

A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF NINTH GRADE
INTERVENTIONS AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

by

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DEDICATION

To my husband and best friend, Melvin J. Kenney, for your continuous love and support. For
always encouraging me when I wanted to give up.

To my heartbeat, Corey J. Dancy, anything is possible if you believe in yourself. Always
remember that I love you to the moon and back.

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ABSTRACT

Ninth grade is typically the year in which many adolescents become disengaged from school; consequently, problems with student truancy, absenteeism, disengagement, and failure often begin in the ninth grade year. Transitional problems in ninth grade also dramatically increase the likelihood that a student will drop out of high school before graduation (Alspaugh, 1998). Schools must look at ways to restructure the freshmen year to ease the transition of adolescents into high school and to improve their chances of earning a high school diploma. To aid in addressing/reducing the problems plaguing ninth graders, intervention programs that are designed to boost academic success are being sought. The purpose of this comparative case study is to provide descriptive analysis of Ninth Grade Interventions and student outcomes and the relationship to the Stage Environment Fit Theory. An analysis was conducted of three case studies to develop a common theme on the effects of Ninth Grade Interventions. Results did not yield a statistically significant relationship between ninth grade interventions and student achievement. Recommendations for future research included the need for a longitudinal study that explores ninth grade interventions at the end of four years, or even beyond high school.

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CHAPTER I

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Transition into high school is a volatile time for adolescents and a precarious point in students' educational progression (Legters, Parise, & Rappaport, 2013). Each year, eighty percent of students in the United States enter a new environment much larger and more impersonal than their middle school (Neild, 2009). In a traditional high school, classes are spread across a large campus, and the structured middle school routine is a distant memory. The transition to high school can often "make or break" a student's educational success in grades ninth through twelfth (Neild).

Students fail ninth grade more than any other academic year and dropout rates are the highest between ninth and tenth grade (Donegan, 2008). The lack of successful transition programs and the often-difficult transition from middle school to high school causes many ninth grade students to fail to meet the academic requirements to advance on to tenth grade on time (Herzog & Morgan, 1998).

Fulk (2003) asserts that in ninth grade, students feel much more academic pressure than ever before because they must earn passing grades in their core subjects to satisfy graduation requirements. Students experience this stress because preparing 21st century learners requires schools to focus on new skills and knowledge that make American students competitive with the rest of the world. Wagner (2008) and Hess (2004) argued that students are failing at both of these tasks. According to Wagner, due to the stress of academic competition and skills development, many students are not prepared academically for their transition from middle school to high school.

Mac Iver (1990) found that ninth-graders who successfully navigate this transition are far

more likely to graduate from high school with their peers and attend college than those who experience failure their freshmen year.

Growing awareness of the importance of the first year of high school for future success has prompted schools and districts across the country to develop supports and interventions such as Ninth Grade Academies (NGA) specifically designed for ninth-graders (Neild, 2009).

Current research offers a mixed assessment of NGAs. Some practitioners report very positive experiences, while others have abandoned the Ninth Grade Academy concept because they found it too costly and difficult to implement. Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) published the most rigorous empirical study of Ninth Grade Academy in 2005. It investigated the impact of Ninth Grade Academies as a core component of Talent Development High Schools, a comprehensive, whole-school reform model. Talent Development was implemented in five high schools, with each receiving intensive, on-site support from facilitators at Johns Hopkins University, where the model was developed. The study found that the model produced significant and substantial gains during students' first year of high school in attendance, academic course credits earned, and promotion rates. The improvements in credits earned and promotion rates for ninth graders were sustained as students moved through high school. These findings do not address whether it is actually feasible to implement Ninth Grade Academies on a large scale, in the absence of a whole-school reform approach and without external support.

The proposed study will attempt to analyze case studies on various Ninth Grade Interventions.

1.2. Background of the Problem

The number of students who drop out of school continues to be an issue of concern at the

federal, state, and local levels. The cost of high school dropouts to the individual as well as to society, changing accountability measures, and the ways in which dropouts are counted, are ongoing topics of research and public debate (Kerr, 2002). Research that examines the reasons why students drop out of school and why students choose to stay in school has a tremendous impact on how educational systems address the problem.

Smink and Schargel (2004) make a poignant statement:

Every September, approximately 3.5 million young people in America enter the eighth grade. Over the succeeding four years, more than 505,000 of them drop out-an average of nearly more than 2805 per day of the school year. Picture it: Every single school day, more than 70 school buses drive out of America's school yard, filled with students who will not return (p. 9).

Research is filled with data regarding why students drop out of high school. Smink and Schargel (2004) stated that, "Poor academic performance linked to retention in one grade is the single strongest school-related predictor of dropping out. One report indicated that out of every ten dropouts, nine had been retained at least one year" (p. 33). Hess (1987) found poor academic performance is the strongest predictor of dropping out. Poor academic performance often results in retention, especially in high school. Slavin and Madden (1989) report that achievement does not improve after retention and refer to what the Youth in Transition study found: "one grade retention increases the risk of dropping out by 40-50 percent, and more than one by 90 percent" (pp. 4-13).

In a position statement on student grade retention and social promotion, the National Association of School Psychologists reported that retained students have increased risks of health-compromising behaviors such as emotional distress, cigarette use, alcohol use, drug abuse, driving while drinking, use of alcohol during sexual activity, early onset of sexual

activity, suicidal intentions, and violent behaviors (National Association of School Psychologists, 2003).

Varieties of programs have been implemented to assist freshmen in their transition to high school. The review of research on transition programs finds that students are less likely to drop out of high school if they participate in programs that help them transition from middle school (Mizelle & Irvin, 2001).

In order to address the issue, the literature on transition in schools provide recommendations that school administrators, counselors, and teachers coordinate activities among all school levels to make school transitions more effective for students and their parents.

As a result, some states have implemented various ninth grade intervention programs. Maryland, for instance, has instituted schools-within-schools, ninth grade academies, smaller learning communities, and other strategies aimed at improving the transition from middle to high school (Legters & Kerr, 2001).

1.3. Statement of the Problem and Need for the Study

Comprehensive public high schools face the overwhelming challenge of transitioning adolescents, who are themselves weathering a multitude of physical, emotional, and social changes, from a smaller, more structured middle school to a larger, less structured high school setting (Vander Ark, 2002). In its current form, the American high school is carrying its ninth graders through this transition with lackluster results. Ninth grade is typically the year in which an adolescent will become disengaged from school; consequently problems with student truancy, absenteeism, disengagement, and failure often begin in the ninth grade year. Transitional problems in ninth grade also dramatically increase the likelihood that a student will drop-out of high school before graduation (Alspaugh, 1998). To aid in addressing/reducing the problems

plaguing ninth graders, intervention programs that are designed to boost academic success are being sought. Schools must look at ways to restructure the freshmen year to ease the transition of adolescents into high school and to improve their chances of earning a high school diploma.

Taking steps to address the issues underlying student retention and threats to graduation is especially important given the social implications associated with non-completion. The large numbers of students who do not graduate from high school can expect to experience long-term social and economic consequences. Students who do not complete high school can expect to experience more unemployment, a higher likelihood of incarceration, and lower lifetime earnings (Bornsheuer, Polonyi, Andrews, Fore, & Onwuegbuzie, 2011; Fields, 2008; Heath, 2011). The social and economic implications associated with non-completers highlight the importance of early intervention programs developed to affect dropout rates (Jimerson, Pletcher, Graydon, Schnurr, Nickerson, Kundert, 2006).

The transition from middle to high school is a time of great turmoil in the lives of adolescents, for current research suggests that students not only lose familiar friends and teachers, but also suffer great academic losses (Alspaugh, 1998). Ninth graders experience more retentions, dropouts, and academic failures than all other grade levels (Alspaugh, 1998; Smith, 1997). Current research suggests the reason is the transition from middle school to high school (Caskey, 2006). Middle school offers very structured classes, with teachers frequently monitoring progress, allowing for mistakes and revisions. High school allows students much more freedom in decision-making and academic responsibility. The majority of students are not prepared for this freedom and responsibility (Akos, 2004).

Research has consistently highlighted the importance of transition programs to ensure student success as they transition from middle school to high school (Mizelle & Irvin,

2001). This study will conduct a comparative case study analysis of three empirical instances to support the claims that ninth grade interventions will have a positive impact on student outcomes.

1.4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this comparative case study analysis is to provide descriptive analysis of Ninth Grade Interventions and student outcomes and the relationship to the Stage Environment Fit Theory.

1.5. Theoretical Framework

Stage Fit Environment Theory will guide this study. The crux of this study is the Ninth Grade Academy and its application as defined by Stage Fit Environment Theory. The Stage Fit Environment Theory states that “ developmentally appropriate and developmentally regressive shifts in the nature of social-emotional well being during these years” (Eccles and Midgley, 1989, p.139). The Stage Fit Environment Theory derived from a developmental theory called Person-Environment Fit Theory (Hunt, 1975). This theory focused on the importance of viewing an idea that a person’s interaction with the environment had to fit their developmental needs to be successful. If the environment were not appropriate for learning based on needs, the academic performance, motivation, and behavior would decline. In this study, the researcher will show that the use of an appropriate academic and behavioral environment will provide the environment necessary to improve student academic performance. The Stage-Environment Fit Theory is being employed to study areas of concerns and subsequent short-term gains.

1.6. Significance of the Study

The results of this study have the potential to assist district and state administrators in determining the most effective transition interventions for students. Leadership preparation

programs may also benefit by ensuring that courses adequately prepare leaders to create effective programming for students. Additionally, this information allows advocacy and outreach professional organizations for school leadership to design workshops and curricula that focus on the most effective areas needed in school improvement.

The transition to the ninth grade can have far-reaching effects with regard to student achievement, attendance rates and the number of discipline referrals accumulated by freshmen (Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis, & Tricket, 1991; Hall, 2007), which often lead to students dropping out of school prior to graduation. According to Kerr (2002), there is a decline in student achievement following a school transition. Roderick and Camburn (1999) revealed course failure for students making the transition to high school was not limited to students with low academic skills; however, the threat of failure was an issue for ninth graders of all achievement levels. Furthermore, Roderick and Camburn (1999) indicated that in addition to the decline in achievement, there is a decline in attendance and an increased feeling of being isolated and anonymous when students enter high school. Students who fail to be successful in the ninth grade may fail to graduate. Queen (2002) maintained that “students who drop out of school experience lifelong difficulties. Among these difficulties are disenfranchisement from society, poor mental health, a greater likelihood of entering low-paying jobs, and unemployment” (p. 753-754). Failing to get a high school diploma not only affects the individual; the consequences of students dropping out of high school are substantial to the national and global economic community (Queen).

The result of students not being successful as they transition to high school warrants attention for studying high school transitions. Further warranted with the increase of schools implementing freshman or ninth-grade academies is examining the impact freshman academies

have on high school transition.

1.7. Limitations

The following are limitations for this study:

1. This study only focuses on the middle school to high school transition.
2. The leadership of the school will not be explored; teacher effectiveness and teaching styles are not evaluated as part of the study. This could potentially impact the results of this study.

1.8. Delimitations

1. For this case study analysis, the interventions discussed were restricted to the three case studies reviewed. However, this study can be duplicated in high schools implementing Ninth Grade Academies within the United States.

1.9. Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following key terms are defined:

Attendance – In order to be considered in attendance, a student must be present in the school for the school day or at a place other than the school with the approval of the appropriate school official for the purpose of attending an authorized school activity. Such activities may include field trips, athletic contests, student conventions, musical festivals, or any similar approved activity. A student must be present at least one-half of the school's instructional day in order to be recorded present for that day (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction School Attendance and Student Accounting Manual, 2011a). The rate of attendance is a comparison of the number of days a student is present in school compared to the number of days the student is enrolled.

Dropout – A dropout is an individual who was enrolled in school at some time during the

reporting year, was not enrolled on day 20 of the current year, has not graduated from high school or completed a state or district approved educational program, and does not meet any of the following reporting exclusions:

1. Transferred to another public school district, private school, home school or state/district approved educational program,
2. Temporarily absent due to suspension or school approved illness, or
3. Death (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011a).

In-School Suspension – Short-term suspensions served in an in-school suspension classroom (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011c).

Ninth Grade Academy – A program for freshman (9th grade) students that is designed to provide the strategies and the support that are needed in order to make a successful transition from middle school to high school (Wilder, Murphree, & Dutton, 2009, p. 11). This small learning community provides students with more individualized instruction given by a select team of teachers. The ninth grade academy is often housed in a separate building or in one specific location within the school building.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) – The No Child Left Behind Act, implemented by President George W. Bush during the 2002-2003 school year, requires that all schools have 100% proficiency in math and reading by 2014. Schools are also required to meet graduation and attendance standards. The focus of this act is to provide school reform while focusing on the following areas: accountability, flexibility, research-based education, and parent options (Ginsburg & de Kanter, 2002).

Promotion Rate – North Carolina public school students are required to meet statewide standards for promotion from grades 3, 5, and 8 and high school graduation. The standards, also called

gateways, will ensure that students are working at grade level in reading, writing and mathematics before being promoted to the next grade (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2011c). The rate of promotion refers to the percentage of students being promoted the following grade level on time. The school district in this study requires that a ninth grade student earn six credits, including a math, English, and health/P.E. credit, in order to be promoted to tenth grade.

Small Learning Community – Oxley (2001) found that Small Learning Communities incorporated inclusive programming, continuous program improvement, rigorous and relevant curriculum, and instruction aimed at improving student achievement. This type of educational setting personalizes the education process by bringing together a small group of students with a select group of teachers. A 9th grade academy is an example of a small learning community.

1.10. Summary

This chapter provided an introduction into Exploring Ninth Grade Interventions and Student Outcomes. Chapter I also presented the background of the problem, need for the study, the purpose of the study, theoretical framework, significance of the study, limitations of the study, the delimitation of the study, and the definitions of terms used in the study. The next chapter will address the literature review.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1. INTRODUCTION

With increasing accountability, more challenging standards, new graduation requirements, and tightening school budgets comes an increased need to be economically sensible when deciding on new school initiatives and reforms. It is, therefore, necessary for school officials to explore all possible options when looking for the most effective ways to increase overall student achievement. Current research indicated that a focus on freshman students and the organization of ninth-grade would lead to the greatest gains in terms of both student achievement and graduation rates.

Research studies have been conducted to measure such areas of impact as ninth grade academic success and graduation rate impact. Research shows that the success achieved in their freshman year of high school follows students throughout the course of their high school career (Blankstein, 2004). Similarly, students who struggle in the freshman year transition tend to struggle throughout high school (Fields, 2005). Moreover, ninth grade has been identified as the most critical point to intervene and prevent students from losing motivation, failing, and dropping out of school (Gainey and Webb, 1998).

By high school, as many as 40 to 60% of students become disengaged from school (Klem & Connell, 2004), as evidenced by students increasingly failing classes in their freshman year. It is reported that many students experience a decrease in their academic achievement and grade point average during a school year following a transition (Reyes, Gillock, Kobus & Sanchez, 2000).

Today, about 30% of students nationally fail one or more classes in the ninth-grade

(Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Fuligni, Eccles, Barber, and Clements (2001) found that students' grades, self-esteem, and sense of academic efficacy are likely to decline after the transition to high school. More significantly, the success or failure during the freshman year sets the tone for a student's entire high school career (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998). Only about 70% of all high school ninth-graders will graduate (Greene & Forester, 2003). These reports of ninth-grade failure rates and graduation rates suggest a study of needed high school reforms should be focused on this year of school.

To combat the ninth-grader's decline in grades and self-esteem and their general disengagement from high school, various interventions are currently used in some high schools (Dudley, Wiest, & Cusick, 2002). Investigation of the research indicated that relationship building and personalization are keys for ninth-grade success (Klem & Connell, 2004). Breaking Ranks II (NASSP, 2004) made recommendations and suggested strategies to reform the American high school so that it can be more favorable for students and, more specifically, the struggling ninth grade student.

Analysis of the research on topics relating to this study is presented in this chapter, beginning with a theoretical framework, general discussion about transition to high school and the emerge of ninth grade academy. Next, the researcher will examine literature about the impact of ninth grade interventions on student academic and social outcome. Further, the researcher will analyze the recommendations and strategies for creating a personalized high school detailed in Breaking Ranks II (2004).

2.2. Conceptual Framework

The Conceptual framework of this study is built around the concept of the academic environment and developmental state being connected in order to make learning and behavior

appropriate over the short and long term. The basis for this study is founded on the Stage-Environment Fit Theory (Eccles and Midgley, 1989).

Change and development during adolescence presents a period of risk (Eccles, Wigfield, Midgley, Reuman, Mac Iver, & Feldlaufer, 1993). One common change that occurs during this period is the transition from middle school to high school. Ninth grade students are considered to be an at-risk group as they transition from one school setting to the next. The transition occurs as adolescents are dealing with physical, social, and emotional changes within themselves. Although these changes pose a potential risk for trauma or other negative experiences, Eccles et al. argued that this period of risk could end positively or negatively. According to the stage-environment fit theory, the outcome of this transition depends on the impact of the school environment. If the school environment supports these students and their needs as they transition, the school has the potential to help them overcome the obstacles of this difficult period of development (Eccles & Midgley, 1989).

The framework that supports the stage-environment fit theory is that the educational environment must meet the needs of students as they develop (Eccles & Midgley, 1989). Garmezy and Rutter (1988) stressed the importance of reducing adverse experiences in children's lives within their daily environment. Matching the school environment with the needs of its students has the potential to increase the positive opportunities for students while increasing the likelihood of success during the transition to high school. In doing so, the school also becomes a protective factor to promote resilience for students who are at risk during this transition.

2.3. The Transition to Ninth Grade

Students experience a recognizable difference in academics from middle to high school.

For the first time in their academic career, ninth-grade students earn grades that count toward something official. Usually, the ninth-grade year marks the first time that grades are entered on a permanent transcript that others will evaluate, that may count toward college applications, and later apply to the search for employment (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

Despite the level of importance of high school, Cauley & Jovanovich (2006) found that ninth-grade students report they have concerns related to academic, procedural, and social issues during the transition process. These concerns are sometimes due to ninth graders experiencing a larger, more competitive, and grade-oriented environment than the middle school (Eccles, Midgley, & Adler, 1984). Ninth graders reported feeling nervous and scared about transitioning to high school. As ninth-graders make the transition, they also report having a negative view of themselves (Hertzog et al., 1996). Some ninth-graders lack the skills needed, such as self-direction, to find success in high school.

Ninth-grade is more than simply a transitional year for developing adolescents because the risks of potential problems with transitioning to the ninth-grade are more notable than any other schooling transition (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Therefore, placing a high level of importance on this year of schooling is essential for school officials in regard to both students' self-perception and actual student performance.

2.4. The Emergence of Ninth- Grade Interventions

When examining the emergence of ninth grade interventions, Weiss & Bearman (2007), reported that the transition between school campuses for students has long been a product of the organization of American schools. In the United States, the educational system has reflected an on-going effort of reform with the intention of meeting the needs of the students more effectively. For example, Tyack (1974) conveyed that during the 19th Century, the one-room

schoolhouse transitioned into larger facilities to meet the needs of a growing school-age population in which the educational community realized that a redesign of the school structure was needed to also benefit the educational needs of these students. This need an era of creating transitions between schools and grade levels in the United States.

During The Industrial Revolution era, which also brought about new changes for schools. The revolution brought order and rationale to business, and schools became more efficient to supply a quality workforce. As the 19th Century ended, several school components were developed that are still seen today (Spring, 1993). These components included students moving from one grade to the next in a progressive and orderly manner with an emphasis on planning and productivity (Hunsaker, 2001).

Due to an increase of children being pushed into joining the workforce, schools were structured through grade 6. The use of elementary schools was sufficient (Veasey, 2011); until a few areas of the country offered upper grades for older students. At the time, the ninth grade was placed with older students on high school campuses, as state laws only required completion of schooling through the eighth grade. The first junior high school with grades 7-9 was established in 1895 and flourished through the 1970s (Hunsaker, 2001). The junior high was developed as a way to ease the transition to high school. The early development of the junior high school was in response to students not going to college and provided help in preventing them from dropping out of school (Veasey, 2011).

W. M. Alexander was developing schools with a student-centered curriculum, not just a subject-centered curriculum as found in most schools of that era (Hunsaker, 2001). This development led to the middle school model that included grades 6-8. As with most educational reforms, meeting the needs of students was at the forefront (Emmett & McGee, 2012; Weiss &

Bearmann, 2007). The middle school reform movement of the 1970s pushed the ninth grade class back to the high school campus (Hunsaker, 2001).

The ninth grade student “basically defaulted to the present setting the high school” (Hunsaker, 2001, p. 6). In response to academic failures, the freshman academy configuration is the “most recent reform effort to assist students in transition from the middle school to high school” (Veasey, 2011, p.13). Across the United States, the educational community responded to the needs of ninth grade students by opening grade-specific freshman schools. In the mid 1990s, Oregon, Florida, Illinois, and Michigan opened ninth-grade academies (Lounsbury & Johnston, 1985). Many other states have opened ninth-grade-only campuses since that time. According to the NCES, the most recent data available from 2010-2011 indicated that 188 ninth-grade-only schools were in operation nationally (NCES, 2005).

The release of *Breaking Ranks* (2004), a framework for responsible K-12 school improvement, signaled the beginning of a new opportunity for principals to tackle the issues involved in school reform in 1996. Designed by a broad range of practitioners and researchers who were aware of the inner workings of high schools, it provided a statement of principles and a host of recommendations for school improvement. Many of the recommendations evolved from existing practices at middle school levels as well as the groundbreaking work of other practitioners and researchers who had embarked upon the topics of various school reform models.

2.5. Benefits of Ninth Grade Interventions

Ninth Grade Interventions are designed to develop academic and behavioral skills that help students meet their goal of graduating from high school (Mizelle and Irvin, 2001). Ninth Grade Intervention research focuses on three areas that schools use to improve student growth:

academics, school environment, improving retention rates. The research enables school leaders to create an academically sound environment that fits the needs of these students as they move through ninth grade.

2.5.1. Academic Development

According to researchers, Mizelle and Irvin (2001), the freshman academy model was developed for several reasons: (1) to improve pass rates for major subjects (English, math, and science), (2) improve the transition from eighth to ninth grade, (3) reduce retention rates, (4) improve graduation rates, and (5) prepare students for their remaining high school experiences. According to Hardy (2006):

Ninth grade is a critical year. It's when students either gain the maturity and academic skills to succeed in high school, or fail and eventually drop out. By separating ninth - graders into smaller learning communities, ninth -grade academies can focus on the unique needs of this vulnerable population (p. 41).

Weiss and Bearman (2007) reported that the first year of high school was extremely difficult for students. First-year high school students faced numerous obstacles in the transition from middle school. Grades often declined, the likelihood of course failure rose dramatically, behavioral problems increased, and absences became much more prevalent. The problems a student experienced in ninth grade often carried over into the remainder of the high school experience.

Cook, Fowler, and Harris (2008) conducted a study that examined the impact of Ninth Grade Interventions on student proficiency and retention. Data for their study was gathered from surveying 134 students in Ninth Grade Academies in the state of North Carolina. Their research study sought answers to the following questions: Are Ninth Grade Interventions affecting

student performance or non-promotion? Are some Ninth Grade Intervention models better than others? What else impacts students' performance in the ninth grade? The findings of their study included the following: (1) attendance had a small negative effect on growth in reading in math, (2) the percentage of teachers with less than three years' experience had little impact, (3) school leadership had a small positive impact, and (4) socio-economic status had a small negative effect on growth. These conclusions were drawn when the following measures were studied:

- Comparing eighth and ninth grade grades in English;
- Comparing ninth grade academic performance to overall state proficiency scores;
- Comparing the dropout and non-promotion rates of schools with and without Ninth Grade Academies (p. 3).

These results, according to Cook et al. (2008), show the Ninth Grade Academy in this case has little impact on student growth and achievement. The study also failed to find any significant improvement in ninth grade scores on end-of-year standardized tests.

Reyes and Jason (1991) also conducted a quantitative study of a transitional program. However, their research focused on high schools located in Iowa that contained 154 ninth grade students; half of which comprised the experimental group, and the other half, the control group. All students were entering a large urban high school that served approximately 2,800 students.

Information, for their study, was provided to the parents as to how the groups would differ in instruction, intervention, and feedback throughout the school year; parents were given the opportunity to object to the measures being administered to their children. Students were assessed after the second semester of their ninth grade school year according to data that were gathered from students' academic records and relevant departmental sources, such as the

counseling office from their eighth-grade and ninth -grade student records. The mean for the number of courses failed was 2.1 for the experimental group of students, and 1.8 for the control group of students. The mean GPA for the experimental group was 2.3 and 2.5 for the control group. However, a significant (.05) difference was found between the groups' Test of Reading Achievement and Proficiency percentile scores in grade nine; the experimental group of students achieved higher scores on this test with a mean score of 38.3 as compared to the control group mean score of 35.1 (Reyes and Jason, 1991).

Gillock and Reyes (1996) conducted a study of a high school transition pilot project that was implemented in two different middle schools. This program was set up in order to prepare eighth grade students for their transition to high school the following year. The 145 predominantly low-income participants in the study were from an urban public school in the Chicago area. The feeder high school had a total enrollment of approximately 2,900 and an average class size of 22 students. For the 60 experimental groups of students, who were still enrolled in the feeder high school at the end of the study, archival school records were used as measures of academic adjustment. Researchers assessed the relationships between students' academic performance at the pre-transition and post-transition levels. Students' GPAs declined significantly ($p < .01$) between pre-transition ($M = 2.59$) and post-transition ($M = 1.58$) to high school. Further, findings from this study indicate that the elementary school setting could have played a role in the students' adjustment during the transition to high school. When the researchers analyzed the elementary school differences of the 60 experimental groups' members, they found that the group of students from North Elementary had a slightly higher GPA ($M = 1.75$ vs. $M = 1.47$) than did their counterparts from West Elementary. Several content specialized teachers that mimicked that of a high school environment taught the students at North

Elementary, where a higher GPA was noted. In addition to the environment, such specialization could have resulted in higher school expectations with consequential higher performance norms. Therefore, the students from North Elementary may have been better prepared for the transition into high school due to the more rigorous academic focus and more high school-like practices.

Hertzog and Morgan (1998) conducted two studies that emphasized the importance of a successful transition plan. In the first study these researchers developed and distributed a survey to 97 middle schools and their receiving high schools. The purpose of the survey was to gather data about the following: a) the transition practices that the schools utilized, b) the percentage of students that dropped out of high school, and c) the percentage of ninth grade students who were retained in the ninth grade due to course failures during that year. The data were analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the transition programs and to justify program effectiveness. Ninth grade course failures reflected a retention rate of 11% for the experimental group, whereas the control group reflected a 14% retention rate. Also, the dropout rate for the experimental group went from five percent to three percent, whereas the control group dropout rate went from eighth percent to five percent. Hertzog and Morgan determined that student success could be affected by the number of transitional activities to ease the transition to high school. An examination of transition practices found three common components among the schools that were surveyed: a) eighth grade field trip to the high school, b) ninth grade counselors working with eighth grade students to determine course selection, and c) meetings with parents of eighth grade students and high school staff.

In the second study Hertzog and Morgan (1999) extended their study of transitional programs. In this national study of surveys completed by 450 eighth grade students and their sending middle school, these researchers established that the number of transnational practices

that had affected the success of the transitional program. Research from this study reflected that schools with between 1-8 total transitional programs in place had a 20% dropout rate as compared to a 10% dropout rate among schools that implemented a total of 9 to 14 transition practices. These researchers concluded that schools that implemented 9 to 14 transitional practices were 10% more successful, measured at the $p \leq .015$ level of significance, than those schools with 8 or less transitional practices.

In a study that examined the impact of transitional programs on student success, Smith (1997) randomly surveyed approximately 8,000 middle grade students nationwide and recollected data from these same students after their completion of high school. Smith investigated the long-term effects that middle school transition programs have on a student's high school performance as measured by their grades throughout high school. Smith established that the students who participated in a transitional program in eighth grade showed an average GPA of 2.43 in high school; whereas those students who did not have a transitional program in place (such as a Ninth Grade Academy) after leaving middle school showed an average GPA of 2.01 at graduation.

2.5.2. Environmental Development

The greatest advantage a Ninth Grade Academy has is the use of the small learning communities (Cotton, 2001), be it the sequestered ninth grade as a whole or the community instructional practice SLCs are the foundation of an academy. Cotton defined Small Learning Communities (SLCs) as "any separately developed, individualized learning unit within a larger school setting, in which students and teachers are scheduled together and frequently have a common area of the school in which to hold most or all of their classes" (p. 7). Herlihy (2007) defined small learning communities as those with reduced class sizes (25 or less), more time

spent by a teacher on a student individually, and more academic feedback that support their learning. Many middle schools are constructed within this model to assist preteen students through middle school, but this ends with the eighth grade. While most students often move from a smaller environment with more support and structure to a larger high school where academic, social, and behavioral demands are sometimes higher, academies offer the smaller interconnected environment that transitioning student's value.

A chronological review of SLC research shows a variety of positive impacts made by this model. Oxley (2001) found that Small Learning Communities incorporated inclusive programming, continuous program improvement, rigorous and relevant curriculum, and instruction aimed at improving student achievement. These teaching and learning practices were developed that incorporated an interdisciplinary team of teachers that included special education teachers and English language learners. The focus of this team was to provide an academic environment that will meet the needs of the incoming ninth graders to ensure their academic success.

Smaller learning communities promoted relationships that bound students to the school and allowed teachers to better identify and respond to student needs (Oxley, 2001). "Small Learning Communities that have the most success with their students are the ones that serve as the building blocks of school organization and the center of school Activities, not as add-ons to the existing school organization" (p. 46). Another point of emphasis on smaller learning communities and their value to successful transition was adult interaction and structure. Two separate research studies - Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) and Letgers and Kerr (2001) - showed that transition programs such as freshman academies, reduced dropout rates and were beneficial to students, because of the social connection these interventions can create between the school,

the student, and the real world.

2.6. Retention and Dropout Rates

To provide clarity on a school's retention rate and dropout rate, the National Center for Educational Statistics (2015) defined the drop out rate as the percentage of students between the ages of 16-21 who are eligible to attend on the first day for class, but are not enrolled in school. Whereas, the retention rate in high school is the percentage of students who do not complete the required courses successfully to be promoted to the next grade. Consequently, ninth graders experience more dropouts and academic failures than all other grade levels (Alspaugh, 1998; Alspaugh, 1998b; Smith 1997). As a result of transition difficulties, current research suggests there is a great academic loss during this brief time (Alspaugh, 1998, Barber & Olsen, 2004). To improve both the retention and graduation rates, establishing an academy within a school will be beneficial for struggling students transitioning into high school.

McAndrews and Andrews (2002) reported that the average national dropout rate for high schools with more than 1,000 students is 6.39%; the same rate for schools of fewer than 200 students is 3.47%. McAndrews and Andrews based their data on a 1996 study report from the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, which measured dropout rates for over 1,000 schools. Roughly 30% of the students in the United States who drop out of high school were never promoted beyond the ninth grade (Neild, 2009). "If the freshman year is a time of increased risk for students ... it may also be a key point for intervention to minimize the risk of dropping out" (Neild, Stoner-Eby, and Furstenberg, 2008, p. 544).

Transitions in schooling are moments of great promise for children, holding the potential for personal growth, new learning, and greater independence and responsibility (Neild, 2009, p.

54).

2.7. Impact of Ninth Grade Interventions on Student Academic Achievement

Research on academic growth differs from the preceding research in that it looks at ninth grade academic development holistically. In this section, the research reviews how ninth graders who do not participate in a Ninth Grade Academy are impacted by their ninth grade experience.

Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, and Sanchez (2000) found that many students experienced a decrease in their academic achievement and grade point average during their ninth grade school year following a transition from eighth grade without a transition plan. To tackle this issue schools have developed transitional programs that are ongoing throughout the year. High school students polled after their transition from eighth grade to ninth grade suggested providing information and insight, better tours of the school so that students know exactly where classes are located and sending high school students to the middle school for discussions about the high school (Akos and Galassi, 2004).

Styron and Peasant (2010) conducted a study to measure the achievement of ninth grade students in an academy and compare them to students who were in a traditional ninth grade setting. The researchers collected archival data for ninth graders using four indicators: algebra I scores, biology scores, ethnicity, and gender. Gender data showed no statistically significant difference between boys and girls in algebra I and biology scores. The only area of statistically significant difference in ethnicity was in scores with black students. They saw a difference of .003. No other data were shown to have any statistically significant difference.

Crockett, Perterson, Graber, Schulenberg, & Ebata (1989) documented a decrease in academic performance from eighth to ninth grade in a study of 253 adolescents. This research study is widely used in modern research and supports trends in academic transition from middle

school to high school that still occur. Using a survey the researcher found that students transitioning once from a primary to a secondary school had a significant decrease in grades, and they also found that students who experienced two transitions (one from fifth to sixth grade and one from sixth to seventh grade) showed a decrease in academic achievement as measured by grades.

Alspaugh (1998) conducted an ex-post facto study of forty-eight school districts, all-varying in size and school design (K-8, K-5, etc.). As a result of this study, Alspaugh suggested there is a loss in achievement as a result of the middle to high school transition. The loss is more than the achievement loss found between elementary and middle school. Furthermore, the study revealed that high school dropout rates were higher for districts with Grade 6-8 middle schools than for districts with K-8 elementary schools.

Alspaugh further revealed that the more transitions students experienced, the more their academic careers suffered. The students attending middle schools experienced a greater achievement loss in the transition to high school than did the students making the transition from K-8 elementary school. The experience of making a previous transition did not mediate the achievement loss during the transition to high school. This finding implies that the students were encountering a double-jeopardy situation (Alspaugh, 1998, p.5).

Alspaugh (1999) conducted an ex post facto study to explore the interactive relationships among grade level of transition to high schools. Sixteen schools were included in the study. The study showed that there is a statistically significant correlation with the increase in grade level and the increase in dropout rate (p. 24). The mean percentage of dropouts for a cohort transitioning from ninth grade to tenth grade was 3.28, compared to the ninth grade level that had a mean score of 6.06. This study also found that each school cohort showed a mean achievement

loss when transitioning from eighth to ninth grade (p. 22). Hertzog and Morgan (1997) studied 150 middle and high schools in Florida and Georgia. They found that fewer than 30% of schools had transition programs from eighth to ninth grade and that eighty seven percent of schools had no contact with parents.

Balfanz and Legters (2004) conducted a study of approximately 1,000 high schools in the southern United States. One of the findings in this study was that in the largest cities (6 cities in this study) in the United States, between 40 percent and 50 percent of high schools graduate less than half of their ninth grade class within four years.

Neild, Stoner-Eby, and Furstenberg (2008) studied 4,000 incoming freshmen and found that first-time freshmen in Philadelphia who repeat ninth grade have a greatly elevated risk of dropping out of school within four years. This represents 57 percent of those retained in ninth grade failed to graduate. In developing a plan to address dropout rates the root causes need to be addressed. Many students who have failed to make this connection become bored with the coursework and have increased disciplinary problems, increasing the likelihood of dropout.

Recently a research study at the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University presented data substantiating concerns that ninth grade is where students drastically fall off-course (Quint, Thompson, and Bald, 2008). Balfanz (2009) presented calculations that “17 of the 22 districts (participating in the conference) lose twenty percent or more of their students after the freshman year” (p.5). At the same conference, Kemple and Herlihy (2005) presented a study in which ninth graders from four school districts were followed throughout their high school careers. Kemple found that “of a typical cohort of 100 such ninth grade students followed in the spring of what should have been their tenth grade year, only 56 had been promoted on time and were attending school as tenth graders. Twenty students had

already dropped out, and the remaining 24 had been kept back in ninth grade” (p.5).

2.8. The Impact of Ninth Grade Interventions on Student’s Behavioral Growth

According to Cushman (2006), every student in the eighth grade has a naturally developed fear of moving into the ninth grade that influences academic and personal growth (p.47). To this point, students admit to being nervous and scared about older students teasing them, getting lost in their larger, unfamiliar schools, and getting bad grades (Cushman). Researchers, Oakes and Waite (2009) found that without the proper information and support, incoming ninth graders can perceive high school as an impersonal and unsupportive place and turn to unconstructive behaviors to find fulfillment. Equally important, during this time, support from adults is crucial (p. 1).

To address these trends, the current literature on transition to the ninth grade shows that these transitional programs include social and academic programs to introduce new students to upperclassmen, and have them hopefully form bonds that help ease some of the social issues that arise in high school. Specifically, academic programs are implemented to help students with the increased rigor of high school work, and to help them catch up or if they fall behind academically. These programs provide a safety net for students, allowing them a situation where they can ask for help without being embarrassed of being intimidated (Butts and Cruzeiro, 2005).

In addition, students also experience a greater diversity of teachers and peers in high school, and they have more choices in their curricular and extra-curricular activities. In this environment, many students’ grades drop, and they do not attend school as regularly as they did (Reyes, Gillock and Kobus, 1994).

Cushman (2006) stated that researchers believed an academy gives a fresh start and allows students to build on the work they have done in middle school while still feeling

comfortable within a small and structured learning beginning. According to Cushman study skills, collaboration skills, social skills, and higher thinking skills are the most important skills. According to DiMartino and Clarke (2008) many ninth grade students do not have forethought or a plan for their own learning. DiMartino and Clarke also state that those who do not develop as quickly as other students become frustrated with high school as academic demands increase and thus, earn poor grades. Fields (2005) stated ninth graders also have weaknesses in basic skills such as reading and writing, and they have an extremely difficult time thinking about and planning for the future.

According to Roeser, Strobel, and Quihuis, (2002), the high school climate is a competitive environment that increased the pressure for students in a manner for which they are not prepared. Research indicates that Ninth Grade Academies have several needs: a dedicated and exclusive structure, a dedicated administrative team, and a faculty dedicated to addressing student needs through inter-curricular planning. For example, Letgers, Parise, and Rappaport (2013) reported that there are four required components to a true Ninth Grade Academy: (1) a high school principal and, more specifically, an assistant principal dedicated to the academy exclusively, (2) a separate space designated for the Ninth Grade Academy, (3) specific faculty dedicated to the academy, and (4) an inter-disciplinary collaborative structure. The purpose of the Ninth Grade Academy, according to Letgers, Parise, and Rappaport is to improve ninth grade curriculum, instruction, and student support.

McComb (2000) stated that test scores in smaller schools were consistently higher than those in traditional large schools. Grouping teachers and students into more cohesive, family-like structures also makes it easier to create opportunities for students to apply skills to real problems, to make connections between classroom activity and work, and to integrate learning across

disciplines (p. 21).

According to Visser and Hudis (1999), an academy's positive impact on student achievement: When learning environments are smaller and more intimate, teachers and students can more easily get acquainted, teachers can spend more time with individual students, and students seem to benefit from the sense of belonging to a community because the students' academic climate, in middle school, is one of conformity and uniformity. Black (2004) stated that students, based on the size of the school and expectations, tend to lose their academic expectations shortly after joining the ninth grade. This disinterest becomes more of an issue as students enter an academically competitive environment. When students transition into a highly managed ninth grade academy, their academic skills increase. In short, learning can be personalized.

The impact of socioeconomic status poverty also has a direct impact on the health and nutrition of adolescents, affecting school attendance, energy level, and concentration (National Commission on Children, 1993). Many students from low-income households drop out, often shortly after they enter high school, or they fall behind and fail to graduate on time (Bureau of Census (DOC), 1997; National Center for Education Statistics (ED) 1995). Far more students than is known will fall through the cracks. Many students from low-income families fall into the category of at-risk teens. At risk students are particularly in jeopardy of failing to graduate. As many as 60% of all those students that are identified as at-risk for failure going into high school will not graduate with their class (Green & Scott, 1995).

Multiple researchers (Neild and Balfanz, 2001; Neild, Stoner, Eby, and Furstenberg, 2008) found that in high poverty urban areas, retention in the ninth grade significantly increases the odds that a student will drop out. These studies conclude that without significant

intervention, students who transition to the ninth grade (particularly those inadequately prepared) will face a much higher risk of further retentions, academic failures, and risk of eventual high school dropout. Additionally, in high poverty urban areas, retention in the ninth grade significantly increases the odds that a student will drop out, thereby indicating that without significant intervention, students who transition to the ninth grade (particularly those inadequately prepared) will face a much higher risk of further retentions, academic failures, and risk of eventual high school dropout. Many of these high-poverty schools end up with an approximate 52% retention rate for their ninth grade students (Hertzog, 2006).

2.9. Ninth-grade Interventions Strategies

Adolescents are faced with many changes including maturation, body and mind development, and brain functions. During the adolescent period, it matters how the student feels about school in terms of his or her academic success (Johnston, 1992). More recently, Dudley, Wiest, and Cusick (2002) found that a perceived supportive environment must be formed for a freshman student to have academic success. This is because the typical high school organization, usually a bureaucratic model, is a challenge for some freshman students. Therefore, various school interventions focused on the ninth-grade student are implemented to create a positive and personal school culture.

Although there are many interventions implemented by schools, one common theme among the ninth-grade interventions is the attempt to create a personalized high school experience for the ninth-grade student. Personalization, as suggested by Breaking Ranks II (NASSP, 2004), is created by focusing on a variety of strategies that include advisories, student- led parent-teacher conferences, freshman orientation, looping, ninth-grade academy, career academy, a transition program, flexibility within a student's schedule, smaller learning

communities, using data to make decisions, peer mentors, adult mentors, counselor for the ninth grade, students remaining with their peers, or a separate wing, hall, or space within the building. Additional research available on the 15 specific intervention strategies recommended in *Breaking Ranks II* (NASSP, 2004) gave further support to their importance.

Breaking Ranks II (NASSP, 2004) offers 31 recommendations to high school decision makers that include pragmatic solutions to the educational crisis of the alarming rate of students not graduating from high school. Each recommendation has a list of strategies and interventions that schools may implement. All recommendations fall into one of three categories:

1. Collaborative Leadership and Professional Learning Communities;
2. Personalization and the School Environment;
3. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (p. 7).

Research indicated that personalizing schools could increase student achievement (Dudley et al., 2002). Therefore, teachers who develop close relationships with students are better able to teach their students. According to educational researchers, creating a school where students perceive that they are cared about will increase student achievement (NASSP, 2004).

Johnston (1992) found that early adolescents who do not connect with school or do not find a common bond with a teacher or counselor are more likely to drop out of school. He also stated that how an adolescent feels about school could determine whether or not he or she continues with school. Thus, personalization of high school for the developmentally different ninth-graders must be a focus when implementing high school interventions and school reform. The three recommendations and the corresponding strategies used for this study are shown in Figure 1.

Strategies used to implement recommendations	Breaking Ranks Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student-led conferences • Freshman orientation Looping • Students remaining with the same group of peers • Houses/clusters/school within a school • Peer mentors • Personal Adult Advocates • Freshmen academies • Career academies • Transition program to adult life 	Recommendation 10: High schools will create small units in which anonymity is banished.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Adult Advocates • Flexible scheduling • Advisories • Personal plan for progress 	Recommendation 13: Every high school student will have a Personal Adult Advocate to help him or her personalize the educational experience.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team Teaching • Use of data to determine what programs are needed 	Recommendation 14: Teachers will convey a sense of caring so that students feel that their teachers share a stake in their learning.

Figure 1. Recommendations 10, 13, and 14 and their corresponding strategies (Breaking Ranks II, NASSP, 2004)

2.9.1. Advisories Interventions

Advisory class periods allow students and teachers to meet at various times throughout the freshman year. This is one way schools attempt to create a more personalized schooling environment for their ninth-graders. Clarke (2003) found that advisories could be used to increase student motivation, guide class selection, and celebrate student achievement. Advisories can be used as a way to combat some of the feelings of isolation that ninth-graders so often feel when transitioning to a high school (Riera, 2004). In addition, advisory teachers may use the time to teach study skills, allow time for homework completion,

or simply act as a mentor to their students.

Darling-Hammond, Aness, and Ort-Wichterle (2002) found that advisories increase student personal support. This can be helpful when students struggle with the new academic standards implemented in high school. Another benefit to student advisories is that they may increase teacher-parent communication. In general, advisories can act as an intervention that attempts to connect students to teachers and teachers to parents.

2.9.2. Student-Led Conference Interventions

While peers can have a positive influence on ninth-graders, adult and parent support is needed, too. MacIver (1990) found that parents impact adolescent motivation, a problem for many ninth-graders. Assuring parent involvement in their ninth-grade child's education through student-led conferences is an important aspect of student success (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

Ninth grade students in some schools are able to facilitate a conference between the teacher and parent about the progress the student is making, class assignments, and other school-related topics. This allows the ninth-grader some ownership in his or her learning. By improving relationships between school and the family, schools can positively impact student achievement (Martin, Tobin, & Sugai 2002). Student-led conferences are one-way schools can improve that relationship and offer the ninth-grader more adult support.

2.9.3. Transitional Program Interventions

Research shows that transition programs into adult life, freshman orientations, and freshman academies, in general, reduce dropout rates and are beneficial to students (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Letgers & Kerr, 2001) because of the social connection these interventions can create between the school, the student, and the real world. When ninth-graders transition to the high school, new feelings of loneliness and isolation can occur that can adversely affect

student achievement (Eccles & Wigfield, 1997). Transitional interventions help to prevent or at least lessen some of those feelings.

Transitional programs can be offered in a variety of ways. Some schools offer transitional programs for students to move into adult life. Other programs take the form of summer programs that occur even before the student enters high school. Freshman orientation programs may entail a freshman-only registration day or a freshman-only first day of school. Schools may call the cluster of programs that offer numerous activities “freshman academies”. Successful schools have programs that provide membership to their students (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989); thus, many of the interventions used for ninth-graders involve the cohesive programming of the above interventions.

2.9.4. Varied Teaching Technique Interventions

Personalized learning can increase student achievement for some ninth-graders. Teachers play a role in a ninth-grader’s success during his or her first year in high school by being responsive to students’ needs (Fraser & Wahlberg, 1991). Flexible scheduling and varied teaching techniques such as team teaching and looping are recommended for ninth grade teachers to create personalization (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; McIntosh & White, 2006; Stevenson, 2002). Team teaching, involving multiple teachers involved in the education of one classroom, increases the adult-to-student ratio in one class period. Looping is when a teacher follows a class to the next level, as when an eighth grade teacher teaches the same students the following year in ninth grade. Clarke, Frazer, DiMartino, Fisher, & Smith (2003) suggested that educators should create a personalized classroom using a variety of teaching techniques: by encouraging personal voice, allowing chances to work in groups, and offering opportunities to have choice in the classroom. Because of ninth graders’ unique developmental process, they

respond to and value techniques such as cooperative learning and team building (Kellough & Kellough, 2008, Wood, 2007).

Darling-Hammond et al. (2002) found that effective teachers offer a variety of teaching techniques during one class period to engage the students and to touch on various learning styles. Additionally, interactive lessons are important interventions for the ninth grade student. For instance, Wood (2007) found that allowing for breaks in the class period assists the ninth-grader in learning. In their stage of development, some ninth graders feel frustrated by the high school workload and may give up. Varied teaching techniques engage the ninth grader and improve achievement by keeping the student connected to their class and to their school.

2.9.5. Career Academy Interventions

Career academies, or a systematic approach to developing career skills, positively impact student success (Turner, 2007). Schools where career academies are recommended to students describe it as a school-within-a-school program that can offer career related curricula based on a career theme, internships, academic coursework, and work experience through partnerships with local employers (What Works Clearinghouse, 2006). Other researchers have found that providing courses for ninth graders that focus on future careers helps to connect ninth graders to their high school, to build relationships with adults, and to encourage authentic learning by making learning applicable to the real world (Feller, 2003).

Some ninth grade students struggle with thinking about and planning for the future and tend to be highly irresponsible (Fields, 2005; Riera, 2004). Career academies have been found to have positive effects on students' decision to stay and progress in school (What Works Clearinghouse, 2006). Career academies offer an explanation of careers available, the skills needed to find and keep a job, and other adult skills ninth-graders require. Used as an

intervention, career academies address some of the unique developmental deficiencies of a ninth- grader.

2.9.6. Data Interventions

Providing feedback for a student can have a powerful influence (Rutter, Maughan, Mortimore, & Ouston, 1982), and sharing data about the student's performance can ultimately increase test scores (Gamble-Risley, 2006). These data can include attendance reports, behavior reports, test scores, and overall achievement. Ninth graders who have more personalized support that provides a descriptive picture of how they are doing in school will do better in their academics (Reinhard, 1997). Thus, sharing a student's own data has positives benefits for that student and can be used as a ninth-grade intervention.

2.9.7. Peer Mentor Interventions

Researchers have found that there is a need for freshman students to be socially connected to other students (Riera, 2004), and that students possess a strong need to belong (Wood, 2007). Peers tend to be the most influential group for freshman students (Uruk & Demir, 2003), indicating a need for peer mentors. Often, when students drop out of high school it is because they did not connect with the school and subsequently formed friendships with students who did not value education (Johnston, 1992). Therefore, one intervention is the use of peer mentors. Some schools have programs that allow time for older students to mentor the younger ninth grader. During this mentorship, they may have conversations about academics, homework, or simply talk about the social aspect of school. Peer mentors can have a positive impact on the emotionally needy and peer dependent ninth grader.

2.9.8. Adult Mentor Interventions

Lee and Burkam (2003) found that students are less likely to drop out of school when

a positive relationship exists between teachers and students such as those intended by the use of adult mentors. Ninth graders often crave adult connection (Wood, 2007) that can be provided by providing an adult mentor to every student. The adult advocates can offer advice, help keep the student organized, or be someone who will listen to the ninth grader. When ninth grade students have strong emotional connections and attachments to the school, they are more likely to have academic success (Johnston, 1992). In addition, Butts and Cruzewo (2005) found that connections to school keep students more engaged. Adult mentors act as a way to link the sometimes emotionally needy or isolated ninth grader to the school.

2.9.9. Counselor Led Interventions

Dedicating a counselor to the ninth grade students can be an effective intervention. Brigman and Campbell (2003) found that counselor-led interventions for ninth graders had a positive effect on students. The ninth grade counselor can be given extra time for ninth grade scheduling so that the incoming student is appropriately placed into classes. Having an active counselor identify at-risk students prior to the students' entry into the high school can be valuable as well (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). The counselor can also aid staff with academic and behavioral interventions (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002) and can facilitate meetings with students, parents, and teachers (Brigman & Campbell, 2003). The ninth-grade counselor can act as another adult with whom the ninth grader may bond and can add another layer of connection and support to the ninth grade student.

2.9.10. Smaller School Interventions

In the transition to a high school, some ninth-graders feel overwhelmed by the size of the new school and challenged with the new social pressures, causing their academics to suffer (Kellough & Kellough, 2008). One intervention to combat this feeling is to give ninth graders

their own space in a school or provide schools within schools (Lee, Smerdon, Alfeld-Liro, & Brown, 2000). Lee and Burkam (2003) found that smaller schools and remaining with peers positively impacted student success. The separate space can ensure stability and consistency for the ninth grade student. Schools within schools (or smaller learning communities, as they are sometimes called) also provide a more socially supportive environment (Conley, 1993) that the ninth grader so often desires. Compared to students in large schools, students in smaller schools feel safer and enjoy the teacher-student relationships (Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). By providing ninth-graders their own space in a school building, student attendance increases, students exhibit better behavior, there is higher teacher morale, and teachers provide more parent contact. In addition, smaller schools or separate spaces often provide opportunities for better relationships between students and staff members, and students tend to be more serious about their learning (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995). Klonsky and Klonsky (1999) contended that students, taken as a whole, are more successful when they attend smaller schools, or at least schools within schools, because smaller schools can create a more personalized environment.

2.10. Summary

Chapter II reviewed literature and research related to the impact of ninth grade interventions and student outcomes. It discussed the conceptual framework surrounding the academic environment and developmental state of being connected in order to make learning and behavior appropriate over the short and long term. Lengthy discussion was devoted to the benefits of ninth grade interventions and the various intervention strategies used. Chapter II also provided information about the impact of ninth grade interventions on student achievement and student's behavioral growth. Chapter III will be devoted to the methodology of this case study analysis. It will address three research case studies and its significance to ninth grade

interventions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the methodology used for this current study and introduces the case studies used in this case study analysis. Case study methodology allows the researcher to ascertain a greater depth of understanding with regard to a particular topic or phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The focus of this particular study is upon those transition programs that have shown student success as they transition from middle school to high school. As result, the boundaries of this study are defined and confined to three empirical instances to support the claims that ninth grade interventions will have a positive impact on student outcomes.

3.1.1. Case Study Analysis

Case study analysis design is optimized when neither qualitative nor quantitative methodologies if used individually would yield the desired information (Creswell, 2013). Case study analysis is well suited for conducting a study to gain a better understanding of ninth grade intervention programs as it relates to student retention and academic achievement. Yin (2012) reported that case studies permit researchers to perform in-depth investigations of a circumstance or trend. Case study analyses allow multiple aspects of that circumstance or trend to be explored from varying perspectives. More recently, Yin (2012) reported that comparing and contrasting several case studies, guided by a theoretical framework, aids in increasing the validity of correlative findings.

Creswell (2013) also reported that qualitative studies, including case studies, can be made more robust by examining multiple case studies in a particular subject area. Doing so allows for varied perspectives from each individual case in both space and time. Gaining the insight from

multiple case studies, therefore, increases the validity of qualitative works of this nature. However, it is important to note that Creswell reports that findings, even when gathered from multiple, similar case studies may not be generalizable. Simultaneously, Creswell states that generalizability is not necessarily the intended goal of case study analyses. Rather, the goal is to gain a greater, in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon.

Creswell (2013) states that case study analyses should be limited to a maximum of five cases to achieve the best results. For this reason, this study examined three case studies.

3.1.2. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to conduct a deeper analysis of case studies to provide policymakers, educators and researchers with a reliable assessment of what is known, and not known, about the effectiveness, the value added of ninth grade intervention programs. This review focuses, in particular, on studies that seek to evaluate the effects of ninth grade intervention programs; that is, empirical studies that address the question: do ninth grade intervention programs matter? Because the objective here was to provide a thorough and comprehensive review, an attempt was made to locate as wide a range of case studies of ninth grade transition programs as possible. To accomplish this, existing systematic, narrative or traditional reviews of research were examined and extensive online searches of numerous databases were conducted, including Dissertation Abstracts, Educational Resources Information Clearinghouse (ERIC), Psychological Abstracts and Sociological Abstracts. Combinations of the following key-words were used in online searches: Ninth Grade Academy; Transition Programs; Student Graduation Rate; Student Retention Strategies; Statistical Data; Educational Policy; and Program Evaluation. Searches included both published and unpublished documents on ninth grade transition intervention programs and studies from the United States.

The search initially located over 10 documents concerned with ninth grade transition intervention programs. These included essays, reviews, reports, studies and articles. In a second sequence of steps, all documents were excluded that were not empirical case studies reporting data on ninth grade transition intervention programs. First, abstracts were reviewed with this criterion in mind – a step that trimmed the list to five documents, and finally, a closer look was taken at the articles, reports and papers themselves – which resulted in a further reduction to 3 case studies discussed below.

3.2. CASE STUDY ONE

Spencer, J. (2008). High School Reform: A Case Study Using The Breaking Ranks II Framework. (Doctoral Dissertation)

3.2.1. Description

Spencer (2003) conducted a case study to examine the complex process of high school reform in six different high schools in an urban school district in North Carolina. The problem that Spencer examined focused on the “great debate” of how to improve public high schools in America. Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, there has been a major push to transform schools to ensure the academic success of all students, both, while in high school and during their post-secondary transitions.

The primary purpose for this study was to:

- Assess how the High School Reform Committee perceived the importance of the Breaking Ranks II recommendations for their school district in 2004 and 2007;
 - Assess how the High School Reform Committee perceived the level of implementation of the Breaking Ranks II recommendations for their school district in 2004 and 2007;
- and

- Describe any relationships between the perceptions of importance/practice of the recommendations and the overall implementation effort over three years (Spencer, 2003, p. 12).

Spencer's study was grounded in the conceptual framework *Breaking Ranks II*, which was developed from research and compiled by educational experts. For the basis of this study, the framework was selected because of the research-based best practices. *Breaking Ranks II* provided examples of reformed high schools, steps for school improvement, challenges, and possible resources for high schools and school districts to use as a tool for reform. In addition, the framework offers 31 core recommendations for schools to implement to achieve high school renewal (NASSP, 2004). Recommendations are clustered into one of three categories:

- Collaborative Leadership and Professional Learning Communities;
- Personalization; and
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment (p. 33).

3.2.2. Methodology

This quantitative study included descriptive data, closely related to a qualitative study, which provided important information into educational change efforts. Spencer (2008) emphasized the importance of the following efforts that would improve the validity of her study.

At the onset of the study, five traditional high schools, one magnet school and one small secondary alternative school were included. However, the original survey was completed by the five traditional high schools and the magnet school. Additionally, all of the schools were involved in the implementation of the reform plan. For the post-reform plan survey, the same schools were included. Thus, including all of the high schools that were a part of the reform effort reduced the possible threat of selection. The participants who completed the pre and post

surveys were the members of the Seaboro High School Reform Committee selected by the process outlined.

The reform plan began in late 2003 with discussions and initial planning, with added implementation strategies for school years 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and 2006-2007. There were other district-wide initiatives during this time period in an effort to maintain the reform plan to allow for stability in the leadership and planning of the high school reform team. For example, a new mentor program was established evolving from discussion in the reform planning meetings. There were minor changes, which affected the school system, including changes in the state standards for standardized testing, changes in how the state works in low-performing high schools, and advances in technology.

In this study, a small percentage of individuals participated in the self-assessment survey in consideration of the many teachers who were responsible for implementing the reform plan. A survey was used to gain a better understanding of best practices implemented. The same self-assessment was given three years later to provide further guidance and direction to the reform effort. The threat of testing was minimized by having only a small representative group complete the surveys. However, the threat was reduced because the survey was not given as a means to reprimand or to define problems, but was used to identify areas in which the committee should focus their efforts.

3.2.3. Significance

For the purpose of this study, *Breaking Ranks II* (NASSP, 2004) provided the most appropriate lens through which to examine the school reform efforts (Spencer, 2013). As school reform continues to be a “great debate”, the researcher hoped to unpack the complex process of high school reform in one urban school system. In all her research efforts and data collection,

other school districts can benefit as they seek improvement within their high schools.

3.3. CASE STUDY TWO

Short, J. (2016). A Ninth Grade Academy and Relationships Among Participating Students, Their Behavior Referrals and The Effect of Leadership Practices On Academic Achievement (Doctoral Dissertation).

3.3.1. Description

Short conducted a case study analysis on the impact of ninth grade academy on student behavior referrals and effect of leadership practice on academic achievement. The purpose of this study was to examine the Grade Point Averages and behavior referrals of students enrolled in the ninth grade academy compared to non-academy students during the 2011-2012 academic school year. The variables chosen for this study were data that was mandated by the State of Maryland and can possibly be used for other school districts to further research regarding Ninth Grade Academy (Short, 2016).

Short developed and implemented a Ninth Grade Academy that provided teachers and students with the additional tools and resources to better support their academic needs. To better understand the logistics of the school studied, the researcher provided the following background information:

The high school in this study had an enrollment of approximately 1,200 students. The school served a large geographic area that is mostly rural with some areas of higher-density apartments and single-family homes. The ethnicity of the population was predominantly divided between African American (63%) and Caucasian (37%), with other ethnic groups comprising approximately less than 1% of the total population. Approximately 8.3% of the population received services through the special education department. From the 2008–2009 school year to

the present, the dropout rate had dropped from over 16% to 8%.

The percentage of teachers who were considered highly qualified had risen significantly over the past years. During the 2009–2010 school year, 81% of courses were taught by Highly Qualified Teachers and 52.9% of the staff held Advanced Professional Certification. That number increased significantly; currently, 91% of the staff is Highly Qualified Teachers, and 54% hold Advanced Professional Certification.

The Ninth Grade Academy began during the 2011-2012 academic year. It was designed to be a small learning community that operated within the normal structure of a school. It had a dedicated academy coordinator, section of the school, a counselor, and administrator to support the academy teachers, parents, and students. According to the Short (2013), the purpose of the separate ninth grade wing was to separate the ninth-grade population from the upperclassmen to allow for a controlled transition from middle school to high school. It was assumed that controlling the movement of incoming ninth-grade students allowed the ninth-grade team to instill the importance of school routines and procedures, thus provided an opportunity for the ninth graders to become accustomed to the importance of following school rules and procedures and understanding the relationship it has with success in high school. In addition, another goal was to eliminate tardiness to class and the lack of a sense of urgency.

The separate ninth grade wing created an atmosphere to motivate transitioning middle school students so they could better concentrate on their academic performance rather than their social status at the school. The ninth-grade teachers had the ability to meet frequently to discuss student performance and communicate student progress to parents on a regular basis with greater detail on specific academic areas of concern. The ability and time to communicate with parents on a regular basis was key goal of the Ninth-Grade Academy.

3.3.2. Methodology

Short (2016) administered the Leadership Practices Inventory 360 (SLPI) to the Ninth Grade Academy teachers. The SLPI contained 30-questions that measured five leadership practices of teachers. The practices included: a) modeling the way, b) inspiring a shared vision, c) challenging the process, d) enabling others to act, and e) encouraging from the heart. The instrument used in this study was developed by Kouzes and Posner (2013).

According to Short (2016), the developers of the LPI survey used data collected to reexamine the reliability and validity of the instrument. The results were consistent with the hypothesized dimensions of the survey.

When examining the students' GPAs and the behavioral referrals, the data indicated no significant differences among the Ninth Grade Academy students and the Non-academy students.

The design of the researcher's study was quasi-experimental; quantitative that used linear regression with a purposeful sampling of students and teachers. It examined the effects of the Freshman Academy/cohort model on student academic achievement on third-quarter student grade-point averages. The examination was completed through the use of ex post facto secondary data that was obtained from the school district. Research subjects, in this study, were not randomly placed in groups.

3.3.3. Significance

The significance of the Short (2016) study was to provide a Ninth-Grade Academy model that will have a positive impact on student behavior and grade point averages. Due to the challenges that many students encounter when transitioning from middle school to high school, the following objectives were also significant to his study:

1. Improve parental involvement;

2. Improve retention rates;
3. Raise grade-point averages;
4. Increase county and state assessment scores;
5. Reduce course failure rates; and
6. Reduces number of disciplinary referrals and suspension rates (p. 12).

3.4. Case Study Three

Barnes, L. (2013). A Quasi-Experimental Study on The Impacts of A Freshman Academy Academic Model on Rural Student's Standardized Math Scores and Grade Point Averages. (Doctoral Dissertation)

3.4.1. Description

Barnes conducted a case study analysis focused on the impacts of a ninth grade academy in hopes of achieving the following goals:

- to examine the impacts of a freshman academy model on student standardized math scores and grade point averages;
- to evaluate transition strategies for young adolescents and ultimately improve the dropout rate; and
- to make recommendations to school leaders and for other schools facing similar issues with student transitions and retention rates (Barnes, 2013, p. 10).

The case study took place in Dorchester County, Maryland. Dorchester County is a unique area with rural features but with inner city problems. These inner city problems include an increase in crime, increasing poverty rate, and an influx in population due to the availability of housing and low cost of living. Interventions, such as ninth grade academy, need to be implemented so that the students in Dorchester County Public Schools can be successful.

Barnes described the design of the freshman academy as follows in her study. All entering ninth graders are placed into teams, much like the middle school model. While on these teams, the students are taught their core subjects (Math, English, Science, and Social Studies) by teachers who serve as both instructors and mentors for the freshman students. The core teachers only teach freshmen. The rest of the schedule for the ninth graders was filled with electives such as music, drama, art, and physical education where they might be in a mixed class with not only freshmen but also upperclassmen, as well. It was in the design for the freshman to be isolated from the upperclassmen in their core classes and classes that were needed to meet the graduation requirements, in the belief that the students will be more comfortable and thus will improve academically (Barnes, 2013).

Grounded on Bandura's Social Learning Theory, Barnes (2013) conducted a quasi-experimental design using archival data on 409 first time ninth graders. Students in the 2010-2011 school year were used as the control group and were not exposed to the freshman academy, while students in the 2011-2012 school year were placed in the freshman academy.

3.4.2. Methodology

The design of this study was quasi-experimental. It examined the effects freshman academy/cohort model has on rural student academic performance on standardized math tests and student grade point averages. The examination was completed through the use of ex post facto secondary data in order to compare the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 cohorts. With this design the overall population came from a rural high school in Maryland with an approximate enrollment of 772 students. Of these 772 students, 412 of these students are Caucasian, 317 are Black, 25 are of two or more races, 16 are Asian, and 2 are American Indian. In addition, 57.4% of the student body is classified as FARMs (Free and Reduced Meals). The school also closely

divided among males (51.7%) and females (48.3%) (Holmes, 2013).

This sample included all incoming/first-time 9th graders entering the school in the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 academic school years. All 2011-2012 students who entered 9th grader were separated into two teams and were taught their core classes (English, History, Math, and Science) by team teachers. The students' other three courses were either electives or languages courses not taught by the team members, and included students from other grades. Of these core courses, students were placed based on ability in U.S. Perspectives (Honors U.S. History and English I), and STEM (Advanced Science and Math courses). Students were also placed in these courses according to MSA Reading and Math Scores and teacher recommendations to the guidance department. The scheduling and selection process was completed prior to the beginning of the school year. Consent for participation in the study was not needed since there were not any major schedule changes and all data being gathered were secondary data.

During the 2011-2012 school year, students received the treatment of the academy. During this year, Algebra I HSA and Grade Point Averages for the students were gathered. These data sets were then compared to first time ninth graders in the 2010-2011 cohort. Demographic data were also collected to see if there were differences in the minority groups. These groups included: ethnic background, gender, special education, and FARMs. To analyze the data, a series of *t*-tests of independent means and chi-square tests of significance were run for each of the research questions.

Barnes conducted *t*-tests for independent means and chi-square tests for significance to determine the impact of ninth grade academy on student G.P.A or standardized math test scores.

3.4.3. Significance

The significance of Barnes' (2013) study was to identify an intervention that could

possibly help students' progress toward graduation. This study can also impact educational leadership. Educational leaders are essentially agents of change and at times have to implement programs to benefit the students and the community. An educational leader has to know the wants and the needs of the school that they are leading. Depending on the culture and climate of the school, a freshman academy might not work in all high schools. It is up to the leader of the school to be able to determine whether or not this model can impact and help the students in the school. This study could also help determine whether or not ninth grade academy should be eliminated from the list of interventions offered in schools located in rural areas, thus best practices.

Figure 5. Case Study Matrix

Barnes (2013)	Short (2016)	Spencer (2008)	Title & Categories
Examine the impacts of a freshman academy model on student standardized math scores and grade point averages	Examine the Grade Point Averages and behavior referrals of students enrolled in the ninth grade academy compared to non-academy students during the 2011-2012 academic school year	Explored the complex process of high school reform initiative in six different high schools in North Carolina	Purpose
Grounded Theory as cited by Barnes	Grounded Theory as cited by Short	Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform as cited by Spencer	Conceptual Framework
When analyzing the three research questions, Barnes utilized <i>t</i> tests for independent means and chi-square test of significance.	When analyzing two of the three research questions, independent <i>t</i> tests were used. The	The qualitative data provided an overview of the perceptions of the reform effort, the	Analysis

	<p>third research question was analyzed using the results of the LPI survey and descriptive statistics of minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation were calculated for each of the five subscale scores and the subscale percentiles.</p>	<p>suggested best practices and the implementation of the recommendations over time.</p>	
<p>It was found that although there were no significant correlations with standardized math scores, grade point averages, and the freshman academy model, student performance on standardized math tests did increase, along with the students' GPAs.</p>	<p>In Shorts' study, there were no significant difference found between the participants and non-participant's outcomes for changes in student's GPA or behavioral referrals indicating that this study should be utilized as a baseline for future research.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For all 31 recommendations, the participants viewed the recommendations as best practices and perceived them to be important in creating an effective high school. 2. The participants indicated an increase in the level of practice of the recommendations from 2004 to 2007 in the surveys. 3. The importance of the recommendations did not affect the degree of implementation over the three-year period as perceived by the survey participants. 	Findings

3.5. Summary

This chapter addressed the methodology of this study, *A Case Study Analysis of Ninth Grade Interventions and Student Outcomes*. It examined three significant case studies, the conceptual framework, a brief analysis and the findings. Chapter IV discusses common and contrasting themes of the case studies examined in this chapter.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Transition into high school is a difficult time for adolescents and a precarious point in students' educational progression (Legters, Parise, & Rappaport, 2013). According to Donegan (2008), students fail ninth grade more than any other academic year and the dropout rates are the highest between ninth and tenth grades. In an effort to ease the transition for students, many school districts are implementing interventions, such as ninth grade academies, to lessen the sink or swim mentality students face when they enter high school. As a result, the purpose of this case study analysis is to explore the impact of ninth grade interventions and student outcomes. This chapter examines the findings of three case studies in the following areas: research design, ninth grade interventions design and implementation, and student outcomes. Each case study reported a unique outcome when implementing a ninth grade intervention.

According to the Stage-Fit Environment Theory, the outcome of middle school to high school transition depends on the impact of the school environment. If the school environment supports the students and their needs as they transition, the school has the potential to help them overcome the obstacles of this difficult period of development (Eccles & Midgley, 1989).

4.2. Analysis of Case Studies Research Design

The differences between the three reviewed case studies are pronounced. Barnes' (2013) and Short's (2016) purpose of their studies focused on the impact of ninth grade interventions that support academic achievement and positive social outcomes, whereas Spencer's (2008) purpose of the study concentrated on unpacking the implementation of the thirty-one strategic recommendations for high school reform identified in *Breaking Ranks II* (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004). Yet, each of these case studies provided a unique

solution for improving the transition from middle school to high school.

The sampled population selected for both Barnes' (2013) and Short's (2016) studies examined rural high schools in the State of Maryland. While reviewing the demographics of these two studies, Caucasian and African American students made up a large percentage of students enrolled in their sampled schools. In addition, a little over a quarter of the student body was classified as receiving Free and Reduced Meals (FARM). Although specific demographic information of the sample student population was not referenced in Spencer's study, the schools included in her study were diverse in the type of programming they offered. For example, she looked at five traditional high schools, one magnet school, and one small secondary alternative school (Spencer, 2008).

Barnes (2013) and Short (2016) conducted quasi-experimental studies that were grounded on small learning communities and the social learning theory, while Spencer conducted a single-exposure case study grounded on the conceptual framework of *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* (NASSP, 2004).

Small learning communities are based on developing schools within schools and providing structure for the everyday needs of transitioning students. In these small learning communities, instruction and curriculum are often focused on the students and their needs. According to Oxley (2001) and Cotton (2001), SLCs typically focus on five best practices that allow them to function. These best practices are as follows:

- Self-determination;
- Identity;
- Personalization;
- Support for teaching;

- Accountability.

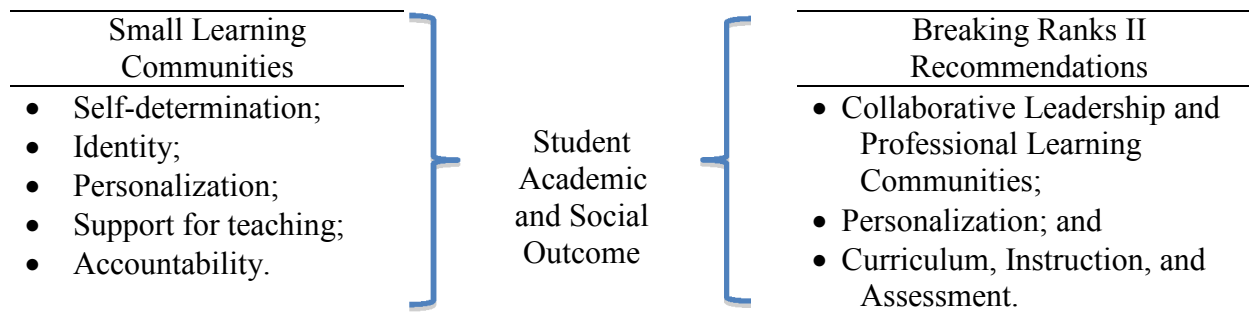
The self-determination of the organization and the small learning community, including all decision-making, is determined by the community and, thus, makes up the identity of the community. This identity that encompasses the vision and interests of the smaller learning community allows personalization of programs and policies in order to suit the needs of the students in the community.

On the other hand, the overarching goal of Breaking Ranks II (NASSP, 2004) was to provide a framework to help high schools improve student learning and academic achievement for all students, especially those transitioning into high school. The framework also provided a model for the process of school improvement that included establishing an improvement team with various stakeholders, completing self-assessments to determine the “best fit” members of the team, and implementing the recommended research-based strategies, as well as continually evaluating the results with current data.

Breaking Ranks II (NASSP, 2004) provides 31 specific recommendations for improving high schools. These recommendations are clustered into one of three categories:

- Collaborative Leadership and Professional Learning Communities;
- Personalization; and
- Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment.

Figure 4.1. Connecting Small Learning Communities and Breaking Ranks II Recommendations in High School Renewal



Both Breaking Ranks II (2004) and Small Learning Communities focus on student centered learning environment and collaboration among staff to foster student achievement.

Since both Barnes (2013) and Short (2016) conducted quasi-experimental studies, they each had a control and experimental group. During the 2010-2011 academic school year, Barnes used first time ninth grade students as the control group. These students were not exposed to any of the freshman academy courses. However, in the subsequent year, 2011-2012, the selected students were all placed in a freshman academy cohort. Correspondingly, in the 2011-2012 school year, Short's control group also consisted of ninth grade students that did not take part ninth grade academy, while in the 2012-2013 school year, his experimental group of ninth grade students participated in ninth grade academy.

Spencer's (2008) case study employed descriptive statistics that examined the perceptions of school reform efforts of the Seaboro High School Reform Committee before the reform initiative. The reform committee consisted of teachers, counselors, and administrators within the school.

Barnes' (2013) and Short's (2016) study were not longitudinal and only lasted one academic year for the control group and another for the experiment group. Spencer's (2008) study on the other hand was a three-year pre and post analysis. Because Spencer's study sought

to investigate the implementation of the Breaking Ranks II recommendations for high school reform, she surveyed teaching and administrative staff before the initiative started three years after it was implemented. This allowed Spencer to have a deeper analysis of outcome not only for students but also teacher's perceptions of the recommendations.

In an effort to further dissect the above case studies, the researcher examined the research questions that guided their research. Barnes' (2013) and Short's (2016) research questions concentrated on the extent of which ninth grade interventions had the most impact on students' math scores and grade point averages (GPA). Furthermore, Short also explored the effects of transformational leadership practices and Ninth Grade Academy students' academic achievement. Guided by the purpose of her study, Spencer's (2008) research questions were focused on the perception of participants on the implementation of Breaking Ranks II recommendations before they were implemented and after they were implemented.

In order to answer the research questions, Barnes (2013) conducted *t*-tests for independent means and chi-square tests of significance. Short (2016) conducted a *t*-test for independent means and ANOVA to examine the significance. In addition, Short also used descriptive statistics of minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation to calculate each of the five subscales of the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) survey scores and the subscale percentiles. An ANOVA was utilized to examine if there was a degree of significance at .05. Spencer (2008) used Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and paired samples *t*-test to answer her research questions.

Table 1: Design Analysis

	Barnes (2013)	Short (2016)	Spencer (2008)
Purpose	To examine the impacts of a freshman academy model on student standardized math scores and grade point averages.	To investigate the relationship among students participating in a ninth-grade academy compared to students from the previous year not participating, their behavior referrals and the effects leadership practices have on academic achievement (GPA) for students transitioning to high school. In addition, this study will look at the role that effective transformational leadership played in implementing transition strategies for ninth graders participating in the Ninth-Grade Academy.	To examine how a school district implemented the thirty-one strategic recommendations for high school reform identified in Breaking Ranks II (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004).
Research Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent does a freshman academy model have an impact on math scores for freshman academy students? 2. To what extent does a freshman academy model have an impact on student grade point averages? 3. Is there a relationship between freshman academy, math scores and grade point averages for freshman academy students? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent is there a relationship between student's participation and non-participation in the Ninth-Grade Academy and academic achievement? 2. To what extent is there a relationship between the Ninth-Grade Academy and non-Ninth-Grade Academy and the proportion of students with behavior referrals and the number of days suspended? 3. To what extent does transformational leadership practices effect the Ninth Grade Academy student's academic achievement. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) a recommendation perceived as being more important than others by participants (teachers, counselors, and administrators) was related to a more intense implementation; 2) a recommendation perceived as being more important than others by participants (teachers, counselors, and administrators) resulted in a more successful longitudinal implementation after three years of implementing the district reform plan; and 3) a recommendation perceived as having a higher degree of implementation by participants (teachers, counselors, and administrators) resulted in a more successful longitudinal implementation after three years of

			implementing the district reform plan.
Theoretical Framework	Small Learning Communities and Social Learning	Small Learning Communities and Social Learning	Breaking Ranks II Framework
Sample	Used archival data on 409 first time ninth graders. Students in the 2010-2011 school year were used as the control group and were not exposed to the freshman academy, while students in the 2011-2012 school year were placed in the freshman academy.	All incoming/first-time 9th graders entering the school in the 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 academic school years.	
Method	Quasi-experimental	Ex post facto non-experimental design to compare the academic achievement and behavior referrals of the 2012-2013 cohorts of ninth-grade students participating in the Ninth-Grade Academy with 2011-2012 ninth-grade students who did not.	Single-exposure case study
Data Analysis	<i>T</i> -tests for independent means and chi-square tests of significance	Independent t tests an ANOVA will be conducted to examine if there is a degree of significance at .05. Descriptive statistics of minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation were calculated for each of the five subscale LPI Scores and the subscale percentiles.	A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to further describe the relationship and a paired samples t-test was performed.

4.3. Analysis of Ninth Grade Intervention Design

The comparison and analysis of the design for the implementation of the Ninth Grade Academy revealed comparable efforts. Spencer (2008) conducted a pre and post assessment of the Breaking Ranks II framework. The pre-assessment was used for two reasons: (1) to determine the perceptions of school reform among all involved stakeholders, and (2) to gather baseline data, which is critical when implementing this framework. Although there was not a clear discussion of the implementation process of the framework, the post-assessment was administered three years later in an attempt to provide further guidance and direction to the

school reform effort.

Many small learning communities use interdisciplinary teaching and learning teams in order to enhance learning. Consequently, Barnes' (2013) Ninth Grade Academy initiative consisted of a team of educators with three to fifteen years of experience in both middle and high school settings. In addition, these educators were experienced in various content areas, such as Math, Science, History and English.

Short's (2016) study did not give details on the Ninth Grade Academy staffing design. Instead, it listed what roles supported the Ninth Grade Academy; dedicated academy coordinator, a counselor, and administrator. All positions were advertised within the building, with the exception of the support staff (building service, security monitor, and instructional aides) that was assigned based on their collaborative and collegial skills.

Similar to Short's (2016) study, Spencer (2008) did not address the design of the school intervention team. Instead, the study listed the stakeholders involved in the reform effort in chapter five. The Seaboro School District High School Reform Committee was composed of a school committee from each of the six high schools. The school committees included the principal, an assistant principal, a counselor, several teachers and a parent liaison. The Seaboro School District High School Reform Committee meetings often included collaboration between job-alike groups as well as school groups. Spencer also highlighted the changes in district-level and school-level leaders and how that may have potentially affected the school reform effort.

It is clear from Short's (2016) and Barnes' (2013) studies that the need for teacher "buy-in" is a precarious part of this new initiative. The rationale for asking for teacher volunteers was to ensure that a school or district-wide initiative should not be forced upon educators, because an effective Ninth Grade Academy would require a lot of time and team collaboration. Having

individuals involved that are not fully committed could potentially have an adverse effect on the program.

According to Oxley (2001), the combination of teaching and learning teams with rigorous and relevant curriculum and instruction is beneficial to students' academic progress and building relationships with teachers. As a result, the designated Ninth Grade Academy courses were not clearly identified in Short's (2016) study. However, Barnes' (2013) study specifically outlined what courses were reserved for which students. Algebra I, Part I, was reserved for students who had not completed Algebra I at the middle school level and who did not score proficient on the MSA Math Test. Algebra I was reserved for students who had not taken the course at the middle school level. Geometry was reserved for students who had passed the Algebra I HSA at the middle school level. Science coursework was also tiered. Students would be separated into courses based on standardized test scores and teacher recommendations. Students could take three levels of Environmental Science. These courses included CCP, Honors, and STEM. Also, English and U.S. History had two levels of distinction. These levels included CCP and Honors. However, in the 2011-2012 cohort, students placed in Honors English and Honors U.S. History courses could take U.S. Perspectives, a course designed to be a collaborative effort between English and History curricula.

Since the learning environment in Small Learning Communities is often smaller than the whole environment of the school, students and classes are inclusive and accepting of students from all areas of diversity. With this comes the support staff that they bring with them.

In both Barnes' (2013) and Short's (2016) study, all entering 9th graders were separated into two teams and were taught their core classes (English, History, Math, and Science) by team teachers. The students' other three courses were either electives or languages courses not taught

by the team members, and included students from other grades. Of the core courses, students were placed based on ability in U.S. Perspectives (Honors U.S. History and English I), and STEM (Advanced Science and Math courses). Students were also placed in the courses according to Maryland State Assessment (MSA) Reading and Math Scores and teacher recommendations to the guidance department.

In Barnes (2013) study, during the 2011-2012 school year, students received the treatment of the academy. During that year, Algebra I HSA and Grade Point Averages for the students were gathered. These data sets were then compared to first time ninth graders in the 2010-2011 cohort. Demographic data were also collected to see if there were differences in the minority groups. These groups included: ethnic background, gender, special education, and FARMs. To analyze the data, a series of t-tests of independent means and chi-square tests of significance were run for each of the research questions.

In Short's study, grades and behavioral referrals were collected using the school system's student database grades and behavioral referrals were collected using the school system's student database for the Ninth Grade Academy cohort and the Non-Academy students. Short (2016) obtained permission from the school district and received an excel data file housing the students' GPA, suspension code (0 for no, 1 for yes), and the number of days suspended. No names or identification numbers were received. The teacher survey was administered and data were collected by manually entering the survey subscale scores and percentiles provided by the survey company. Teacher names were omitted from the data file.

Spencer (2008) examined the following data in order to better understand the longitudinal implementation: attendance rates, suspension rates, retention rates, teacher turnover rates, dropout rates, graduation rates, cohort graduation rates, SAT scores, Performance Composites,

percentage of AYP goals met, and Advanced Placement tests data. These data points were selected because they were included in the district's planning process as specific areas to address the reform effort. Most of the areas were calculated in similar methods from 2003-2007.

In both Barnes' (2013) and Short's (2016) studies, the physical location of all academy classrooms, excluding electives, were positioned on the same hallway. The purpose was to not only allow for efficient collaboration among the teachers in the academy, but also to eliminate transition time for the students. This would also reduce student tardiness and possible anxiety of not being able to find classes. A separate ninth grade academy wing created an atmosphere to motivate transitioning middle school students so they could better concentrate on their academic performance rather than their social status at the school. The ninth-grade teachers had the ability to meet frequently to discuss student performance and communicate student progress to parents on a regular basis, with greater detail on specific academic areas of concern. The ability and time to communicate with parents on a regular basis was a key goal of the Ninth-Grade Academy.

Another main component of Small Learning Community is the continuous program improvement. Reflection and team assessments were constantly done in order to improve on the structure. Staff and team members were not the only ones sending feedback to decision makers; students and parents were also encouraged to provide input to teachers and administrators in charge of the Small Learning Communities. This concept is important since students are the center of learning in the Small Learning Communities (Oxley, 2001).

Throughout the school year many key features were added in attempts to strengthen the academy in Barnes' (2013) study. One feature was the addition of a team wide common planning period. The planning period was not only used for content area collaboration, but also

team meeting with teachers, guidance, and administration. The common planning time was also used for whole team meetings with parents and students. There was, however, no mention of modifications made in Ninth Grade Academy in Short's (2016) study.

Spencer (2008) also noted that one major change that emanated from the High School Reform Committee was a decision by the Reform Committee to move towards a block schedule at the five traditional high schools during the 2005-2006 school year. Although this decision evolved from conversations during the High School Reform Committee meetings, some stakeholders felt that this decision had already been made from the top down, causing a small degree of controversy and trust in the initiative. This change was one of the larger reform plan changes included over the three-year period.

Barnes' (2013) study also clearly outlines treatment/handling? of makeup work, late work and retaking assignments while Short's (2016) study did not.

Table 4.3: Ninth Grade Intervention Design

	Barnes (2013)	Short (2016)	Spencer (2008)
Staffing	It was decided that eight teachers were to be involved into the academy. Two teachers would be needed for each of the core content areas of Math, Science, History, and English. Once the master schedule was designed and shown to fit into the school's master schedule administrators asked for volunteers to teach these courses. Seven teachers were chosen, and teachers previously working in the building except for one math position filled all academy positions.	It has a dedicated academy coordinator, section of the school, a counselor, and administrator to support the academy teachers, parents, and students. All positions were advertised within the building with the exception of the support staff (building service, security monitor, and instructional aides) that were assigned based on their collaborative and collegial skills.	School Reform Committee was composed of a school committee from each of the six high schools. The school committees included the principal, an assistant principal, a counselor, and several teachers. After the reform effort began, the committees added a parent to the committee.

Courses Design	<p>Algebra I, Part I, reserved for students who had not completed Algebra I at the middle school and who did not score proficient on the MSA Math Test, Algebra I, which was reserved for students who had not taken the course at the middle school level, Geometry, which was reserved for students who had passed the Algebra I HSA at the middle school level. Students could take three levels of Environmental Science. These courses included CCP, Honors, and STEM. Also, English and U.S. History had two levels of distinction. These levels included CCP and Honors. However, in the 2011-2012 cohort, students placed in Honors English and Honors U.S. History courses could take U.S. Perspectives, a course designed to be a collaborative effort between English and History curricula</p>	Not Specified	Not Specified
Student placement-Implementation	<p>students were placed into courses that they needed as a graduation requirement. While many incoming first time ninth graders were placed together in certain courses it was not a guarantee. Also, these courses, depending on the level or classification distinction, might contain students who might by credit accumulation be labeled as ninth graders but in actuality be repeaters of the grade.</p>	<p>All 2011-2012 entering 9th graders was separated into two teams and was taught their core classes (English, history, math, and science) by team teachers. The students' other three courses were either electives or language courses not taught by the team members and included students from other grades. Of these core courses, students were placed based on ability in U.S. Perspectives (Honors U.S. History and English I), and STEM (Advanced Science and Math courses). Students were also placed in these courses according</p>	Not Specified

	Furthermore, many of these courses were located in content segregated departments. This meant that many of the classes were at opposite ends of the building. This aspect increased the likeliness of student tardiness and discipline infractions. In addition, since these courses were based on need, classes were ultimately larger. This meant that there was a decrease in teacher to student interaction. This was the case in the 2010-2011 cohorts, which was used as the control group.	to MSA Reading and Math Scores and teacher recommendations to the guidance department.	
Policy	Make-up Work, Retaking Assessments, and Plagiarism policies	Not Specified	Not Specified
Physical Classroom set up	All academy classrooms, excluding electives, were positioned on the same hallway.	A separate ninth grade academy wing.	Not Specified
Recumbent/ welcoming	A welcome flyer was mailed to all incoming ninth graders introducing them to their teachers and welcoming them to the school and inviting them to the “Back to School Night” and to inform them about supplies and other important information. To further welcome the students, incoming ninth graders were involved in a freshman only orientation day.	Not Specified	Not Specified

Modifications of the Academy	Addition of a team wide common planning period. This planning period was not only used for content area collaboration but also team meeting with teachers, guidance, and administration. This common planning time was also used for whole team meetings with parents and students.	Not Specified	Decision was made by the Reform Committee to move towards a block schedule at the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year at the five traditional high schools.
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4.4. Analysis of Findings

Small learning communities, another type of ninth grade intervention, demonstrated a promise for promoting academic and school-success outcomes for school districts (Short, 2016). Based on the readings, much of the research reported gains in the area of Grade Point Averages (GPA) and grades, while additional research documented little to no significant change. However, in both Barnes' and Short's studies, it was reported that Ninth Grade Academy did not have a significant impact on student achievement. Specifically, Barnes (2013) found that, while there were no great significances attributed to the implementation of the freshman academy model on ninth grade students, student performance on standardized math tests increased as well as students' GPAs. Moreover, students receiving free and reduced meals had an increase in performance, which was also attributed to the implementation of the freshman academy.

Similarly, Short (2016) found that there were no significant differences between the Academy and the Non-academy students' GPAs, suspension rates and attendance rates. Short further investigated the impact of Ninth Grade Academy and teachers as leaders using the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI). Based on the results of the LPI, teachers in the Ninth Grade Academy scored higher in leadership skills when compared to the national percentile scores, which means there was a positive significance relating to teacher leadership.

Spencer's (2008) study was slightly different than the two previously discussed studies. She examined how various stakeholders perceived the importance and the implementation of 31 recommendations for high school reform as identified in Breaking Ranks II (NASSP, 2004). She found that the Breaking Ranks II framework proved to be an accurate tool in identifying important best practices. With very little variation between how participants viewed the importance of the recommendations in 2004 and again in 2007, it was evident that the district leaders identified an effective framework through which to outline their reform effort. Spencer also found that the rates of dropouts, suspensions, and teacher turnover improved from the 2003-2004 school year to the 2006-2007 school year, while, the areas of attendance, retention, SAT scores, percentage of Annual Year Progress (AYP) goals met, and the percentage of Advanced Placement (AP) scores at or above a 3, did not show improvement over the same period of time.

Table 4.4: Analysis of Findings

	Barnes (2013)	Short (2016)	Spencer (2008)
Findings	Freshman academy model did not have a significant impact on student G.P.A or standardized math test scores. However, the freshman academy model did have an impact on student	No significance differences found between the participants and non-participants' outcomes for changes in student's GPA or behavior referrals However, the results indicated there was a positive significance in the	It was found that while no great significance can be attributed to the implementation of the freshman academy model on ninth grade students, student performance on standardized math tests did increase as well as GPA. Furthermore,

	discipline and promotion to the tenth grade.	data relating to teacher leadership as measured by the LPI.	FARMs students also had an increase in performance that can be attributed to the implementation of the freshman academy.
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4.5. Summary

The common theme that was found among the three studies was consistency and timing. Spencer (2008) stated that during the reform efforts, there were many notable issues including policy, personnel and district-wide issues that were surrounding the implementation of the reform effort. Barnes (2013) also highlighted the challenges the school district encountered with the design and implementation of the freshman academy program. There was a tremendous amount of trial and error in the designing of a Ninth Grade Academy that was appropriate for the school district. Additionally, involved staff spent countless hours researching best practices in order to create and implement procedures conducive to the freshman academy model. However, since every school has its own unique culture and climate, some of the best practices had to be modified in order to strengthen the program. Furthermore, some of the suggested practices in Barnes' study were not entirely feasible for Cambridge-South Dorchester High School due to resource availability.

Lastly, although Short (2016) did not elaborate on implementation challenges, he strongly suggested investigating the relationship between students' academic performance and participating in the ninth grade academy throughout all four years of high school for further research. This implies that a longer, longitudinal study can help unpack the impact of Ninth Grade Interventions on student academic and social achievement.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

Chapter Five outlines and reviews the discussion, implications, and conclusions of this case study analysis. The outcomes that resulted from the reviewed case studies are discussed. The implications for teachers and school leaders are also be addressed in this chapter. This chapter also presents the recommendations for future studies.

5.1. Summary

The purpose of this case study analysis was to determine the effects of ninth grade interventions and student outcomes. As a result, three case studies were examined to better understand school reform. The data and research related to these three case studies associated to school reform (Freshman Academy and Breaking Ranks II) and student achievement had mixed outcomes.

In terms of Short's (2016) study, the purpose was to investigate the relationship among students participating in a ninth-grade academy compared to non-academy students from the previous year, their behavior referrals and the effects of leadership practices on academic achievement. His study was guided by the following three research questions:

1. To what extent is there a relationship between student's participation and non-participation in the ninth-grade academy and academic achievement?
2. To what extent is there a relationship between ninth-grade academy and non-ninth grade academy and the proportion of students with behavior referrals and the number of days suspended?
3. Were the leadership practices of the ninth-grade academy teachers higher than the national sample?

Based on the results of his research, the data indicated there were no significant differences between the students that participated in ninth-grade academy when compared to non-academy students' academic achievement, behavior referrals and number of days suspended. However, when examining the leadership practices of ninth-grade academy teachers, the results were interesting. According to Short (2016), they scored higher than the national average. More specifically, teachers scored highest on Challenge the Process, followed by Inspire a Shared Vision, Model the Way, Enable Others to Act and Encourage the Heart.

Barnes' (2013) purpose of her study was to examine the impacts of a freshman academy model on student standardized math scores and grade point averages. Her study also sought to evaluate transition strategies for young adolescents and improve the dropout rate. To better understand the impacts of freshman academy, her study was guided by the three following questions:

1. To what extent does a freshman academy model have an impact on math scores for freshman academy students?
2. To what extent does a freshman academy model have an impact on student grade point averages?
3. Is there a relationship between freshman academy, math scores and grade point averages for freshman academy students?

Based on the results of Barnes' (2013) research, there was no great significance attributed to the implementation of the freshman academy model on ninth grade students. However, student performance on standardized math tests increased as well as their grade point averages. In addition, students receiving free and reduced meals also showed an increase in performance

that was attributed to the implementation of the freshman academy.

Lastly, the third case study used the conceptual framework, *Breaking Ranks II* (NASSP, 2004) to provide a description of the relationship between stakeholder perceptions about the importance of and implementation of high school best practices for high school reform.

According to *Breaking Ranks II* (NASSP) there are three major components that contribute to success in high schools: Collaborative Leadership and Professional Learning Communities, Personalization of the School Environment and Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment.

Spencer's study was aimed at discerning the following:

1. A recommendation perceived as being more important than others by participants (teachers, counselors, and administrators) was related to a more intense implementation;
2. A recommendation perceived as being more important than others by participants (teachers, counselors, and administrators) resulted in a more successful longitudinal implementation after three years of implementing the district reform plan; and
3. A recommendation perceived as having a higher degree of implementation between participants (teachers, counselors, and administrators) resulted in a more successful longitudinal implementation after three years of implementing the district school reform plan.

The results of Spencer's study are as follows:

- In 2004 and 2007, there was not a statistically significant correlation between the perception of importance and current practice. However, there was a significant difference between the perception of importance and current practice in the same years.

- In reference to question 2, there was not a significant correlation between the perception of importance in 2004 and the perception of importance in 2007. In addition, there was not a relationship in the degree of importance and the degree of longitudinal implementation as perceived by the stakeholders.
- The findings of research question 3 showed there was a statistically significant correlation between the perception of practice in 2004 and practice in 2007. In fact, the recommendations that were perceived as having a lower practice in 2004 had a greater rate of perceived longitudinal implementation.

5.2. Discussion

The framework that supports the need for school reform is the stage-environment fit theory. The educational environment must meet the needs of students to ensure success (Eccles, 2004). Garmezy and Rutter (1988) urged the importance of reducing adverse experiences in children's lives within their daily environment. Matching the school environment with the needs of its students has the potential to increase the positive opportunities for students while increasing the likelihood of success during the transition to high school. In doing so, the school also becomes a protective factor to promote resilience for students who are at risk during this transition. Research has shown that transitioning from middle school is a difficult period for students (Ellerbock, 2012). Eccles and Midgley (1989) suggested that the outcome of transition from middle school to high school depends on the impact of the school environment. For example, if the school environment supports the needs of students, as they transition, then the school has the potential to help them overcome the obstacles of this difficult period of development. Although, the case studies reviewed did not yield a statistically significant relationship between ninth-grade interventions and student outcomes, prior research supports the

importance of these factors in terms of students' academic success (Eccles, 2004; Lagenkamp, 2010; Martin & Marsh, 2009).

5.3. Implications

5.3.1. Implications for Practice

Findings from this case study analysis indicate the need to further research on various ninth grade interventions. As previously mentioned, not only should educational leaders search for ways to improve the transition of students from middle school to high school, they must also reflect on the current practices and interventions implemented to ensure student success. The results of the case studies reviewed did not yield statistically significant relationships between ninth grade interventions put into practice and overall student achievement. Consequently, there is a greater challenge for stakeholders to employ an environment that is conducive for incoming ninth graders. Previous studies have shown that students who view their school environment in a positive manner are more likely to excel academically (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013).

Furthermore, school administrators may develop new, or continue to make, adjustments to the current transition programs to better prepare incoming freshman to be more comfortable and successful in their new school environment. School leaders can also continue to research transitional issues to ensure their schools are meeting the academic and behavioral needs of all students from their first day in high school to graduation. Ninth grade academy teachers may also benefit from more professional development trainings on ninth grade interventions, common planning time, and more instructional supports from building level administrators.

5.4. Recommendations for Future Study

Smith (2006) suggested that the research on the outcome of students' ninth grade year is a key factor on future success in high school and beyond. Students who experience a successful ninth grade year are expected to graduate from high school within the next the next three years. As a result, the following are recommendations for future studies:

1. A longitudinal study that explores ninth grade interventions at the end of four years or beyond high school.
2. A comparison study on inexperienced freshman academy teachers and experienced academy teachers in relation to student success.
3. Conduct a program evaluation of ninth grade interventions in different school districts to determine the effectiveness of their program on student achievement.

5.5. Conclusion

This case study analysis was designed to explore the impact of Ninth Grade Interventions and student outcomes. The purpose of this analysis was to show the impact of various research-based interventions. The information obtained could be used to assist district leaders and school leaders in addressing strengths and weaknesses in transition planning for students entering into the ninth grade. Research has shown that students who experience a successful ninth grade year are more likely to graduate within four years and not drop out of high school (Smith, 2006). On the contrary, students who experience a successful ninth grade year are expected to be more successful beyond the ninth grade year (Smith).

In conclusion, this analysis has brought attention to ninth grade interventions. In response to research, many school districts have implemented various methods of school reform.

However, more studies are needed to bridge that gap for students transitioning from middle school to high school. The “one size fits all” method for transitioning students is not successful for many rising ninth graders and, as a result, school districts must put different strategies in place to address ninth grade transition issue. The strategies can include, but are not limited to, providing freshman orientation, summer programs for rising freshmen, and pairing upper classmen students with incoming ninth graders.

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