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# The Effect of Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team on Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Measured Achievement, Engagement, and Behavior Outcomes

Frances K. Pokorski

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The Effect of Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and  
Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team on Ninth-Grade Students  
At-Risk Measured Achievement, Engagement, and Behavior Outcomes

By

Frances K. Pokorski

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College of the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

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2011

Supervisory Committee

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**Abstract**

THE EFFECT OF OPTIONAL SUMMER TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL  
PROGRAM PARTICIPATION AND REQUIRED SCHOOL YEAR LONG  
PLACEMENT ON A CORE CONTENT TEAM ON NINTH-GRADE STUDENTS AT-  
RISK MEASURED ACHIEVEMENT, ENGAGEMENT, AND BEHAVIOR  
OUTCOMES

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No significant difference in beginning ninth-grade pretest compared to ending ninth-grade posttest comparisons of American History  $t(17) = 0.34, p = .37$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.09$ , English  $t(17) = 1.40, p = .09$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.34$ , and Biology ( $t(17) = -1.58, p = .07$  (one-tailed),  $d = -0.22$ , course grade scores were observed for students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team. Students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team also had no significant pretest-posttest course grade score comparisons for American History  $t(7) = 1.34, p = .11$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.45$ , English  $t(7) = -0.75, p = .24$  (one-tailed),  $d = -0.26$ , and Biology  $t(7) = 1.00, p = .18$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.08$ . However, null hypotheses were rejected for pretest-posttest comparisons of math course grade scores in the direction of course grade digression for optional summer transition to high school program accepters  $t(17) = 2.80, p = .01$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.50$  and students who refused to participate  $t(7) = 2.55, p = .02$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.60$ . No significant posttest-posttest grade score comparisons

were found. Overall, students of both groups completed the school year with average achievement grade scores in American History, English, and biology. Finally, given the statistical equipoise observed for school engagement frequencies and reported *no office referral* compared to reported *office referral* frequencies it may be said that both groups of at-risk students, those who refused and those who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team were equally well served by the required school year long placement on a core content team.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I acknowledge God. My faith and continual reliance on prayer and its power have been such crucial components to the completion of this program.

In addition, I have been blessed to have experienced tremendous support and encouragement throughout the doctoral process from many people. It is with utmost gratitude that I recognize my wonderful, patient, and supportive husband, Mike. His unwavering confidence in me inspired the pursuit of this journey from his initial suggestion to his unending support through the final stages. My son, Henry, has been my motivation for completing this process. His well-mannered disposition made all the hours of writing possible. To my parents, I am grateful that they not only have continued to support me in my lifelong learning, but that they instilled the value of education within me at an early age and sacrificed to make it all happen. Their belief in me is inspiring.

Dr. John W. Hill, my dissertation chair, walked me through the entire process, stretching me to learn, grow, and persevere. His passion for learning, research, and writing is truly worthy of emulation. To the other members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Jeanne Surface, Dr. Neal Grandgenett, and Dr. Larry Dlugosh, as well as the other members of the education administrative faculty, I am grateful for the expertise, knowledge, and continued guidance throughout the program and the writing process.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract	<i>ii</i>
Acknowledgements	<i>iv</i>
Table of Contents	<i>vi</i>
List of Tables	<i>xi</i>
Chapters	
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b><i>1</i></b>
Why Students Leave School Early	<i>2</i>
Real or Perceived Skill Deficits	<i>2</i>
Little or No Parental Support at Home	<i>3</i>
Positive Teacher Mentors	<i>4</i>
Negative Peer Influences	<i>5</i>
Purpose of the Study	<i>6</i>
Research Questions	<i>7</i>
Importance of the Study	<i>13</i>
Assumptions of the Study	<i>13</i>
Delimitations of the Study	<i>14</i>
Limitations of the Study	<i>14</i>
Definition of Terms	<i>15</i>
Significance of the Study	<i>22</i>
Contribution to Research	<i>22</i>
Contribution to Practice	<i>23</i>
Contribution to Policy	<i>23</i>



Organization of the Study	23
<b>2. Literature Review</b>	<b>24</b>
The Complex Needs of High School Students	24
Extended mental health and mentoring support for students	25
Prosocial behaviors	26
The Forty Developmental Assets	27
Ninth-Grade Transition to High School Programs	28
Ninth-grade academies	29
The Responsibilities of the School	32
Teachers as Mentors	32
Teaching that ensures successful transition	34
Safe and Secure Schools	36
Parental Involvement	37
Conclusion	38
<b>3. Methodology</b>	<b>39</b>
Participants	39
Number of participants	39
Gender of participants	40
Age range of participants	40
Racial and ethnic origin of participants	40
Inclusion criteria of participants	41
Method of participant identification	41
Description of Procedures	42

Research Design	42
Implementation of the Independent Variables	43
Description of the optional summer transition to high school program	
43	
Description of the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade	
core content team	46
FASE Program	47
Ninth-grade student and parent registration night	48
Parent-student handbook	49
Social skills	49
Focus on literacy	49
Guided personal study	50
Dependent Measures	51
Research Questions and Data Analysis	51
Research Question #1	51
Research Question #2	53
Research Question #3	54
Research Question #4	56
Research Question #5	58
Research Question #6	59
Data Collection Procedures	59
Performance site	59

Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Human Subjects Approval Category

60

**4. Results** 61

Purpose of the Study 61

Research Question #1 62

Research Question #2 64

Research Question #3 65

Research Question #4 67

Research Question #5 69

Research Question #6 69

**5. Conclusions and Discussion** 86

Research Question #1 Conclusion 86

Research Question #2 Conclusion 88

Research Question #3 Conclusion 90

Research Question #4 Conclusion 92

Research Question #5 Conclusion 94

Research Question #6 Conclusion 95

Discussion 96

Implications for practice 96

Ninth-grade Transition Programs 97

Team Approach 97

Implications for policy 98

Implications for further research 99

**References** 100

## List of Tables

### Tables

- Table 1. Demographic Information of Individual Ninth Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation But Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team 71
- Table 2. Demographic Information of Individual Ninth Grade Students At-Risk Who Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team 72
- Table 3. Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation But Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team 73
- Table 4. Pretest and Posttest English Grade Scores of Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation But Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team 74
- Table 5. Pretest and Posttest Math Grade Scores of Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation but Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team 75

- Table 6. Pretest and Posttest Biology Grade Scores of Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation but Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team 76
- Table 7. Beginning Ninth-Grade Pretest Compared to Ending Ninth-Grade Posttest Grade Scores of Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation but Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team 77
- Table 8. Beginning Ninth-Grade Pretest Compared to Ending Ninth-Grade Posttest Grade Scores of Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation but Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team 78
- Table 9. Ending Ninth-Grade Posttest Compared to Ending Ninth-Grade Posttest Grade Scores of Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Accepted and Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation but Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team 79
- Table 10. Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team Posttest Compared to Pretest American History Improve or Lose Grade Score Frequencies 80

- Table 11. Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team Posttest Compared to Pretest English Improve or Lose Grade Score Frequencies 81
- Table 12. Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team Posttest Compared to Pretest Math Improve or Lose Grade Score Frequencies 82
- Table 13. Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team Posttest Compared to Pretest Biology Improve or Lose Grade Score Frequencies 83
- Table 14. Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team Co-Curricular Compared to Sports Participation Frequencies 84
- Table 15. Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team With No Reported and Reported Office Referral Frequencies 85

## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

The emphasis in schools is on student performance. Middle and high schools across the country are now more than ever before expected to produce graduates who can read, write, solve mathematical problems, and think at levels congruent with students from countries worldwide (Heck & Mahoe, 2006). Preventing students from leaving school prior to graduation and fostering academic success continues to be two of the biggest challenges facing the American educational system (Bradshaw, O'Brennan, & McNeely, 2008). Currently, one in four high school students will fail to graduate in the prescribed four years of high school (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009; Laird, DeBell, Kienzl, & Chapman, 2007). Furthermore, the consequences for leaving school before graduation will affect a student's lifelong health (Bonny, Britto, & Klostermann, 2000; Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007), result in diminished earnings over a lifetime (Bottoms, 2008; Chen, Boyce, & Matthews, 2002; Palmer, 2004), and lead to engagement in risky behaviors including alcohol and drug abuse (Chew, Osseck, Raygor, Eldridge-Houser, & Cox, 2010; Townsend, Flisher, & King, 2007). The result of these conditions is predictably increased risk for poor mental health (Bottoms, 2008; Chen, Boyce, & Matthews, 2002), public assistance (Cohen, 1998), and imprisonment for criminal offenses (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). However, a student seldom drops out of school suddenly but rather over time produces behaviors that clearly communicate disengagement to the entire school process (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2005) beginning as early as the first-grade (Croninger & Lee, 2001). The highest dropout rate occurs as students make the transition to high school during the ninth-grade school (Cooper & Liou, 2007). This is not a



surprising finding as the transition from middle school to high school is challenging, even for many academically successful students (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

### **Why Students Leave School Early**

Risks of potential adolescent problematic behaviors are typically categorized in four broad domains: (a) peer influences (peer health-related behaviors, friends' support, friends' positive activities); (b) family relationships (parent-child relationship, family support, family conflicts); (c) community characteristics (drug-availability in the community, high availability of after-school activities); and (d) individual characteristics (self-acceptance, coping skills, academic performance); (Ostaszewski & Zimmerman, 2006). Students leave school early when they do not believe they are going to be able to be successful in the classroom because of real or perceived skill deficits (Hill, 1989; Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007), have little or no parental support at home for succeeding or even attending school (Archambault, Jonosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009), do not have at least one positive teacher mentor at school (Black, 2003), and have negative peer influences and no learned way to resist trouble (Staff & Kreager, 2008).

**Real or perceived skill deficits.** Students need to believe in their abilities to succeed academically prior to the eighth-grade in order to prevent leaving high school early (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007). Academic failure and disengagement from the school environment are said to be the two general reasons why students opt to drop out of high school (Kemp, 2006). The Search Institute (2007) tells us that students need to develop a commitment to learning which includes a desire for academic success and recognition of the lasting importance of learning.

The absence of perceived academic skill competencies is an important indicator of school failure as it is associated with high school completion, the transition into the adult world, economic sufficiency, and the ability for youth to positively contribute to society (Walters & Bowen, 1997). It is even more difficult for students with learning disabilities to make the transitions to the adult world as they report feeling a lack of preparedness for independence, common for students who opt to drop out of high school (Scanlon & Mellard, 2002). Further, dropping out of high school seems to bring a sense of relief to these students who feel inadequate in terms of academic achievement, until they realize the lack of preparation they have for life beyond school.

**Little or no parental support at home.** The role of parental involvement in students' learning has been under the scrutiny of society and educational researchers for years (Fan, 2001). Because parental support and involvement is crucial to the success of students at school regardless of their socioeconomic status (Williby & Hill, 2010) the inverse or lack of parental involvement or the absence of a positive adult role-model outside school can lead many students to early school failure (Bottoms, 2008; Bottoms & Timberlake, 2007; Cushman, 2006; Dedmond, Brown, & LaFauci, 2006; Donegan, 2008; Heckman, 2008; Hertzog & Morgan, 1998; Hertzog and Morgan, 1999; Mizelle, 2005; Smith, 1997). However, when families actively participate in their child's education, they influence the potential of successful academic achievement (Williby & Hill, 2010). The traditional role of parental involvement in schools views teachers and parents as partners that overlap with roles and responsibilities (Nelson & Guerra, 2009). Unfortunately, students who struggle with the academic tasks of education are often not receiving the support they need from home.

The Search Institute (2007) has identified specific developmental assets required for the healthy development and the overall wellbeing of adolescents. The first external category required to ensure success for a 12-16 year old child is support. This includes: (a) family support (family life provides high levels of love and support); (b) positive family communication (young person and his/her parents communicate positively with one another and young person is willing to seek advice from parents); (c) other adult relationships (young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults); (d) caring neighborhood (young person experiences caring neighbors); (e) caring school climate (school provides a caring, encouraging environment); and (f) parent involvement in school (parents are actively involved in helping the child succeed at school). When these components of support are put in place in a child's life, the end result is a child who will grow up to be healthy, caring, and responsible.

The students who consider leaving school early and have parents that did not graduate from high school and reported dissatisfaction with their own educational experience are predictably the most likely themselves to not complete high school (Terry, 2008).

**Positive teacher mentors.** Students need to feel as though there is an adult in their school that genuinely cares about their academic successes (Golden, Kist, Trehan, & Padak, 2005). Half of high school dropouts blame their decision to leave school on not getting along with their teachers (Black, 2003). Young people need to be surrounded by adults that love, support, appreciate, and respect them (Eklund, 2008). Some urban students lack meaningful relationships in their lives and may be missing the kind of caring that is needed to develop healthy, trusting relationships with parents, family

members, neighbors, or friends. As a result, teachers have the responsibility of forming environments of mutual respect in order to create a classroom where learning can occur against the obstacles the students face outside of the school walls (Brown, 2002).

Positive factors are crucial in an adolescent's life because they contribute to developmental processes that build resiliency (Ostaszewski & Zimmerman, 2006), a skill needed for adolescents to be able to cope with difficult events and respond appropriately under pressure (Thornton, Collins, & Daugherty, 2006). Nonparent adults who serve as mentors for adolescents take on the role of educators and figures of support which lead to the promotion of learning and competencies, introducing positive societal norms, and helping youth reach their potential (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005). A study of high school dropouts indicated that many of them believed that with increased time spent with their teacher they could have remained in school (Swanson, 2004).

**Negative peer influences.** Generally speaking, close, healthy friendships most commonly begin during early adolescence (Berndt, 2004). In fact, peer approval, acceptance and even peer pressure, to an extent, is an important developmental milestone in an adolescent's life and contributes to their social-emotional development required of good school performance (Hill & Coufal, 2005). Therefore, adolescents place a strong emphasis on the status of their peers in high school (Brown 2002). It is when an adolescent is overwhelmed with negative peer interactions, social pressures, and media influences that the likelihood of them engaging in particularly risky behaviors such as alcohol consumption, tobacco and drug use, sexual experimentation, school truancy, and even gang affiliation become most alarming (Schlossberg, 2001). This is the case with a *false friend*. In this relationship, the best needs of the emotionally needy student are not

met. Rather, it is a pattern of manipulation in which the needy student performs or carries out the wishes of the *false friend* (Hill & Long, 1999).

A study conducted to identify the top five reasons why students leave high school early indicated that 42% of students that left school early stated they had spent too much time with peers who were not interested in school, making it hard for them to continue with the day to day expectations of education (Swanson, 2004). In addition, when students missed school to spend time with negative peers and give in too much to the negative aspects of peer pressures, the results often led to breaking the law and incarceration. When an adolescent has spent time in the juvenile justice system, chances of completing high school become increasingly more difficult (Hardy, 2007). However, with day-to-day positive support and direct skill building at school, students will respond to teachers' and parents' insistence and encouragement to continue attending classes and successfully complete assignments that are required to continue down the path towards high school completion.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of optional summer transition to high school program participation and required school year long placement on a core content team on ninth-grade students at-risk measured achievement, engagement, and behavior outcomes compared to the achievement, engagement, and behavior outcomes of ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team.

## **Research Questions**

Research questions one through four were used to analyze the achievement of students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content area team and students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but participated in required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content area team.

**Overarching Pretest-Posttest Achievement Research Question #1.** Did students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team lose, maintain, or improve in their end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology course grades?

**Sub-Question 1a.** Was there a significant difference between students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (a) American History course grades?

**Sub-Question 1b.** Was there a significant difference between students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (b) English course grades?

**Sub-Question 1c.** Was there a significant difference between students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (c) math course grades?

**Sub-Question 1d.** Was there a significant difference between students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (d) biology course grades?

**Overarching Pretest-Posttest Achievement Research Question #2.** Did students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team lose, maintain, or improve in their end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology course grades?

**Sub-Question 2a.** Was there a significant difference between students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (a) American History course grades?

**Sub-Question 2b.** Was there a significant difference between students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but

completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (b) English course grades?

**Sub-Question 2c.** Was there a significant difference between students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (c) math course grades?

**Sub-Question 2d.** Was there a significant difference between students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (d) biology course grades?

**Overarching Posttest-Posttest Achievement Research Question #3.** Did ninth-grade students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team compared to students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team have congruent or different end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology course grades?

**Sub-Question 3a.** Was there a significant difference between ninth-grade students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and



required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team compared to students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (a) American History course grades?

**Sub-Question 3b.** Was there a significant difference between ninth-grade students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team compared to students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (b) English course grades?

**Sub-Question 3c.** Was there a significant difference between ninth-grade students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team compared to students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (c) math course grades?

**Sub-Question 3d.** Was there a significant difference between ninth-grade students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team compared to students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school

program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (d) biology course grades?

**Overarching Pretest-Posttest Achievement Research Question #4.** Did ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team have congruent or different posttest compared to pretest (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology improve or lose grade score frequencies?

**Sub-Question 4a.** Were the observed lose or improve frequencies for American History the same for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team?

**Sub-Question 4b.** Were the observed lose or improve frequencies for English the same for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team?

**Sub-Question 4c.** Were the observed lose or improve frequencies for math the same for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team?

**Sub-Question 4d.** Were the observed lose or improve frequencies for biology the same for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional

summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team?

Research question five was used to analyze engagement of students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content area team and students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content area team.

**Overarching Pretest-Posttest Engagement Research Question #5.** Did ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team have congruent or different school engagement participation frequencies for (a) co-curricular and (b) sports activities?

**Sub-Question 5a.** Were the observed frequencies for co-curricular activities the same for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team?

**Sub-Question 5b.** Were the observed frequencies for sports activities the same for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team?

Research question six was used to analyze no reported office referrals compared to reported office referral frequencies of students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a

ninth-grade core content area team and students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content area team.

**Overarching Pretest-Posttest Behavior Research Question #6.** Did ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team have congruent or different no reported office referrals compared to reported office referral frequencies?

### **Importance of the Study**

This study contributes to research, practice, and policy. The study is of significant interest to high schools that have current ninth-grade transition programs or are beginning the process of implementing ninth-grade transition programs as well as high schools that operate with the team concept at the ninth-grade level.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

This study had several strong features. The optional summer transition to high school program was begun by and has been continuously supported by the Bellevue Public School District since 2006. All eighth-grade core content teachers were involved in the recommendations for students extended the invitation of the optional summer transition to high school program. All parents of the students recommended to the optional summer transition to high school program were extended a personal invitation to the program. Transportation was provided to the students from their home middle school locations to the high school each day. All teachers of the optional summer transition to high school program were certified full-time employees of the district. All teachers of

the optional summer transition to high school program received collaboration time to plan for the summer curriculum through the research school district's personnel department.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This study was delimited to the eighth-grade students who were recommended to attend the optional summer transition to high school program to Bellevue West High School upon completing their eighth-grade school year. Study findings were limited to the students who were recommended to the optional summer transition to high school program and either chose to participate or refused participation and completed their ninth-grade school year at stated high school during the 2009-2010 school year. All students had the same opportunities provided them to be involved in school activities. All students also worked with the same dean of discipline for all misconduct referrals.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was confined to the students who were recommended to the optional summer transition to high school program ( $N = 26$ ). Study participants consisted of eighth-grade students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team ( $n = 18$ ) and eighth-grade students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but participated in required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team ( $n = 8$ ). The limited sample size and changes made to the optional summer transition to high school program may limit the utility and generalizability of the student results and findings.

## **Definition of Terms**

**Absenteeism.** Absenteeism is defined as students accumulating twenty days of absence from school to include excused absences as well as unexcused absences.

**Academic achievement.** Academic achievement is defined as students maintaining passing grades in classes while in attendance at the research school as reported by semester grades from student's ninth-grade core content area courses.

**AS 400.** AS 400 is defined as the information data base of the research school's district.

**Athletic activities.** Athletic activities refer to students' participation in Nebraska School Activities Association (NSAA) sanctioned sports teams associated with the research high school. Students' participation in such athletic activities were included as a dependent measure of engagement for the purposes of this study.

**Attendance.** Attendance is defined as the frequency with which a student is present in school. Teachers at the research school use the school's electronic database, AS 400, to record when students are missing from a class, whether the absence is excused or unexcused. The attendance secretary at the research school is responsible for coding absences as excused or unexcused. Absences for school-sponsored activities were not counted against students' attendance.

**At-risk.** At-risk refers to aspects of a student's background and environment that may lead to a high risk of her or his educational failure (Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007). An at-risk student is identified by his/her core classroom teachers as needing assistance to reach optimal success in the educational setting in the areas of attendance, discipline,

social services needs, health concerns, family/personal issues, chronic underachievement, academic deficiencies, and suspicion of alcohol/drug use.

**Band.** Band refers to the participation in any of the extra-curricular activities produced through the band department at the research school. These include: drill team, flag corp., marching band, jazz band, small group ensemble, concert band, symphony, wind ensemble, pep band, and orchestra pit crew.

**Chorus.** Students' participation in such athletic activities were included as a dependent measure of engagement for the purposes of this study.

**Chronic underachievement.** Chronic underachievement is defined as the student's inability to perform academically to his/her capabilities.

**Co-curricular activities.** Co-curricular activities are NSAA-sanctioned competitive opportunities in which students may chose to participate. They are an extension of academic and/or elective area courses. Examples of co-curricular activities include: debate, speech team, band, chorus, DECA, and JROTC drill teams. Students use the skills learned from the content area coursework as part of a team that competes with other like teams, often outside the regular school day. Students' participation in such co-curricular activities were included as a dependent measure of engagement for purposes of this study.

**Core teachers.** Core teachers are defined as teachers in the area of English, math, social studies, and science at research school.

**Core content.** Core content is defined as the studying of English, math, social studies, and science that are required for graduation. Students in the ninth-grade are enrolled in these four content areas in either basic, general, or honors levels.

**Core content team.** Freshman teams are composed of four core teaching area teachers: English, math, social studies, and science. Every ninth-grade student in this school is assigned to a team. In this school, team teachers meet daily to discuss the concerns and needs of individual students.

**Credit.** Credits are points awarded at the end of a semester to students who successfully completed a content area class. Credit hours accumulate toward graduation at a rate of one credit hour per completed course. Students must acquire 46 credits in order to graduate from research school.

**Dean.** A dean is defined as a staff member whose primary purpose is to problem-solve with students when they have made a poor behavioral choice. A dean is also responsible for assigning the consequence and communicating with the student's parents.

**Discipline issues.** Discipline issues are defined as a student who has received multiple misconduct reports and has, consequently, been sent to see the dean frequently. Discipline issues also refer to the number of out of school suspensions a student has been assigned.

**Disengaged students.** Pupils who persistently resist, reject, or refuse formal learning tasks as a result of regular off-task behaviors such as chatting, walking around, daydreaming, playing, fighting, joking, etc., (Ravet, 2007).

**Elective course.** An elective course is typically offered from business, world language, physical education, practical arts, or the fine arts departments. Courses that go beyond the minimum requirements needed for graduation in academic areas are also considered elective area courses.



**Engagement.** Engagement is defined as the student's connection to his/her school. It refers to the students' participation in athletic, co-curricular, and extra-curricular activities. Study school personnel routinely collect and maintain rosters listing participants for such organizations.

**Essential outcomes.** Essential outcomes are standards and benchmarks predetermined by the research school's district as required knowledge obtained through enrollment in courses.

**Excused absence.** An excused absence is defined by an unpreventable absence that is communicated to the school by a parent/guardian. Examples of excused absences include: illness, family emergencies, appointment that could only be met during the school day, and school sponsored activities outside of the school building.

**Extra-curricular activities.** Extra-curricular activities are opportunities that study schools students have to participate in school-sponsored activities that take place outside the regular school day and are not NSAA-sanctioned. While some extra-curricular activities are competitive in nature, most are simply opportunities for students to enjoy one another's company while honing skills in common interest area or hobby. Some examples of extra-curricular activities include: world language clubs, art club, and stagecraft. Students' participation in such extra-curricular activities were included as a dependent measure of engagement for purposes of this study.

**FASE Program.** The Family and Student Empowerment (FASE) Program reflects the research school district's commitment to meeting the unique needs of all students through the employment of licensed social workers to meet with individual and groups of students during the school day. Students are referred to the FASE Program by

their respective guidance counselor and approved for participation in the program by their parents.

**Harassment.** Harassment is defined as unprovoked aggression in which there is an imbalance of power or strength between two children, a perpetrator, and a victim (Newman & Murray, 2005).

**Health issues.** Health issues are defined as medical conditions that prevent a student from attending school on a consistent basis or performing to academic ability.

**Highly-qualified.** Highly-qualified means that teachers have to have obtained a bachelor's degree, full state certification, and proven their competency in teaching the subject areas for which they are hired, (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006).

**Junior Reserve Officer Training Camp.** Junior Reserve Officer Training Camp (JROTC) is a federally funded program sponsored by branches of the military located in high school and college settings. Students' participation in such athletic activities were included as a dependent measure of engagement for the purposes of this study.

**Low self-esteem.** Low self-esteem is defined by the student's inability to confidently approach peer situations or academic tasks.

**No office referrals.** No office referral frequencies indicate that the student was never removed from the classroom to visit the dean for attendance or behavior concerns.

**Office referrals.** Office referrals are defined as any action on the part of the student that refers them to the dean's office. These behaviors may include, but are not limited to: five tardies to a class, not following directions, horseplay, excessively talking in class, major disrespect to peer or staff, rude and/or insubordinate behavior, improper use pass, bus misconduct, and improper check-out.

**Optional summer transition to high school program.** The optional summer transition to high school program reflects the research school district's commitment to ensuring that all students are prepared to encounter their next educational setting. This free program runs for four weeks at the high school campus from 7:50 A.M to 11:50 A.M., and is taught by teachers from both the middle school setting as well as the high school setting. Students who participate and complete the program are eligible for an elective credit towards high school graduation.

**Out of school suspension.** An out of school suspension is defined as a consequence that is assigned to students for accumulation of demerits or serious behavioral infractions that cause disruption to the educational process. Student behavior that results in a police citation is also grounds for an out of school suspension. Students who are issued an out of school suspension at the research school are encouraged to attend the Success Center.

**Peer relationship problems.** Peer relationship problems are defined as occurrences of social inappropriateness on the part of one or more students. Problems can be characterized by bullying, harassment, or the lack of understanding of social cues in the educational setting.

**Poor academic progress.** Poor academic student progress is characterized by not passing required core class Essential Outcome (EO's) assessments.

**Personal or family problems.** Personal or family problems are defined as issues that primarily occur outside of the school building and school hours but still affect school performance and attendance.

**Poor attendance or truancy.** Poor attendance or truancy is defined as a student not consistently reporting to class on time or attending class on a regular basis. An accumulation of ten absences (excused or unexcused) result in a letter sent to the county attorney on behalf of the student.

**Possible drug or alcohol use.** Possible drug or alcohol use is defined as the suspicion of a minor student occasionally or consistently partaking in drug or alcohol use outside of the school day.

**School resource officers.** School resource officers are certified police officers that are trained to provide law enforcement as well as law-related teaching and counseling to students, (Benigni, 2004).

**Semester grade.** A semester grade is defined as the official grade posted on a student's transcript at the end of either the fall or spring semester. Students are awarded credit hours towards graduation for any semester grade above failing. Semester grades in academic courses were used as a dependent measure in this study.

**Social work services.** Social work services are defined as the need for the student to consult with the school social worker through the FASE (Family and Student Empowerment) program for additional mental health guidance as sponsored by the research school district.

**Sports.** Sports refer to the participation in extra-curricular, athletic programs. Sports offered at the research high school include: football, cheerleading, cross country,

volleyball, soccer, basketball, wrestling, softball, baseball, track, tennis, golf, and swimming.

**Stagecraft.** Stagecraft is the art, design, construction, and set-up of the theater stage for performance. Students' participation in such athletic activities were included as a dependent measure of engagement for the purposes of this study.

**Success Center.** The Success Center is described as a temporary placement for students who have broken the research school's code of conduct and are assigned a day, or multiple days, of out of school suspension. Students that attend the Success Center receive credit for work completed as well as attendance.

**Transition.** Transition is defined as the process of preparing students to move on to the next educational setting with assistance. The transition program is offered the month of June at the research school's campus for upcoming ninth-grade students identified as at-risk.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study has the potential to contribute to research, practice, and policy. It is of significant interest to educators and parents seeking ways to help students make the transition from eighth-grade to ninth-grade. By understanding the results of this study, school districts are able to determine the appropriateness of continuing, adjusting, and/or expanding eighth-grade to ninth-grade transition programs.

**Contribution to research.** There is research that suggests the importance of having a transition program in place for students leaving eighth-grade and entering ninth-grade. However, specific suggestions for how to incorporate a successful transition process in the ninth-grade will vary. The results of this study, may inform theoretical and

practical literature on the effectiveness of the practices and strategies used in this optional transition program.

**Contribution to practice.** Based on the outcomes of this study, the school and the district may decide whether to continue the program and also consider expanding the program to reach a larger number of students.

**Contribution to policy.** If results show the positive implications for students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team, a discussion should ensue regarding how to ensure the continuation of such program and how to best recruit larger numbers of students to the program.

### **Organization of the Study**

The literature review relevant to this study is presented in Chapter 2. This chapter reviews professional literature on transitions programs, the changing adolescent, the importance of school engagement, parental support, and reduction in the high school dropout rate. Chapter 3 describes the research design, methodology, and procedures that will be used to gather and analyze the data of the study. Chapter 4 reports the research results and findings--including data analysis, tables, and descriptive statistics. Chapter 5 provides conclusions and a discussion of the research findings.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

With increasing emphasis placed on public school systems to better prepare our youth to compete in life beyond the high school setting, educators and educational leaders are faced with the challenge of preparing all students for many options after high school including college, technical training, the workforce, or military service. As a result, high schools have the tremendous responsibility to ensure all students are completing high school successfully in order to begin the important next step in their lives. Recognizing the tremendous weight placed on the ninth-grade year of high school, it is imperative that schools are implementing programs that successfully transition students into the high school realm.

#### **The Complex Needs of High School Students**

Adolescence is described as the period of time ranging from ages 13 to 19 years (DeLamater & Friedrich, 2002). It is during this time that teens grapple with a wealth of physical, emotional, and intellectual changes. One in ten children suffers from a mental, behavioral, or learning problem that interferes with their ability to effectively function in the school setting (Stoep et al., 2005). Consequently, schools play an essential role in determining if the emotional needs of students are being addressed to ensure the successfulness of students. After all, students who are not emotionally engaged in learning, tend to not have the positive experiences of school which can lead to a lack of school completion. Because adolescent development is significantly shaped by the school environment (Griffen, Newman, Newman, O'Connor, & Spas, 2007) school

health programs have proven an effective means for improving the educational achievement of students who are hungry, ill, depressed, or injured (Stoep et al., 2005).

**Extended mental health and mentoring support for students.** When a student begins the transition to high school, the reality becomes higher stakes associated with achieving school success than the student previously encountered at the middle school or junior high school level. If a student had difficulty at the middle school or junior high level obtaining academic success, achieving success at the high school setting may seem impossible. However, schools that provide additional help for students who previously have not experienced success at school through the use of school social workers and licensed mental health professionals help to bridge the gap for these students to experience academic and school success (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001).

The growth in the number of school based mental health programs is due to an increase in federal initiatives. Both the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S Public Health Service have recognized the mental health crisis in today's youth. As a result, the need for effective intervention practices that are readily available for parents and youth is at the forefront of tackling the mental health concerns of our youth. Because of the number of students enrolled in school, providing mental health services within the school setting seems the most common-sense approach. The policy statement (Committee on School Health, 2004) provided by the American Academy of Pediatrics concluded that school-based mental health programs improve opportunities for coordination of services, strong potential for prevention, and intervention services (Paternite, 2005).



A successful school-based prevention program fosters adolescent health and overall well-being (Archambault et al., 2009). In accordance with the school-based mental health program model from the New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, the Surgeon General, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, a successful school based mental health program shall include the following elements: (a) school-family-community agency partnerships; (b) commitment to a full continuum of mental health education, mental health promotion, assessment, problem prevention, early intervention, and treatment; and (c) services for all youth, including those in general and special education programming (Weist et al., 2002).

**Prosocial behaviors.** Prosocial behaviors are thought to be voluntary in nature and performed to benefit another individual (Gregory, Light-Hausermann, Rijdsdijk, & Eley, 2009). Examples of prosocial behaviors include helping, sharing, comforting, and cooperating (Nantel-Vivier et al., 2009). While prosocial behaviors are initially taught at home the development of such behaviors is a process that extends into adolescence and requires direct instruction and modeling from adults who themselves possess these person-to-person interactive qualities (Gregory et al., 2009). Furthermore, it is expected that the frequency of prosocial behaviors exhibited by youth will increase with age (Nantel-Vivier et al., 2009) indicating the need for continued guidance in school settings.

Teachers cannot assume students are automatically programmed to act in accordance with society's expectations (McArthur, 2002). Social skills must be taught to students, and in teaching them, teachers are fostering an environment where students' self-esteem and self-respect increases, a positive learning environment is promoted, and more time is available for instruction (McArthur, 2002). Schools that adopt and correctly

facilitate a social skill program allow for students to work through self-defeating behaviors and experience respect by the adults in their school in the process (Hill & Long, 1999). In addition, schools that implement and consistently follow-through with social skill instruction on the part of all school staff increase the instructional time of students as opposed to exclusionary practices of removal from class, in-school and out of school suspensions (Lavender & Hill, 2010). Increasing the amount of time dedicated to actual instruction due to a commitment to teaching prosocial behaviors gives way to optimal academic success.

**The Forty Developmental Assets.** The Forty Developmental Assets (Search Institute, 2007) are the relationships, opportunities, values, and skills that prevent adolescents from engaging in otherwise risky, unhealthy behaviors, and actions. These relationships include student to student, student to teacher, student to school staff, and student to parent interactions (Scales & Taccogna, 2001). The developmental assets framework must be imbedded in the school's mission to provide leadership, knowledge, and resources to ensure healthy development of children (Mannes, 2003). By fostering developmental assets in students, the likeliness of students experiencing success in school and in life increases.

Building developmental assets is more of a way of life than a prescriptive program. Schools that promote developmental assets in their students focus their efforts in five areas: (a) curriculum and instruction; (b) school organization--the physical building and the school day schedule; (c) co-curricular programs--before and after school programs; (d) community partnerships--with parents and stakeholders; and (e) support services--counseling services and health care providers (Scales & Taccogna, 2001).

### **Ninth-Grade Transition to High School Programs**

A student's transition from middle school to high school is a monumental life step for many students and can be a time of feelings of isolation, disconnectedness, and loneliness (Cooper & Liou, 2007). The high school setting represents a new environment for students to adjust to as well as new roles and behaviors for the student to learn and perform (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). The ninth-grade year is the first year in a student's educational history where courses have to be passed in order to receive credits needed for high school graduation. This is a substantial change in academic rigor for students coming from the middle school setting (Falk, 2003; McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Some researchers suggest that students make the decision of whether or not they will finish high school within the first few critical weeks of the ninth-grade (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). Because not all students recognize the increasing importance of their ninth-grade year upon high school graduation, many will not pass the state mandated required courses the first time attempted (Falk, 2003). For many students high school may seem like a less personally supportive and overwhelming learning environment unfortunately resulting in overt behavioral disturbances, declining academic performance, increasing absenteeism, and decreasing enthusiasm for extracurricular involvement (Fritzer & Herbst, 1996). Therefore, establishing a program to successfully transition students from the middle school to the high school setting is at the heart of any nurturing high school environment that is meeting the challenges of ensuring all students are preparing to complete high school successfully.

When students are able to progress from one educational level to the next with extended support from school staff the probability for a successful transition to high

school is greatly improved (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001). Schools can best meet the needs of students by recognizing the immense social, emotional, and pubescent changes students transitioning from middle to high school settings are experiencing and respond proactively to meet the needs of these students (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). In addition, when students experience support from others during the transition to high school, they are more likely to experience instances of positive mental health and avoid risky health behaviors (Griffen et al., 2007).

**Ninth-grade academies.** When students begin high school, they are expected to move into large high school buildings where they are presented with new procedures and expectations, tougher grading standards, and varying instructional styles. Because the ninth-grade year is such a critical year for students and one often marked with difficulty for students, many districts have created special programs or academies specifically designed to help students succeed in making the transition to high school (Chmelynski, 2004).

A successful transition to high school program should incorporate a separate physical location on campus for ninth-grade students. According to Hebert (1998) the organization of a specific location or space for ninth-grade students has a monumental positive effect on their learning success. For some students, a solution to easing the transition to high school may be as simple as providing them with small hand held maps of the school campus and their daily school schedule (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001). In many metropolitan and urban school districts a large and unfamiliar centralized high school building results in many ninth-grade high school students reporting feelings of *getting lost* (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010).

Furthermore, attending large classes with unfamiliar students from other middle schools throughout a school district may also contribute to feelings of isolation and confusion potentially resulting in frequent absences and academic failure because it seems no one cares (McIntosh & White, 2006; Fritzer & Herbst, 1996). By physically separating the ninth-grade students' classrooms from the rest of the high school student body, schools are providing the new high school students with additional support to learn the building and to become more familiar with the school's academic curriculum while avoiding the potential pitfalls of students becoming overwhelmed in the larger school setting (Reents, 2002). Students report that being grouped together with other ninth-grade students within the larger school building helps encourage positive social bonding and support. These smaller learning communities enable students with the opportunity to find their academic and social bearings (Cushman, 2006).

For example, in Findlay, Ohio, creating a ninth-grade only wing within the high school campus provided a successful avenue for students by ensuring the smaller environment was built with these concepts in mind: (a) core teacher classrooms located in the specified wing; (b) a formation of ninth-grade teams comprising of math, English, science, and social studies teachers that share the same students; (c) a common planning period for the group of teachers listed above; (d) a freshman counselor that works with the eighth-grade counselors in preparation for high school; (e) ninth-grade students having the same lunch period as their teachers; (f) ninth-grade only homerooms; (g) a common ninth-grade principal, counselor, and intervention specialist working with the new ninth-grade class each year; and (h) hosting a ninth-grade orientation before school begins (McIntosh & White, 2006).

In addition to providing a separate location on campus keeping a close watch on ninth-grade students as they progress through their first year of high school is one way to prevent potential academic pitfalls that can eventually escalate to the point of them leaving high school early. By providing ninth-grade students with common core teachers that meet each day to discuss concerns regarding students' academic performances and behaviors ensures schools are doing what they need to do to ease the transition into high school for ninth-grade students. In addition, having a common team-time each day allows the teacher to effectively communicate with parents via weekly emails or phone calls home and provides parents with feasible times to reach teachers to discuss concerns. Finally, teaming ninth-grade students with common core content area teachers ensures they are paired with teachers that have experience in working with that specific age group and are able to monitor student success and consequently decrease the amount of failures present in the ninth-grade year (McIntosh & White, 2006). When smaller, more intimate teams of learners are formed within the larger school setting, the student has the opportunity to be more closely connected to their teachers. The end result of teachers' interdisciplinary and team efforts on behalf of students who need additional transition support is a student's increased focus on learning and a feeling of day-to-day acceptance and belonging (Heck, 2003).

Additional suggestions for making a smoother transition to high school can include an orientation night for incoming ninth-grade students, an open house for both parents and students prior to the start of the school year, and the use of student mentors to help with the acclamation to the school building, its policies, and operating procedures (Cushman, 2006; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001). When the specific ninth-grade teachers,

principal, dean, and counselor invite parents and their children to the school prior to the start of the school year for information on course registration, course offerings, and specific academic programs the open communication between the school and the parents has begun leading to a sense of trust amongst the parents and team teachers (McIntosh & White, 2006).

### **The Responsibilities of the School**

Teaching students organizational skills through the required use of a daily student planner to record assignments and upcoming projects and assessments is an important tool to help ninth-grade students learn the rigors of high school (Falk, 2003). As the school year progresses teachers provide students with essential study and time-management skills (McIntosh & White, 2006).

High school leaders play a very important role in the successful transition to high school for students by ensuring that administrators, deans, and counselors provide students and parents with accurate and timely information (Cooper & Liou, 2007). High school leaders also provide by word and deed a safe and secure environment dedicated to learning and in so doing promote a positive climate for students (Halawah, 2005).

**Teachers as mentors.** In schools dedicated to providing successful transition experiences for ninth-grade students all teachers are considered mentors (Maylor, 2009). In addition to fulfilling contractual teaching duties, teachers also serve as mentors to assigned mentees. Teenagers look up to a variety of people. More so than any other developmental period adolescents have a fundamental need to form and maintain positive interpersonal relationships (Griffen et al., 2007). Furthermore, like parents, it is teachers, who are most involved with, care for, and have the most positive influence on

adolescents. Teachers have the power to affect the attitude and behaviors of students by responding to them with empathy and exhibiting respect for the students' efforts, struggles, and concerns (Cushman, 2006).

A good mentor will possess the following qualities: (a) willingness to share skills, knowledge, and expertise; (b) demonstrate a positive attitude and act as a positive role model; (c) take a personal interest in the mentoring relationship; (d) exhibit enthusiasm in the respective field; (e) value on-going learning in the respective field; (f) provide guidance and feedback; (g) be respected by colleagues and employees in all levels of the organization; (h) set and meet ongoing personal and professional goals; (i) value the opinions and initiatives of others; and (j) motivate others by setting a good example (Loretta, 2010).

In a study of 3,187 young adults, 1470 males and 1717 females between the ages of 18 and 26 years, approximately 72.9% ( $n = 2,323$ ) reported they have a mentor in their life. Of those 72.9%, nearly one-quarter (26%) named a teacher or guidance counselor as their designated mentor. These mentoring relationships had started during the study participants' school years and were maintained for a minimum of one to an astonishing 26 years (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005).

When teachers exhibit the traits of a good mentor for students, they are demonstrating a genuine interest in them. The teachers that hold the largest impact on students are those that guide with the principles of not only making better students, but most importantly, help their students to develop their own identity and foster growth and the ability to challenge themselves (Yeager, 2008). Students will emulate the behaviors they witness in their teachers (Maylor, 2009). This finding is especially supported when



students are of the same gender as their teacher (Carrington, Tymms, & Merrel, 2008). Further, these supportive mentoring relationships with non-parent adults during the adolescence age have the potential to impact and promote successful lifelong outcomes (DuBois & Silverthorn, 2005).

**Teaching that ensures successful transition.** Even before the implementation of No Child Left Behind legislation, school administrators were striving to hire the best of the best when it came to teachers. It is the hiring of competent, caring, qualified teachers that leads to the enhancements of student achievement (Clement, 2009). Teachers need to be well-prepared and well-supported to meet the unique needs of all learners, especially the students who come to school with greater needs. Being highly-qualified means that teachers have to have obtained a bachelor's degree, are certified in the specific state in which they teach, and have proven their competency in teaching the subject areas for which they are hired (Darling-Hammond & Berry, 2006).

In addition to the required teacher credentials that ensure all teachers are highly competent in their core content area, The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF, 2010) has taken on the monumental task of transforming schools into learning communities. The basic makeup of any learning community is a group of individuals who share a common purpose (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). The ultimate goal of the learning community is to encourage and promote the amount of teacher collaboration that is occurring within each school day. Schools, as a result, are encouraged to facilitate small groups of teachers that meet regularly to discuss the school-wide curricular goals and how to best reach the desired outcomes. Informal means of learning communities occur constantly throughout the school environment.

They can consist of two teachers discussing curriculum in the staff lounge or spontaneous conversations that arise in the school hallways. However, formal learning communities have preset guidelines and protocols--generally established by the building's administrative team. When teachers collaborate through professional learning communities, they are able to rely on each other for suggestions on how to best work with difficult students. In addition, successful professional learning communities contribute to a positive school-wide culture that provides emotional and social support for teachers (Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman, 2007).

Examples of formal learning communities include: (a) co-teaching; (b) teaching teams; and (c) peer teaching (Sawyer & Rimm-Kaufman, 2007). Co-teaching, also known as team teaching, involves two or more faculty members working cohesively to increase the learning outcomes of all students (Dugan & Letterman, 2008; Rice & Zigmond, 2000). The collaborative nature of a co-taught setting encourages common beliefs and practices and a shared sense of responsibility by both teachers for the learning occurring in the classroom. In co-taught settings, teachers are able to provide an immediate response to students' questions and concerns regarding the academic lesson which encourages the student to become fully engaged in the learning (Carambo & Stickney, 2009). When teachers combine their knowledge, resources, and love of pedagogy through co-teaching practices, students report they are more successful and have better student-teacher relationships that contribute to an increased likelihood that a student will complete high school successfully (Dugan & Letterman, 2008). In addition, co-teaching is also a means for providing support in the inclusion of students with special needs in the general education setting (Rice & Zigmond, 2000).

**Safe and secure schools.** Schools must ensure they are providing a safe and secure environment for all students and staff. Schools can provide security through means of strict supervision in the school, starting in the early morning hours and continuing beyond the end of the school day (Dees, 2003). It is also imperative that schools have a functional crisis plan in place to explicitly describe how staff and students need to react to emergencies that can potentially occur at school (Kennedy, 2002). However, the safety of a school seldom relies solely on one avenue or plan. Rather, it is a collection of strategies and ideas (Brunner & Lewis, 2005).

According to the American Civil Liberties Union nearly 70% of students attending middle and high schools in 2005 reported their schools had security officers or police officers on campus to help ensure the safety of all students and school staff (Kennedy, 2006; Kim & Geronimo, 2010). School resource officers (SRO) are certified police officers that are trained to provide law enforcement as well as law-related teaching and counseling to students (Benigni, 2004). Having an SRO on duty full-time makes sense in some of the larger school settings. After all, some schools are the size of small towns (Finn, 2006).

School resource officers are responsible for handling criminal law issues, not school discipline issues (Kim & Geronimo, 2010). By participating in SRO programs, schools are proactively protecting their schools, students, and staff. The primary purpose of all SRO's is to deter students through visibility from making poor behavioral choices, and to encourage positive participation in their school (Benigni, 2004). School resource officers engage in three types of activities in the school setting: (a) law enforcement; (b) teaching; and (c) mentoring. The employment of SRO's provides four benefits: (a) it

reduces the workload of patrolling officers; (b) improves the image of officers amongst juveniles; (c) creates better relationships with schools; and (d) enhances the agency's reputation in the eyes of the community (Finn, 2006).

### **Parental Involvement**

Parental support and active involvement in their child's education is an important predictor of a student's academic success (Carranza, You, Chhunon, & Hudley, 2009; Griffen et al., 2007; Williby & Hill, 2010). Parental involvement in their child's education is often determined through the presence of specific parent behaviors: having aspirations for their child's education, communication with their child about the importance of education, communication with teachers about their children, participation in school activities, and the implementation of rules in the home environment that support the concept of valuing education (Fan & Chen, 2001; Fan, 2001). The most successful home-school communication relationships view parents and teachers as partners that are collaborating to best meet the needs of students where both parties are equally responsible for the educational success of the child (Nelson & Guerra, 2009).

Students whose parents are actively involved in their education and the day to day operations of their school and have open communication with their child's school are more likely to experience academic motivation and a greater commitment to learning (Strom & Strom, 2002). However, the means of communication from school to home may vary from district to district.

Parents and teachers that work collaboratively for the best interest of the child are less likely to fault the other party for possible academic short-comings of the child. The need for schools and parents to keep the lines of communication fluid are indicative in

the responses collected on behalf of 250,000 students from sixth-grade to twelfth-grades that report without home and school collaboration there is a significant decline in family dialogue, parent-child time spent together, and lack of homework help from the parent in the home setting (Strom & Strom, 2002).

### **Conclusion**

Clearly transition programs are necessary to ensure all students are appropriately introduced to high school and given the tools they need to achieve optimal academic, social, and behavioral success. Based on the aforementioned literature and research findings in an effort to promote student academic achievement, school engagement, and appropriate social behaviors, the research school of this study created and implemented an optional summer transition to high school program and a required year long placement on a core content team for ninth-grade students deemed at-risk and in need of transition services to encourage such successes.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of optional summer transition to high school program participation and required school year long placement on a core content team on ninth-grade students at-risk measured achievement, engagement, and behavior outcomes compared to the achievement, engagement, and behavior outcomes of ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team.

### Participants

Individuals who participated in this study were identified during the second semester of their eighth-grade school year, as at-risk students in need of assistance for ninth-grade transition support by their core content teachers. Reasons for referral to the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team as identified by eighth-grade teachers on the ninth-grade Transition Class Recommendation Form included: (a) poor academic progress, (b) personal or family problems, (c) poor attendance or truancy, (d) low self-esteem, (e) peer relationship problems, (f) chronic underachievement, (g) discipline issues, (h) health issues, (i) social work services, and (j) possible drug or alcohol use.

**Number of participants.** The maximum accrual for this study was  $N = 26$ . Study participants consist of eighth-grade students ( $n = 18$ ) who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team and eighth-grade students ( $n = 8$ ) who

refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team.

**Gender of participants.** The gender of the 2009 group of students that participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team was male  $n = 8$  (44%) and female  $n = 10$  (56%). The gender of the 2009 group of students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team was male  $n = 6$  (75%) and female  $n = 2$  (25%). The gender of the study participants was congruent with the research school districts gender demographics for ninth-grade students identified for at risk academic support.

**Age range of participants.** The age range of the students in both groups was from 13 years to 15 years. All students completed the ninth-grade school year and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team. The age range of the study participants was congruent with the research school districts ninth-grade age range demographics.

**Racial and ethnic origin of participants.** The ethnic origin of the students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team in 2009 were White not Hispanic,  $n = 11$  (61%), Black not Hispanic,  $n = 4$  (22%), and Hispanic,  $n = 3$  (17%). Students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team in 2009 were White not Hispanic,  $n = 7$  (88%), and Hispanic,  $n = 1$  (12%).

The racial and ethnic origin of the study participants is congruent with the research school districts racial and ethnic origin demographics for ninth-grade students.

**Inclusion criteria of participants.** Study participants consisted of ninth-grade students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team ( $n = 18$ ) and eighth-grade students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team ( $n = 8$ ). Students qualifying for and receiving special education services who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team were identified as eligible for Specific Learning Disability services,  $n = 1$ , Speech Language Impairment services,  $n = 1$ , and Other Health Impairment services,  $n = 2$ . Students qualifying for and receiving special education services who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but participated in required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team were identified as eligible for Specific Learning Disability services,  $n = 1$  and Other Health Impairment services,  $n = 1$ .

**Method of participant identification.** Reasons for referral to the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team as identified by eighth-grade teachers on the ninth-grade Transition Class Recommendation Form included: (a) poor academic progress, (b) personal or family problems, (c) poor attendance or truancy, (d) low self-esteem, (e) peer relationship problems, (f) chronic underachievement, (g) discipline issues, (h) health issues, (i) social work services, and (j) possible drug or alcohol use. No individual



identifiers were attached to the achievement, engagement, or behavioral data of the 26 participating students in the two groups.

### **Description of Procedures**

**Research design.** The pretest-posttest two-group comparative efficacy study design is displayed in the following notation.

Group1  $X_1 O_1 Y_1 O_2$

Group 2  $X_1 O_1 Y_2 O_2$

**Group 1 = study participants #1.** Naturally formed group of ninth-grade students ( $n = 18$ ) with identified transition to high school at risk needs.

**Groups 2 = study participants #2.** Naturally formed group of ninth-grade students ( $n = 8$ ) with identified transition to high school at risk needs.

**$X_1$  = study constant.** All study participants completed the eighth-grade and ninth-grade in the research school district and were identified as at-risk and in need of transition to high school support by their core content eighth-grade teachers and were invited to attend the optional summer transition to high school program and required to complete the year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team.

**$Y_1$  = study independent variable, ninth-grade at-risk student transition program participation, condition #1.** Students participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team.

**$Y_2$  = study independent variable, ninth-grade at-risk student transition program participation, condition #2.** Students refused participation in the optional

summer transition to high school program but completed required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team.

**O<sub>1</sub> = study pretest dependent measures.** (1) Achievement as measured by the research school districts individual student end of first semester ninth-grade averages for core content courses including: (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology.

**O<sub>2</sub> = study posttest dependent measures.** (1) Achievement as measured by the research school districts individual student end of second semester ninth-grade averages for core content courses including: (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology. (2) Engagement as measured by the research school districts individual student end of second semester ninth-grade participation in: (a) co-curricular (b) sports participation. (3) Behavior as measured by the research school districts individual student end of second semester ninth-grade office referral frequencies and no office referral frequencies.

### **Implementation of the Independent Variables**

The independent variable conditions for the study were students' participation in the optional summer transition to high school program and completion of the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team and students' refusal to participate in the optional summer transition to high school program and completion of the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team.

**Description of the optional summer transition to high school program.** The Bellevue West optional summer transition to high school program began in 2006. It was initially begun under the leadership of the 9-10 principals of the district's two high

schools: Bellevue West and Bellevue East High Schools. Although changes in leadership at each high school have occurred, the program has continued.

Each year, the district provides training time for the teachers of the optional summer transition program to collaborate and make changes from one year to another to the program. Over the past two years, the focus has been more on how to give students skills and experiences that better prepare them for the following year rather than such a strong focus on remediation of eighth-grade material and an introduction to ninth-grade Essential Outcomes (district assessments). Although both skill remediation and attention to EO's still occur, multiple intelligences inventories and literacy strategies have also been incorporated to the program because of the district's strategic goals and the belief that both skills lead to life-long learning strategies.

Students are referred to the optional summer transition to high school program in the spring of their eighth-grade school year by their core content teachers. Reasons for referrals include: poor academic achievement, personal or family issues, attendance concerns, low self-esteem, poor peer relations, discipline concerns, chronic underachievement, involvement with the district's FASE program, or suspicion of alcohol/drug use. Once these referrals are made by the eighth-grade core content teachers, parents are contacted regarding this free optional summer transition to high school program. The high school is provided a copy of the referral for each student, those that chose to participate as well as those that refuse participation in the optional summer transition to high school program.

The teachers hired for the optional summer transition to high school program have always been full-time Bellevue Public School District teachers. The goal has been to

employ teachers that the students have worked with in the past from eighth-grade or those that they will see in the building the following year as ninth-graders. These teachers are familiar with the district curriculum and the essential outcomes written by the district.

The optional summer transition to high school program runs the same length of time as the high school's summer school program. It begins the second week of summer vacation and ends the last week of June. Each morning, the students participating in the optional summer transition to high school program have the option of riding a bus from their home middle school to the high school building. The morning session begins at 7:50 A.M. and ends at 11:50 A.M. During this time, students are placed between four groups that rotate each week of the program. Each week of the program will focus on one specific core content area, addressing skill retention and the expectations for mastery of the district's assessments. Students that attend the optional summer transition to high school program without missing more than 600 minutes (as determined by the Nebraska State Department of Education as the maximum amount of time that can be missed during the given program) during the four week duration of the program will earn one academic credit towards high school graduation in the area of an elective. Because the optional summer transition to high school program runs in the morning session of summer school only, students are able to take an additional free-of-charge class in the afternoon to attempt to bank an additional early credit for graduation in the area of physical education or computer application skills. Students that enroll in an additional afternoon course also free up time in their daily school year schedule for participation in additional elective credit courses. Transportation back to the student's home middle

school is provided at the end of both the morning and afternoon sessions of summer school.

**Description of the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team.** Each incoming ninth-grade student is placed on a core-content team. The team of teachers consists of both male and female teachers in the areas of math, English, history, and biology. Each team also has at least one coach or extracurricular sponsor serving as teacher on that team. Students are placed on one of the respective teams: Heat, Fusion, Storm, or T-Birds through the randomization of the school's computer registration system after students needing collaborative classes as designated by their IEP's have been hand-placed on a specific core-content team.

The purpose of the team concept is to allow for open-dialogue amongst the core content teachers each day during their scheduled team time. Every ninth-grade teacher has a designated planning period and a period that is specifically assigned for team meetings each day. During these meetings, the team will talk about concerns they have regarding the specific students they have in common, make phone calls to parents and answer parent emails, conference with the dean of students regarding behaviors of specific students or follow up with misconduct reports issued to students, consult with IEP case managers or the ninth-grade counselor, send home weekly emails to parents regarding up-coming topics of study, plan for weekly assessments, and write positive notes home regarding specific students. It is during these meetings that the teachers will share specific strategies or accommodations they have used for specific students on their respective team to ensure that every student on each team is being given every possible support required to be successful at school.

In addition to being placed on a core-content team, all ninth-grade students are assigned a final study period at the end of the day (as are all high school students) with one of their core-content area teachers. As a result, of the possible eight teachers they may have in one given day, five of those teachers are from their assigned core content area team. This helps build relationships between students and teachers. Finally, all ninth-grade students share one common school counselor, one dean of students, and one principal. This promotes consistency within the ninth-grade and helps to relieve the anxieties students may feel when they are expected to know all the adults of the school.

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of optional summer transition to high school program participation and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team on at-risk students measured achievement and engagement outcomes of at risk students who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but participated in required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team.

**FASE Program.** In the 2008-2009 school year Bellevue Public Schools implemented its own school-based mental health program in an attempt to reach the increasing number of youth in the district that had demonstrated a need for mental health assistance. The Family and Student Empowerment (FASE) Program was created and implemented by the Bellevue Public School District in response to the poverty plan of the local learning community. The goal of the program is to provide resources to students and their families through the discretion of licensed school social workers and community mental health professionals. Students are referred to the program by their school counselors for a variety of reasons. Some of these reasons for referrals include,

but are not limited to: a need for community assistance in their home environments, additional social skill training to effectively associate with peers, grief counseling, teenage pregnancy, chemical dependencies, concerns from the home environment, and self-injurious behaviors. The social workers and licensed mental health therapists of the program seek parental permission prior to working with referred students. Because the program is a district-wide initiative, students who were referred to the program in the middle school setting but are moving to the high school environment the next year, have the opportunity to continue with the school-based mental health services without interruption. In addition, the program continues through the summer months despite the break in the school calendar. The frequencies of the interactions between the student and the licensed professional vary from case to case. As in any mental health session conducted outside of the school, the information obtained and discussed between the student and the professional is kept confidential.

**Ninth-grade student and parent registration night.** Recognizing the importance of implementing additional information to ease with the transition to high school for incoming students and parents, Bellevue West High School offers a registration night in the spring for all in-coming ninth-graders and their parents. It is at this event that graduation requirements, course offering options, and extra and co-curricular activities are presented to the students and their parents. In addition, the counselor meets with each eighth-grade class of the district in the spring to register each student for the ninth-grade year. Tours of the building are offered during this evening, the counselors are available to help students select their courses for the up-coming year,

and all extra and co-curricular sponsors are available to meet with parents and students to encourage engagement in specific activities.

**Parent-student handbook.** To ensure consistency amongst all students, parents, and school personnel, the printed parent-student handbook is given to each student the first week of school. The handbook includes operating policies and procedures of the school and district. It includes state laws that the school acts in accordance with as well as the school's unique code of conduct. In addition, the student must sign off upon receipt of the handbook each fall, acknowledging the rules and procedures stated in the handbook and the following of stated student code of conduct. By adhering to the guidelines of this handbook, it ensures that all involved are aware of the school's guiding principles. In addition, Bellevue Public Schools utilizes the same handbook for all secondary schools in the district, both middle school and high school levels.

**Social skills.** In pursuit of consistency amongst all staff, Bellevue Public Schools have adopted the Boystown Social Skills Model to be incorporated in all schools. This training ensures all staff, certified and classified, has received the same training in promoting desired behaviors and correcting the undesired behaviors that potentially can occur in the classroom, on the bus, in the hallways, and even in the classroom. By establishing a standard set of expectations district-wide through the implementation of the Boystown Social Skill Model and using the guidelines of one common student handbook, the students of Bellevue Public Schools are continuously aware of the expectations set forth for them to follow while attending school.

**Focus on literacy.** The research school has made a commitment to increase the literacy skills of all learners. As a result, the daily schedule at Bellevue West High



School includes twenty minutes of silent sustained reading for every student and staff member. The content of the reading material is up to the discretion of the reader. It may include any novel of choice, reading homework, textbook reading, or magazines. The school purchases newspapers for each classroom each day for students to use during this reading time.

In addition, Bellevue West High School has developed a literacy team to ensure that literacy strategies are being incorporated in each classroom. The team consists of a specific group of teachers that have received additional literacy training by Rachel Billmeyer. In return, this group of teachers works with all the staff members to teach them new strategies to be used in their classrooms. Specifically addressing the ninth-grade students, the literacy team spends time in each ninth-grade core content area classroom to offer suggestions and support to include proven literacy strategies. In addition, the literacy team spends time collaborating with the ninth-grade core content area team teachers to provide them with feedback about the strategies they are using in their classrooms.

**Guided personal study.** Mandating each student ends the day with a thirty-minute study period under the direction of one of their assigned core teachers is another example of how schools have implemented procedures to ensure students are not slipping between the cracks. By being assigned study time in one of their core areas, students are provided the additional academic help they may need to ensure they are successfully obtaining the credits they need in each academic area for graduation. If the student has demonstrated that he/she is able to perform to their academic capacity by the end of the first semester ninth-grade year, they are able to attend the guided personal study period

facilitated by one of their elective teachers: band, chorus, art, woods, JROTC, foods and nutrition, etc.

### **Dependent Measures.**

The study's two dependent variables are (1) achievement as measured by the research school districts individual student grade averages for core content courses including: (a) American History, (b) biology, (c) English, and (d) math, (2) engagement as measured by the research school districts individual student participation in (a) co-curricular and (b) sports, (3) behavior as measured by office referrals and no office referrals.

### **Research Questions and Data Analysis**

Research questions one through four were used to analyze achievement of students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content area team and students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but participated in required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content area team.

**Overarching Pretest-Posttest Achievement Research Question #1.** Did students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team lose, maintain, or improve their end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology course grades?

**Sub-Question 1a.** Was there a significant difference between students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (a) American History course grades?

**Sub-Question 1b.** Was there a significant difference between students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (b) English course grades?

**Sub-Question 1c.** Was there a significant difference between students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (c) math course grades?

**Sub-Question 1d.** Was there a significant difference between students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (d) biology course grades?

**Analysis.** Research Sub-Questions #1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d were analyzed using dependent  $t$  tests to examine the significance of the difference between ninth-grade students end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester

ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology course grades. Because multiple statistical tests were conducted, a one-tailed .01 alpha level was employed to help control for Type 1 errors. Means and standard deviations were displayed on tables.

**Overarching Pretest-Posttest Achievement Research Question #2.** Did students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team lose, maintain, or improve their end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology course grades?

**Sub-Question 2a.** Was there a significant difference between students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (a) American History course grades?

**Sub-Question 2b.** Was there a significant difference between students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (b) English course grades?

**Sub-Question 2c.** Was there a significant difference between students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team

end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (c) math course grades?

**Sub-Question 2d.** Was there a significant difference between students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (d) biology course grades?

**Analysis.** Research Sub-Questions #2a, 2b, 2c, and 2d were analyzed using dependent *t* tests to examine the significance of the difference between ninth-grade students end of first semester ninth-grade pretest compared to end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology course grades. Because multiple statistical tests were conducted, a one-tailed .01 alpha level was employed to help control for Type 1 errors. Means and standard deviations were displayed on tables.

**Overarching Posttest-Posttest Achievement Research Question #3.** Did ninth-grade students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team compared to students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team have congruent or different end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology course grades?

**Sub-Question 3a.** Was there a significant difference between ninth-grade students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team compared to students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (a) American History course grades?

**Sub-Question 3b.** Was there a significant difference between ninth-grade students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team compared to students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (b) English course grades?

**Sub-Question 3c.** Was there a significant difference between ninth-grade students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team compared to students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (c) math course grades?

**Sub-Question 3d.** Was there a significant difference between ninth-grade students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and

required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team compared to students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (d) biology course grades?

**Analysis.** Research Sub-Questions #3a, 3b, 3c, and 3d were analyzed using independent *t* tests to examine the significance of the difference between ninth-grade students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team compared to students who refused participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but participated in the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content team end of second semester ninth-grade posttest achievement as measured by (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology course grades. Because multiple statistical tests were conducted, a one-tailed .01 alpha level was employed to help control for Type 1 errors. Means and standard deviations will be displayed on tables.

**Overarching Pretest-Posttest Achievement Research Question #4.** Did ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team have congruent or different posttest compared to pretest (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology improve or lose grade score frequencies?

**Sub-Question 4a.** Were the observed lose or improve frequencies for American History the same for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted

optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team?

**Sub-Question 4b.** Were the observed lose or improve frequencies for English the same for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team?

**Sub-Question 4c.** Were the observed lose or improve frequencies for math the same for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team?

**Sub-Question 4d.** Were the observed lose or improve frequencies for biology the same for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team?

**Analysis.** Research Sub-Questions #4a, 4b, 4c, and 4d were analyzed using a chi-square test of significance to compare observed verses expected improve or lose frequencies posttest compared to pretest (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology improve or lose grade score frequencies. An alpha level of .01 was utilized to test the null hypothesis for these frequencies. Frequencies and percents were displayed in tables.

Research question five was used to analyze engagement of students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content area team and students who refused



participation in the optional summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content area team.

**Overarching Pretest-Posttest Engagement Research Question #5.** Did ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team have congruent or different school engagement participation frequencies for (a) co-curricular and (b) sports activities?

**Sub-Question 5a.** Were the observed frequencies for co-curricular activities the same for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team?

**Sub-Question 5b.** Were the observed frequencies for sports activities the same for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team?

**Analysis.** Research Sub-Questions #5a and 5b were analyzed using a chi-square test of significance to compare increased or decreased frequencies in (a) co-curricular and (b) sports participation. An alpha level of .01 was utilized to test the null hypothesis for these frequencies. Frequencies and percents were displayed in tables.

Research question six was used to analyze no reported office referrals compared to reported office referral frequencies of students who participated in the optional summer transition to high school program and required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content area team and students who refused participation in the optional

summer transition to high school program but completed the required school year long placement on a ninth-grade core content area team.

**Overarching Pretest-Posttest Behavior Research Question #6.** Did ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team have congruent or different no reported office referrals compared to reported office referral frequencies?

**Analysis.** Research questions #6 was analyzed using a chi-square test of significance to compare no reported office referrals compared to reported office referral frequencies. An alpha level of .01 was utilized to test the null hypothesis for these frequencies. Frequencies and percents were displayed in tables.

#### **Data Collection Procedures**

All study achievement, engagement, and behavior data was retrospective, archival, and routinely collected school information. Permission from the appropriate school research personnel was obtained. Naturally formed groups of 18 students in one arm and 8 in the other will include achievement and engagement data. Non-coded numbers were used to display de-identified achievement and engagement data. Aggregated group data, descriptive statistics, and parametric statistical analysis were used and reported with means and standard deviations in tables.

**Performance site.** This research was conducted in the public school setting through normal educational practices. The study procedures did not interfere with the normal educational practices of the public school and did not involve coercion or discomfort of any kind. Data was stored on spreadsheets and computer flash drives for

statistical analysis in the office of the primary researcher and the dissertation chair. Data and computer files were kept in locked file cabinets. No individual identifiers were attached to the data.

**Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of Human Subjects**

**Approval Category.** The exemption categories for this study were provided under 45CFR.101(b) categories 1 and 4. The research was conducted using routinely collected archival data. A letter of support from the district was provided for IRB review.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of optional summer transition to high school program participation and required school year long placement on a core content team on ninth-grade students at-risk measured achievement and engagement outcomes compared to the achievement, engagement, and behavior outcomes of ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team.

The study's three dependent variables were (1) achievement, (2) engagement, and (3) behavior. The first dependent variable measuring achievement, was analyzed using the following dependent measures: Pretest fall semester ninth-grade 2009 core (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology course grades, and posttest spring semester ninth-grade 2010 core (a) American History, (b) English, (c) math, and (d) biology course grades. The second dependent variable measuring engagement was analyzed using students' reported spring semester ninth-grade 2010 posttest only participation frequencies for (a) co-curricular and (b) sports activities. The third dependent variable measuring behavioral data was office referral frequencies compared to no office referral frequencies. All study achievement, engagement, and behavioral data related to each of the dependent variables were retrospective, archival, and routinely collected school information. Permission from the appropriate school research personnel was obtained before data were collected and analyzed.

Table 1 displays demographic information of individual ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team. Table 2 displays demographic information of individual ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team. Pretest and posttest American History grade scores of ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team is displayed in Table 3. Table 4 displays pretest and posttest English grade scores of ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team. Table 5 displays pretest and posttest math grade scores of ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team. Pretest and posttest biology grade scores of ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team are found in Table 6.

### **Research Question #1**

Table 7 displays beginning ninth-grade pretest compared to ending ninth-grade posttest grade scores of ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year

long placement on a core content team. The first pretest-posttest hypothesis was tested using the dependent  $t$  test. As seen in Table 7, null hypotheses were not rejected for the core content grade scores for American History, English, and biology pretest-posttest comparisons but the null hypothesis was rejected for the core content grade score for math. The pretest American History grade score for the ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 3.47$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) compared to the posttest American History grade score ( $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) was not statistically significantly different in the direction of posttest American History grade score digression,  $t(17) = 0.34$ ,  $p = .37$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.09$ . Also as found in Table 7 the pretest English grade score for the ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 3.08$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ) compared to the posttest English grade score ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ) was not statistically significantly different in the direction of posttest English grade score digression,  $t(17) = 1.40$ ,  $p = .09$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.34$ . As found in Table 7 the pretest math grade score for the ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 3.42$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ) compared to the posttest math grade score ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ) was statistically significantly different in the direction of posttest math grade score digression,  $t(17) = 2.80$ ,  $p = .01$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.50$ . Finally, as found in Table 7 the pretest biology grade score for the ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required

school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 3.97$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ) compared to the posttest biology grade score ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) was not statistically significantly different in the direction of posttest biology grade score improvement,  $t(17) = -1.58$ ,  $p = .07$  (one-tailed),  $d = -0.22$ .

### **Research Question #2**

Table 8 displays beginning ninth-grade pretest compared to ending ninth-grade posttest grade scores of ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team. The first pretest-posttest hypothesis was tested using the dependent  $t$  test. As seen in Table 8, null hypotheses were not rejected for the core content grade scores for American History, English, and biology pretest-posttest comparisons but the null hypothesis was rejected for the core content grade score for math. The pretest American History grade score for the ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) compared to the posttest American History grade score ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) was not statistically significantly different in the direction of posttest American History grade score digression,  $t(7) = 1.34$ ,  $p = .11$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.45$ . Also as found in Table 8 the pretest English grade score for the ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) compared to the posttest English grade score ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ) was not statistically significantly different in the direction of posttest English grade score improvement,  $t(7) = -0.75$ ,  $p =$

.24 (one-tailed),  $d = -0.26$ . As found in Table 8 the pretest math grade score for the ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) compared to the posttest math grade score ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) was statistically significantly different in the direction of posttest math grade score digression,  $t(7) = 2.55$ ,  $p = .02$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.60$ . Finally, as found in Table 8 the pretest biology grade score for the ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 3.63$ ,  $SD = 0.69$ ) compared to the posttest biology grade score ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ) was not statistically significantly different in the direction of posttest biology grade score digression,  $t(7) = 1.00$ ,  $p = .18$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.08$ .

### **Research Question #3**

Table 9 displays ending ninth-grade posttest compared to ending ninth-grade posttest grade scores of ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted and refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team. The third hypothesis was tested using the independent  $t$  test. Tests compared ninth-grade ending grade scores in American History, English, math, and biology. As seen in Table 9, the null hypothesis was not rejected for American History, English, math, and biology. The ending ninth-grade posttest American History grade scores of ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 3.56$ ,  $SD = 0.94$ ) compared to



ending ninth-grade American History posttest grade scores of ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 3.13$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) was not significantly different  $t(24) = 1.03$ ,  $p = .16$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.42$ . The ending ninth-grade posttest English grade scores of ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 3.39$ ,  $SD = 0.78$ ) compared to ending ninth-grade English posttest grade scores of ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 3.38$ ,  $SD = 0.52$ ) was not significantly different  $t(24) = 0.05$ ,  $p = .48$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.02$ . The ending ninth-grade posttest math grade scores of ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 4.06$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ) compared to ending ninth-grade math posttest grade scores of ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 3.81$ ,  $SD = 0.86$ ) was not significantly different  $t(24) = 0.52$ ,  $p = .31$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.24$ . The ending ninth-grade posttest biology grade scores of ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 3.72$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ) compared to ending ninth-grade biology posttest grade scores of ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but

completed the required school year long placement on a core content team ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 0.75$ ) was not significantly different  $t(24) = 0.07$ ,  $p = .47$  (one-tailed),  $d = 0.03$ .

#### **Research Question #4**

The analysis of research question 4 is displayed in Tables 10, 11, 12, and 13. Table 10 displays ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team posttest compared to pretest American History improve or lose grade score frequencies. Table 11 displays ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team posttest compared to pretest English improve or lose grade score frequencies. Table 12 displays ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team posttest compared to pretest math improve or lose grade score frequencies. Ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team posttest compared to pretest biology improve or lose grade score frequencies were displayed in Table 13.

Sub-question 4a was tested using chi-square ( $X^2_{Yates}$ ). The results of  $X^2$  with Yates' correction applied because 20% of expected frequencies were less than 5 were displayed in Table 10 for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team posttest compared to pretest American

History improve or lose grade score frequencies was not statistically different ( $X^2_{\text{Yates}}(1, N = 26) = 0.027, ns$ ) so the null hypothesis of no difference or congruence for the posttest compared to pretest American History improve or lose grade score frequencies was not rejected. Sub-question 4b was tested using chi-square ( $X^2_{\text{Yates}}$ ). The results of  $X^2$  with Yates' correction applied because 20% of expected frequencies were less than 5 were displayed in Table 11 for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team posttest compared to pretest English improve or lose grade score frequencies was not statistically different ( $X^2_{\text{Yates}}(1, N = 26) = 0.137, ns$ ) so the null hypothesis of no difference or congruence for the posttest compared to pretest English improve or lose grade score frequencies was not rejected. Sub-question 4c was tested using chi-square ( $X^2_{\text{Yates}}$ ). The results of  $X^2$  with Yates' correction applied because 20% of expected frequencies were less than 5 were displayed in Table 12 for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team posttest compared to pretest math improve or lose grade score frequencies was not statistically different ( $X^2_{\text{Yates}}(1, N = 26) = 0.711, ns$ ) so the null hypothesis of no difference or congruence for the posttest compared to pretest math improve or lose grade score frequencies was not rejected. Sub-question 4d was tested using chi-square ( $X^2_{\text{Yates}}$ ). The results of  $X^2$  with Yates' correction applied because 20% of expected frequencies were less than 5 were displayed in Table 13. As seen in Table 13 ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year

long placement on a core content team posttest compared to pretest biology improve or lose grade score frequencies was not statistically different ( $X^2_{\text{Yates}}(1, N = 26) = 0.389, ns$ ) so the null hypothesis of no difference or congruence for the posttest compared to pretest biology improve or lose grade score frequencies was not rejected.

### **Research Question #5**

The analysis of research question 5 is displayed in Table 14. Research question 5 was tested using chi-square ( $X^2_{\text{Yates}}$ ). The results of  $X^2$  with Yates' correction applied because 20% of expected frequencies were less than 5 were displayed in Table 14. As seen in Table 14 ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team co-curricular compared to sports participation frequencies was not statistically different ( $X^2_{\text{Yates}}(1, N = 19) = 0.047, ns$ ) so the null hypothesis of no difference or congruence for co-curricular activities compared to sports participation frequencies was not rejected.

### **Research Question #6**

The analysis of research question 6 is displayed in Table 15. Research question 6 was tested using chi-square ( $X^2_{\text{Yates}}$ ). The results of  $X^2$  with Yates' correction applied because 20% of expected frequencies were less than 5 were displayed in Table 15. As seen in Table 15 ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team no reported and reported office referral frequencies was not statistically different ( $X^2_{\text{Yates}}(1, N = 26) = 0.914, ns$ ) so the null

hypothesis of no difference or congruence for the no reported and reported office referral frequencies was not rejected.

Table 1

*Demographic Information of Individual Ninth Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation But Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team*

Student Number	Gender	Ethnicity	Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program	Special Education
1.	Male	Hispanic	No	No
2.	Male	Caucasian	No	Yes
3.	Female	Caucasian	Yes	No
4.	Female	Caucasian	Yes	No
5.	Male	Caucasian	Yes	No
6.	Male	Caucasian	Yes	Yes
7.	Male	Caucasian	No	No
8.	Male	Caucasian	No	No

*Note.* All students were in attendance in the research school district eighth-grade through ninth-grade.

Table 2

*Demographic Information of Individual Ninth Grade Students At-Risk Who Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team*

Student Number	Gender	Ethnicity	Free or Reduced Price Lunch Program	Special Education
1.	Male	Black	No	No
2.	Male	Caucasian	Yes	No
3.	Male	Caucasian	No	No
4.	Female	Caucasian	No	No
5.	Female	Caucasian	No	No
6.	Male	Black	No	No
7.	Female	Hispanic	No	No
8.	Female	Caucasian	No	Yes
9.	Female	Black	No	No
10.	Male	Hispanic	Yes	No
11.	Male	Caucasian	No	No
12.	Female	Hispanic	No	Yes
13.	Female	Caucasian	No	No
14.	Female	Caucasian	No	No
15.	Male	Caucasian	No	No
16.	Male	Black	Yes	No
17.	Female	Caucasian	No	Yes
18.	Female	Caucasian	No	No

*Note.* All students were in attendance in the research school district eighth-grade through ninth-grade.

Table 3

*Pretest and Posttest American History Grade Scores of Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation But Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team*

		Students Who Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation <sup>a</sup>		Students Who Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation <sup>b</sup>	
		Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
1.	3		4	1.	4
2.	3		4	2.	3
3.	3		4.5	3.	2.5
4.	3		3	4.	2
5.	2		1	5.	2
6.	3		3	6.	2
7.	3		3	7.	5
8.	2		2.5	8.	2
				9.	5
				10.	4
				11.	4
				12.	4
				13.	4
				14.	3
				15.	2
				16.	4.5
				17.	5
				18.	4.5

<sup>a</sup>Student numbers correspond with Table 1.

<sup>b</sup>Student numbers correspond with Table 2.



Table 4

*Pretest and Posttest English Grade Scores of Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation But Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team*

		Students Who Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation <sup>a</sup>		Students Who Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation <sup>b</sup>	
		Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
1.	4	4		1.	3
2.	4.5	4		2.	2
3.	3	3		3.	2
4.	4.5	3		4.	2
5.	3.5	3		5.	3
6.	2	3		6.	2
7.	4	4		7.	5
8.	3	3		8.	3
				9.	3
				10.	3
				11.	2
				12.	4
				13.	2
				14.	4.5
				15.	3
				16.	4
				17.	3
				18.	5

<sup>a</sup>Student numbers correspond with Table 1.

<sup>b</sup>Student numbers correspond with Table 2.

Table 5

*Pretest and Posttest Math Grade Scores of Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation But Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team*

	Students Who Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation <sup>a</sup>		Students Who Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation <sup>b</sup>	
	Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
1.	5	5	1.	5
2.	1	2.5	2.	4.5
3.	3	3	3.	3.5
4.	3	4	4.	3
5.	3	3	5.	4.5
6.	4	4	6.	1
7.	4	5	7.	3.5
8.	2.5	4	8.	2
			9.	5
			10.	2
			11.	4
			12.	4
			13.	4.5
			14.	5
			15.	1
			16.	2
			17.	4
			18.	5
				5

<sup>a</sup>Student numbers correspond with Table 1.

<sup>b</sup>Student numbers correspond with Table 2.

Table 6

*Pretest and Posttest Biology Grade Scores of Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation But Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team*

		Students Who Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation <sup>a</sup>		Students Who Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation <sup>b</sup>	
		Pretest	Posttest	Pretest	Posttest
1.	5	5		1.	5
2.	4	4		2.	4.5
3.	3.5	3.5		3.	3
4.	3	3		4.	2
5.	3	3		5.	3
6.	3	3		6.	2
7.	4	4.5		7.	5
8.	3.5	3.5		8.	3
				9.	5
				10.	3
				11.	4
				12.	4
				13.	4
				14.	4.5
				15.	4.5
				16.	5
				17.	5
				18.	5

<sup>a</sup>Student numbers correspond with Table 1.

<sup>b</sup>Student numbers correspond with Table 2.

Table 7

*Beginning Ninth-Grade Pretest Compared to Ending Ninth-Grade Posttest Grade Scores of Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team*

Source	Core Content Grade Scores						<i>p</i>
	Pretest		Posttest		<i>d</i>	<i>t</i> <sup>a</sup>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
A	3.47	(1.16)	3.56	(0.94)	0.09	0.34	.37 <sup>†</sup>
B	3.08	(1.03)	3.39	(0.78)	0.34	1.40	.09 <sup>†</sup>
C	3.42	(1.41)	4.06	(1.17)	0.50	2.80	.01**
D	3.97	(1.05)	3.72	(1.23)	-0.22	-1.58	.07 <sup>†</sup>

*Note.* A = American History; B = English; C = Math; and D = Biology.

<sup>a</sup>Negative *t* result is in the direction of lower posttest mean scores and student grade score improvement.

<sup>†</sup>*ns.* \*\**p* = .01.

Table 8

*Beginning Ninth-Grade Pretest Compared to Ending Ninth-Grade Posttest Grade Scores of Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation But Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team*

Source	Core Content Grade Scores						<i>d</i>	<i>t</i> <sup>a</sup>	<i>p</i>
	Pretest		Posttest						
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>					
A	2.75	(0.46)	3.13	(1.09)	0.45	1.34	.11 <sup>†</sup>		
B	3.56	(0.86)	3.38	(0.52)	-0.26	-0.75	.24 <sup>†</sup>		
C	3.19	(1.19)	3.81	(0.86)	0.60	2.55	.02*		
D	3.63	(0.69)	3.69	(0.75)	0.08	1.00	.18 <sup>†</sup>		

*Note.* A = American History; B = English; C = Math; and D = Biology.

<sup>a</sup>Negative *t* result is in the direction of lower posttest mean scores and student grade score improvement.

<sup>†</sup>*ns.* \**p* < .05.

Table 9

*Ending Ninth-Grade Posttest Compared to Ending Ninth-Grade Posttest Grade Scores of Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Accepted and Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation But Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team*

Source	Core Content Grade Scores						<i>p</i>
	At-Risk Students Who Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation Posttest		At-Risk Students Who Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation Posttest		<i>d</i>	<i>t</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
A	3.56	(0.94)	3.13	(1.09)	0.42	1.03	.16 <sup>†</sup>
B	3.39	(0.78)	3.38	(0.52)	0.02	0.05	.48 <sup>†</sup>
C	4.06	(1.17)	3.81	(0.86)	0.24	0.52	.31 <sup>†</sup>
D	3.72	(1.23)	3.69	(0.75)	0.03	0.07	.47 <sup>†</sup>

*Note.* A = American History; B = English; C = Math; and D = Biology.

<sup>†</sup>*ns.*

Table 10

*Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team Posttest Compared to Pretest American History Improve or Lose Grade Score Frequencies*

Grade Score	American History				$X^2_{Yates}$
	At-Risk Students Who Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation		At-Risk Students Who Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation		
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
Improve	9	(50)	5	(62)	
Lose	9	(50)	3	(38)	
Totals	18	(100)	8	(100)	0.027 <sup>ab†</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Yates' correction applied because 20% of expected frequencies were less than 5.

<sup>b</sup>Observed versus expected cell frequencies used for calculation with  $df = 1$  and a tabled value = 6.635 required to obtain an alpha level of .01, the threshold for statistical significance for this research question.

<sup>†</sup>*ns.*

Table 11

*Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team Posttest Compared to Pretest English Improve or Lose Grade Score Frequencies*

Grade Score	English				$X^2_{Yates}$
	At-Risk Students Who Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation		At-Risk Students Who Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation		
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
Improve	11	(61)	5	(62)	
Lose	7	(39)	3	(38)	
Totals	18	(100)	8	(100)	0.137 <sup>ab†</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Yates' correction applied because 20% of expected frequencies were less than 5.

<sup>b</sup>Observed versus expected cell frequencies used for calculation with  $df = 1$  and a tabled value = 6.635 required to obtain an alpha level of .01, the threshold for statistical significance for this research question.

<sup>†</sup>*ns.*



Table 12

*Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team Posttest Compared to Pretest Math Improve or Lose Grade Score Frequencies*

Grade Score	Math				$X^2_{Yates}$
	At-Risk Students Who Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation		At-Risk Students Who Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation		
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
Improve	6	(33)	4	(50)	
Lose	12	(67)	4	(50)	
Totals	18	(100)	8	(100)	0.711 <sup>ab†</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Yates' correction applied because 20% of expected frequencies were less than 5.

<sup>b</sup>Observed versus expected cell frequencies used for calculation with  $df = 1$  and a tabled value = 6.635 required to obtain an alpha level of .01, the threshold for statistical significance for this research question.

<sup>†</sup>*ns.*

Table 13

*Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team Posttest Compared to Pretest Biology Improve or Lose Grade Score Frequencies*

Grade Score	Biology				$X^2_{Yates}$
	At-Risk Students Who Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation		At-Risk Students Who Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation		
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
Improve	14	(78)	8	(100)	
Lose	4	(22)	0	(0)	
Totals	18	(100)	8	(100)	0.389 <sup>ab†</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Yates' correction applied because 20% of expected frequencies were less than 5.

<sup>b</sup>Observed versus expected cell frequencies used for calculation with  $df = 1$  and a tabled value = 6.635 required to obtain an alpha level of .01, the threshold for statistical significance for this research question.

<sup>†</sup>*ns.*

Table 14

*Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team Co-Curricular Compared to Sports Participation Frequencies*

Participation	School Engagement				$X^2_{Yates}$
	At-Risk Students Who Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation		At-Risk Students Who Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation		
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
Co-Curricular	10	(71)	4	(80)	
Sports	4	(29)	1	(20)	
Totals	14	(100)	5	(100)	0.047 <sup>abc†</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Yates' correction applied because 20% of expected frequencies were less than 5.

<sup>b</sup>Observed versus expected cell frequencies used for calculation with  $df = 1$  and a tabled value = 6.635 required to obtain an alpha level of .01, the threshold for statistical significance for this research question.

<sup>c</sup>Totals are fewer than the number of study subjects because not all students elected to participate in either co-curricular or sports activities.

<sup>†</sup>*ns.*

Table 15

*Ninth-Grade Students At-Risk Who Refused and Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation and Completed the Required School Year Long Placement on a Core Content Team With No Reported and Reported Office Referral Frequencies*

	Behavior				$X^2_{Yates}$
	At-Risk Students Who Accepted Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation		At-Risk Students Who Refused Optional Summer Transition to High School Program Participation		
Reported	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
No Referrals	4	(22)	4	(50)	
Referrals	14	(78)	4	(50)	
Totals	18	(100)	8	(100)	0.914 <sup>abc†</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Yates' correction applied because 20% of expected frequencies were less than 5.

<sup>b</sup>Observed versus expected cell frequencies used for calculation with  $df = 1$  and a tabled value = 6.635 required to obtain an alpha level of .01, the threshold for statistical significance for this research question.

<sup>c</sup>Totals fewer than the number of study subjects because not all students elected to participate in either co-curricular or sports activities.

<sup>†</sup>*ns.*

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusions and Discussion

The following conclusions may be drawn from the study for each of the six research questions.

#### Research Question #1 Conclusion

Overall, pretest-posttest results indicated beginning ninth-grade pretest American History compared to ending ninth-grade posttest American History grade scores for ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team were not statistically significantly different. Comparing ending ninth-grade posttest American History grade scores for ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team with letter grades puts their performance in perspective. A posttest American History grade score of 3.56 is congruent with a letter grade of C and a qualitative description of average. Comparing ending ninth-grade posttest English grade scores for ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team with letter grades puts their performance in perspective. A posttest English grade score of 3.39 is congruent with a letter grade of C and a qualitative description of average. Comparing ending ninth-grade posttest math grade scores for ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team with letter grades puts their

performance in perspective. A posttest math grade score of 4.06 is congruent with a letter grade of D and a qualitative description of below average. Comparing ending ninth-grade posttest biology grade scores for ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team with letter grades puts their performance in perspective. A posttest biology grade score of 3.72 is congruent with a letter grade of C and a qualitative description of average.

Finally, the ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team had a higher posttest American History grade score (.09) indicating a not statistically significantly different grade score digression with a final grade of C measured within the average range, a higher posttest English grade score (.31) indicating a not statistically significantly different grade score digression with a final grade of C measured within the average range, a higher posttest math grade score (.64) indicating a statistically significantly different grade score digression with a final grade of D measured within the below average range, and a lower posttest biology grade score (-.25) indicating a not statistically significantly different grade score improvement with a final grade of C measured within the average range. The pattern of average and below average range posttest grade score stability from pretest to posttest indicated that ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team experienced first year high school success with average range performance in American History, English, and biology preparing them for 10th-grade coursework and

credit accrual. The math score digression must be addressed from both an individual student and course content and instruction perspective, for these vulnerable learners.

### **Research Question #2 Conclusion**

Overall, pretest-posttest results indicated beginning ninth-grade pretest American History compared to ending ninth-grade posttest American History grade scores for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team were not statistically significantly different. Comparing ending ninth-grade posttest American History grade scores for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team with letter grades puts their performance in perspective. A posttest American History grade score of 3.13 is congruent with a letter grade of C and a qualitative description of average. Comparing ending ninth-grade posttest English grade scores for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team with letter grades puts their performance in perspective. A posttest English grade score of 3.38 is congruent with a letter grade of C and a qualitative description of average. Comparing ending ninth-grade posttest math grade scores for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team with letter grades puts their performance in perspective. A posttest math grade score of 3.81 is congruent with a letter grade of C and a qualitative description of average. Comparing ending ninth-grade

posttest biology grade scores for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team with letter grades puts their performance in perspective. A posttest biology grade score of 3.69 is congruent with a letter grade of C and a qualitative description of average.

Finally, the ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team had a higher posttest American History grade score (.38) indicating a not statistically significantly different grade score digression with a final grade of C measured within the average range, a lower posttest English grade score (-.18) indicating a not statistically significantly different grade score improvement with a final grade of C measured within the average range, a higher posttest math grade score (.62) indicating a statistically significantly different grade score digression with a final grade of C measured within the average range, and a lower posttest biology grade score (.06) indicating a not statistically significantly different grade score digression with a final grade of C measured within the average range. The pattern of average range posttest grade score stability from pretest to posttest indicated that ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team experienced first year high school success with average range performance in American History, English, and biology preparing them for 10th-grade coursework and credit accrual. The math score digression must be addressed from both an individual student and course content and instruction perspective, for these vulnerable learners.



### **Research Question #3 Conclusion**

Overall, posttest-posttest results indicated that students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team mean scores in American History, English, math, and biology scores had posttest grade scores that were numerically congruent with students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team. Overall, statistical equipoise was observed between the two groups of students in all four academic grade score comparisons.

The posttest American History grade score of 3.56 congruent with a letter grade of C and a qualitative description of average for ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team was not statistically significantly different from the posttest American History grade score of 3.13 congruent with a letter grade of C and a qualitative description of average for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team. The posttest English grade score of 3.39 congruent with a letter grade of C and a qualitative description of average for ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team was not statistically significantly different from the posttest English grade score of 3.38 congruent with a letter grade of C and a qualitative description of average for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team. The posttest math grade score of 4.06 congruent with a letter

grade of D and a qualitative description of below average for ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team was not statistically significantly different from the posttest math grade score of 3.81 congruent with a letter grade of C and a qualitative description of average for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team. The posttest biology grade score of 3.72 congruent with a letter grade of C and a qualitative description of average for ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team was not statistically significantly different from the posttest biology grade score of 3.69 congruent with a letter grade of C and a qualitative description of average for ninth-grade students at-risk who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation but completed the required school year long placement on a core content team.

The pattern of average range posttest grade scores for ninth-grade students at-risk who accepted and refused optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team indicated both groups experienced first year high school success with average range performance in American History, English, and biology preparing them for 10th-grade coursework and future credit accrual. The pattern of average (C) and below average (D) significantly digressing math scores at posttest for students at-risk who accepted and refused optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team must

be addressed from both an individual student perspective as well as through revised course content and renewed instructional motivation to serve students at-risk.

#### **Research Question #4 Conclusion**

Overall, posttest compared to posttest findings indicate that the ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team were not statistically different in their improve and lose posttest American History course grade score frequencies and percents. Percents for at-risk students who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation posttest American History grade score change was improve 50% and lose 50%. Percents for at-risk students who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation posttest American History grade score change was improve 62% and lose 38%. Given the statistical equipoise observed it may be said that both groups of at-risk students, those who refused and those who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team were equally well served by the required school year long placement on a core content team making optional summer transition to high school program participation less critical for these vulnerable youth. Overall, posttest compared to posttest findings indicate that the ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team were not statistically different in their improve and lose posttest English course grade score frequencies and percents. Percents for at-risk students who accepted optional summer transition to high

school program participation posttest English grade score change was improve 61% and lose 39%. Percents for at-risk students who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation posttest English, grade score change was improve 62% and lose 38%. Given the statistical equipoise observed it may be said that both groups of at-risk students, those who refused and those who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team were equally well served by the required school year long placement on a core content team making optional summer transition to high school program participation less critical for these vulnerable youth. Overall, posttest compared to posttest findings indicate that the ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team were not statistically different in their improve and lose posttest math course grade score frequencies and percents. Percents for at-risk students who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation posttest math grade score change was improve 33% and lose 67%. Percents for at-risk students who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation posttest math grade score change was improve 50% and lose 50%. Despite the given statistical equipoise observed, it may be said that the imbalance in the percentage of improve verses lose in math grade score for at-risk students who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation deserves addressing to ensure the needs of these students deemed at-risk are truly being met in this core content course. Overall, posttest compared to posttest findings indicate that the ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition

to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team were not statistically different in their improve and lose posttest biology course grade score frequencies and percents. Percents for at-risk students who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation posttest biology grade score change was improve 78% and lose 22%. Percents for at-risk students who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation posttest biology grade score change was improve 100% and lose 0%. Given the statistical equipoise observed it may be said that both groups of at-risk students, those who refused and those who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team were equally well served by the required school year long placement on a core content team making optional summer transition to high school program participation less critical for these vulnerable youth.

#### **Research Question #5 Conclusion**

Overall, posttest compared to posttest engagement findings indicate that the ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team were not statistically different in their co-curricular activities compared to sports participation frequencies. Percents for at-risk students who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation posttest co-curricular activities participation frequencies were 71% and sports 29%. Percents for at-risk students who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation posttest co-curricular activities participation frequencies were 80% and sports 20%. Given the statistical equipoise observed it may be said that both groups of at-

risk students, those who refused and those who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team were equally engaged in the research school. Further, the optional summer transition to high school program participation appears less critical for these vulnerable youth in its effects for increasing school engagement participation frequencies compared with the required school year long placement on a core content team.

### **Research Question #6 Conclusion**

Overall, posttest compared to posttest findings indicate that the ninth-grade students at-risk who refused and accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team were not statistically different in their reported *no office referral* compared to their reported *office referral* frequencies. Percents for at-risk students who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation posttest no office referral frequencies were 22% and office referral frequencies 78%. Percents for at-risk students who refused optional summer transition to high school program participation posttest no office referral frequencies were 50% and office referral frequencies 50%. Given the statistical equipoise observed it may be said that both groups of at-risk students, those who refused and those who accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team had office referrals for nuisance behaviors that were consistent with in-school management with no suspensions or expulsions reported for any research participant over the academic year. The efforts of the core content teachers had a positive influence in helping promote acceptable student behaviors as demonstrated by the percent of students in both groups (31%) with no reported office referrals.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study did not indicate a significant difference in academic achievement, school engagement participation frequencies, or reported office referral frequencies for at-risk students who refused or accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team. However, students of both groups, those that accepted and those that refused optional summer transition to high school program, maintained average achievement grade scores in American History, English, and biology which needs to be commended. This result indicates the positive impact the required placement on the core content team had for these students deemed at-risk.

**Implications for practice.** Statistics indicate that one in four students will fail to complete high school successfully within the traditional four years (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009; Laird et al., 2007). The decision to leave school early is made over time as the student produces overt behaviors that indicate disengagement with the school process (Entwisle et al., 2005). Most concerning, however, is that the highest dropout occurs as students attempt to make the transition to high school during the ninth-grade year (Cooper & Liou, 2007).

This study indicates that the student-teacher relationship is crucial in fostering successful ninth-grade completion. The results of this study suggest that when students deemed at-risk are placed on common core content teams, achievement can be positively affected, school engagement enhanced, and office referrals can be avoided. The findings of academic achievement in the areas of American History, English, and biology for at-risk students who refused or accepted optional summer transition to high school program participation and completed the required school year long placement on a core content team highlights the

tremendous impact the core content teacher team served on the academic success for the ninth-grade students who previously were regarded as unsuccessful in their eighth-grade year.

**Ninth-grade transition programs.** The ninth-grade year is significant in determining the future lives of students (Dedmond, 2005). It is during this first year of high school that most students make the determination of whether they will finish high school or leave early (Cooper & Liou, 2007; Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). Ninth-grade students, therefore, need to be taught the immense importance of high school completion (Dedmond, 2005). When students are successfully transitioned into the ninth-grade year, they feel support from their teachers (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001). The students, in return, feel a heightened sense of positive mental health and are better equipped to avoid risky behaviors (Griffen et al., 2007).

The George Washington University Freshman Transition Initiative encourages schools across the nation to implement a 10-step plan to ensure all students make the transition from eighth to ninth-grade successfully. This 10-step plan involves a scripted curriculum for schools to implement as an academic required course either during the students' eighth-grade or ninth-grade year. The philosophy of the program is that when students are able to project themselves into the future through a 10-year plan and understand the consequences associated with actions, students are less likely to drop out of school, become a teen parent, or engage in drug or substance abuse (Academic Innovations, 2010).

**Team approach.** Students that are grouped together with same-aged peers within the school setting report positive social bonding. This sense of security within the larger school setting helps promote academic success for ninth-grade students (Cushman, 2006). Further, creating a smaller learning environment with common core teachers for ninth-grade students in the areas of math, English, science, and social studies ensures that students deemed at-risk are



receiving extra attention to ensure successful completion of required courses (McIntosh & White, 2006).

**Implications for policy.** Schools need to make the commitment to implementing successful transition programs for students entering the ninth-grade. Many schools have optional transition programs in place for eighth-grade students to offer a glimpse of the high school environment during the summer before the ninth-grade school year. These programs are often lacking in concrete research-based curriculum and offer only a few of weeks intervention. Students deemed at-risk leaving the eighth-grade need to be exposed to a mandatory transition to high school program that implements a consistent and effective curriculum.

Although the intentions of the optional summer transition to high school program of the research district are admirable, the effects were not measurable. Perhaps a more complete academic and social summer transition to high school curriculum that provides students with early credit course work support through collaborative instruction and team building would result in a more robust outcome. In addition, the current program operates under voluntary participation for students deemed at-risk by the core content teachers of the eighth-grade. The key decision-makers of the district need to recognize that aiding students in making the often overwhelming transition to ninth-grade will aid in the prevention of students leaving school early. Consideration needs to be given to extending funding to create a mandatory transition to high school program where all incoming ninth-grade students are learning the importance of high school completion through the implementation of a rigorous accredited curriculum that cultivates the importance of academic achievement, promotes school engagement, and teaches the social skills students need to complete the ninth-grade year successfully in preparation for future success.

The study school needs to recognize the positive impact the required school year long placement on a core content team has on positive academic achievement, school engagement, and limited office referrals. The school's master schedule needs to continue to allow for the common team-time for each group of ninth-grade team teachers to allow for continued collaboration and frequent communication between the school and home.

**Implications for further research.** The results of this study indicates a need for further research regarding what components should be incorporated into a successful transition to high school program. A comprehensive student and parent survey to explore the perceived effectiveness of the optional summer transition to high school program could potentially yield important information about both the students' and parents' perceptions of the program. In addition, the survey could also address areas of success and need to facilitate better planning for interventions that will touch the hearts as well as the minds of students who need to know that their teachers care about them and will guide them towards the success and independence they desire but cannot achieve alone.

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