and share information about their respective schools, classes, and core curriculum (Hertzog et al., 1996). It takes a team of
administrators, teachers, parents, and students to ensure ninth grade success. A short freshman orientation is not enough (Mizelle, 2005). Administrators and counselors know the importance of having strong teachers in the ninth grade. This is the year where students need the most support. Placing teachers who are not only good with the delivery of academic content, but also good at nurturing, caring, and comforting students, is vital in ensuring overall success for ninth grade students.

Research Question 6 asked: Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve those who come from a low-socio economic status? This research question was addressed by testing Hypothesis 6: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve those who come from a low socio-economic status. A one-way ANOVA test was performed and it indicated that Hypothesis 6 showed no statistical difference in the beliefs of administrators, counselors, and teachers regarding that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will improve those who come from a low socio-economic status. In analyzing the descriptive statistical information for socio-economic status, administrators and counselors agreed and teachers were neutral that the isolation of the freshmen population improves academic success of low socio-economic students. The same was found to be true for the question regarding the isolation of the freshmen population improves attendance rates of low socio-economic students. According to the data, counselors and teachers were neutral whereas administrators did agree that the isolation of the freshman population improves behavior of low socio-economic students. Blue and Cook (2004) revealed that students who reside in low socioeconomic neighborhoods are more likely to drop out of
high school than those students who live in a more prosperous neighborhoods. Also, students who live in low socioeconomic areas have a high mobility rate (Rumberger, 2003). Most students who come from a low socio-economic background need extra support. It is recommended by the researcher that administrators, counselors, and teachers think outside the box to make sure these students are reporting to school on time and are being successful. Perhaps providing transportation for after school tutoring is one way to help those less fortunate meet with success. Also, these students should have an advocate, other than a counselor, that they trust and can go to in times of need.

Research Question 7 asked: Do administrators, counselors, and teachers differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce teacher isolation and increase teacher morale? This research question was analyzed by testing Hypothesis 7: Administrators, counselors, and teachers do differ in their beliefs that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce teacher isolation and increase teacher morale. By using a one-way ANOVA, Hypothesis 7 showed a statistical difference between administrators’, counselors’, and teachers’ opinions that the implementation of a Freshman Academy will reduce teacher isolation and increase teacher morale. Administrators agreed in all subscales that implementing a freshman academy reduces teacher isolation and increases teacher satisfaction and morale. Administrators strongly agreed and counselors agreed that implementing a freshman academy increases a collective responsibility for student success. Teachers felt neutral in all subscale questions. White (2008) concluded that moving ninth grade students to a separate building or wing is not the solution. Chmelynski (2004) stated that Freshman Academies are built around a philosophy. The key is finding a group of committed
teachers who enjoy working with ninth graders and are sold on the philosophy of helping the students transition into high school (Chmelynski, 2004). Finding a group of teachers who care about each other and consider all ninth graders a collective team or unit can be a powerful thing.

Limitations

There were several factors that limited this study’s findings. Participants for this particular study were limited to administrators, counselors, and teachers who work in the state of Mississippi. Also, the only schools that participated currently work within a ninth grade academy or schools that isolate freshmen from the high school population. The researcher mailed the questionnaire out to 12 schools in five different school districts. Out of the 12 schools, only six schools chose to participate. Out of those six schools, four of them were considered high performing. The researcher would have preferred to have more low performing districts participate in the research study.

Another limitation was that 63 teachers participated in the survey, whereas only 10 administrators and 12 counselors participated. For a more balanced analyzation, more administrators and counselors needed to participate.

The Cronbach’s alpha test of reliability was performed on each set of items. All items, which included academics, attendance, discipline, school culture, transitioning, socio-economic status, and instructional staff, all yielded a reliability greater than the recommended .70; therefore, the Cronbach’s alpha test was not a limitation to this particular study.
Recommendations for Policymakers and Practitioners

More and more pressure is being placed on public schools to produce high test scores, hire and grow quality teachers, and increase schools graduation rates. Schools should look in depth at their data to see if freshman are prepared when entering high school. It is the administrators, counselors, and teachers responsibility to ensure that students are prepared when they enter the ninth grade. Mizelle (2005) reminds educators that it takes a team of administrators, teachers, parents, and students, not just a short freshman orientation prepared by most high schools, to ensure ninth grade success.

It is also recommended by the researcher that middle school and high school teachers collaborate to determine an effective plan to ensure students are prepared when they enter the ninth grade. Collaboration among middle school and high school administrators and teachers is a crucial component to ensure a smooth transition from eighth grade to ninth grade. These individuals must work together and share information about their respective schools, classes, and core curriculum (Hertzog et al., 1996). Mizelle (2005) suggested that a vertical alignment team, consisting of teachers, counselors, and administrators, meet to measure and align the curriculum. This gives members from both schools a better understanding of what is being taught and the expectations of each level of middle school and high school (Mizelle, 2005).

Another recommendation for policymakers and practitioners is to look at the teaching staff to be sure you have the most effective teachers teaching ninth grade students. Donegan (2008) concluded that the freshman year is the make or break year for students. He conducted a study that revealed that the lowest student-to-teacher ratio was among the 12th grade classes and the highest student-to-teacher ratio was among the ninth
grade classes. He also asked several principals to identify the top ten teachers in their building. He found that a high number of these teachers were teaching upperclassmen or honors classes. If the freshman year is the make or break year for students, why are the best teachers educating older and more advanced students (Donegan, 2008)? The researcher agrees with Donegan that administrators should rethink their teacher assignments and place some of their best teachers within the ninth grade.

Policymakers and practitioners could utilize the questionnaire to determine administrators’, counselors’, and teachers’ opinions of freshman academies as it relates to effective transitioning. The data illustrated that there was a statistical difference between opinions of administrators, counselors, and teachers in the subscale areas of academics, discipline, school culture, transitioning, and instructional staff. The data revealed no statistical difference in the subscale areas of attendance and socio-economic status. Future policymakers and practitioners could do more in-depth study to determine why there was a statistical difference in five of the seven subscale areas. The researcher believes that in order to conduct a successful freshman academy, administrators, counselors, and teachers should all be on the same page to guarantee a smooth transition for ninth grade students.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

On many occasions, research yields the opportunity to investigate a study in more depth. These findings reveal additional opportunities for those interested in implementing a freshman academy. For future studies, the researcher recommends the following be considered when researching topics related to freshman academies:
1. Future studies should consist of schools outside of Mississippi. This will allow for a much broader spectrum of research.

2. Schools who are considered low performing were not well represented in this study. It is recommended for a more representative sample of these particular schools.

3. It is recommended that more administrators and counselors participate in the research. Even though it is the norm for more teachers to participate, additional administrators and counselors opinions could have made the research stronger.

4. Future studies should include a qualitative component to the questionnaire.

5. Future studies should include superintendents’, curriculum coordinators’, department chairs’, and students’ opinions.

6. It is recommended that any future researcher who wishes to use the survey instrument make the necessary revisions to improve the reliability of the instrument.

Summary

This study examined administrators’, counselors’, and teachers’ opinions regarding the impact of freshman academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade school, as it relates to effective transitioning. This study included an introduction and a literature review about freshmen academies. The study also included methodology, research results, conclusions, recommendations for policy makers and practitioners, and recommendations for future research. The researcher developed a survey instrument to examine opinions of administrators, counselors, and teachers regarding the impact of
freshmen academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools, as it relates to effective transitioning. The study was conducted using a paper/pencil questionnaire involving 85 participants with the majority being female with 11-20 years of experience.

This study analyzed administrators, counselors, and teachers regarding the impact of freshmen academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools, as it relates to effective transitioning. The results from the study revealed that there was a significant difference in the opinions of administrators, counselors, and teachers concerning academics, discipline, school culture, transitioning, and instructional staff. On the other hand, the study revealed that there was no significant difference in the opinions of administrators, counselors, and teachers concerning attendance rates and students from a low socio-economic background.
APPENDIX A – Survey Instrument

Administrators’, Counselors’, and Teachers’ Opinions Regarding the Impact of Freshmen Academies, Schools-Within-Schools, and Ninth Grade Schools, as it Relates to Effective Transitioning

Please complete the following survey. This survey is anonymous and will be used for the purpose of the researcher’s dissertation. Your input is critical to the validity of the researcher’s work. Please be honest in answering all questions.

Before you begin, please answer the consent form below:

Do you voluntarily consent to take this survey and give your permission to the researcher for the use of your answers in her research?

_____ Yes, I voluntarily give my permission to the researcher.

_____ No, I do not voluntarily give my permission to the researcher.

If you answered NO to this question, please do not proceed.

Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Please answer the following questions by circling the correct response.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What is your gender?</td>
<td>(1) Male  (2) Female</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What is your age?</td>
<td>(1) 20-29  (2) 30-39  (3) 40-49  (4) 50 +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Counting this year, how many years have you been working in education?</td>
<td>(1) 1-5  (2) 6-10  (3) 11-20  (4) 21-30  (5) 30+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What type of certification do you currently hold?</td>
<td>(1) Bachelor’s Degree  (2) Master’s Degree  (3) Specialist’s Degree  (4) Doctoral Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. In what capacity are you currently working at your school?</td>
<td>(1) Principal/Assistant Principal  (2) Counselor  (3) Teacher</td>
</tr>
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</table>
6. How many years have you been working in that capacity? (1) 1-5  (2) 6-10  (3) 11-20  (4) 21-30  (5) 30+

7. In what type of school best describes your freshmen academy? (1) School-Within-A-School  (2) Separate Ninth Grade School

8. How many years has your ninth grade school or school-within-a-school been in place? (1) 0-5 years  (2) 5-10 years  (3) 11+ years

9. What most accurately describes your ninth grade population? (1) 1-100  (2) 101-199  (3) 200-299  (4) 300-399  (5) 400-499  (6) 500+

**Academics**

**Please indicate the following strategies as:**
1. Strongly Disagree  
2. Disagree  
3. Neutral  
4. Agree  
5. Strongly Agree

10. The isolation of the freshmen population improves scores on state assessments. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

11. The isolation of the freshmen population improves academic performance (grades). (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

12. The isolation of the freshmen population increases the high school’s graduation rate. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

13. The isolation of the freshmen population decreases the retention rate of ninth grade students. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

14. The isolation of the freshmen population provides early identification and intervention in academics. (1) (2) (3) (4) (5)

**Attendance**

**Please indicate the following strategies as:**
1. Strongly Disagree  
2. Disagree  
3. Neutral  
4. Agree  
5. Strongly Agree
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population improves attendance rates.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population decreases the school’s drop-out rate.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discipline</strong></td>
<td>Please indicate the following strategies as:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population decreases discipline referrals.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population increases positive behavior.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population provides early identification and intervention of at-risk behavior.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population decreases student tardiness.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School Culture</strong></td>
<td>Please indicate the following strategies as:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population encourages student involvement and participation in school activities and functions.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>The isolation of the freshmen population establishes positive connections with incoming ninth grade students with a specific set of teachers.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. The isolation of the freshmen population increases class identity and cohesiveness.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Transitioning</strong></td>
<td>Please indicate the following strategies as:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. The isolation of the freshmen population establishes positive transitions for incoming ninth grade students with a specific set of teachers.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25. The isolation of the freshmen population aides with social transition to the high school environment.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. The isolation of the freshmen population eases the transition from middle school to high school.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Socio-Economic Status</strong></td>
<td>Please indicate the following strategies as:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. The isolation of the freshmen population improves the academic success of low socio-economic students.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. The isolation of the freshmen population improves the attendance rate of low socio-economic students.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. The isolation of the freshmen population improves the behavior of low socio-economic students.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Staff</strong></td>
<td>Please indicate the following strategies as:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1. Strongly Disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Neutral</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Agree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Strongly Agree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Agree</td>
<td>5. Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. Implementing a freshmen academy reduces teacher isolation.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. Implementing a freshmen academy increases teacher satisfaction and morale.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Implementing a freshmen academy increases a collective responsibility for student success.</td>
<td>(1) (2) (3) (4) (5)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
APPENDIX B - Letter Requesting Permission From Superintendents

Date

Name of Superintendent

Name of School District

District Address

Dear Superintendent:

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study with the teachers in your school district. The information gathered will be used in my dissertation at the University of Southern Mississippi (USM), shared with my dissertation committee.

The research will analyze the opinions of administrators, counselors, and teachers related to the impact of freshman academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools. The title of my research is *Administrators’, Counselors’, and Teachers’ Opinions Regarding the Impact of Freshman Academies, Schools-Within-Schools, and Ninth Grade Schools as They Relate to Effective Transitioning*. I am requesting to survey the freshman academy/ninth grade school in your school district. If approved, I will contact the ninth grade principal to determine the best time to mail out the paper/pencil survey. The data gathered will be kept confidential with only the researcher and committee members having access to the participants’ responses. This research is anonymous and no teacher, school, and/or district will be identified. The time to complete the survey will take less than 10 minutes and will not be a distraction to your teachers. I plan to begin collecting data in January 2016 and be completed by the end of February 2016. Participation is completely voluntary; participation may be discontinued at any time without penalty or prejudice to the participant. Surveys collected will be shredded after the study is completed. There is no inherent risk associated with being a participant of this survey.

I am required to follow all of the ethical guidelines of research as proposed by the Human Subjects Committee at USM. Upon receipt of your consent letter, I will submit my application to this committee for approval.

If it is your decision to grant me permission, please print the attached permission letter on your school letterhead, sign the permission letter, and scan your signed permission letter to me at rkillebrew@pc.k12.ms.us. Thank you for your support.

Respectfully,

Robyn Killebrew
Pass Christian High School
Principal
APPENDIX C – Superintendent Survey Permission Form

Ms. Robyn Killebrew has requested permission to survey all certified personnel involved in the Freshman Academy in your school district. The title of her survey instrument is *Administrators’, Counselors’, and Teachers’ Opinions Regarding the Impact of Freshman Academies, Schools-Within-Schools, and Ninth Grade Schools as They Relate to Effective Transitioning.*

Surveys will be administered in consultation with the high school principal at an agreed upon time. Staff completion of the survey will not interfere with classroom instruction. This research is anonymous and no teacher, school, and/or district will be identified. I also understand that participation is voluntary and participants may choose to end their participation at any time without penalty.

____________________________________  ____________________
Superintendent of Education (or Designee)  Date
APPENDIX D – Institutional Review Board Approval for Study

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 21, 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: 15120105
PROJECT TITLE: Administrators’, Counselors’, and Teachers’ Opinions Regarding the Impact of the Freshman Academies, Schools-Within-Schools, and Ninth Grade Schools as They Relate to Effective Transitioning
PROJECT TYPE: New Project
RESEARCHER(S): Robyn Suzanne Killebrew
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education and Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 12/15/2015 to 12/14/2016
Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board
APPENDIX E – Informed Consent Form

The University of Southern Mississippi Consent Document

**Purpose:** As educators in the ninth grade setting in Mississippi, you are being as to participate in research designed to help us better understand the impact of freshman academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools as it relates to effective transitioning. This research is being conducted by Robyn Killebrew, a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. David Lee, at the University of Southern Mississippi.

**Direction of the Study:** As a participant, you are being asked to complete a questionnaire on your opinion regarding the impact of freshman academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools as it relates to effective transitioning. The questionnaire should take no longer than 5-10 minutes of your time. The results will be shared after the study is conducted with interested participants by contacting the researcher using the provided contact information.

**Benefits:** Your input will assist us in studying the impact of freshman academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools as they relate to effective transitioning.

**Risks:** There are no known risks to participants. The district, as well as the participants, will be kept confidential.

**Subject’s Assurance:** Participation in this study is strictly voluntary. You may refuse to participate in the questionnaire without any punishment. Refusing to participate will not affect your standing as an educator by any means. If you have any questions, you may contact Robyn Killebrew at 601-596-5576 or Dr. David Lee at 601-266-4580.

This research project is in the process of being reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee. This committee ensures that research projects
involving human subjects follow federal guidelines. Any questions of concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, Box 5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001 or call 601-266-6820.

By returning the survey, you are indicating your consent to participate. The consent form is yours to keep for future reference. Please email me your completed survey at rkillebrew@pc.k12.ms.us. Thank you!
APPENDIX F – Letter to Participants

Dear Participant,

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am conducting a research study titled *Administrators’, Counselors’, and Teachers’ Opinions Regarding the Impact of Freshman Academies, Schools-Within-Schools, and Ninth Grade Schools, as It Relates to Effective Transitioning*. Please take a few moments of your time to complete the enclosed questionnaire. The survey should take no more than 5 minutes to complete. The questionnaire contains 32 questions ranging from the following: demographics, academics, attendance, discipline, school culture, transitioning, socio-economic status, and instructional staff. Upon receipt of all participants’ responses, aggregated information from all participants will be shared with my dissertation committee.

The data collected from the completed questionnaires will be compiled and analyzed. All data collected will be anonymous. All information gathered will be kept completely confidential and reported in aggregated form. To ensure confidentiality of teachers, no one will be identified by name. Upon completion of this research study, I will shred all surveys. As the researcher, I am very appreciative of your participation. By completing the survey, you will be providing your consent to participate in the study. However, you have the option to decline to participate if you so wish. If you decide to withdraw from participation at any time there is no penalty or risk of negative consequence.

I will use the data you provide to inform and strengthen the research in the area of freshman academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools, and how it relates to effective transitioning. Should you have any questions please feel free to contact me: Robyn Killebrew, email: robyn.killebrew@eagles.usm.edu; phone: 601-596-5576. The research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. David Lee, The University of Southern Mississippi, email: david.lee@usm.edu; phone: (601) 266-4580. This research project has been reviewed and approved by the Human Subjects Protection Review Committee, which ensures that all research fits the federal guidelines for research involving human subjects. Any questions or concerns about the rights of a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5147, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, (601)-266-5997.

Thank you for your participation.

Sincerely,

Robyn Killebrew
Dear Participant,

My name is Robyn Killebrew, and I am completing my dissertation entitled “Administrators’, Counselors’, and Teachers’ Opinions Regarding the Impact of Freshmen Academies, Schools-within-Schools, and Ninth Grade Schools, as it Relates to Effective Transitioning.”

In order to complete my study, I am asking you to become part of my Panel of Experts. Your expertise in education will provide me with quality feedback on the content validity of my crisis management training survey.

Please read and analyze the attached survey. After analyzing the survey, please complete the validity form that I have attached.

Thank you for participating and assisting me with this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Robyn Killebrew
Doctoral Candidate, University of Southern Mississippi
APPENDIX H – Validity Questionnaire

Ninth Grade Academy Survey

Administrators’, Counselors’, and Teachers’ Opinions Regarding the Impact of Freshman Academies, Schools-Within-Schools, and Ninth Grade Schools, as It Relates to Effective Transitioning.

Thank you for volunteering your time to assist me in the development of this survey. Your input is very important with respect to the survey itself and the development of the dissertation overall. Your willingness and consideration to participate in this study is greatly appreciated.

Please rate the include survey based on the following information:

1. Does the survey contain language that can be understood by administrators, counselors, and teachers who have experience in freshman academies, schools-within-schools, or ninth grade schools?
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

2. Does the survey address specific and appropriate issues in the statements, as it relates to the impact of freshmen academies, schools-within-schools, and ninth grade schools?
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

3. Do you find any of the questions offensive or obtrusive? ________________

4. Are there any questions that you would exclude from the survey?
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________

5. Are there any other statements that you would include that are not a part of the survey?
__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
REFERENCES


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Randolph, K., & Wilson-Younger, D. (2012). *Is No Child Left Behind effective for all students? Parents don’t think so.* Retrieved from 

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