

COMPARISON OF MIDDLE TO HIGH SCHOOL
TRANSITION PROGRAMS

by

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The results were used to develop a list of effective strategies and interventions that could be useful in a high school transition program. This information may be helpful in the development of new high school transition programs. High schools who currently have transition programs in place may benefit from the research as well.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Whose fault is it? Certainly not mine....

The college professor said,
“Such wrong in the student is a shame,
Lack of preparation in high school is to blame.”

Said the high school teacher,
“Good heavens, that boy is a fool.
The fault, of course, is with the middle school.”

The middle school teacher said,
“From such stupidity may I be spared,
They send him to me so unprepared.”

The elementary teacher said,
“The kindergartners are block-heads all.
They call it preparation; why it’s worse than none at all.”

The kindergarten teacher said,
“Such lack of training never did I see,
What kind of mother must that woman be.”

The mother said,
“Poor helpless child, he’s not to blame,
For you see, his father’s folks are all the same.”

Said the father,
At the end of the line,
“I doubt the rascal’s even mine!”

(Anonymous, cited in Hertzog & Morgan, 1998)

This poem points out several transitions in the development of children. It also conveys a lack of communication among those involved in each transition. Instead of laying blame on one another, we need to develop solutions to help ease these transitions. This paper focuses specifically on the transition from middle school to high school.

While working as a teacher for freshmen students identified as “at risk” of dropping out, the researcher observed a link between successful transitions from middle school to high school and student success. Students who made a connection with the school appeared to be more successful than those who did not make any connections.

Barone, Aguirre-Deandreis & Trickett, 1991(cited in Mizelle, 1999) noted that many adolescents experience a decline in grades and attendance as they make the transition into high school. This decline in attendance and grades leads to a national drop out rate of approximately 11% for students between 16 and 24 years of age (Hess & Lauber, 1985; McMillen, Kaufman, Hausken, & Bradby, 1993, cited in Smith, 1997). According to the U.S. Census Bureau in 1992, high school drop outs generally worked at low-paying jobs, earning on average less than \$13,000 per year (Smith, 1997). It is important that efforts are made to help these students experience a seamless transition, encouraging them to stay in school.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine effective strategies, interventions and components of middle to high school transition programs. During the spring of 2001, twenty-eight different high schools in the United States (Appendix A) will be sent questionnaires and asked to return any information regarding their transition program.

Research objectives

There are three objectives this research wishes to address. They are:

1. To identify components of successful transition programs

2. To determine effective strategies and interventions of transition programs
3. To obtain evaluation criteria to assess the effectiveness of high school transition programs.

Definition of terms

For clarity of understanding, the following terms need to be defined:

Transition program- a program specifically aimed at easing the transition for students from middle school/junior high school to high school

Smaller Learning Communities Program- grants awarded by the U.S. Department of Education to help high schools with 1,000 or more students to plan, develop, and implement strategies that personalize the learning environment for students

Assumptions

There are several assumptions that are apparent in this research. These are:

1. The clients will be honest when filling out the questionnaire.
2. The contacted schools will return the questionnaires and additional information pertaining to their high school transition program.
3. Each school will have effective strategies to their transition program.
4. The research will support high school transition programs.

Limitations

The researcher has identified two limitations. These are:

1. Schools selected for the study are of various sizes.
2. Each school has different needs and issues to be addressed based on student populations served.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Literature

According to the Smaller Learning Communities Grantee Resource Book (2000), freshmen transition activities are defined as activities to help ease the difficulties students often encounter as they move from middle school to high school. Some schools place all first-year students in their own academy or house setting, sometimes in a separate wing or even a separate building, with extra support from adults. In other cases, freshman transition includes mentoring from older students, or special career exploration classes designed to set the context for high school as a pathway to college and careers (Smaller Learning Communities, 2000).

The review of literature will focus on three main areas. They include the following: 1) Current information on transition programs and the need for such programs, 2) Specific examples of transition programs, and 3) Components of effective transition programs.

Information on the need for transition programs

The 1999 edition of The Digest of Education Statistics reported many startling facts when comparing 9th grade students with 12th grade students. Table 2.1 is a partial list that compares reported experiences with drugs and violence on school property between 9th graders and 12th graders.

Type of violence or drug related behavior	Grade 9	Grade 12
Felt too unsafe to go to school	5.5 %	2.6%
Carried a weapon on school property	10.2%	7.0%
Threatened or injured with a weapon on school property	10.1%	5.8%
In a physical fight on school property	21.3%	9.5%
Property stolen or deliberately damaged on school	36.9%	27.9%
Marijuana use on school property	8.1%	5.9%

The statistics show that 9th graders are more at risk of being involved in the violence and drug-related behaviors listed above. Dryfoos suggested (1998) that 35 percent of all 14 year-olds should be considered “very high risk” or “high risk” and that another 25 percent considered “moderate risk.” According to research by Green and Scott (1995), as many as 60% of students who are identified as “at-risk” for failure going into high school will not graduate with their class (cited in Mizelle & Irvin, 1999). In turn, Catalano & Hawkins (cited in Kaplan, 1998, p. 310) found that academic failure and a lack of commitment to school are strongly related to delinquency.

Hertzog (cited in Mizelle & Irvin, 1999) noted that during the transition these students develop a more negative view of themselves and have an increased need for peer friendships. A study done in 1979 by T. J. Berndt (cited in Kaplan, 1998, p. 296) found that, “Adolescents in late junior high and early high school (8th and 9th graders) seem to be most influenced by peers. Conformity to peers for antisocial acts peaks during 9th grade and declines thereafter.” Sylvia Thomas, a school counselor, agrees, “The

transition from eighth grade to ninth grade is so heavily influenced by peers,” (cited in Ortiz, 1999). At a time when peer groups are such a strong influence, it appears important to provide guidance and support.

Specific examples of transition programs

Worthington Kilbourne High School

Worthington Kilbourne High School in Worthington, Ohio implements a freshman transition program that begins ten months before the school year even begins. Their program is based on the premise that the success of their freshmen is dependent on how welcome they feel entering the new school. A team of various school personnel including both schools’ principals and counselors meets ten months before the beginning of the school year to begin the process. They plan meeting times and deadlines for the transition process. They make a checklist for parents so parents will remember the meeting times and deadlines (Lindsay, 1998).

The team also puts together a three-ring notebook for parents of incoming freshmen. This contains a description of course offerings, lists of extra curricular activities, registration forms, newsletters, medical data, and profiles of school personnel and recent graduates. This gives parents and students a chance to become familiar with all the high school has to offer. Instead of being confused and nervous, students can feel more comfortable about the upcoming year (Lindsay, 1998).

In May there is a special visitation for all incoming freshmen. Each freshman is assigned a junior student who they shadow. The first day of school is one in which only

freshmen come. They have an assembly in the morning and at lunch, they have a picnic with the entire faculty (Lindsay, 1998).

The faculty comment that the first week is much more organized with this program. There are fewer schedule changes, fewer first-day absentees, and fewer lost students. The school cares about making their new students feel welcome. One new student wrote, “This school cares about us kids. I’m glad I’m finally here,” (Lindsay, 1998).

Link Crew, Gladstone High School

“Imagine walking into a gym and having 1,000 screaming, cheering high school students showing their school spirit. The deafening sound tells you that this school had pride. If that isn’t getting linked, I don’t know what is,” says Lindsay Davis of Gladstone High School (Link Crew, 2001).

The quote above is from a student who attends a high school where Link Crew is implemented. Link Crew is a freshman transition program that aims to make freshmen feel very welcome and comfortable throughout their first year of high school. Highlands Ranch teacher Jeff Bennett, a link crew coordinator for 4 years, says, “We’ve seen significant drops in behavior problems, suspensions, and dropouts” (cited in Wallace, 2000).

The Link Crew process begins with a few designated school personnel who commit to being facilitators for the process. These facilitators attend a three-day training to become Link Crew facilitators. From there, Link Crew facilitators train members of

the junior and senior class to be Link Leaders. The Link Leaders act as motivators, leaders, and role models that guide the freshmen.

The school year at a Link Crew high school begins with an interactive freshmen orientation. There is a general assembly to start the day. Following the assembly, Link Leaders take their ten freshmen through a variety of fun activities to help them get to know one another and to also familiarize them with the school.

Throughout the school year, the Link Crew provides both academic and social follow up activities. Academic follow-ups are lessons presented by the Link Leaders. These lessons are designed to give freshmen the skills needed to be successful during high school. Social follow-ups provide activities outside of the classroom to further build relationships and make more connections.

Patterson High School

Patterson High School in Baltimore, MD, is a talent development high school with career academies. Implementation of this program began in 1995-1996 with the help of the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk (CRESPAR) at John Hopkins University. There are many specific elements to this program including a ninth grade success academy (McPartland, 1998).

The ninth grade success academy is a separate transitional program designed for students in their first year of high school. The academy is located in a separate part of the school and also has its own principal and instructional leader.

This program places students in small interdisciplinary teams with 4 or 5 teachers who share the same 150 to 180 students and a block schedule with common planning

time. Each interdisciplinary team has a team leader that is responsible for monitoring trends in student behavior. The team works to find solutions to individual student attendance, discipline, and learning problems.

The main goal of the ninth grade success academy is to prepare students to make an informative choice of program for their final three years of high school. Many activities are done during the first term, including self-awareness opportunities regarding career goals and interests, to help students make this choice. Students are also given detailed information on high school choices and college alternatives. After their freshman year, students attend their chosen career academy (McPartland, 1998).

Components of effective transition programs

A study done in 1999 in Georgia and Florida by C. Jay Hertzog and Lena Morgan (cited in Mizelle & Irvin, 1999) showed that the more extensive the transition program, the lower the drop out rate and retention rate of 9th graders. Schools that implemented only a couple of transition strategies, such as school tours and students meeting counselors, had the highest drop out and retention rates.

According to a study done by D.J. MacIver (1990), school administrators felt the most successful transition programs included the following three components: 1) provided students and parents information about the new school, 2) provided students social support during the transition, and 3) brought middle school and high school personnel together to learn about one another's curriculum and requirements (MacIver, 1990).

Providing both students and parents information about the new school is very helpful. Students want to know what their new school is going to be like. A study done by Nancy Mizelle (1995) showed that students are most concerned about being picked on by older students, having harder work, getting lower grades, and getting lost in a large, unfamiliar school. While they have many concerns, they are also excited about having more freedom and making new friends. Keeping students informed makes them feel more at ease during the transition. Parents need to be informed as well and need to be involved in the class registration process (Mizelle, 1999). Classes taken during a student's freshman year can have long-term effects. For example, if a student wants to go to a four-year liberal arts college, they may want to take a foreign language because it is generally a requirement.

Activities that provide social support are important. This can include activities that give incoming students the opportunity to get to know one another better or activities that include older students. A program done in 1999 by C.A. Cognato (cited in Mizelle, 1999), discovered that students who engaged in several different interactions with older students, had fewer failing grades and fewer absences. These interactions included letter writing, meetings and a picnic with older students. Some other activities in the program were eighth graders shadowing ninth grades, eighth grade students writing to a ninth grade buddy, and ninth grade students meeting with eighth graders to dispel some of the myths of high school (Mizelle, 1999).

Activities that bring middle school and high school educators together are very important, but are not frequently done. Educators from both levels need to work together

to develop a transition program. (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998). Although the high school teachers will be the ones working with the ninth graders, it is the middle school teachers who know them best and are aware of student needs. Common complaints among both faculties include the following: 1) a lack of academic preparation, 2) indifference toward homework assignments, 3) a lack of appropriate study skills, and 4) a lack of parental involvement and concern (Hertzog & Morgan, 1998). Sharing curriculum requirements is vital because educators at both levels know what to expect and can better prepare their students. Input from parents and students can be equally important when developing a transition program (Mizelle, 1999).

Lena Morgan, co-chair of the Center for Transition Studies at Augusta State University, suggests a transition program include the following: 1) visits to eighth graders by the ninth grade counselors and teachers, 2) visits to high school by eighth grade teachers, students, and parents, 3) professional development programs on the development of the young adolescents for high school teachers, and 4) a high school design where freshmen can stay with the same group of teachers and remain somewhat separate from older high school students (McAdoo, 1999, cited in Mizelle & Irvin, 1999).

A study done by Julia Smith (1997) also concluded that schools which had full transition programs had students who performed better in high school and were less likely to drop out than students who only had a partial program or no program at all (Smith, 1997). This study also showed that transition programs must include students,

parents, and teachers. Programs that targeted only one population were considered wasted (Smith, 1997).

Jett, Pulling, and Ross (1995) offer similar suggestions. First, share middle-level and high school buildings, teachers and preparation time to facilitate a seamless transition. For example, ninth grade teachers who can attend eighth grade team meetings will become aware of the needs of their incoming freshmen. High school students can also lead activities at the middle school to make the middle school students feel less threatened. Second, organize ninth grade students and teachers into interdisciplinary teams. This approach works well in the middle school and may be helpful to freshmen that are not quite ready for high school.

Another strategy is to conduct regularly scheduled and planned advisory programs. Although ninth graders love the idea of freedom, it is important to incorporate a strategy of “guided freedom” (Jett, Pulling, & Ross, 1995). Advisors can provide academic and social support for their students. A fourth approach is assigning upper classmen as mentors for ninth-graders, who often feel isolated because of their status as “freshmen.” This approach works well when it is organized and the mentors are trained appropriately (Jett, Pulling, & Ross, 1995).

Providing maximum flexibility in grouping students for instruction is vital. It is important that ninth graders can be regrouped during the year if they make academic progress. This allows teachers the chance to teach to each student’s abilities. Finally, create opportunities for ninth graders to participate in noncompetitive activities as part of their school program, and provide an environment where it is ok for them to act like 13-

and 14-year olds. Freshmen should have the chance to engage in noncompetitive activities where they can have fun and not risk lowering their self-esteem. Also, teachers must recognize that freshmen, who are generally 13 and 14 years old, have different physical, social and emotional needs than older high school students (Jett, Pulling, & Ross, 1995).

It appears that it is important to implement full transition programs from middle school to high school. Current information supports the need for extra guidance and support during this transitional period. There are many samples of successful transition programs in the research. Specifically, there is a lot of information regarding components, strategies, and interventions that are effective. Communication between teachers, parents, and students and social support seem to be two of the most important.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine effective strategies, interventions, and components of middle to high school transition programs. The sample of schools selected for this study all received an implementation grant from the U.S. Department of Education in July 2000 for a transition program. These schools were listed in the Smaller Learning Communities Grantee Resource Book (2000).

Description of sample schools selected

Components of middle to high school transition programs were obtained from schools who received a Smaller Learning Community grant to implement freshmen transition programs. An attempt was made to contact twenty-eight schools across the United States, which received grants. School populations varied greatly. The project director for each school was called to see if they would be willing to return the questionnaire and any additional information that might be helpful to the study. All twenty-eight schools were sent questionnaires regardless of whether or not they were reached by telephone. No schools declined by phone to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

The questionnaire was developed specifically for this study. Since the objective of the study was to determine effective strategies, interventions, and components of high school transition programs, the contents of the questionnaire centered around the effectiveness of each school's transition program (Appendix B).

Research Procedures

A list was made of all the schools that received the Smaller Learning Communities grant specifically for freshmen transition programs. Once the list was compiled, an attempt was made by phone to contact each project director of the various schools. The list included twenty-eight schools. Out of the twenty-eight schools, fourteen were reached by phone and agreed to receive the questionnaire. One project director stated that they had not yet implemented their freshmen transition program, and another project director was no longer at the school and could not be reached. Phone numbers for two of the schools were disconnected, voice mail messages were left with five of the schools, and messages were left with secretaries of three other schools.

Each school was sent a questionnaire and self-addressed stamped envelope in March of 2001. A deadline of April 20th was included to ensure enough time to collect data. Nine schools returned completed questionnaires. The nine completed questionnaires were evaluated for strategies, components, and interventions. Similarities and differences among transition programs were noted.

Limitations

Schools contacted ranged in size. Effective strategies for freshmen transition programs may vary depending on the size of the school. Another limitation included the data collection. Since the questionnaires were mailed to each school, the study is dependent on each school returning the questionnaire. Additionally, the information is based on what another person observes versus first hand observation. Since the questionnaire was developed specifically for this study, it has only face validity.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

This chapter will present the results of the questionnaires returned by schools. Nine of the schools returned the questionnaires while the other nineteen did not. Strategies, interventions, and components of each school's transition program, as well as current information will be reported.

School A

Smaller Learning Communities grant School A is implemented at the high school level. The transition program takes place between the eighth and ninth grade levels. Since the program is in its first year, there are no statistics that support it yet.

Components to the program include the following: 1) high school teachers shadowing middle school teachers and vice versa, 2) three mornings of summer orientation for students, 3) Saturday parent orientation, and 4) the infusion of study skills into other content areas. Again, since the program is in its first year of implementation, the school was unable to determine which strategies and interventions have been effective.

School B

School B is implemented during the night grade year at the high school level. The program has been in effect since October of 2000. Although data will not be completed until the end of the 2000-2001 school year, there has been a marked improvement in attendance and decrease in discipline referrals so far.

There are many components in this transition program. First, teachers continue training to design and implement curriculum integrated with inquiry/problem-based instruction, student-centered learning, and technology application. Additional teachers have been added in algebra and biology classes to reduce the pupil-teacher ratio and provide personalized attention to students. The curriculum also addresses goal setting, study skills, and career awareness. Teachers continue training to develop performance-based standards and criterion-referenced student assessments aligned with the state's learning standards as well.

The school also created block scheduling where a fifth block is used for after school tutoring, service learning, advisor/advisee, mentoring activities, goal setting, study skills, career awareness, and social skills. Another component includes support groups for alcohol/drug abuse and a Student Assistance Program that focuses on drug and violence prevention. An Attendance Specialist and Human Relations Specialist work with individual students to improve their attendance and also maintain daily communication with parents.

The school notes that creating a smaller learning community and using block scheduling with the ninth grade students has been effective. Other effective strategies listed include the after school tutoring and team teaching in algebra and biology classes. Next year, there are plans to initiate an advisor/advisee program.

School District C

The focus of the transition program for School District C occurs between the eighth and ninth grades. This district has 25 high schools and most of them have a ninth

grade transition program called Seminar of Success. These programs have been in existence for approximately eight years. Some of the middle schools have an eighth grade career education course as well.

The Seminar of Success program consists of four modules. Module 1 is “Strategies for success/motivating and accelerating learning.” This module focuses on learning styles, note taking, goal setting, time management strategies, and procrastination. Module 2 is “Key Strategies in developing your Career through classroom action research.” This module emphasizes important career components such as mock interviews, career ethics, interviewing, and preparing for the world of work. Module 3 is “Mentors, advisors, and professionals supporting students.” This module consists of service learning, internships, and a freshman problem-solving project. Module 4 is “Creating a continuum of success in high school and beyond.” All four of the components consist of an emphasis on higher levels of critical thinking.

It is stated in the questionnaire that most of the strategies have been effective. Revisions are being made to the teacher resource guide to emphasize more reading for fluency. Also, lessons are being developed on ethical decision making, cultural awareness, sex equity, social etiquette, and credit.

The school district notes two ineffective strategies or strategies that need improvement. First, not all teachers follow the lesson plans that emphasize higher levels of critical thinking. More training is needed. Second, the guidance departments need to be aware of what the students are learning in the Seminar of Success course in order to follow up when directing and scheduling students.

School D

The transition program for School D is implemented at the ninth grade level and has been in effect for 3 years. In the first year of the program, a separate 9th grade academy with 900 students was housed in one wing of the building. Key components were team teaching, modified block schedule, common planning time for teaching teams, and a 42-minute advisory program. In the second year of the program, the 9th grade academy was maintained, but the program was changed. The advisory program and common planning time was eliminated.

The third year, the 9th grade academy was abolished and the ninth graders were moved into the existing small learning communities. A freshman foundations course was developed to help the 9th graders in their transition to from middle school to high school. Other components to the program include an emphasis on reading and literacy in all courses, pre/post assessments in reading and math, and career focused exploration courses for all freshmen.

School D lists several effective strategies. First, it is noted that the advisory program has merit, but is no longer used. Other effective strategies include team teaching, common planning time for teachers, and student involvement in extra curricular activities. The emphasis on reading and literacy is also very critical. Ineffective strategies include a failure to give programs a chance to succeed, not documenting progress, and a lack of emphasis on math literacy.

Currently, the school is working on a dynamic freshman orientation similar to what colleges implement. They are also planning a leadership/mentor program in which

freshmen are paired up with an upper classmen. This will hopefully create an ongoing relationship that will help the freshmen adapt to the new school. Finally, in an attempt to improve academic performance, project based learning will be added to the curriculum.

School D notes that in the first year there was an improvement in attendance. There was also a reduction in the number of ninth graders receiving no credits for the entire year due to excessive absences. In the questionnaire, it is stated that, “The bottom line in our school is that the freshmen have traditionally had the worst attendance, the most discipline problems, the worst drop out rate, and the worst academic performance. Students that experience success in their freshmen year generally are successful for the rest of their high school years.”

School E

School E is a high school with an enrollment of 2,152 students. This school designed a comprehensive project restructuring the entire high school. At the freshman level, a Freshman Academy program is implemented. Sophomores move into 3 customized Humanities block. Finally, during grades 11 and 12, students attend career-focused academies.

One of the primary goals of the Freshman Academy is to foster a strong relationship with individuals and families. The academy organizes the freshmen into 5 teams of approximately 150 students each. Each team has 4 core teachers that assume mentor and counselor responsibilities. They serve as a link between the student, larger learning community, and the family. The Freshmen Academy also has 2 counselors that work with the teachers to individualize and personalize the learning environment.

Other components include the following: 1) each freshman is assigned a mentor, 2) all freshmen have lunch together separate from the rest of the school, 3) designing a four year high school plan with a counselor, and 4) housing the freshmen in a separate wing of the building. Twenty-eight teachers also participated in 2 days of professional development activities that focused on instructional strategies for the Freshmen Academy.

No statistical evidence was provided to support the success of the program. The school also did not provide a list of effective and ineffective strategies.

School F

Beginning in the 2000-2001 school year, School E began implementation of a 9th grade academy for all incoming freshmen. The purpose of the academy is to provide a foundation of learning for academic success and future career success. The academy creates a school-within-a-school environment where students are grouped into teams.

Several goals are listed for the academy. They include the following : 1) to focus on state standards, 2) to reduce the retention rate of ninth grade students, 3) to reduce the suspensions/expulsions through behavior modification, 4) to provide mentoring for all new 9th grade students, 5) to establish a foundation of career awareness and college preparation, 6) to increase involvement in extra curricular/community activities, and 7) to improve the attendance of 9th grade students.

There are several components to the 9th grade academy. Teachers who are assigned to the academy only work with students in the academy. Each teacher is

assigned a group of students who they interact with daily, and also mentor approximately 10 students. Students are assigned to courses as groups in order to develop a sense of community within their group. Class sizes are reduced to a maximum of 25 students as well. Team teachers collaborate during a common planning time to develop strategies for integrating and applying what is learned in each class. Learning styles are also addressed during each course through various strategies.

During the common planning time, teachers also discuss the needs and progress of each student. When needed, strategies are developed on an individual basis for improving performance and relationships within the academy. Students may also be referred to programs, such as tutoring or behavioral modification, to receive academic and social support.

Another component is a career exploration course. This course consists of orientation, career exploration, study skills development, and research skill development. Once the students complete the career exploration course and the 9th grade year, they enter the Career Pathways program for the remainder of their high school career.

Finally, a sub-component of the program is a behavior modification program that attempts to correct problem behaviors before they become severe and/or chronic. Students are referred to this program when they have discipline problems or problems with attendance. More specifically, they are referred when they accumulate 5 unexcused absences, have 7 discipline referrals, have a recommendation from an administrator, or have been referred by a teacher.

Strategies and interventions that have been identified as effective are teaming of teachers, mentoring, and the application process for college and career pathways. On the questionnaire, it is noted that the behavior modification program will be revised for the 2001-2002 school year. Revisions will include increasing academic interventions and intervening earlier in the school year.

School G

School G is in the planning stage for the 2001-2002 school year. They will be implementing their transition program between the 8th and 9th grade years. Components they plan to include are freshmen orientation night, a summer academy, and a freshman success program. Since they are in the planning stage, it was noted on the questionnaire that they have very little to share.

School H

School H is an academy that has a ninth grade program serving 85 students. The mission of the academy is to prepare students for the world of work and careers by providing a safe environment that promotes community, self-esteem, and academic success. This program has been in effect for 5 years, but statistics will not be available until August of 2001.

The ninth grade academy is located in a separate site and has a teacher to student ratio of 17:1. It is designed for students with diverse social and educational needs. It is a full day, full year program that offers courses in English, science, social studies, math,

reading, and learn and serve. Learn and serve is a service learning class that includes volunteering and career components.

Another component is a building-wide Career Fair that is done in the third quarter of the year. The Career Fair brings local business people into school to expose students to possible school-to-career options. The teachers also facilitate career exploration activities to create an awareness of post high school options.

In the questionnaire, it is noted that the 9th grade academy has been effective in bringing the students' grade level up to 2-3 years on the average. It is also stated that the students are given another year to mature before tackling 2000+ kids at the high school.

In order to participate in the 9th grade academy, a parent or guardian must contact the school and fill out the necessary paper work. Eighth grade core teachers also make recommendations regarding which students may be successful in the program. Originally, if eighth grade students failed 2 or more core classes, they were sent to the 9th grade academy. However, this strategy of forcing kids to come was abolished because it was determined to be ineffective. Now, the student and parent make the choice.

School District I

School district I has 2 high schools which implement the same transition program at the 9th grade level. In these programs, freshmen are put in houses in a separate part of the building. Faculty are assigned in teams of four providing a foundation for constant relationships. Within the team, each teacher serves as an advisor to 20-25 students developing personal knowledge and relationships with each of their students. Advisors

also develop Individual Learning Plans (ILP) for their students, monitor student progress, and provide personal and academic guidance and support.

The Freshmen Houses use a block schedule and interdisciplinary approach. The focus is on the core areas, but other topics are integrated such as career exploration. For example, all 9th graders participate in the Career Planning Profile (CPP) assessment. Students have multiple opportunities for exploration through guided-discussion, technology-supported research, and community based workplace experiences. Advisors work with advisees in selecting courses related to their individual career goals.

Although it is noted in the questionnaire that it's too early to identify ineffective strategies, some effective strategies have been identified. One effective strategy has been the closed campus lunch even though it has been difficult to manage. Another effective strategy has been arranging students in core areas. The district states that the 9th grade wing has been very effective in raising grade point averages, cutting down on discipline referrals, and increasing attendance.

Some common strategies, interventions, and components of the nine programs were 9th grade academies, freshmen orientation, non-traditional scheduling, team teaching, study skills classes, service learning, and volunteering. Although the programs had many similarities, they were each unique in their own way. Each school developed a transition program based on the needs of their students.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This chapter will include a discussion of the results of the study and conclusions. In particular, effective strategies, interventions, and components of successful transition programs as well as statistical evidence will be discussed. Recommendations for further research will conclude the chapter.

Discussion

After reviewing the questionnaires, it was discovered that most schools viewed components, interventions, and strategies as one and the same. Therefore, while discussing, I paired them together and used the term strategies.

There were many effective strategies identified by the various schools. One of the most prevalent strategies was housing freshmen in a separate part of the building from upper classmen. Some of the schools even developed a 9th grade academy for only freshmen. Many schools felt by doing this, it gave 9th graders another year to grow up and also kept students away from poor role models. However, there were some schools that used upper classmen as mentors as a successful strategy. These schools stressed the importance of picking students who were good role models.

Another popular strategy was providing a freshman orientation at the beginning of the school year, or even before the year started. One school commented that they would like their freshman orientation to be as extensive as college freshman orientations.

Schools used orientation as a time to familiarize the 9th graders with the school and to hopefully reduce some of their fears and anxieties about high school.

Many schools used non-traditional schedules, particularly block scheduling and teaching in teams. Several schools noted team teaching as a successful strategy. One important point schools made regarding team teaching was that there needed to be a common planning time for the interdisciplinary teams. Without a common planning time, schools did not appear to have as much success. Block scheduling was utilized to reduce the number of classes freshmen had to focus on at one time. One school added a fifth block that was used as a time to provide extra help for students who were struggling.

Another effective strategy was designing a class specifically to teach freshmen important skills for high school. These classes included skills such as note taking, goal setting, time management, and study skills. Schools felt these classes were vital because 9th graders needed to be taught these skills. Previously, schools just assumed the students had already developed these skills.

Service learning and volunteering are strategies that were only mentioned twice, but were noted as being effective. Advisor/advisee programs where teachers were advisors to a small number of students were also discussed. At some schools this was an effective strategy, and at others, it was not.

Since this was the first year of the transition program for most schools, there was no statistical evidence. However, some schools did notice an increase in attendance, grade point averages, and grade levels, and a decrease in discipline referrals.

Conclusions

Although the sample size was small, there were a lot of common ideas among schools, and the results of the study did concur with some of the research. Many of the strategies used by schools provide students social support during the transition that MacIver (1990) felt was important. Some of the schools also use older students as mentors. This concurs with a program done by C.A. Cognato in 1999 (cited in Mizelle, 1999) which discovered that students who engaged in several different interactions with older students, had fewer failing grades and fewer absences.

Many of the schools are implementing full transition programs instead of partial programs with only a few components. Research done by Hertzog and Morgan (1998) supports this showing that the more extensive the transition program, the lower the drop out rate and retention rates of 9th graders.

However, when comparing the results of this study with the review of literature, there was one major difference. The schools in this study seemed to implement many effective strategies, but many of them did not mention the importance of communication between students, parents, and teachers. A study done by Smith (1997) showed that programs that targeted only one population were considered wasted. MacIver (1990) supported the importance of communication. When MacIver surveyed school administrators, they stressed the significance of communication between school and home and also between middle school and high school teachers.

Joyce Epstein (1995) works with schools to develop programs that create partnerships between school, the family, and the community. I think this quote by

Epstein says it best, “When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students and begins its work,” (Epstein, 1995).

In conclusion, the transition from middle school to high school is generally a difficult and uncertain one. Erik Erikson’s psychosocial theory (1959) states that adolescence is a time of identity versus role confusion (cited in Kaplan, 1998, 291). “Adolescents are walking a tightrope” (Kaplan, 1998). It’s important that counselors, teachers and administrators make a concerted effort to incorporate strategies that will encourage a “seamless transition.”

Recommendations for further research

Several suggestions are offered for further research regarding high school transition programs. First, using a larger sample of schools will provide more information to be evaluated. The researcher suggests that there are many more innovative ideas and strategies that were not covered in this limited research sample. Additionally, the writer recommends modifying the questionnaire to include a question regarding the significance of communication between school and home and between middle school and high school. It is possible that many of the schools did not include this information because they were not asked about it. Finally, the researcher recommends completing a follow up study in approximately 5 years to obtain statistical evidence regarding the success of these programs.

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Appendix ASample schools

Fresno Unified School District
School Board of Broward County
J. Sterling Morton High School District #201
Rockford Public Schools
St. Charles Public Schools
Frederick County Public Schools
Watauga County Board of Education
Wake County Public Schools
Montclair Board of Education
Trenton Public Schools
Cleveland Municipal School District
Charleston County School District
Sumter School District #17
Sevier County Schools
Milwaukee Public Schools
St. Paul Public Schools
Norwalk-LaMirada Unified School District
Oakland Unified School District
Malden Public Schools
Albuquerque Public Schools
North Clackamas School District
Rapid City Area Schools 51-4
San Marcos Consolidated Independent School District
Norfolk Public Schools
Newport News Public Schools
Consolidated High School District #230
Los Angeles Unified School District

Appendix B

My name is Laura McGrew, and I am a teacher at Wausau West High School in Wausau, WI and a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin, Stout. During this past year, the U.S. Department of Education awarded our school a planning grant to research various schools and programs around the nation. Our committee decided to focus on freshmen transition programs because so many of our freshmen seem to be struggling. I decided to use this as my thesis topic as well. I am hoping that you can take a few minutes to share some information that may help us in creating a freshmen transition program.

I have included a very brief questionnaire to be filled out by the director of your freshmen transition program. I have also included a 9 x 12 envelope in which the questionnaire can be returned. Any additional packets of information that can be included in the envelope would be helpful as well. Due to upcoming deadlines, it would be greatly appreciated if it could be returned by April 20th.

I look forward to hearing about your freshmen transition program and hope with your help, we can create a successful program as well.

Sincerely

Laura L. McGrew
Alternative Education Teacher
Wausau West High School

I understand that by returning the attached questionnaire, I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of the study and agree that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I also understand the potential benefits that might be realized from the successful completion of this study. I am aware that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse to participate and that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study will be respected with no coercion or prejudice.

NOTE: Questions or concerns about participation in the research or subsequent complaints should be addressed first to the researcher or research advisor and second to Dr. Ted Knous, Chair UW-Stout Institutional Review Board for Protection of Human Subjects Research, 11 HH, UW-Stout, Menomonie, WI, 54751, phone (715) 232-1126.

High School Transition Questionnaire

1. At what grade level do you implement your transition program?
2. How long has your transition program been in effect?
3. Are there any statistics that support the effectiveness of the transition program? If so please attach.
4. Please list any components to your transition program
5. What strategies/interventions have been effective?
6. What strategies/interventions have been ineffective?
7. Please add any additional comments below or attach any additional information that may be helpful for this research (i.e. goals, objectives, mission statements, sample forms)

