

THE FRESHMAN ACADEMY IMPACT:
A COMPARISON OF NINTH GRADE STRUCTURES THROUGH ANALYSES OF
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND PERFORMANCE DATA

A Dissertation
by
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ABSTRACT

THE FRESHMAN ACADEMY IMPACT: A COMPARISON OF NINTH GRADE STRUCTURES THROUGH ANALYSES OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS AND PERFORMANCE DATA. (May 2012)

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A student's transition from middle school to high school can prove to be a difficult time, often leading to an academic decline, an increase in the number of accumulated discipline referrals, and an increase in absences. In order to help students make the transition, many school systems are establishing freshman academies on their high school campuses to serve as a metaphorical bridge between the middle school and high school. Clark County Schools¹ implements the academy model. This study provides a holistic comparison between Clark County and Lewis County Schools, which does not use the ninth grade academy intervention strategy.

Student engagement served as the conceptual framework for this study as it is a strong predictor of academic outcomes. Performance and perceptual data from current tenth

¹ Clark County Schools and Lewis County Schools are pseudonyms

graders in each district provided me a holistic view of the ninth grade experience. The variables of achievement (growth on English I End of Course test), attendance (number of days absent), and discipline (number of incidents accumulated) were analyzed using three methods. First, historical data were collected for each variable and analyzed to determine if the academy model had an impact pre- and post implementation. Second, student performance data and student perceptions from surveys were compared using *t*-tests to determine if a significant difference existed between students in Clark County and students in Lewis County. Third, data were correlated to determine if a relationship existed between student performance and student perception.

After analysis, I found that with regard to achievement, no significant difference existed in student perceptions or performance data and no relationship existed when comparing performance to perception within each district. However, the analysis of historical data illustrated that Clark County students are closing the gap in the average growth disparity on the English I End of Course test since the implementation of the academy model.

With regard to attendance, the historical data showed that attendance rates have remained steady for both districts for since the 2006-2007 academic year. The analysis of perceptual data did not yield any significant difference; however, a significant difference did exist in the number of days absent as Lewis County students had a better attendance rate. A relationship existed for both Clark County and Lewis County students with the analysis of correlational data.

The analysis of historical discipline data found that both districts are on the same trajectory as both have decreased the number of incidents by 23% since the inception of the academy model in Clark County. No significant difference was found between students'

perceptions of discipline. However, a significant difference existed when analyzing performance data as Clark County had significantly fewer incidents. Additionally, a relationship existed between student perception and student performance in terms of discipline in Clark County.

Most research studies on freshman academies are from urban areas and focus primarily on student performance data. This research sought to add student perceptual data to the performance data component, thereby providing a holistic view of the freshman academy model. Additionally, the research conducted in this study took place in suburban/rural areas. For Clark County, the freshman academy model is serving as a cost-effective manner of helping freshman make a smooth transition to high school as the outcome of the study mirrors other positive data found in national studies.

In future studies, researchers may want to replicate this study with a larger sample size to increase the generalizability of the study. This could take place using multiple districts statewide. A researcher may want to conduct a similar study using teacher performance data and perceptual data in order to gain faculty members' perceptions of students' ninth grade experiences. Research could be conducted in multiple ninth grade academies to determine best practices and shared amongst schools/districts in order to best serve ninth grade students as they transition to high school.