

# Transition Programs Used to Bridge Incoming Ninth Grade At-Risk Students

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## ABSTRACT

CASSANDRA RICHARDS: Transition Programs Used to Bridge Incoming Ninth Grade At-Risk Students  
(Under the direction of Rita O'Sullivan)

The purpose of this study was to investigate transitional programs effectiveness for increasing incoming ninth grade student's academics, behavior, and grade promotion in light of effective transitional program components. This study used literature from three programs to identify successful components of transitional programs. The researcher then assessed their level of effectiveness through an analysis of 15 transitional programs. Moreover, the results showed that a successful transition program may or may not use all of the best practices named from literature. However it is clear that the most effective programs pay attention on to activities that increase academic skills, work to improve student behavior, and focus on student's promotion from grade to grade.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Across the United States in middle and high schools, the student dropout rates are increasing at alarming rates. This problem disproportionately affects students of color and students from low poverty school districts. Data further confirm that dropouts in 9th grade occur more often than any other grade. Although multiple solutions are needed to eradicate this problem, implementing a transition period from middle school to high school has been shown to reduce dropout rates for at-risk students. This study will use the literature on effective programs to identify successful components of these transitional programs. In addition, recent samples of transition programs will be reviewed to assess the degree to which they meet these identified criteria and contribute to school success as defined by higher graduation rates.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2007) indicated that 74% of high school seniors in the U.S. graduated in 2008. Nationally, dropout rates are at an all time low of 9.4%, with the distribution clearly reflecting the impact on minorities: 5.4% of dropouts are White students, 10.7% Black students, and 22.1% Hispanic students. By comparison, the North Carolina Report Card (NCRP) shows that 70% of the student population graduated from high school in the 2007-2008 school year. This percentage is significantly smaller for students of color: 63% of Black students, 56% of Hispanic students, and 54% of Native American students graduated from high school in 2007-2008. The data

illustrate that over one quarter of students from North Carolina have dropped out of school. For 2007-08, this total includes a combination of 11,674 White students, 8,329 Black students, 2,344 Hispanic students, and 480 Native American students (NCRP, 2008).

As indicated in Table 1: *Percent of Student Dropout by Grade in North Carolina*, found below, more students fail in the 9th grade than in any other grade. One third of the dropout population comes from 9th grade whereas a quarter comes from 10th grade (“Annual Report in Dropout Events and Rate” [ARDER], 2008). Similar dropout patterns can be found in the other states; 29 of 51 states have similar rates within their high schools (First Year High School [FYHS], 2007).

Table 1.

Percent of Student Dropout by Grade, North Carolina

Grade	%
9	32
10	25
11	22
12	15

Unfortunately the nation’s trend of declining dropout rates is parallel in North Carolina. Although North Carolina’s dropout rates (5.24%) are not above the nation’s average, this state’s dropout rates have steadily increased; 5.04% in 2005-2006 from 4.74% in 2004-2005 (ARDER, 2007). As the student population in NC has increased, the number of dropouts in North Carolina have consistently increased accounting for 23,550 students for the 2006-2007 school year compared to the previous year of 22,180 students (an 6% increase). According to North Carolina’s 2008 Annual Report in Dropout Events and Rate (ARDER), this is the highest dropout rate since 1999-2000. ARDER further indicated that the top reason for



students dropping out of school is poor attendance. Nonattendance was cited for more than 50% of all dropouts.

In the U.S, consistent absence during the first 30 days of 9th grade is the strongest predictor of which students will drop out of school. This indicator is stronger than behavior problems in the 8th grade, academics, test scores, and age (FYHS, 2007). Generally, students who drop out of high school fail at least 25% of their courses compared to 8% of high school graduates who have encountered the same struggle. A majority of high school dropouts are poor and underprivileged students of color. Of the dropouts in low-income high schools, 40% left after the 9th grade (Barr & Parrett, 2007).

Ninth grade also has been noted for having the highest enrollment. The Ninth Grade Bulge is a term characterizing the high volume of students in 9th grade, varied from transitioning 8th graders to those held back from the tenth grade. This term is found to be more prominent in urban high poverty schools. Of the students who are repeaters, their chance of dropping out of school increases. According to research done by Johns Hopkins University, of the cities with the highest dropout rates, 40% of students repeat the 9th grade while only 10-15% 9th grade repeaters continue on to graduate (FYHS, 2007). In the last 30 years, the Ninth Grade Bulge has increased from 4% to 13%.

There is a positive correlation between education level and social status: the more education one has, the more money one will make. Male students who did not graduate from high school earn an average salary of \$19,225, while their female counterparts earn \$11,583. These lower salaries can be compared to the yearly salary average of \$26,339 for high school male graduates and \$16,573 for female graduates (Barr & Parrett, 2007). Beyond this

research has shown that over 80% of inmates have dropped out of school and over 50% are illiterate.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Rites of Passage

Arnold van Gennep (1960) endorsed the idea that all individuals travel through rites of passage during their lifetimes. The author defined rites of passage as life transitions when individuals join new groups. According to Van Gennep, one's rite of passage takes an individual through a series of three stages; separation, liminality, and re-incorporation. A life crisis and/or life ceremony can prompt the first stage of separation to begin. During this stage, a person is separated from their traditional pattern and forced to begin a passage in a new direction. The second stage, known as liminality, derives from the Latin term *limen* meaning threshold (Brendendick, 2004). The liminal stage is defined as the "no-man's land" between the first stage and the second stage (p.57). Van Gennep (1960) argued that is impossible to get from one to the other without traveling through a middle stage. During the last stage, an individual goes through a period of re-incorporation into a culture, climate, or identity. He addresses the significance of transitions, thus:

For groups as well as for individuals, life itself means to separate and to be reunited, to change form and condition, to die and to be reborn. It is to act and to cease, to wait and rest, and then to begin acting again, but in a different way. Moreover, there are always new thresholds to cross. (p.189)

According to Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) for students the rite of passage period of separation is defined as leaving the comforting surroundings of middle school and entering a

new larger environment with intimidating upperclassmen, new teachers, and more rules. For rising 9th grade students this period of separation may cause anxiety and challenge their ability to handle a new environment. Anxiety may be further heightened by puberty, hormonal, and emotional development changes. Even higher levels of stress fall on those students who are already at-risk of dropping out. Rising 9th grade students also worry about establishing themselves in clichés and fulfilling expectations of peers and teachers. This in the context of research suggesting that peer conforming peaks in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, when students look for an identity.

Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) found that incoming 9th grade students listed the following as their top three concerns for entering high school: 1) academic, 2) procedural, and 3) social. Students defined academics as being curious about what high school was like, making sure to choose the right classes, and reach expectations of teachers. They were also concerned with graded assignments and taking tests and quizzes. The second major concern dealt with the procedural aspect of high school. Students wanted to know how to find and open lockers, the location of classes, and lunch time. The final concern students expressed was the social aspect of high school. Incoming freshmen were concerned about being in the right social group, making friends, and joining sports teams and clubs.

The rite of passage period of liminality is defined as Cauley and Jovanovich's (2006) term preparedness. This phrase is defined as meaning how well a student is prepared for high school and what extent of support is needed for a transition. The length of a student's liminal stage can be measured by the student's preparedness for high school. Students who have high grade marks, superior work habits, organizational skills, and the ability to conform to high standards, have a good chance to successfully transition into high school without much

support. For these students a shorter liminal stage would be needed. However for the average students, and those who are at-risk of dropping out, a transition program could be used to gradually improve academics, behavior, and level of comfort in a new environment. These programs could also be used to address the academic, procedural, and social concerns of students. For these students a longer liminal stage/transition process would be required.

A constructive liminal stage that supports and improves student achievement has the capability to decrease dropout rates. Author Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) identified a student's academic failure during their transition from middle school to high school as a strong indicator of dropping out. These authors reported that students who failed to transition successfully showed the following characteristics: not engaged in academic coursework, poor behavior, falling grades, and inappropriate interactions with classmates. Reports from the National High School Center also indicated that 9th grade students who were not involved in school activities were more likely to develop academic and behavior problems in the near future (FYHS, 2007). These reports also indicated that both poor students and students of color were more likely to not be involved in school activities.

And finally, Arnold Van Gennep's concluding stage of re-incorporation is identified as a student making a successful transition into high school. Depending on a student's level of preparedness, this period may last from a couple of days to a couple of years. Without this final stage, students who were unable to successfully transition either fall behind or drop out of school. Transition programs allow for a natural modification between middle and high school but are only successful once a student has advanced on.

Research shows that the success or failure of a student in 12<sup>th</sup> grade can be predicted by how well he (or she) performed as a freshman (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001). It is critical to

ensure that all incoming 9th grade students, especially those who are at-risk of dropping out, are maintaining and/or improving scholastics and behavior throughout their freshmen year. Without a successful transition, mistakes made as freshmen, can potentially limit the individual later on in life and prolong their re-incorporation stage.

### Types of Transition Programs

Transition programs have four models that range from lasting one day to several years. They may also assist a small group of students and/or an entire class. These models will be referred to as special programs, alternative education programs, freshmen academy, and freshmen first day. Each program benefits and/or addresses different needs.

The first model is known as special programs and interacts with students from one week to two years. Within this type of program, students at-risk for dropping out attend separate classes to bring them up to date with their peers. This form of transition specializes in pinpointing areas of weakness and working to improve those areas. For example, these programs focus on developing the emotional, mental, behavioral, and/or academic areas. Once these students become juniors or seniors, they may continue to work through the special program by mentoring incoming freshmen (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

The second model is known as alternative education program. This model is used more frequently for at-risk students and ranges from a few days to multiple months or years. An alternative education program assists short-term and long-term suspended students during their time away from their base school thus, providing more of a supportive and intimate setting (Barr & Parrett, 2007). Compared to traditional school, this model uses low teacher to student ratios, self-regulated instruction, fewer forms of competitive measurement, and less

structural rigidity. Within this type of program, mentoring and counseling can play a significant role in remodeling and modifying behavior of students (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Thirty years of evidence has documented the benefits of alternative school environments: students achieve better grades, their attitudes about school improve, their attendance improves, and they become less violent (Barr & Parrett, 2007).

The third model is referred to as freshmen academy, is also referred to as the School within a School model. In this model, some 9th grade students begin the transition before classes start by introducing transitional techniques in the summer. In addition, their entire school year is separate from the remaining high school student body (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). For urban schools with high numbers of at-risk students, this appears as the most effective model for transitioning 9th grade students. A freshmen academy allows students to make a smooth transition from middle to high school.

Finally, the last model is known as the freshmen only-first day of School. Usually this transition program lasts for one day. Incoming freshmen attend a day of school before the remaining student body. On this day they are given an orientation to high school, teachers are introduced, and rules and classroom expectations are presented (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). This form of transition is offered to all 9<sup>th</sup> grade students and does not necessarily focus on assisting students who are at-risk. For this reason, freshmen only-first day of school programs are not included in this study.

### Effective Transition Programs

Transition programs for middle school students at risk of dropping out of high school benefit students moving from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade to high school. Using a analysis of successful

transition characteristics from Cauley and Jovanovich (2006), Hertzog and Morgan (1999), and Barr and Parrett (2007), the researcher was able to determine effective components for transition. Together Kathleen Cauley and Donna Jovanovich work at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA. Over the years both authors have contributed to increasing an understanding of dropout rates in ninth grade and the importance of student transitions from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school. Both authors have collaborated in writing the following articles, *Effectives of Eighth Grade Transition Programs on High School Retention and Experience Report* (1997) and *Developing an Effective Transition Program for Students Entering Middle School or High School* (2006).

Both authors Dr. C. Jay Hertzog and Dr. P. Lena Morgan are colleagues who have collaborated for the past 10 years on conducting research on students transitioning from middle school to high school. Within this field, both authors have jointly conducted numerous studies and written multiple articles. The following articles represent a sample of their work, *Making the Transition from Middle Level to High School* (1999) and *Breaking the Barriers Between Middle School and High School* (1998). Dr. C. Jay currently works as the Dean of College of Education at Slippery rock University of Pennsylvania. And Dr. P. Lena Morgan is an associate professor at George Mason University.

And finally both authors Dr. Robert Barr and Dr. William Parrett worked in the Center for School Improvement and Policy Studies (Barr and Parrett, 2007). They have contributed to the field of education for several decades through teaching and researching. They are also co-authors of *Saving Our Students, Saving Our Schools* (2008), *Hope Fulfilled for At-Risk and Violent Youth: K-12 Programs that Work* (2001), and *How to Create Alternative, Magnet, and Charter Schools that Work* (1997).



Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) stated that a successful program is known to have the following components: 1) a planning team; 2) improving student attendance, achievement, and retention; 3) aiming activities toward students, parents, and teacher; 4) counseling and mentoring students; and 5) working with students who have the hardest time transitioning. They argued that only when each of these areas is addressed could at-risk students make an adequate transition from middle to high school. This process depends on collaborative measures, joint communication, a shared consensus, and dedication from all teachers, parents, administrators, and students.

In Georgia and Florida, researchers Hertzog and Morgan (1999) analyzed 56 high schools and their experiences with dropout rates. According to their findings, schools that implemented a transition program had considerably lower dropout rates in comparison to schools that did not. The researchers further concluded that successful transition programs included such things as extra activities, summer school orientations, counseling sessions, and school visits. They concluded that schools that implemented transition activities kept the attention and attendance of incoming 9th grade students.

Barr and Parrett (2007) focused on transition programs that specifically addressed the needs of students who were at-risk of dropping out. According to those authors, an effective transition program has contributed to an increase of test scores and graduation rates in high minority/high poverty schools. The researchers argued that such a program should not be limited to a certain period but fully meet the needs of at-risk students. They asserted that this type of program should exhibit the following characteristics: 1) addressing and improving academic/behavior of student; 2) individual and group counseling sessions; 3) peer mentoring ; 4) a planning team involved in pre and post transitions; 5) double dose of core

classes; 6) extending transition periods, 7) parental (or guardian) involvement, and 8) extra activities.

### 1) Extra Activities

Cauley and Jovanovich (2006), Hertzog and Morgan (1999), and Barr and Parrett (2007) agreed that incorporating extra activities into a transition program greatly increases its success. The authors recommend implementing an orientation at the end of 8th grade or the beginning of 9th grade for all students. An orientation allowed students to meet teachers, coaches, and upperclassmen. It also removes procedural concerns from students by giving them the opportunity to tour their new school and visit future classrooms. Prior to entering 9th grade, students who have struggled with their coursework are given access to summer tutorial programs. These opportunities allow students to develop their academics in a separate and private environment.

Each author agreed that including parents in a freshmen orientation would encourage them to ask educators pertinent questions. Barr and Parrett (2007) believed that parents should be involved in deciding which classes are best for their student(s). They should be able to meet with counselors to discuss their student's future coursework and schedules. Further they believed that parents should be given a day to get familiar with their student's teachers and new environment. This day could involve meetings with upperclassmen to allow parents to ask questions about their concerns. The authors firmly believed that engaging parents, families, and communities would have a positive impact on transitioning underachieving students.

An additional activity used by transitional programs is to require community service (Barr and Parrett, 2007). This type of extracurricular activity helped place students in environments that could potentially spark an interest in a future job. The authors also argued that community service can be used for investigating career pathways. Barr and Parrett argued that this could lead to internships, apprenticeships, and job shadowing.

## 2) Counseling

Cauley and Jovanovich (2006), Hertzog and Morgan (1999), and Barr and Parrett (2007) acknowledged counseling and mentoring as an important component of a transition program. Students may have a difficult time in dealing with a larger number of older students, interacting with authoritative adults, and coping with an increase in assignments. With these new changes occurring during key developmental stages, students need a safe outlet of emotions. To encourage peer mentorship, Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) encourage programs such as big brother and big sister, spring socials, pen pals, and freshmen awareness groups. All of these programs support 9th grade students interacting with other classes and moves them past the isolation that they experience in this transition period. All authors strongly agree that the presence of peer mentorship and counselors would improve transitions.

## 3) Planning Team

Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) and Barr and Parrett (2007) argued that the planning team is one of the most important pieces of a transitional program. The authors defined a planning team as every person involved with student transitioning from middle to high

school (Cauley and Jovanovich, 2006). It is responsible for increasing communication between both primary and secondary institution teachers and counselors to ensure that students have support before, during, and after transition. The group identifies students who are at-risk of dropping out and provides additional support.

The planning team is responsible for building and maintaining relationships with parents, school faculty, and students. In some cases, the planning team visits the homes of incoming freshmen to create an open relationship between the school and families (Barr and Parrett, 2007). Parents may be contacted to discuss any transition programs available for their students. When parents are included in the transition process, they are more likely to play an active role in their child's education (Cauley and Jovanovich, 2006).

The last necessary responsibility of the planning team is to maintain student data. (Cauley and Jovanovich, 2006) This group meets on a regular basis to discuss the progress of students, to review progress and discuss any needed modifications to the program. These meetings are reserved for looking at students who are in need of behavior modification and students who struggle with their academics. This group provides available data for all parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators (Barr and Parrett, 2007).

#### 4) Improving Attendance, Academics, and Behavior

According to Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) and Barr and Parrett (2007) transition programs like these need to increase attendance, improve behavior, and raise retention. It is important that transition programs push students into a pattern of attending school on a regular basis and develop good methods for controlling student behavior. It is also important

that programs assist students to achieve at grade level before entering high school. Research shows that this type of improvement increases student confidence.

### 5) Adjusting Transition Time

Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) and Barr and Parrett (2007) argued that transition periods should not be set for a particular amount of time but should fully assist the student. According to Cauley and Jovanovich (2006), a transition period should begin during the spring/summer of 8th grade and should extend to 9th grade year. Again, this emphasis is in reference to the level of preparedness a student has once he (or she) enters 9th grade. Students who have high levels of preparedness may only need a first day orientation of high school. However, for the majority of students a transition period should last into their first semester of school. For those students who are the at-risk of dropping out of school, this period needs to extend to the end of their 9<sup>th</sup> grade year or even the beginning of 10<sup>th</sup> grade.

### Research Question

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of transitional program effectiveness for improving incoming ninth grade students' academics, behavior, and grade promotion in light of transitional program components. The following question will be investigated:

- 1) What does an analysis of transition programs reveal about actual programs in practice?

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

This study compares qualitative and quantitative data about ninth grade transition programs from throughout the United States to see the extent to which they utilized the effective transition program components synthesized from the literature.

#### a. Sample

To identify transition programs to review, this study began with an ERIC search of “transition programs” which lead to 616 citations. The researcher narrowed results by including “high school” and reduced the publication period to 1999-2008. This decreased the number of available references to 37. Secondly, the researcher created a system by which to select articles on transition programs for inclusion in the study. Only transition programs that focused on at-risk students were included. Thirdly, for discussion the article needed to describe the effects of the transition program on the students and answer the question: *Was it effective?* Of the 37 articles available and the selection system used, 7 qualified articles remained.

As the ERIC search resulted in only 7 articles, the researcher continued the search for effective transition programs via the website, using the database Google Scholar. The study continued with a search of “transition programs for high school” and totaled over 2,190,000 hits. Again, the search was narrowed down to “effective transition programs for middle and high school” and totaled over 310,000 articles. According to Google Scholar’s criteria

(2009), articles are organized based on the weight of the article, the year it was published, the author(s), the number of times cited, and the relevance of results (most relevant appears earliest). Following this Google Scholar metric, the researcher searched through the first 10 pages of more than 100 titles and identified an additional of 5 to include in the study.

In addition to the two previous sources, the researcher personally knew of seven transitional programs before beginning analysis. Of the seven programs, only three followed the criteria listed above. Two were alternative education programs, and one was a freshmen academy. The researcher was able to use information from personal records and the schools' website for further details.

The final sample for this study included 15 transition programs within the United States. Each of the 15 programs was identified as belonging to one of the three transition program models: Separate Academy, Alternative Education Program, and Special Programs described in the literature review.

#### b. Instrumentation/Analysis Framework

The following questions were asked in order to compare and contrast program data: 1) How were the programs' activities defined? 2) How successful were the programs in promoting student success? And 3) What, if any, positive attributes did the program have? The researcher used the literature matrix to evaluate the 15 transition programs created from the literature section. The literature matrix table was used as an evaluation of transition programs in order to assess the presence of effective components in light of evidence provided of program effectiveness.

Below in Table 2: Transition Programs Matrix is a summary of all three models of effective transition programs. Each row is divided based on category type. All authors stated that extra activities before, during, and after school would be beneficial to students. All also agreed that students making transitions need additional support through counseling. These five categories will be used to analyze actual transition programs for their level of effectiveness.

Table 2.

Transition Programs Matrix

		<b>Cauley and Jovanovich (2006)</b>	<b>Hertzog and Morgan (1999)</b>	<b>Barr and Parrett (2007)</b>
Categories of a Successful Transition Defined by Literature	1	Activities for Students, Parents, and Teachers	Extra activities, Summer School Orientation, School Visits	Extra Activities, Peer Mentoring and Parent Involvement
	2	Counseling	Counseling	Counseling
	3	Planning Team		Planning Team
	4	Attendance, Achievement, and Retention		Improve academics and behavior; Double Dose of Classes
	5	Adjusting Transition Time		Adjusting Transition Time



## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of transitional program effectiveness for improving incoming ninth grade students' academics, behavior, and grade promotion in light of transitional program components. Fifteen programs were reviewed in terms of the effective program matrix to see if components identified from the literature fit with the program effects reported. Based on the literature reviewed, Tables 3-5 below capture which categories appear to be effective components of transition programs by type of program.

#### Special Programs

Five special programs were reviewed for comparing program success with the five effective components. These programs were as follows, Culbreth Middle School, Cognato's Study, Sunset School, Maryland High Schools, and Pulaski and Schlagle Schools. Programs represented various locations, one located in Durham, NC, two located in Maryland, one located in Wisconsin and Kansas, and one was in unknown location. Of the five categories of effectiveness, one program contained four categories, two programs contained two categories, and two programs contained one category. The analysis below will briefly describe each program, address the success of the program, and identify the effective categories related to that program.

Table 3 Special Programs Transition Programs by Effective Components								
Source	Name and Location of Program	Year of Program; Sample Size	Extra Activities	Mentoring/ Counseling	Planning Team	Student Achievement	Adjust Time of Transition	Success
<b>Special Programs</b>								
ERIC	Culbreth Middle School <i>Durham, NC</i> (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001)	1998; 11 Students	X	X	X	X		Students and faculty expressed satisfaction with program; trust was built and maintained between school staff, parents, and students.*
ERIC	Cognato's Study (Cognato, 1999); (Mizelle & Irvin, 2001)	N/A	X	X				Females benefit more from this study in terms of socialization, self esteem, and academic performance.*
Google Scholar	Sunset School <i>Baltimore, Maryland</i> (Holland & Mazzoli, 2001)	'99-'00; N/A	X			X		The numbers of suspensions were reduced.*
Google Scholar	Maryland High Schools <i>The State of Maryland</i> (Legters & Kerr, 2001)	2000; 138 High Schools				X		High Poverty High Minority (HPHM) schools that implemented special programs had an 8% increase in ninth grade promotion compared to those HPHM schools that did not implement a transition process.
ERIC	Pulaski and Schlagle School <i>Milwaukee, WI &amp; Kansas City, KS</i> (Quint, J., Miller, C., Pastor, J., & Cytron, R., 1999)	'95-'97; 2,750 Students			X			There was an increase in peer relationships, peer autonomy and engagement. About 54% of students from Schlagle High School earned a C or better before the program was implemented. During implementation this figure rose to 64%.
* Limited data provided								

	Table 4 Alternative Education Transition Programs by Effective Components							
Source	Name and Location of Program	Year of Program; Sample Size	Extra Activities	Mentoring/ Counseling	Planning Team	Student Achievement	Adjust Time of Transition	Success
	<b>Alternative Education Programs</b>							
School Records	The Dubois Center <i>Wake Forest, NC</i>	'05-'07; 16 Students	X	X		X		Of the program participants, 12 of 16 (75%) students returned back to their base school after long term suspension and 6 of 16 (38%) students advanced onto next grade. Grades and behavior of students improved. However, there was a regression of student achievement after one year follow up; 6 of 16 (38%) students eventually dropout of school.
School Website	YMCA Boomerang <i>Durham, NC</i> (YMCA, 2006)	'06-'07; 150 Students	X	X		X		A majority of students return back to their base school after short term suspension*
Google Scholar	Nonprofit Community Organization <i>Midwestern City</i> (Cox, 1999)	N/A; 83 Students		X		X		Student self-esteem average increased from 3.77 before the program to 4.08 after. At one year follow-up it decreased to 3.91. The GPA average increased from 1.38 before program to 1.87 after. At one year follow-up it decreased to 1.29. School absences average increased from 31 before the program to 20 after. At the one year follow-up absences increased to 34.
Google Scholar	Westside School Performance Learning Center <i>Valdosta, GA</i> (Capece, 2004)	'02-'03; 299 Students		X		X		There was an improvement grade point average from 68% to 80%. The average number of in school suspensions decreased from 1.35 to 0.16 per person. Out of school detention decreased from 0.73 to 0.33 per person.
Google Scholar	Muskogee Alternative Program <i>Oklahoma</i> (Storm & Storm, 2005)	'00-'02 364 Students	X	X	X	X		Drop out rates decreased from 13.1% to 10.8%. Graduation rates for seniors were at an all time high.
* Limited data provided								

Table 5 Freshmen Academy Transition Programs by Effective Components								
Source	Name and Location of Program	Year of Program; Size of Sample	Extra Activities	Mentoring/ Counseling	Planning Team	Student Assessment	Adjust Time of Day	Success
<b>Freshmen Academy</b>								
ERIC	Thomas A. Edison HS <i>Philadelphia, PA</i> (Smith, 2007)	N/A	X		X	X	X	This program reached targets for reading proficiency for all key subgroups. Graduation rates also increased.*
School Website	Hillside New Tech HS <i>Durham, NC</i> ("New Tech")	2007; 100 Students			X	X	X	Majority of students have successfully transitioned from 9 <sup>th</sup> grade to 10 <sup>th</sup> grade. *
ERIC	Gladston High School <i>Midwestern City</i> (Holland & Mazzoli, 2001)	'99-'00; 330 Students	X			X	X	All students from credit recovery math program improved on their proficiency test. Of those students, 70% passed their math courses.
ERIC	Dudley High School <i>Greensboro, NC</i> (Chmelynski, 2004)	'99-'00; 100 Students	X		X	X		Academic achievement and retention increased. Behavior problems were also down from pervious year.*
ERIC	Talent Development High Schools <i>Philadelphia, PA</i> (ED, N., 2007)	'99-'01 11 High Schools	X		X	X		Students from the Talented Development High Schools (TDHS) earned more academic credits per year (9.5) compared to those students who were not in the academy (8.6). Their chance of grade promotion was 8% higher than students who did not attend a TDHS school.
*Limited data available								

Overall, the general success found within special programs reflected an emotional gain for students. Students, parents, and school faculty, were noted for saying that they were generally pleased with the overall structure of the program. Unfortunately, limited information was given on the sample size of students along with information on the after effects of the program. The studies show that though special programs may be easier to maintain, more economical, and shorter in duration, their success on overall student achievement may be limited.

Communities-in-Schools (CIS) implemented a transition program in Culbreth Middle School (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001). Eleven 8<sup>th</sup> grade students participated in the program in preparation for high school. The program goals were as follows; 1) introducing students to their new high school environment, 2) allowing their parents to discuss any concerns relevant to transitioning, and 3) guiding students to think of their future career by showing them the connections between careers and schooling. Students spent one class period each week with CIS instructors. This transition process lasted during the final six weeks of students' 8<sup>th</sup> grade school year.

In viewing the success of the program, everyone involved with this special program equally expressed satisfaction (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001). Communities in Schools representatives stated that there were plans to improve the program through enhancing the peer mentorship piece, extending the period of transition, and encouraging more discussion between middle and high school students. No information was given on the status of students once they began high school. The authors do not offer data on student progress, thus making it difficult to measure success. However, all parties were impressed by the amount of communication between schools, parents, and students. .

This special program reached four of five program effectiveness characteristics; extra activities, mentoring/counseling, planning team, and student achievement. This school also offered additional extra activities for their students. Activities were implemented in students' schedules to increase student achievement. Students participated in a ropes course in learn how to depend on each other (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001). In addition, once a week professionals present educational requirements for students to reach their career goals. This allowed students to see the importance of completing high school and setting future occupational goals. Parents were strongly encouraged to be involved in their child's transition. An orientation was created for parents to open a discussion on items of concern. This orientation also allowed the parents to meet future administrators and teachers of their students.

Students received tutoring during their classroom sessions with CIS teachers. For one class per week, students received counseling about fears of transitioning to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Students were also given high school mentors from their future high school. They gave 8<sup>th</sup> grade students a tour of their high school and answered any pressing questions. A planning team were used to ensure communication between all parties at Culbreth Middle School (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001). A MSW intern was involved with all phases of the program. Whose responsibilities included bringing together staff from both the middle school and high schools, including the CIS teacher, in order to create a successful transition phase for students. Teachers, counselors, administrators, and CIS representatives worked collaboratively for each student.

The next special program is known as Cognato's Study and focused on providing social support to incoming 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. This project allowed freshmen to develop a positive

relationship with upperclassmen by creating interactive environments (Cognato, 1999). It also allowed incoming 9<sup>th</sup> grade students to erase any stigmas they may have already formed prior to entering ninth grade. This transition process lasted from the end of student's 8<sup>th</sup> grade year until the first day of their freshmen year. The project hoped to have transitioning students continue to talk with upperclassmen during their high school years.

In Cognato's study, students who participated in activities with upperclassmen had overall lower school absence and received fewer failing grades (Cognato, 1999). It is clear that mere interaction with upperclassmen had the power to reduce students' fears about high school. Another form of success was that female students benefited more from the program than male students. The author does not offer data on student progress after the program, thus making it difficult to measure how much the program effected students' academics, behavior, and grade promotion. It would be interesting to uncover what could be implemented to benefit the male students in this experiment.

It would also be interesting to analysis the type of students who participated in the program. Without the number of students reported and an idea of their academic standing, it is difficult to say that this program assists students who are at-risk of dropping out. This program focused on the entire incoming ninth grade class leaving out special attention for those students who may need it. This could mean that this program did not affect students who may be inclined to drop out of school.

This special program reached two of five program effectiveness characteristics, extra activities and mentoring/counseling. It implemented extra activities to encourage transition. Eighth grade students from Cognato's study were expected to attend a picnic with 9<sup>th</sup> grade students (Cognato, 1999). This allowed them to interact and feel more comfortable with

upperclassmen. Like Culbreth Middle School's Program, the Cognato's study included 8<sup>th</sup> grade students who had also received 9<sup>th</sup> grade mentors (Mizelle & Irvin, 2001). Eighth grade students wrote letters to their mentors, sent emails, and attended in-school activities with mentors. In both programs, relationship building was key and instrumental in helping student's transition.

The third special program is known as the Sunset School in Baltimore, Maryland. This program was created as an alternative to in-class suspensions (Holland & Mazzoli, 2001). With high numbers of repeat offenders, it became evident that administrators needed to create an alternative to in-class punishments. Educators wanted to reduce the amount of time students spent away from the classroom and thus created supervised study sessions. These sessions started after school and helped reduce students' behavior problems. Program length lasted between one and three days.

Success in this program was linked to overall improvement in students' behavior (Holland & Mazzoli, 2001). As the school year progressed, the number of students sent out of class decreased. Due to the results, the school system extended the program to neighboring middle and high schools. A student was quoted for saying, "it helped me get focused" (p.303). The author does not offer the amount of times students were sent out of class at the beginning or end of the school year. With the lack of data given, it is challenging to measure student success from the given information.

This special program reached two of five program effectiveness characteristics; extra activities and student achievement. Students participated in extra activities within the Sunset School. They were required to write "personal reflections" about their behavior and create a set plan to improve it (Holland & Mazzoli, 2001, p.303). In order to increase their academic



achievement they were required to complete make up work missed due to their outbursts in class. If a student did not pass their state proficiency tests, they are also required to review courses for which they need assistance.

Next, in evaluating transitional special programs found in Maryland High Schools, data was collected by the Maryland State Department of Education (Legters & Kerr, 2001). In spring of 2000, 174 schools were surveyed with a response rate of 79%. Of those schools that responded, overwhelmingly 94% admitted using a special program to support incoming 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. Transitional practices last throughout one school year. This study compared schools with high poverty and high minority populations that used transition programs versus those that did not. According to the data, High Poverty High Minority schools using special programs had a higher promotion rate compared to HPHM schools that did not use transitional programs (Legters & Kerr, 2001).

Of the special programs identified, these reached one of five program effectiveness characteristics; student achievement. From the Maryland High School report, over 50% of HPHM schools provided students with a double dose of instruction. Of those schools, 75% used extended class periods to allow more time to succeed (Legters & Kerr, 2001). For HPHM schools, this method of increasing student achievement is more economical than creating a separate school.

The final special program was implemented at Pulaski and Schlagle High Schools through a project known as Project Transitions (Quint et al., 1999). Project Transitions was created by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, a nonprofit corporation whose interests lie in improving achievement of students from low-income neighborhoods. The sample size for students from Pulaski High totaled 1,750 students compared to a little over

1,000 students from Schlagle High School. Both projects lasted an entire school year. Project Transitions implemented the following three components; 1) student-teacher clusters, 2) additional time for teachers to meet, and 3) a “coach” to improve changes in teaching practices (p.42).

Both Pulaski and Schlagle Schools reflected different success outcomes. While the transition program at Pulaski High School only improved peer relationships and did not impact teacher-student relationships, at Schlagle High School peer relationships improved and relationships also improved between teachers and students (Quint et al., 1999). In addition, student feelings of autonomy and engagement improved. At Schlagle High School, student attendance and number of academic credits received was higher than the students at Pulaski High. About 54% of students from Schlagle High School earned higher than a 3.0 GPA before the program were implemented. During implementation, this figure rose to 64%.

This special program reached one of the five program effectiveness characteristics, a planning team. Teachers from the Pulaski and Schlagle School created small teams (three group clusters of 4 teachers and 120 students), led by a coach, and met daily to discuss ways to improve student problems (Quint et al., 1999). The coach was responsible for assisting teacher development and improving practice.

Of the five effective components, one was not implemented by any of the transition programs. It is apparent that none of the special programs fulfilled the adjustment of time component. Thus, it is difficult to evaluate or prove whether shorter or longer periods of transition time and the increase of services during that time would reduce the dropout rate. However, it seems reasonable to speculate that longer transitions periods should benefit students in jeopardy.

On average, special programs fulfilled the least number of effective components compared to the remaining two models. Three of 5 programs focused on student achievement, the fewest in comparison to other models. Three of 5 programs implemented extra activities within their transition. None of the programs worked on adjusting the time of transition. Overall students who participated in special programs benefited socially and were satisfied with outcomes.

Special programs are interested in reducing dropout rates through small-scale projects. Within the special programs, each identified one issue and used various activities to improve the problem. For example, in one program the school was interested in increasing peer communication and created opportunities for eighth grade students to mingle with upperclassmen. As a result, incoming ninth grade students were more comfortable with their surroundings thus attended classes more often.

#### Alternative Education Programs

Five alternative education programs were reviewed for comparing program success with the five effective components. These programs were as follows, The Dubois Center, YMCA Boomerang, Nonprofit Community Organization, Western School Performance Learning Center, and the Muskogee Alternative Program. Programs represented various locations, two located in North Carolina, one located in Georgia, one in Oklahoma, and the meta-analysis was in an unknown Midwestern city. Of the five categories of effectiveness, one program contained four categories, two programs contained two categories and, two programs contained two categories. The upcoming paragraphs will give a brief description of each program, identify their effective categories, and address their success.

Overall, the general success found within alternative education programs reflected increased academics, behavior, and attendance. Unlike the special programs, each selected alternative education program used a counseling/mentoring piece and addressed student achievement. Similar to the special programs, none of the alternative programs addressed the fifth component adjust time of transition. This could explain why two of five programs expressed a regression of student achievement after a one-year follow up.

The first alternative education program is known as the Dubois Center and served a large Black and Hispanic population in Wake Forest, NC. In response to growing numbers of Long Term Suspended (LTS) students, the Wake County Public School System created four additional alternative education programs for students in the county. The program begins once a student is LTS from his (or her) base school and ends the last official day of school. Sixteen students were accepted into this center during the 2005-2006 school year. Students accepted must adhere to the rules, guidelines, and requirements of the Alternative school. Once a student is admitted to the school he (or she) must complete no less than 2 academic credits, volunteer for more than 90 hours, and receive multiple counseling and behavior management courses. At the end of the fiscal school year, students' completed academic courses and volunteered hours were transferred to their Base school.

The success of this center can be viewed in student achievement. All students who completed the program received academic credit from their base school. On average students completed 87.7 community service hours, were absent for five days, and completed 25 credits. Each student's academic status was followed a year after exiting the Dubois Center. Six students advanced to the next grade, six students dropped out of school, five students remained in the same grade, two students were long term suspended, and one student

transferred. Again, this supports the idea that these programs need to be extended for long-term success.

This alternative education program reached three of five program effectiveness characteristics; extra activities, mentoring/counseling, and student achievement. Students were required to participate in the following extra activities; community services weekly, attend educational workshops with members of the community, and participate in behavioral modification programs. Students were required to participate in five hours of counseling sessions per week. These sessions were either group or individual and allowed each student to work on solving inner issues. To increase student achievement, students used a computer-based program known as NOVANET to receive academic credit for their core courses. Students were instructed to work on courses that proved to be most difficult. If students continued to struggle in courses, they were assigned a tutor for additional supports.

The YMCA Boomerang alternative program served middle and high school students from the Chapel Hill-Carrboro County School System in Durham, NC. This program assisted about 150 students during the 2006-2007 school year who were suspended from school for 3 to 10 days (YMCA, 2006). Based on the Resiliency Approach<sup>1</sup>, this program strived to strengthen and encourage every student. It also provides students with goals, a formative structure, and other factors to assist the individual to be the best that he (or she) can be. Similar to the Dubois Center, Boomerang provided community service opportunities for their suspended students. Each student was required to complete a community service project by the completion of the program.

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<sup>1</sup> Resiliency Approach- nurturing suspended students and reinforcing their gifts and inner strengths (YMCA, 2006)

The success of the program can be linked to student achievement. A majority of the students completed the program's requirements and returned to their Base school after short term suspensions were over (YMCA, 2006). Students were also able to complete hundreds of community service hours during the school year. Also they were encouraged to continue working with Boomerang staff throughout the year. It would be interesting to see the recidivism rate for suspended students. This could allow for a better interpretation of the success of the program.

This alternative program reached three of five program effectiveness characteristics; extra activities, mentoring/counseling, and student achievement. All students were encouraged to attend a monthly basketball reunion. This activity allowed students to meet up in a healthy environment and with peers and educators (YMCA, 2006). Similar to the Dubois Center, the Boomerang Alternative Program provided a place where students are able to voice their problems, goals, and feelings to staff. Students were encouraged to work with each other in-group sessions to build necessary communicative skills. In order to increase student achievement, this program used additional time to complete homework and review class work missed due to suspension.

The next alternative education program was located in a large Midwestern city and managed by nonprofit community organizations (Cox, 1999). Students enrolled in each program attended the alternative school for one semester and then returned to their base school for the second semester. Students labeled at-risk were eligible for this program. At-risk was defined as the following, involved with police, in-school suspensions, involved with fights, absent for at least 20 days, and at least one year behind. Eighty-three students were selected as a sample for this study.

Of the 83 students, the researcher randomly selected 41 students for the program and the remaining 42 were in a control group (Cox, 1999). The researcher tested the self-esteem, academics, and attendance of all students at the completion of the alternative program and at a one-year follow-up. The researcher used the Rosenberg-Bachman Measure of Self Esteem, which contained six items to measure self-esteem. The experimental group scored higher on their self-esteem compared to the control group. At the one-year follow-up, these differences were not present. Official school records were reviewed and the experimental group exhibited higher grades compared to the control group. After the one year follow up, the experimental group's grades decreased and the control group's grades increased. Finally, the attendance of the experimental group increased while students attended alternative program but decreased when they returned to their base school. Student attendance for the control group remained constant.

This alternative program reached two of five effectiveness characteristics; mentoring/counseling and student achievement. All students were involved in-group or individual counseling sessions in order to replace dysfunctional behavior with positive actions (Cox, 1999). In an effort to increase student achievement, students were given tutors to complete work.

The next alternative education program is known as the Westside School Performance Learning Center (PLC) and was located in Valdosta, GA. It originated as a high school for African American students during racial segregation in the 50s (Capece, 2004). In the late 80s, the PLC became the site for Lowndes County Schools short-term suspended students to catch up on schoolwork. A decade later, the center transformed into a place for long term suspended students to work on their academics and behavior. This site holds 60-70 students

during the day and 20 students at night. Between August 2002 and December 2003, almost 300 students attended this program. Similar to the Dubois Center, this program lasted for the remaining school days of the suspended student.

PLC's data was conducted by comparing prior entrance scores to exit scores on students' GPA, number of in-school suspensions, and number of out of school suspensions (Capece, 2004). The data revealed that on average students grades did increase from 68% to 80%. The average number of in-school suspensions also decreased from 1.35 to 0.16 per person. Finally, on average the out of school detention decreased from a 0.73 to 0.33 per person. During a focus group, students commented that the NovaNet program's self paced instruction helped improve their grades. One student stated, "You stay on that subject until you get it, and if you don't get it, the teacher is right there to help you and has the time for you" (p.7).

This alternative education program reached two of five effectiveness characteristics; mentoring/counseling and student achievement. Students participated in a mentoring program that promoted student success by attaining their personal and educational goals. Mentors were required to work with students, teachers, parents, volunteers, and educators. Each student had their own mentor to assist personal needs and in setting goals (Capece, 2004). Similar to students from the Dubois Center, PLC implemented the NOVANET program for their suspended students. Students used the online coursework to receive academic credit.

Finally, in 1994 the Oklahoma Juvenile Justice Act created a pilot alternative school to serve grades 6<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> long-term suspended students (Storm & Storm, 2005). Programs were placed in neighborhoods with a high number of dropouts and high referrals to juvenile justice systems. A total of 364 students were served on Monday through Fridays. A majority of



students (87%) participated in the program for one year or less, 13% participated for 2 years, and 1 student was enrolled for 5 years. Students who were labeled at-risk were referred to this program. At-risk was defined as students who underachieved in academics, were retained in grade for more than one year, had increased school absences, belonged to a family with an income below poverty, or was determined by school staff to behave inappropriately.

Students in Muskogee Alternative Program improved in academics, attendance, and behavior. Program students outperformed similar students who were not enrolled in an alternative education program (Storm & Storm, 2005). Dropout rates decreased from 13.1% in 2000-2001 to 10.8% in 2001-2002. Graduation rates for seniors were at an all time high. The researcher also noted that disciplinary referrals decreased for students. For those students who received counseling, 53% said that the sessions were helpful. Finally, 50% of students reported getting along with their teachers and peers.

This alternative education program reached four of five program effectiveness characteristics; extra activities, mentoring/counseling, a planning team and student achievement. Students were also encouraged to complete and/or attend extra activities. They were responsible for completing course work, attending fine arts education seminars and extracurricular activities. For students attending the Muskogee Alternative Program, students were initially screened before beginning classes and required to take counseling sessions with staff (Storm & Storm, 2005). Of the five alternative education programs, this was the only program that used a planning team. Teachers created individual graduation plans for students. These plans were shared amongst educators and ensured that every member worked toward students' individual goals (Storm & Storm, 2005). In an effort to increase student achievement, teachers created an initial screening process to see what levels students were at

once they began the program. Once student levels were identified, a tutor was put in place to assist students reach projected goals.

On average, each alternative education programs fulfilled the second highest number of effective components. Each program contained a student achievement piece and a mentoring/counseling piece. None of the programs expressed an interest in adjusting time of transition. Students sent to alternative education programs were only there to work until the completion of suspensions. None of the programs worked with students after suspensions. Overall students who attended alternative programs improved their behavior, increased their GPA and attendance.

According to the Community Conference at the University of North Carolina A&T, in 2004-2005, 97 percent of students who attended an alternative program returned to their Base school the following year. Only about 31% of the students who did not attend an alternative program, returned to their Base school. It appears that students who attend alternative schools during their suspensions have a significantly higher chance in returning to their Base school in the following year. Unfortunately, little research has been done on the status of suspended students a year after they return to school. From the text, there were two instances (The Dubois Center and Meta-Analysis of 57 Schools) where a follow up study was done on previously suspended students. In both cases, a majority of students repeated suspensions, dropped out of school, or reverting to old behaviors and/or academic patterns from pre-alternative program. Future research needs to be done on the extent that alternative education programs assist at-risk students in the end.

## Freshmen Academies

Five freshmen academies were reviewed for comparing program success with the five effective components. These programs were as follows; Thomas A. Edison HS, Hillside New Tech HS, Gladston HS, Dudley HS, and Talent Development High School (TDHS). Programs represented various locations; two located in Pennsylvania, two located in North Carolina, and another in an unknown Midwestern city. Of the five categories of effectiveness, one program contained four categories and four programs contained three. The following overview provides a brief description of each program, addresses the success, and identifies the relevant effective categories.

Overall, the general success found within freshmen academies was not only an increase in academics and behavior, but students were being promoted to the next grade. Similar to special programs, counseling/mentoring was not a definite piece within the academies. In fact none of the selected academies used any form of mentorship and/or counseling to assist students. Unlike both special programs and alternative education programs, three of five freshmen academies implemented the adjustment of transition component.

The first freshmen academy, Thomas A. Edison High School, served a large Hispanic low-income population in Philadelphia, PA (Smith, 2007). The principal noticed that students were experiencing difficulty in transitioning from eighth to ninth grade. In addition, incoming ninth graders' basic skills in English and Mathematics were well below proficiency levels. Dropout rates increased while graduation rates declined. A separate yearlong academy was created for the ninth grade students to guarantee additional support and more structure. Students were located in a separate wing of the high school and had their own entrance ensuring that their interaction with upperclassmen was limited.

The success found in Thomas A Edison High has been moderate. While this school has met 18 of 25 state target goals, they did not reach Adequate Yearly Progress. All students from this freshmen academy reached reading proficiency (Smith, 2007). This includes students from key subgroups such as economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, Hispanic students, and students who were Limited English Proficient. Graduation rates have continued to climb in the past four years and dropout rates have decreased. Unfortunately, math test scores remained low. The author does not offer data on student progress, thus making it difficult to measure success. Overall, this program has improved the achievement of its students.

This high school exhibits four of the five effectiveness categories, extra activities, a planning team, improving student achievement, and adjusts time of transition period. This program reached the extra activities component by maintaining communication with parents through frequent conferences and an orientation for all ninth grade students. The ninth grade faculty implemented the use of a planning team. This group separated into four teams and each was responsible for intermingling and teaching their students (Smith, 2007). Each group was assigned a team leader who was responsible for interactions with parents, disciplinary actions, and arranging group meetings. If one student was having a problem in adjusting to high school, every adult within the team was aware of it and worked together. The team also encouraged teachers to share instructional strategies.

In an effort to improve student achievement, English and Math were double dosed. Students take only 4 subjects per semester and classes are divided into 90-minute blocks. Students were also required to take a freshmen seminar where they were taught study skills, managing time, and dealing with challenges from peers. This program was known as the

twilight academy and was offered to anyone in need. Finally, this program extended the time of transition for those students who missed work or needed additional assistance

The next freshmen academy is known as the Hillside New Tech High School. In March of 2006, Judge Howard Manning Jr. created a list of forty-four North Carolina high schools that were deemed low performing and inadequate. On his list, Hillside High was noted for having state standardized test scores at or below 55 percent. Judge Manning demanded that Hillside High (and others like it) be removed from the district and close. In an attempt to give these beleaguered schools another opportunity before closure, he ruled that only through the replacement of current principals and the creation of “smaller schools” that these institutions could remain in operation. In the fall of 2007, the New Technical High School opened its doors within Hillside High and was represented as a smaller school/freshmen academy. This program served 100 students throughout the school year. A majority of Black students from the local community attended the program.

Overwhelmingly students from this academy successfully transitioned from 9<sup>th</sup> grade to 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Teachers noted that students developed analytical and critical thinking skills sooner than their peers. They also agreed that students were prepared to advance to the next grade. Hopefully patterns will continue as students advance within the high school.

Unfortunately, data was not revealed in describing the total number of students who progressed. Since this school is located within another school, it would be interesting to compare freshmen classes from Hillside to freshmen from New Tech High School. In addition, to compare End of Course (EOC) and End of Grade (EOG) scores from both freshmen classes.

This program shows three of five effectiveness categories; a planning team, student achievement, and adjust time of transition. Their planning team was defined as every teacher, counselor, administrator, and staff member. This group met every Monday afternoon to discuss student progress, plans for the academy, and ways to improve current procedures. In addressing student achievement, students were taught through a project-based curriculum that enabled them to think critically and analytically. This program also adjusted their time of transition through implementing a Saturday Academy once a month for students who are interested in reviewing EOC exams.

The third freshmen academy is known as Gladston High School and is located in a mid-sized Midwestern city (Holland & Mazzolli, 2001). Gladston accepted 1/3 of the total number of freshmen (approximately 330 students) from the entire school district. Students attended the academy for half of a day and then returned to their traditional school. This program became known as the place “where everyone knows your name” (p.297). Teachers acknowledged that if a school created an environment where students knew they were cared for, students would be more engaged and perform at a higher level.

Students who attended the academy and entered the credit recovery program improved on their proficiency tests. In addition, 70% of the students passed their math courses (Holland & Mazzoli, 2001). Teachers agreed that there was a noticeable positive difference in student confidence toward coursework. Based on the success of this program, similar programs were implemented in neighboring schools.

This freshmen academy demonstrated three of the five effective categories; implementing extra activities, student achievement, and adjust time of transition. Teachers implemented extra activities to assist students in transition. Students visited local college

campus and attended etiquette classes. A program called credit recovery, designed as an academic “safety-net” for students in need, fulfilled the effectiveness categories for student achievement and adjust time of transition (Holland & Mazzolli, 2001, p.301). In the credit recovery program students stayed after school 5 nights a week for 90-minute sessions to review challenging lessons. Each student may work independently with a tutor or within a study group.

The fourth freshmen academy is known as Dudley High School located in Greensboro, NC (Chmelynski, 2004). This school first opened for the 1999-2000 school year with 100 students enrolled. Originally, this program was created to assist identified students who needed the most help in adjusting behavior and academics. As time passed, this school transformed from an alternative program to a freshmen academy to meet the needs of all incoming ninth grade students.

The success found at Dudley High School reflects similar characteristics in previous selected freshmen academies. Students from this academy exhibited increased academic achievement and retention (Chmelynski, 2004). Students also had a decrease in behavior problems. One teacher stated that one of the reasons of student success was due to their limited ability to move around. No further information was given on student success found at Dudley High School

The Dudley High School exhibits three of the five effective transitional traits, extra activities, planning team, and student achievement. To address the extra activities category, students received classes that discussed study skills and advice for surviving their freshmen year. In regards to a planning team, teachers met regularly about the progress of students, identifying items that hinder students from excelling in the classroom, and discussing ways to

improve behaviors and academics (Chmelynski, 2004). Teachers also received group special training at North Carolina A&T State University. Finally, this academy encouraged student achievement by implementing a double dose of core classes such as English and Math. Tutors from the university were also available for students to improve their skills in reading and math.

The final freshmen academy is known as the Talent Development High Schools (TDHS) of Philadelphia, PA (What Works Clearinghouse [WWC], 2007). The TDHS model included large schools that had recurring problems with discipline, poor attendance, low student achievement, and high numbers of dropouts. The model transformed program schools into smaller learning environments with freshmen academies, career development programs for upperclassmen, and after school programs for behaviorally challenged students. The program held all students to a high standard and provided required college preparatory classes. The sample of this evaluation covers 11-year long schools in the Philadelphia area. The number of students was not reported.

Similar to the previous freshmen academies, the TDHS increased student achievement for students at risk of dropping out. The success of the program was found in credits and grade promotion. Students in the TDHS earned an average of 9.5 credits in comparison to those students who were not in the program (8.6). Their chance of grade promotion was 8% points higher than students who did not attend a TDHS (WWC, 2007).

Within the TDHS model, three of five effective transitional characteristics were found and identified, extra activities, a planning team, and student achievement. To address the extra activities category, students were required to complete a one-semester tutorial that introduced them to the demands of high school. In regards to a planning team, the freshmen



academy was a small school taught by four to five teachers (WWC, 2007). This group met on a regular basis to discuss student achievement and best teaching practices. The final characteristic of program effectiveness used in this model was student achievement was shown through their using increased time spent on core courses. According to the TDHS model, it offers a double dose of Math and English and extended from 80 to 90 minutes per session.

On average, freshmen academies fulfilled the most number of effective components compared to other models. In comparison to the other models, the freshmen academy was the only model to strongly use a planning team. Of the programs listed, 4 of 5 implemented a planning team, compared to 1 of 5 alternative education programs, and 2 of 5 special programs. Four of five of the freshmen academies listed also used extra activities to keep their students engaged. Overall students who attended freshmen academy improved in their academics and made successful transitions from 8<sup>th</sup> grade to 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Grade retention increased and thus dropout rates decreased.

Three of five freshmen academies adjusted the time of transition for their students. None of the other models addressed this component. In most cases, students began their transitions from eighth grade and extended to their ninth grade year. In extreme cases, at-risk students' time of transition lasted from 8<sup>th</sup> grade to 10<sup>th</sup> grade to ensure that they were comfortable. Author Cox (1999) argues that a transition of short length will have inadequate positive effects for at-risk students and that these students need more than one semester to alter behavior.

## Comparison of Programs

As indicated earlier, the researcher was interested in an analysis of the success of transition programs in light of effectiveness by components. Below in Table 6: Number of Components by Success, the researcher used the data to compare the number of components selected to the programs' reported successes. The success of the program was defined as students' GPA and/or test scores increased, behavior improved, and grade promotion increased. Of the five special programs, only two programs provided evidence of improvement in academics and grade promotion. While Culbreth Middle School had the highest number of components selected (4), it did not provide evidence of the degree of improvement in academics, behavior, or grade promotions. However, special program Maryland High Schools employed only one component but did provide evidence of an improvement in grade promotion.

A different reaction was found in the alternative education programs. According to Table 6, Muskogee Alternative Program was the program with the highest number of components selected (4) and reached all specific areas of success but provided only limited data about those successes. Westside School of Performance had two selected components and saw an increase in student academics and behavior. Similar, the Nonprofit Community Organization had two selected components and saw an increase in self-esteem and grade promotion. Of the five programs, only two provided evidence of improvement in all three specific areas of success.

Of all three models, freshmen academies fulfilled the most components and reached more specific areas of success than any other model but here again only two of the five programs provided evidence of program success. Of the five programs, only two programs

provided evidence of improvement in academics and grade promotion. While Thomas A. Edison HS had the highest number of components selected (4), evidence of the degree of improvement in academics, behavior, or grade promotions was not provided. However, both freshmen academies Gladstone HS and Talent Development HS employed three components but did provide evidence in academics and grade promotion.

Table 6.

Number of Components verses Success

		Specific Areas of Success		
# of Components Selected	Name of Program	Academics Increase	Behavior and/or Self-Esteem Improves	Grades Promotion
Special Program				
4	Culbreth Middle School*			
2	Cognato's Study*	X	X	
2	Sunset School*		X	
1	Maryland High Schools			X
1	Pulaski and Schlagle Schools	X		
Alternative Education Program				
4	Muskogee Alternative Program	X	X	X
3	The Dubois Center	X	X	X
3	YMCA Boomerang*			
2	Nonprofit Community Organization		X	X
2	Westside School Performance	X	X	
Freshmen Academy				
4	Thomas A. Edison HS*	X		X
3	Hillside New Tech HS*			X
3	Gladstone HS	X		
3	Dudley HS*	X	X	X
3	Talent Development HS	X		X

\*Limited Data Available

## CHAPTER V.

### CONCLUSION

In summary, the level of effectiveness for the five components fluctuates in each model. In order to have a successful transition program the use of all components may or may not be beneficial to increase academics, improve behavior, and increase grade promotion. For special programs, there was no obvious relationship between the uses of components versus the success of the program. However, in some cases for alternative education programs and freshmen academies the use of components created a linkage with program success.

The effectiveness of each component shared different power in each model. For example, in the special program model extra activities and student achievement were seen the most. In alternative education programs mentoring/counseling as well as student achievement appeared in each transitional program. And, within the freshmen academy, extra activities, a planning team, and student achievement were all key factors. Whereas Mentoring/Counseling played a significant role in alternative education programs, this component was not present and did not exist in freshmen academies. In these cases, each component played a different but essential role within each model.

Future research should consider the following limitations of this study. Data collected from each transition program was limited. Six of 15 transitional programs included statistical data while the remaining programs generalized their success. Another limitation is

that only two programs had a one-year follow-up evaluation. The one year follow-up research was beneficial to this study and would improve the general findings if all future programs had this component.

It is important to continue research on transitional periods for upcoming ninth grade students. According to the National High School Center (2007), schools that have a fully operational transition program have an average dropout rate of 8% in comparisons to schools that do not have a transition program averaged a dropout rate of 24%. In order to reduce and control ninth grade dropout rates, educators need to be encouraged to incorporate a transitional process for incoming freshmen. This process will not only promote communication between teachers and students, but also will improve retention, increase student performance, and allow more students the opportunity to proceed on to higher achievement.

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