# THE STATISTICAL IMPACT OF FACULTY MENTORING PROGRAMS ON NINTH GRADE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

at

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Date Submitted 7/1/2022

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Date Approved 9/30/2022

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## ABSTRACT

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Students' transition from middle to high school is challenging on many levels. Research has shown that students who perform poorly academically during their freshman year are more likely to graduate later or drop out of school altogether. By studying the literature surrounding the transition to high school, I will identify elements of effective transition programs (the totality of transition activities a district employs). This will be a convergent mixed method study, where I will use Social Support theory as a framework to examine the statistical significance of faculty mentoring programs impact on grade student achievement during the 2018-2019 school year. I will survey principals and assistant principals in schools that have mentoring programs to assess the characteristics and perceived effectiveness of the programs. High schools in two suburban New York counties will be surveyed to assess the correlation, if any, that exists between number of hours spent in a faculty mentoring program, whether a school has a faculty/student mentoring program and percentage of economically disadvantaged students and the number of course failures in ninth grade during the 2018-2019 academic year. I will also study themes and patterns of established faculty mentoring programs.

## DEDICATION

I am fortunate enough to have many people in my life who have supported and guided me throughout this journey. Mom: your constant love, support, guidance, and humor have shown me that all things in life are possible. Your continued positive outlook in the face of the numerous challenges you have overcome has inspired me to be the best possible version of myself. I am a better person because I am your son. I love you very much. Pete and Tim: I am honored to be your older brother. I am proud of the men you have become. Col: your friendship has meant the world to me and you have taught me the benefit of connecting with all students. Your strong belief in advocating for all students has inspired me to become a better educator and I am eternally grateful for you. Heather: your presence and support during the culminating chapter in this journey has been invaluable to me. You inspired me to finish this. I love you. Dad: even though you are gone, your example continues to guide me to be the best man possible. You left big shoes to fill, and every day I try to live life by the example you set.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A successful middle to high school transition is fundamentally important to guarantee students' academic, social, and emotional success in life. Student performance in the ninth grade has direct correlations to their performance for the duration of their academic careers. Research has shown that "failure at the ninth-grade level has significantly greater implications than in earlier school years because students must accumulate a set number of credits to avoid retention" (Marshall, 1995, p. 15). Specifically, failure in the ninth-grade leads students to exist in a state of credit recovery, which decreases the amount of opportunities they are afforded as they progress through high school. This lack of opportunities includes fewer options in terms of elective courses or job training programs they can pursue in the later years of high school. Pursuing certain courses or programs often allows student to hone an interest in a life path they seek to follow. Thus, course failures lead to fewer chances to explore these paths and career options, potentially leading to post-graduation confusion, or even no graduation at all.

Students who struggle with middle to high school transition frequently demonstrate signs of difficulty earlier in their academic careers, often starting in elementary and middle school. According to Marshall (1995), "The individuals most likely to drop out before completing the ninth grade are those who have had attendance, discipline, and/or academic problems in the past, possibly from the beginning of their school careers" (p. 15). Moreover, Neild (2009) showed that "students who drop out of school earn less on average than high school graduates, have a high probability of

experiencing long stretches of unemployment, participate less in civic life, and are more likely to be incarcerated" (p. 22). It is also important to note that "students who fail after a transition are especially at risk for school disengagement and dropout. . . . identifying circumstances in which failure may be alleviated is a critical step in the promotion of academic persistence and success" (Langenkamp, 2010, p. 25). As I will argue in this dissertation, it would be beneficial to students if schools offered structured transition programs to assist them in getting acclimated to the high school setting. As other researchers have pointed out, "High schools bear the most immediate responsibility for putting in place the curriculum, school organizational features, and strong teachers who will increase a ninth graders chances of making a good transition to high school" (Neild, 2009, p. 25).

**Purpose of the Study**

Some students feel lost and overwhelmed in the high school setting, as they embark on the school year. Students often have to traverse a large school building to get to their next class; they face the challenge of meeting new classmates and instructors and of building a transcript and are undergoing physiological changes at the onset of the puberty. This can lead to feelings of anxiety; therefore, it is necessary for schools to provide additional support services to students. Every student should feel a connection to their school and the people in it— that is a key tenet of Social Support theory. "Although many view and treat the middle to high school transition as a one-time event that occurs during matriculation to high school, researchers have suggested that the transition is a process that begins at some point during middle school and extends throughout ninth

grade and possibly beyond" (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009, p. 32). Therefore, schools should create comprehensive transition programs to ensure that all students receive the tools and resources necessary to thrive in high school. Most high schools are larger than middle schools, and students are given more freedom—and therefore more responsibility—to select activities and courses that pique their interest. On the other hand, students are also expected to become more self-sufficient. At times, however, some students do not have the maturity level to handle this level of independence and responsibility in their approach to school. Putting a multi-tiered transition program in place would allow schools to monitor students and keep them on a path towards success. It is important to "address students and their troubles during various stages of the transition, not just once they reach the ninth grades – this demands early intervention, rigorous courses in middle school, and a continuously supportive environment" (Cohen, 2009, p. 32).

Transition programs should be important in every high school. They are especially crucial in larger schools because "districts with larger enrollments per attendance center tend to have higher dropout rates" (Alspaugh, 1998, p. 47). "As enrollment per attendance center increases, there is a tendency for school districts to create more intermediate level schools thus increasing the number of school-to-school transitions;" moreover, "school size and school to school transitions may be working jointly to increase high school dropout rates" (Alspaugh, 1998, p. 47).

The purpose of this research study will be to investigate the correlation between student participation in a faculty mentoring program and student achievement. I will survey high schools to determine whether faculty programs had a statistically significant

impact on the number of ninth grade students who failed a course during the 2018-2019 school year. I will also interview survey respondents that offer faculty mentoring programs to assess any themes and patterns of the programs offered.

To demonstrate the need for a comprehensive middle to high school mentoring program, it is necessary to review data from a suburban high school located in New York to determine the impact the lack of a transition program has on students. I have reviewed data from the following school years: 2017-2018; 2018-2019, and 2019-2020 (first semester only). I did not include in the review the second semester of 2019-2020 and the 2020-2021 school year because the Covid-19 pandemic had a definite impact on the instruction results.

This high school has a single day Freshman Orientation scheduled for the last week in August. Since this is a one-time event, it is not a continual transition activity. Students attend Orientation with their parents or guardians and hear a presentation on the rules and procedures of the high school. Students then receive their schedules and take a self-guided tour through the school. Guidance counselors and administration are available to address any schedule concerns. There are volunteers stationed throughout the hallways to assist parents and students in navigating the school. Once students complete the self-guided tour, they leave campus and do not return until the first day of classes.

This high school also utilizes a peer mentoring program, which is an inclusive transition activity that runs throughout the school year. Juniors and seniors are assigned as mentors to incoming ninth grade students. Students are recommended for the program by their middle school guidance counselors. Not all ninth-grade students are assigned a

mentor, and for those that do, there is no set schedule of meeting times. The number of participating students varies from year to year based on the recommendations of the middle school. These are the only two transition activities at this high school.

This high school had a total enrollment of 2199 students (542 ninth graders) for the 2017-2018 school year; 2184 students (547 ninth graders) for the 2018-2019 school year and 2105 students (490 ninth graders) for the 2019-2020 school year. The high school is situated on one large campus and encompasses grades 9-12. The data I collected included the number of ninth grade students who failed at least one course (see details below).

- 2017-2018 Academic Year: 17.2% (93/542) ninth grade students failed one course
- 2018-2019 Academic Year: 4.8% (26/547) ninth grade students failed one course
- 2019-2020 (1st Semester Only) 15.1% (74/490) ninth grade students failed one course.

This data provides an example for one high school. In this study, I will look at high schools in two suburban New York counties to determine if there is a correlation between the number of hours spent in a faculty mentoring program, the statistical difference in students course failure rates between schools that offer faculty mentoring programs and those that do not, and the percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged according to New York State and the number of ninth grade students that failed a course during the 2018-2019 school year.

## Theoretical Framework

Looking at mentoring programs during the transition to high school demonstrates the need to further study the connections students make in school, leading to the development of a supportive network. Social Support Theory is a theory that focuses on developing relationships and providing support in those relationships. Researchers have shown that "people who are more socially integrated and who experience more supportive and rewarding relationships with others have better mental health, higher levels of subjective well-being, and lower rates of morbidity and mortality" (Feeney & Collins, 2015, p. 1).

The use of faculty mentoring programs serves as an example of Social Support theory and allows students to develop close relationships with their teachers, which will lead to a stronger connection to the school environment. These close relationships become important because "close relationships promote well-being in many ways, not just as a resource in times of adversity" (Feeney & Collins, 2015, p. 1). By making use of faculty mentoring programs, students can develop close relationships with their teachers, who will help them navigate the many trials and tribulations of entering high school. This allows students to thrive in a high school setting because these mentoring relationships serve "two important support functions that correspond to the two life contexts through which people may potentially thrive – coping successfully with adversity and participating in opportunities for growth and fulfillment in the absence of adversity" (Feeney & Collins, 2015, p. 6).

## Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is to study the correlation, if any, between faculty mentoring programs, time spent in the program, and student success/failure rates, and the correlation between the percentage of economically disadvantaged students, the existence of a faculty mentoring program, and whether it had a statistically significant impact on ninth grade student failure rates in the 2018-2019 school year in two suburban New York counties. I will also study the characteristics and themes of faculty mentoring programs as well. Students often "fly under the radar" and are not given the support services necessary for them to cope with the many changes occurring in their lives during this time period, which clearly highlights the need for strong faculty mentoring programs. As students navigate the challenges of high school, it is imperative that they feel connected to the adults in the school. Such a connection allows them to have a mentor to confide in and a trusted adult to discuss issues in and out of the classroom. It should be the mentor's task to make sure that students are getting whatever assistance they need in order to help them navigate the trials and tribulations of the high school setting.

In fact, current research supports the correlation between more extensive transition activities and students' success in the ninth grade: "The stronger the reported quality of the schools' implementation of transition activities, the fewer students were reported to be struggling in the ninth grade; this suggests that more active and systematic attempts to engage families in the transition could help mitigate the struggles so commonly experienced by ninth grades" (Mac Iver et al., 2015, p. 47). For that reason, it is important to create a system that monitors and keeps track of all incoming ninth grade

students to help them acclimate to the high school setting. This system assists students in finding the path that is most beneficial and supports them in moving forward.

However, the existing programs are frequently undermined by discrepancies between stakeholders' views of transition programs and students' expectations. "These discrepancies could indicate the reasons students have failed to successfully make the transition from middle school to high school in the past and continue to struggle in making this transition" (Wilson, 2011, p. 44). Students "need to know how to achieve success and what others have learned about that process – they need respect while acknowledging their developing maturity – they need the questions answered that they are afraid or do not even know to ask – they need guidance from mature adults and help from older, more experience peers" (Benson, 2009, p. 55). This highlights the need for strong faculty mentoring programs, an example of Social Support theory, during ninth grade.

The particular difficulty that ninth grade students face is that:

> (The) transition from middle to high school disrupts relationships with teachers and peers as students choose or are assigned to different high schools or different courses of study. This occurs at a time when adolescents are becoming more independent from their families and experience less parental involvement in their schooling. For some students, this is liberating; for others, particularly those who have struggled academically, the competitive and impersonal nature of high school takes a negative toll on their performance and behaviors. (Cohen, 2009, 179)

As a result of this disruption in social support and relationships, faculty mentoring programs become even more essential to the success of the transition.

An adolescent is defined as "a young person whose reproductive system has matured, who is economically dependent upon adults, whose chief source of need gratification is his peers. . . and for whom status and roles as defined for children and adults in his culture are confused" (Childress, 2013, p. 20). Furthermore, similar to 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 (Pokorski, 2011, p. 33).

Since the beginning of Covid-19 pandemic, it has become even more essential to ensure that there is a comprehensive transition program. With the creation of hybrid and remote learning models, more students cannot easily build connections to the school and faculty. It is also evident that many students during this time have not been fully participating in academics which will further jeopardize their high school future. Researchers have noted the particular challenge this educational shift has created: "the COVID-19 pandemic has rewritten the script on this critical year, making it a troubling transition for many" (Schneider, 2021, p. 1). "The two big things that they are missing are the collaboration among students and the direct academic, emotional support from teachers" (Schneider, 2021, p. 1). As a result of these changes, faculty mentoring programs during the transition to high school have become even more important.

## Research Questions

The goal of this dissertation will be to answer the following research questions:

***RQ1.*** Is there a statistically significant correlation between the number of hours ninth grade students spent in a faculty mentoring program and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year?

***RQ2.*** Is there a statistically significant correlation between schools that offer a faculty mentoring program and those that do not, and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year?

***RQ3.*** Is there a statistically significant correlation between schools that are classified as economically disadvantaged and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year?

***RQ4.*** How do principals and assistant principals in schools with faculty mentoring programs perceive the characteristics and effectiveness of the programs?

## Research Design and Data Analysis

In this convergent mixed method study, I will analyze the statistical impact of faculty mentoring programs on ninth grade student achievement during the 2018-2019 school year and the characteristics and effectiveness of those programs. I will send a Google form, via email, to the public high school principals and assistant principals in two suburban counties in New York.

I will collect and analyze the following data:

- Number of hours students spent working with a faculty mentor weekly during the 2018-2019 school year.
- Number of ninth grade students who failed a course during the 2018-2019 school year.
- Number of total ninth grade students enrolled in the school during the 2018-2019 school year.
- Percentage of students identified as "economically disadvantaged" by the New York State Education Department in the schools surveyed for the 2018-2019 school year.

**Data Collection**

I will send out the survey via email to high school principals and assistant principals in two suburban counties in New York. The email will contain a link to a Google form. All participants will receive a follow up email 3 weeks later. After 4 weeks, I will collect, code, and analyze the data using SPSS. I will use Linear Regressions and Pearson Coefficients to analyze the data. The dependent variable will be the number of ninth grade students who failed a course in the 2018-2019 academic year. The independent variables will include the number of hours ninth grade students spent with their faculty mentors during the 2018-2019 school year, whether or not schools offered the program, and the percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged according to New York State Education Department. The primary limitation of this study is that I can only analyze data from the 2018-2019 academic year. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic that resulted in school closures beginning in March of 2020, it would be

difficult to assess data from the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years because education changed greatly, with hybrid and remote learning structures taking over from traditional in-person education. These learning structures limited the number of students in physical school buildings, thereby making the transition data less accurate for the purposes of this study.

**Definition of Terms**

*Transition Program*: "a collaborative attempt on the behalf of middle schools to prepare their students for high school. The program "must involve collaboration between eight and ninth grade buildings/personnel (Chen, 2019, p. 2). Programs can include various transition activities that fall under the umbrella of the term transition program.

*Transition Activity*: an event that takes place during the movement from middle school to high school, often continuing throughout freshman year. Transition activities are part of a district's overall transition program.

*Academic Teams*: the most common application of the term **teaming**, which refers to pairing a group of teachers (typically between four and six) with a group of sixty to eighty students (https://www.edglossary.org/teaming/).

*Peer Mentoring*: a program designed to set up a ninth-grade student with an upperclassman, so that incoming students can learn the culture and logistics of the high school from older students (juniors and seniors).

*Faculty Mentoring*: a program designed to set up a ninth-grade student with a faculty mentor, so that incoming students can establish positive relationships with their teachers.

*Freshman Seminar*: A class with "a focus on teaching specific academic and life skills. . . students benefit from activities that demystify rules, expectations, and the layout of the high school" (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014, p. 17).

*Family Engagement*: strategies used by schools to incorporate a student's family in the learning and educational process.

*Economically Disadvantaged*: Economically disadvantaged students are those who participate in, or whose family participates in, economic assistance programs, such as the free or reduced-price lunch programs, Social Security Insurance (SSI), Food Stamps, Foster Care, Refugee Assistance (cash or medical assistance), Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), Safety Net Assistance (SNA), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), or Family Assistance: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). If one student in a family is identified as low income, all students from that household (economic unit) may be identified as low income.

*Advisory Program*: another term used for faculty and peer mentoring programs, often organized in a homeroom setting.

# CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Entering high school is a challenging time in one's life. With all the social, mental, and physical changes that teenagers are going through at the time of their lives they are faced with increased adversity. This increase in adversity facing students lends itself to the creation of strong support networks, the key feature of Social Support theory. Programs such as Freshman Academy, Parent Engagement, Peer Mentoring and Faculty Mentoring allow students to develop key relationships and build a support structure to assist them when they are faced with the challenges often associated with high school. "One important function that relationships serve is to support thriving through adversity, not only by buffering individuals from the negative effects of stress, but also by helping them to emerge from the stressor in a way that enables them to flourish either because of or despite their circumstances" (Feeney & Collins, 2015, p. 6).

## School Organization

Most high schools across the country operate in a similar manner. They are frequently large, crowded, compartmentalized, and surely overwhelming to most of the student body. It is evident that many "high schools are organized in ways that are counterproductive to promoting caring relationships and a deep sense of belonging (Ellerbrock, 2010, p. 393). The size of schools plays a negative part in the transition process because "research on school size seems to suggest large high schools are not as effective as previously thought, proposing that smaller school environments might be better at meeting the needs of today's students" (Kmiec, 2007, p. 25).

There are many challenges that students encounter as they enter high school. For instance, “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” (Pokorski, 2011, p. 28). This demonstrates the need for strong supportive relationships, using the Social Support Theory.

Currently in the United States “over 70% of American high schools serve over 1,000 students, and 50% enroll over 1,500 students” (Kmiec, 2007, p. 25). In the context of students working in such a large, populated building, “school environments typically highlight departmentalization, teacher-centered pedagogy, competition, and strict student control which can pose problems for incoming students” (Kmiec, 2007, p. 181). Researchers underline that what the schools prioritize can lead to some students feeling alone and facing the daunting challenges of high school on their own. “As freshmen experience this newfound freedom, they are unaware of high school requirements, which include strict discipline policies, grading procedures and accountability” (Coley, 2015, p. 10). Moreover, in many school districts, these problems are compounded by students moving into a large and unfamiliar centralized high school building where many ninth-grade high school students reporting feelings of getting lost (Pokorski, 2011, p. 29). It is also quite evident that “practitioners are forced to address concerns that high schools have become too impersonal to adequately attend to students, especially during the difficult time of adolescence. Powerful changes in society have occurred over the last few decades that necessitate the need for high schools to reevaluate their approach to education” (Wiegand, 2003, p. 5).

Most schools are curriculum and assessment-based, certainly as we have seen with the movement towards increased standardized testing. Ideally, this should lead to a discussion regarding whether schools are best meeting the current and future needs of students as a society across the country. It is evident that "high school of the 21st century must be much more student-centered and, above all, much more personalized in programs, support services, and intellectual rigor" (Wiegand, 2003, p. 29). At the moment, many schools allow incoming freshmen students to navigate the challenges and figure out the nuances and complexities of the high school setting. "Counselors, teachers, and administrators distribute schedules to freshman, conduct a short orientation and building tour, and later allow the incoming freshman to run free into the high school building, with their schedules in hand" (Coley, 2015, p. 11), as previously referenced in the case study.

It is also apparent that since many school districts operate with a large number of students , there are several school transitions that must take place to accommodate the entire student body. "Dropout rates were higher in schools with two transitions (fifth to sixth and eighth to ninth) when compared to one transition (K-8 to ninth) (Alspaugh, 1998, p. 23). Moreover, Butts (2011) pointed out that "highest dropout rates were in eleventh grade in all high schools studied (7-12, 9- 12, and 10-12). The lowest dropout rate was in the schools with only one school-to- school transition (K-6 to 7-12)" (p. 16).

As I have shown above, it is evident that the high school transition is a challenge for many students, which is why so many students need additional resources from school personnel. "Many students need support and guidance to remain on track and

successfully complete high school. Unfortunately, many students report that high schools do not offer enough guidance and social support opportunities" (Kmiec, 2007, p. 28). It is also the reason "schools must be concerned about establishing a positive sense of community within their physical structures because of the high probability that "students transfer the interpersonal skills and attitudes they learn in school to their relationships with other individuals and groups as members of the larger society" (Schulte, p. 2). It is clear that schools must better serve student needs and foster a sense of a community.

Research has shown that students who are perceived to lack drive and motivation to be successful in the ninth grade "were a result of a mismatch between their needs and their school environment. Schools that support adolescent developmental needs help students make the transition to their new school (Kmiec, 2007, p. 181). Introducing effective transition programs which will be beneficial to all students would help them meet the needs of their students. "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" (Pokorski, 2011, p. 6) By creating and maintaining strong faculty and peer mentoring programs, in agreement with the Social Support Theory, students would be assisted in their progress towards life goals following high school.

**Students at Risk**

In the complex issue of the middle school to high school transition, schools must focus on how to identify the students who are most at risk of facing challenges.

According to various researchers, “approximately 40 percent of the dropouts could be identified using grade, attendance, and behavioral indicators as early as sixth grade” (Neild, 2009, p. 60). For students who fit certain criteria and might be considered “at-risk” during the transition, “educators may want to consider more intensive targeted interventions. These students would benefit from meeting individually with the school counselor or with teachers with whom these students have positive relationships” (Akos & Galassi, 2004, p. 17). Various researchers point out the reasons for students dropping out of school:

> 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, et al., 2007), have little or no parental support at home for succeeding or even attending school (Archambault et al., 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). (Pokorski, 2011, p. 2)

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 (Pokorski, 2011, p. 28). The highest dropout rate occurs as students attempt to make the transition to high school during the ninth-grade year (Pokorski, 2011, p. 97).

One of the most crucial markers of academic success is steady attendance: students need to be in school in order to be successful academically. Numerous studies have demonstrated this correlation between school attendance and academic success:

> Absences at the middle school and high school levels have a significant and similar impact on high school completion; students who missed an average of zero to five days of school in the seventh, eighth, or ninth grades graduated at rates of 65% to 69%. Graduation rates dropped 40% for students who averaged 10 to 20 days of absences, and further dropped between 17% to 24 % for students who were absent 21 days or more. (as cited in Heppen & Therriault, 2008, p. 3). (Coley, 2015, p. 19).

It has been "suggested that middle school students who receive even one of the following four signals have a high risk of not completing high school: a final grade of F in mathematics, a final grade of F in English, an attendance rate below 80% for the year, an 'unsatisfactory' behavior mark in at least one class" (Montgomery, 2012, p. 247).

Another serious indicator of student success is the level of education achieved by a student's parents:

> students most likely to leave without completing high school often live in single-parent homes, live in low-income households, have parents or brothers or sisters who dropped out of high school, do not speak English well, have repeated one or more grades, have behavioral problems in school, and are absent frequently (Montogmery, 2012, p. 247)

**Transition Activities**

There are multiple activities that high schools employ to transition students from middle school to high school, all designed to build connections and a supportive network

of relationships for students to utilize during their transition to high school. These include but are not limited to: summer orientation; peer mentoring; faculty mentoring; freshman academies; parent outreach programs. Coley (2015) stated that "students who participate in transition programs have a lower risk of course failure and dropout than those who do not participate in such programs" (p. 24). Research suggests "that a strong transition program that includes at least three activities targeted to decrease students' procedural, social, and academic-related concerns can help support students during the move" (Ellerbrock, 2010, p. 14).

Consequently, a school's lack of attention to transition has an adverse effect: "schools with relatively weaker transition activities reported a higher proportion of more struggling students" (Mac Iver et al., 2015, p. 40). Schools that have "two or fewer transition practices had higher attrition and dropout rates than those with three or more" (McIntosh & White, 2006, p. 41). Moreover, Kmiec (2007) has pointed out that "schools with comprehensive transition support structures in place report a decrease in student retention, higher student grades, and fewer students dropping out of school (p. 32). This is significant because it demonstrates that "active and systematic attempts to engage families in the transition could help mitigate the struggles so commonly experienced by ninth graders, particularly in high-poverty high schools" (Mac Iver et al., 2015, p. 40). That being said, unfortunately, many schools still do not develop comprehensive transition programs to assist their students as they prepare for high school: "High school educators report using only a few practices to support their incoming ninth-grade students during this critical period" (Ellerbrock, 2015, p. 393)

Numerous researchers have shown that activities that connect students to the school, and to the adults in the school, are quite beneficial: "Students benefit from activities that demystify rules, expectations, and the layout of the high school. Opportunities to build supportive relationships with teachers and peers (Social Support Theory) are also important" (Ellerbrock, 2015, p. 14). A transition is not a one-time event and should not be treated as such. Often the transition process is focused on and mostly limited to the freshman orientation where students receive their schedule and tour the school building in the summer. Schools may perceive orientation as a singular event that allows students to move into high school. However, many "researchers have suggested that the transition is a process that begins at some point during middle school and extends throughout ninth grade and possibly beyond (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009, p. 180). Therefore, it is of fundamental importance that transition programs "include activities that provide incoming students social support: activities that give students the opportunity to get to know and develop positive relationships with older students and other incoming students" (Butts, 2011, p. 10). Moore (2009) emphasizes the importance of a successful transition experience by stating that "if a student does not have a good experience, that freshman year, the decision to drop out of high school is either consciously or subconsciously made at that time" (Moore, 2009, p. 1).

It is imperative for schools to begin the transition as early as possible, certainly before the students enter high school. This process, which typically commences in the spring/summer, should begin in middle school, and continue throughout the summer before students enter high school: "A supportive middle school environment coupled

with a solid transition program into a developmentally appropriate high school can help ease the middle to high school transition and keep students in school" (Kmiec, 2007, p. 32). A comprehensive transition program can show that:

> dropout rates were significantly lower in schools with explicit transition programs (Hertzog & Morgan, 2001). Transition programs should have multiple opportunities for students and families to discuss, explore and experience academic, social, and organizational similarities and differences between middle school and high school, (Butts, 2011, p. 37)

**Why Students Drop Out**

As expected, the movement to high school can be a tumultuous event in the life of a student. Therefore, "it is not surprising that immediate experiences of the high school transition would be associated with heightened states of loneliness, anxiety, and depression" (Benner, 2011, p. 310). Unlike a student's previous academic career where a course could be failed without overly serious repercussions, "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" (Pokorski, 2011, p. 28). This greater level of pressure along with the increased academic rigor can lead to a student failing a course and struggling through the transition to high school. According to researchers Kennelly and Monrad (2007), there has been a sharp increase in the number of students enrolled in the ninth-grade over the last 30 years, indicating that an increasing number of students are being retained, and the rate at which students disappear between ninth and tenth grade

has tripled over the same period (Coley, 2015, p. 10). Kennelly and Monrad (2007) also stated that

> 40% of freshmen fail to meet requirements to be promoted from ninth grade to tenth grade in the first year of high school; less than 20% of those students recover from their ninth-grade failure and do not go on to graduate. The transition to high school has gained massive attention due to increased high school dropout rates (Williamston, 2010). (Coley, 2015, p. 18)

It is imperative to have a comprehensive transition program that ensures that all students are kept on track by building a connection to their school and teachers/peers, one of the key features of Social Support Theory. According to the Breakthrough Collaborative (2011), "failure to graduate high school is strongly associated with ninth grade course failure. Research shows that between 70% and 80% of students who fail courses in the first year will not graduate from high school" (Coley, 2015, p. 24). In addition to not preparing students for life after high school, this can obviously cause, a huge strain on the country and its resources. "High school dropouts are more likely to be unemployed, on public assistance, in prison, or enrolled in adult education and training, thereby putting significant strain on funds earmarked for domestic programs (Cohen, 2009, p. 178).

If students fail to achieve success in their freshman year of high school, they are facing an uphill battle the rest of their academic careers. Since ninth grade is a steep change in the academic rigor students are accustomed to, they need to be successful

moving forward. Evidence suggests that "students taking five courses and failing one class increased the probability of not graduating by one third" (Childress, 2013, p. 24).

There currently exist four dominant theories regarding why ninth grade is the most challenging year for students overall. The first theory is "that ninth grade coincides with life-course changes, such as reduced parental supervision and increased peer influence" (Neild, 2009, p. 22). The second and third theories discuss the fact that ninth graders break the bond they have with middle school teachers and peers, and that they might be inadequately prepared for high school. The final theory is quite important; it claims, "that the organization of some high schools is itself a major source of students' difficulty" (Neild, 2009, p. 22).

An increase in the number of school to school transitions within a school district is associated with an increase in the high school dropout rates: "As enrollment per attendance center increases, there is a tendency for school districts to create more intermediate level schools, thus increasing the number of school-to-school transitions"; as a result, both "school size and school to school transitions may be working jointly to increase high school dropout rates" (Alspaugh, 1998, p. 33). Districts should analyze the number of school-to-school transitions that exist within their organizations to see if the transition process to high school can be eased. Districts would have to commit multiple financial resources to organize their schools to reduce the number of school-to-school transitions. As Kathleen Cauley states, "schools can do a better job of preparing students for the challenges ahead," and should also:

> review the development needs and challenges of young adolescents and the concerns that they and their parents have about moving into a new school – then we consider how transition programs can address the characteristics of effective transition programs that have been identified in the literature and present activities that may help schools with transition services. (Cauley, 2006, p. 17)

For this reason, it is necessary that:

> middle and high school educators strategically implement transition supports – programs and transition courses – that address the procedural, social, and academic aspects of the move in a responsive way by attending to students' basic and developmental needs and transition-related concerns. Students themselves must perceive these supports as truly meeting their needs and addressing their concerns in order to foster a developmentally responsive move. (Ellerbrock, 2015, p.7)

Studying "stakeholder perception toward ninth grade expectations and student perceived self-efficacy, yield(s) insight into what further steps could be taken to help all transitioning first time ninth graders to succeed and remain on track for on-time graduation?" (Wilson, 2011, p. 25). Statistics and data show that we are losing more and more disengaged and disenfranchised students every year in America: "the ninth-grade year may be the pivotal year for many students; making sure students experience success during this academic year may determine whether or not they graduate and receive a high school diploma" (Wilson, 2011, p. 25). "These discrepancies could indicate the reasons

students have failed to successfully make the transition from middle school to high school in the past and continue to struggle in making this transition" (Wilson, 2011, p. 25).

Effective middle to high school transition programs are comprehensive and ongoing, with activities scheduled throughout students' last year of middle school, through the summer, and into their first year of high school (Ellerbrock, 2014, p.7). I suggested programs based on research are "student tours, hosting a high school informational session, plan for middle school students to shadow ninth grade students, hold orientation, have eighth grade students follow the high school bell schedule for a period of time, arrange for a high school mentor, collaboration between eighth and ninth grade teachers, and upperclassmen serve as tutors for eighth grade students" (Ellerbrock, 2014, p. 7).

Another option that could assist in the transition process would be to create a freshman seminar course, similar to ones offered by many colleges and universities. "A focus on teaching specific academic and life skills, whether through a ninth-grade transition course or infused in coursework at the middle level, can also foster a smooth middle to high school transition – students benefit from activities that demystify rules, expectations, and the layout of the high school" (Ellerbrock, 2014, p. 17).

**Family Engagement**

The National Association for Family, School, and Community Engagement (NAFSCE) defines family engagement as a "shared responsibility in which schools and other community agencies and organizations are committed to reaching out to engage

families in meaningful ways and in which families are committed to actively supporting their children's learning and development" (www.nafsce.org). The NAFSCE advocates the use of high impact strategies of family engagement that schools can use, such as building personal relationships, sharing data regarding student skill level, demonstrating effective teaching practices so they can be used at home, and gleaning information from families regarding student interests and challenges. "While the transition to high school from middle school presents many challenges for students, these challenges are exacerbated for students without proper support at home. Research shows that "organization in the home also may help to reduce stress and flux in the child's or adolescent's life outside of school and thus contribute to academic success in this manner as well" (Montgomery, 2012, p. 247). As Social Support Theory states, "it is clear that "supportive relationships with parents, friends, and school are positively linked with adolescents' academic success and their socioemotional well-being (Benner, 2011, p. 2131). It is also evident that "family involvement is influenced by the actions of teachers, principals, and other school leaders, and should be considered an important aspect of teacher and administrators' professional roles and responsibilities" (Mac Iver, 2015, p. 29). Communication with parents is of paramount importance to assist students and their families, and it has academic benefits as well as overall improved communication. "Parental support and active involvement in their child's education are an important predictor of a student's academic success" (Pokorski, 2011, p. 35).

> Parental involvement in their child's education is often determined through the presence of specific parent behaviors: aspiring 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. (Pokorski, 2011, p. 35)

Those 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 (Pokorski, 2011, p. 36).

As previously mentioned, family involvement in the students' lives assists them in the overall transition to high school. It is reported that schools that reach out to parents and encourage them to become active participants in their child's education have higher rates of parental involvement, resulting in lower dropout rates, higher achievement, and smoother transitions (Coley, 2015, p. 32). In preparing for the middle to high school transition process, "parents should be well informed about details of the transition process, privy to curricular and course decisions that their child makes, and part of the planning for future articulation activities" (Cohen, 2011, p. 182). Parents who monitor their students' activities, evaluate possible problems, and intervene positively (school work, peer networks, and direct participation with the school) have students who made the transition to high school successfully (Butts, 2011, p. 11). Moreover, when parents are involved in their students' transition to high school, they tend to stay involved in their

child's high school experiences (Mac Iver, 1990) and when parents are involved in their child's high school experiences, students achieve more (Butts, 2011, p. 35). Three types of parental participation have been cited as beneficial to students in their transition to high school, including the following:

> Active involvement in school work (tutoring, help with projects continuous encouragement, helping them overcome emotional distress from being overwhelmed); nesting the teen in a desirable peer network (enrollment in activities prior to high school which allows the student to be accepted into various high school peer groups); and direct participation in the school (course selection, extra-curriculars, active communication with teachers/counselors, booster clubs, chaperones). For a student to be successful, parents had to engage in at least two of these kinds of interventions. (Butts, 2011, p. 35)

Often, schools only reach out to parents if the need arises or when there is an issue that needs to be addressed. A 2011 study of parent groups found that:

> high schools participating in the joint United Way-Harvard Family Engagement Project (2011) Pilot Study in eight districts across the country indicated that, at the outset, parents felt unwelcomed by high schools; reported lack of sufficient communication from the schools about course and credit requirements each year and timely information on student progress; lacked information and capacity to help students with high school coursework; and had other logistical difficulties in connecting with the school because of their work schedules, transportation problems, and childcare needs. (Mac Iver et al., 2015, p. 29)

It is the responsibility of both the middle and high schools to foster a sense of open communication with parents. Open lines of communication allow all parties to have a dialogue about the potential challenges and pitfalls of a student's transition to high school. Researchers have shown that "only transition practices that included parents, school staff, and students—a three-way orientation—had a positive effect on student outcomes in the transition to high school" (Mac Iver et al., 2015, p. 29). Open lines of communication between schools and families have many benefits, among them being that "schools that improved the quality of their family partnership programs from one year to the next, decreased the number of disciplinary actions with students (e.g., suspensions, detentions). (Mac Iver et al., 2015, p. 30). There is a direct correlation between family outreach by the schools and student overall success. Mac Iver et al. (2015) showed that "the stronger the reported quality of the schools' implementation of transition activities, the fewer students were reported to be struggling in the ninth grade" (p. 40).

There are several methods of engagement that schools can use:

> Engagement extends to encouraging students to accept and identify with the role of student, anticipate high school graduation, and plan for the future. By understanding the importance of the transition to high school and requirements for promotion from grade 9 to grade 10 and to the upper grades, more parents can extend instrumental goal-linked engagement activities with encouraging messages, high expectations, positive communications, and positive parenting of adolescents. (Mac Iver et al., 2015, p. 41)

According to Mac Iver et al. (2015), " it is crucial for middle and high schools to enlist and equip families as allies in supporting student success" (Mac Iver, 2015, p. 41). Therefore, "active and systematic attempts to engage families in the transition could help mitigate the struggles so commonly experienced by ninth grades" (Mac Iver, 2015, seep. 41). Students who have a high amount of familial support are much more likely to succeed in a school setting during the transition to high school. The main issue is to regularly engage families and support systems to assist all students, so that they might have success.

**Freshman Academy**

A common strategy employed by districts across the country to assist students in the transition from middle to high school is the formation of a Freshman Academy. "The freshman academy, also called ninth grade academy or ninth grade center, is a specialized small learning community that is usually housed within a larger, comprehensive high school, although there are a few freshman academies that are housed in a building separate from the rest of the high school population" (Fulco, 2009, p. 5).

In this communal setting, incoming students all have the same teachers and support staff and are scheduled in the same classes or cohort, allowing them to develop the support structure needed to thrive in the high school setting. "Through the use of a cohort style of organization teachers have lower numbers of students with whom they have daily contact. This type of arrangement also creates a compromise between the desire for personalization and teachers' subject expertise" (Wiegand, 2003, p. 27). There are many benefits to this approach, which include the following: "it encourages a more

student-centered focus, improved academic achievement, improved attendance and behavior, and improved sense of community among professionals" (Wiegand, 2003, p. 30). Among the advantages to using this practice during the transition process is "that it supports the ability to provide a smaller learning community, an increased level of personalization, and interdisciplinary instruction" (Wiegand, 2003, p. 87). Pokorski (2011) also claims that "the organization of a specific location or space for ninth-grade students has a monumental positive effect on their learning success" (p. 29). Often, schools using the freshman academy approach dedicate a certain portion of their school building to ninth grade or a separate building entirely.

> 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. (Pokorski, 2011, p. 30)

In addition to the academic benefits of the Freshman Academy there are social benefits. For example, "students that are grouped together with same-aged peers within the school setting report positive social bonding (Pokorski, 2011, p. 97). This also serves to help teachers to prepare students for the post high school world they will encounter. "Teacher teams differentiate instruction, often create interdisciplinary lessons, and implement a student- and career-focused rigorous curriculum aimed at helping students achieve academic success in ninth grade and beyond" (Kmiec, 2007, p. 34). Teachers noted that:

> reinforcing common strategies such as reading and note taking, taking an active role in knowing what was going on in other team teachers' classrooms, and checking up on students' progress in other classes. Additionally, because teachers knew their teammates' weekly agendas, teachers reported being able to adjust their course work to better balance students' workloads. (Kmiec, 2007, p. 80)

Focusing on collaborative teaching and teaming allows teachers to develop bonds and connections with their colleagues and their students. These connections allow both teachers and students to feel a sense of pride and bonding with their school. This allows for the development of faculty mentoring programs. Research demonstrates that

> student learning growth was greater at high schools that implemented greater numbers of "reform" practices, such as common planning time for teachers, schools-within-a-school, interdisciplinary teaching teams, and a cooperative learning focus, than at schools with more traditional practices. (Neild, 2009, p. 63)

A suggestion is that there is a creation of a transition team, which includes teachers, administrators, and support personnel from middle school and high school. "Effective transition programs bring middle school and high school educators together by incorporating planned activities, providing information to families and students, and socially supporting the students during transition planning" (Coley, 2015, p. 24). Transition teams can be involved in such activities as "registration activities conducted by ninth-grade counselors, parent nights, mentoring programs, shadow experience, etc.

Cooperative learning and academic teams had “a significant positive effect on ninth grade student success” (Marshall, 1995, p. 20). The key concepts that need to be understood are that “the individuals most likely to drop out before completing the ninth grade are those who have had attendance, discipline, and/or academic problems in the past, possibly from the beginning of their school careers” (Marshall, 1995, p. 20). Students who encounter difficulty and failure in the ninth grade are playing “catch-up” the rest of their high school careers, thus leading to an increased likelihood that they will fail to graduate from high school. However, providing students with additional support will lead to increased performance in the ninth grade, which will lead to further success during their high school careers.

Despite changes in both student demographics and in society, many high schools have experienced few curriculum, administrative, or structural changes since the latter part of the 1ninth century” (Kmiec, 2007, p. 32). This is key because many districts are organized around these structures, but many schools are reluctant to make the adequate changes necessary to successfully implement programs that will guarantee success. The main conclusions reached are that freshman academies where team teaching occurred was very beneficial and “teaming and common planning appeared to create opportunities for increased teacher communication, collaboration, and opportunities to help individual students” (Kmiec 2007, p. 32). Additionally, “interdisciplinary teaching teams are noted as being the “hallmark” of the success of freshman academies, requiring a major change in the organization and curriculum typically found in traditional high schools” (Kmiec,

2007, p. 32). Incorporating such teams in the transition process would allow each student to have multiple faculty mentors.

As we move towards teaching students to grasp concepts on a deeper level, it is necessary to incorporate interdisciplinary teaching. Assumptions are that school leaders have the necessary skills to successfully implement programs that create academic teams to assist students in transitioning from middle school to high school. However, in reality, professional development for administrators incorporating programs such as these is quite imperative. "Practitioners need to continually investigate options that will assist all students in reaching their potential and in doing so need to have insight in to practices and procedures that have been found to be effective" (Wiegand, 2002, p. 24).

McIntosh (2006) focused on the creation of a freshman wing concept at a large, comprehensive high school in Ohio. McIntosh determined that "success or failure during the freshman year sets the tone for a student's entire high school career, if a student is a successful during that freshman year, there is a great likelihood that the student will not only graduate from high school but will also enjoy the high school experience" (McIntosh, 2006, p. 55). Also, McIntosh (2006) claimed that teacher "teaming has opened doors for teachers to have meaningful discussions regarding pedagogy as well as student behavior and academic performance" (p. 57). Based on the experience of the Freshman Wing, McIntosh showed that eventually the amount of freshman who failed courses declined, which the author attributed to the creation of team teaching and the Freshman Wing. By moving towards a freshman academy model, the creation of a faculty mentoring program becomes less cumbersome logistically.

**Peer Mentoring**

As evidenced by the Social Support Theory, students transition to high school concerned about the ability to fit in with an older, unfamiliar group of peers. Therefore, building strong support networks is of paramount importance to their success. A peer mentoring program is designed to pair incoming ninth grade students with older students (juniors and seniors) who serve as mentors. These mentors are usually chosen by the faculty and staff of the high school and are high character, positive role models for ninth graders. Some ways to begin a peer mentoring program include "meetings, letter-writing, and a picnic with older students-received fewer failing grades and missed fewer days of school than students who did not participate in such programs" (Butts, 2011, p. 10). A concern educators might have about new students entering high school is that students are "attending large classes with unfamiliar students from other middle schools throughout a school district" (Pokorski, 2011, p. 30). The lack of familiar faces among students or teachers "may also contribute to feelings of isolation and confusion potentially resulting in frequent absences and academic failure because it seems no one cares" (Pokorski, 2011, p. 30). When moving to high school, students find themselves in the position to meet new friends and create new peer groups. While this situation can be a positive, it is also perhaps a cause for consternation: "The disruption of their social network makes incoming ninth-grade students more susceptible to harmful peer influences during the middle-to-high-school transition" (Kmiec, 2007, p. 28).

To offset the feeling of isolation in the new environment, high schools should offer opportunities for incoming ninth graders to establish new, positive social networks

(Social Support Theory) and to work on developing a sense of belonging to their new school (Kmiec, 2007). Scholars have noted that it is especially difficult for students to transition and leave their peer groups that have previously been established through elementary and middle school. Moreover, they felt isolation due to being the youngest and least experienced, and thus lacking in the skills of successfully fitting in: "Students talked about being younger and much smaller than their upperclassman peers. They worried about being bullied and sitting at the wrong lunch table. Students believed they were lost in among the upperclassman student culture" (Kmiec, 2007, p. 67) As one can imagine, students "begin to exhibit lower self-esteem and fears about new social situations that involve older students, effectively budgeting their time, and coping with increased academic stress" (Cohen et al., 2009, p. 179).

One aspect of peer mentoring that has proven to be quite beneficial has been the creation of student panels where incoming students are able to discuss the pitfalls that older students have encountered during their transition to high school. Letrello and Miles (2003) found that student-to-student talks were the most important in reducing transition tensions. These discussions often assist the incoming students in making them feel more comfortable upon entry to high school. After discussions with older students, "the number of eighth graders feeling "comfortable" or "very comfortable" regarding the upcoming transition rose from 31.67% to 53.22%. Furthermore, the number of students feeling "very anxious" or "anxious" dropped from 28.33% to 16.14%" (Benson, 2009, p. 32). It is common for faculty and staff to provide the most assistance to students during this period of time; however, their peers may provide insight into such elements of high

school culture which the adults would not necessarily consider: “transitioning students perceived the most help from high school students rather than from adults. Of the surveyed eighth-grade students, 85.48% reported that discussions with high school students, formally or informally, helped them the most” (Benson, 2009, p. 32).

According to Butts (2011), in addition to the panel and informal discussions between upper classmen and incoming students, a more formal peer mentoring program has also been shown to be effective.

> Monahan (1992) employed the concept of assigning upper class “buddies” to accompany and aid the newly entering students. Akos and Galassi (2004) referred to research (Felner et al., 1993) that reported that students had a more positive transition experience (as reflected by academic, socio-emotional, and behavioral measures) in schools that had modified their social environments to increase a sense of belonging than in schools that had not. (Butts, 2011, p. 10)

It is vital for a transition program to include activities that will “provide incoming students social support activities that give students the opportunity to get to know and develop positive relationships with older students and other incoming students (Butts, 2011, p. 18). Peer mentoring can also help students avoid troubling behaviors that might increase with the transition to high school. “The reduction of parental supervision and support, accompanied by the increase in peer influence that characterizes adolescence, may result in increased risk-taking behaviors and declining academic performance” (Neild, 2009, p. 58). Peer mentoring programs also can be seen as “increasing levels of friend support and school belonging across the high school transition were associated

with better socioemotional functioning for students as they made the transition from middle to high school" (Benner, 2011, p. 2138). These types of programs allow students to develop positive peer relationships, which will also greatly influence the ability for students to stay in school. "Adolescents whose perceived peer conflict declined across the high school transition were more likely to be in school in 12th grade, whereas adolescents whose peer relationships remained relatively unchanged across the transition were more likely to have dropped out" (Benner, 2011, p. 312). As such, "students who embraced a positive school identity and rejected the negative influences of their peers were more likely to persist in school" (Benner, 2011, p. 312). Working with peer mentors allows students the ability to foster a feeling of connection to both fellow students and their school as a whole.

When students don't feel as if they fit in to the school, certain issues may arise, such as:

> A lack of belongingness has been associated with incidence of mental and physical illness, behavior problems, teen suicide, violence in schools, loneliness, delinquency, withdrawal, aggression, drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, depression, drop outs, teen pregnancy, vandalism, diminished motivation, and poor academic performance. (Schulte, p. 2)

Overall, a sense of school community and belonging makes students feel more comfortable. "It should also be noted that of all the support processes, school belonging appeared to play the most prominent buffering role, influencing positive transition

experiences in relation to students' depressive symptoms, loneliness, and school engagement" (Benner, 2017, p. 2138).

Langenkamp (2010) focused particularly on low-achieving middle school students as they transition to a high school setting. Some key questions the researcher addressed included the following: does the maintenance of middle school social ties protect students from low academic outcomes during the transition to high school? do protective effects of middle school social relationships convey to low-achieving middle school students? and does district context (in terms of feeder pattern) predict achievement after transition? Students' "middle school social relationships and the context of the transition contribute to academic vulnerability – low math course placement and course failure – in the first year of high school" (Langenkamp, 2010, p. 25). In addition to providing transitional support for middle school students moving to high school, we must recognize the importance of peer-to-peer relationships in academic success.

Langenkamp concluded that "students who fail after a transition are especially at risk for school disengagement and dropout and identifying circumstances in which failure may be alleviated is a critical step in the promotion of academic persistence and success" (Langenkamp, 2010, p. 25). This is especially true for low academic performers. Obviously, the more support the students receive outside of school, the more likely they will be to achieve success. School administration should consider:

> the ways districts organize and funnel students as they move through their academic trajectories which have the potential to provide opportunity or exacerbate vulnerable students' weaknesses as they make the transition to high

> school. Providing ways for students to form new social ties with prosocial peers and teachers in their receiving schools will likely ease their transition to high school. (Langenkamp, 2010, p. 26)

**Faculty Mentoring**

Social Support Theory is key to developing relationships between students and their faculty mentors. It is also true that faculty mentoring programs allow for the development of supportive relationships which "help people thrive by promoting engagement in opportunities that enable them to enhance their positive well-being by broadening and building resources and finding purpose and meaning in life" (Feeney, 2015, p. 9).

Faculty mentoring programs also benefit the faculty mentor. Being a mentor allows faculty to feel connected to their students and "research indicates that small acts of care can have a profound impact on personal and relationship well-being" (Feeney, 2015, p. 12). Mentoring relationships are even more essential for students, however:

> if they experience reduced anxiety, increased feelings of security and hope, reduced autonomic reactivity to stress, positive coping, increased motivation to face adversity and then rebuild, problem resolution, and increased trust/closeness after interacting with significant others when distressed, then these experiences should, over time, contribute to thriving in terms of enhanced prospects for good mental and physical health, relationship growth/prosperity, and both hedonic and eudemonic well-being. (Feeney, 2015, p. 20)

One of the main arguments in favor of creating a teacher mentor program is that "a student's perception of his or her teacher greatly affected his or her self-perceptions and their academic performance" (Wilson, 2011, p. 107). "Kids need adults other than their parents, the teacher-student relationship is a very important one. When they feel alienated, they are not going to perform as well" (SchneiderN, 2021, p.1). This is demonstrated by the fact that "interpersonal social support process is predicted to have an important influence on immediate and relational outcomes that are both personal and interpersonal in nature – and these personal and relational outcomes are posited to influence future responses to life adversities and opportunities" (Feeney & Collins, 2015, p. 34)

A teacher mentoring program consists of faculty and staff who volunteer to serve as mentors to an incoming ninth grade student or a group of students throughout the school year. Often, a student is paired with a teacher that the student has for an academic subject. Teachers meet with students for mentoring outside of their assigned class period. This extra time with the teachers also assists them in remaining in school, as "half of high school dropouts blame their decision to leave school on not getting along with their teacher" (Pokorski, 2011, p. 4). According to Pokorski (2011), 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" (p. 5). According to another 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" (Pokorski, 2011, p. 34). Pokorski describes many benefits to providing teacher mentors to incoming students:

> 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. Students will emulate the behaviors they witness in their teachers. (Pokorski, 2011, p. 34)

When their work is combined with a peer mentoring program, faculty mentors provide students with an opportunity to "forge positive relationships with new sets of teachers and peers (or maintain positive relationships with friends from middle school who transition with them to high school), it is not surprising that this would ease the socioemotional burden of negotiating this school transition" (Benner, 2011, p. 2138). In addition to providing students with routine transition information regarding schedules and lockers, teachers can also provide positive interactions which is beneficial to students, especially due to the fact that many have preconceived negative views towards teachers on the high school level:

> adolescents perceive lower support and caring from their high school teachers and principals as compared with their middle school educators (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Reyes et al., 1994; Seidman et al., 1996), and they rate their high school teachers, counselors, and administrators as less helpful than those at their middle schools (Reyes et al., 1994; Smith et al., 2008). Newman et al. (2000) found that

> adolescents' reports of teacher relations varied, although more students had increasingly negative (rather than positive) feelings about their teachers across the high school transition. (Benner, 2011, p. 312)

Faculty mentors and students acquiring a more positive view of teachers will help students that are struggling the most. Social Support Theory and faculty mentoring programs help address the fact that "all adolescents experienced increased depression across the transition, this increase was not as severe for adolescents with the most positive views of their teachers' supportiveness" (Barber & Olsen, 2004). The quicker the intervention and ability to create a relationship with students, the better the overall outcome. "Although disengaged adolescents reported that teachers did not intervene when they began getting off track, particularly in relation to school attendance, resilient adolescents reported seeking help from teachers when they experienced transition disruptions" (Benner, 2011, p. 315). It is also evident "that the teacher–student relationship established between an adult and an adolescent determines, to a large extent, the degree to which students feel cared for and part of their school community" (Ellerbrock, 2015, p. 394). Overall, the biggest argument for creating a teacher mentor program is that "a student's perception of his or her teacher greatly affected his or her self-perceptions and their academic performance" (Wilson, 2011, p. 107). "Kids need adults other than their parents, the teacher-student relationship is a very important one. When they feel alienated, they are not going to perform as well" (Schneider, 2021, p.1). Unfortunately, few school districts are willing to commit the resources needed to make a mentor program a success (Adelman & Taylor, 2006).

As evidenced by Social Support Theory, all individuals have the need to belong and to form relationships with others, which can be provided by a strong faculty mentoring program. Croninger and Lee (2001) suggested that supportive relationships between teachers and students, which they define as social capital, result in a nearly 50% reduction in the probability of students dropping out of high school. Most mentor programs do offer two critical components: one-on-one personal advisement and a place for group interaction between the mentor or mentors and a number of students. Faculty mentoring programs with all high school students, especially freshmen, are quite beneficial. Social Support Theory demonstrates that "supportive adult relationships have shown to increase students' perceptions of school and reduce the number of misconducts for Latino students" (Brewster & Bowen, 2004). The benefits to effective faculty mentoring programs for students are demonstrated in that "there is a positive correlation between supportive adult relationships and school engagement and a negative correlation between supportive relationships and other risk factors (Woodley & Bowen, 2007). Converse and Lignugaris/Kraft (2009) found that students paired with a teacher within their school for a mentor program reported higher levels of school connectedness and had fewer office referrals.

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

## Hypotheses/Specific Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is a statistically significant correlation between the number of hours ninth grade students spent in a faculty mentoring program, the percentage of economically disadvantaged students, the number of hours students spent in a faculty mentoring program, and the number of ninth grade students who failed a course in the ninth grade during the 2018-2019 school year. After conducting the analysis, I will be able to answer the following research questions:

***RQ1.*** Is there a statistically significant correlation between the number of hours ninth grade students spent in a faculty mentoring program and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year?

***RQ2.*** Is there a statistically significant correlation between schools that offer a faculty mentoring program and those that do not and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year?

***RQ3.*** Is there a statistically significant correlation between schools the percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged in a school and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year?

***RQ4.*** How do principals and assistant principals in schools with faculty mentoring programs perceive the characteristics and effectiveness of the programs?
The following describes the null and the alternate hypotheses for this study:

***RQ1.*** Is there a statistically significant correlation between the number of hours ninth grade students spent in a faculty mentoring program and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year?

> ***$H_0$1.*** There is no statistically significant correlation between the number of hours ninth grade students spent in a faculty mentoring program and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year.
>
> ***$H_A$1.*** There is a statistically significant correlation between the number of hours ninth grade students spent in a faculty mentoring program and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year.

***RQ2.*** Is there a statistically significant correlation between schools that offer faculty mentoring programs and those that do not, and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year?

> ***$H_0$2.*** There is no statistically significant correlation between schools that offer a faculty mentoring program and those that do not, and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year.
>
> ***$H_A$2.*** There is a statistically significant correlation between schools that offer a faculty mentoring program and those that do not, and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year.

***RQ3.*** Is there a statistically significant correlation between schools the percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged in a school and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year?

***$H_03$.*** There is no statistically significant correlation between the percentage of economically disadvantaged students and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year.

***$H_A3$.*** There is a statistically significant correlation between the percentage of economically disadvantaged students and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year.

**Participants and Demographic Data**

In this convergent mixed method study I will look at the statistical impact of the number of hours spent in a faculty mentoring program, the percentage of economically disadvantaged students, and whether a school offered a faculty mentoring program or not on ninth grade student achievement. For this study, I used data from the New York State Department of Education website (https://data.nysed.gov/profile.php?county=58). I sent out the survey to principals and assistant principals in 84 public high schools in two suburban New York Counties. I also conducted an open-ended interview with respondent schools who offer a faculty mentoring program to determine if there are common themes and patterns of established faculty mentoring programs and respondents' views on effectiveness of the programs.

**Instrument**

I sent a Google form via email to high school principals and assistant principals in two suburban New York counties.

Using that form, I collected the following data:

Number of hours ninth grade students spent working with their peer mentor weekly during the 2018-2019 school year.

Number of hours ninth grade students spent working with their faculty mentor weekly during the 2018-2019 school year.

Overall number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year.

**Research Design and Data Analysis**

I analyzed data using correlational analysis to test for the Pearson Coefficient. The dependent variable is the number of ninth grade course failures in the 2018-2019 academic year. The independent variables include the number of hours, on average, that ninth grade students spent weekly with their faculty or peer mentors during the 2018-2019 school year, the percentage of students who are classified as economically disadvantaged, and whether a school offered a faculty mentoring program or not. The suggested sample size based on a p value of .05 and 20% probability of a Type II error is 15. This is suggested for a -.67, which is a moderately strong negative correlation. This necessitated a return rate of 17.85% out of the 84 schools where I sent the survey. The purpose of data analysis was to identify if a strong correlational relationship exists between the number of hours spent in a faculty mentoring program, whether a school offered a faculty mentoring program, and the percentage of students who were classified as economically disadvantaged, and ninth grade student course failures in the 2018-2019 school year. I used the Pearson coefficient to determine the degree of the relationship between the independent variables (hours spent in mentoring program; percentage of

economically disadvantaged; and whether a school offered a mentoring program) and dependent variables (course failures).

**Data Collection**

I sent the Google form via email with a link to 84 high school principals in two suburban counties in New York. The email contained a link to a Google survey. I sent a follow up email three weeks later as a reminder. After 4 weeks I collected, coded, and assessed the data using SPSS. The limitation of this study was that I could only analyze data from the 2018-2019 academic year. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic that resulted in school closures beginning in March of 2020, it would be difficult to assess data from the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years due to the rise of hybrid and remote learning structures. These learning structures limited the number of students in physical school buildings, thereby making the transition data less accurate for the purposes of this study. I gathered data for Research Question Two via open-ended interviews with respondents that offered faculty mentoring programs to assess the viability of any emerging themes or patterns of the faculty mentoring programs offered for ninth grade students and beliefs on whether the program offered is effective.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

I sent the following survey via email containing a link to a Google form to 84 public high schools in two suburban New York counties. I sent a follow up email three weeks later. I collected and analyzed data at the four-week mark. There were 20 responses for a return rate of 23.8%. Out of the 20 responses, three were incomplete and thus were not included in the summary of results. This left 17 valid survey responses.

**Table 1**

*Respondent Schools Ninth Grade Enrollment and Failure Data for the 2018-19 School Year*

| School | Enrollment | Failures | Failure % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 68 | 12 | 17.6% |
| 2 | 169 | 7 | 4.15 |
| 3 | 175 | 20 | 11.4 |
| 4 | 189 | 12 | 6.3% |
| 5 | 193 | 16 | 8.3% |
| 6 | 234 | 24 | 10.3% |
| 7 | 258 | 11 | 4.3% |
| 8 | 289 | 67 | 23.1% |
| 9 | 300 | 50 | 16.6% |
| 10 | 303 | 12 | 4.0% |
| 11 | 318 | 37 | 11.6% |
| 12 | 367 | 19 | 5.2% |
| 13 | 375 | 75 | 20.0% |
| 14 | 376 | 48 | 12.8% |
| 15 | 456 | 65 | 14.3% |
| 16 | 547 | 26 | 4.8% |
| 17 | 553 | 30 | 5.4% |

**Table 2**

*School Enrollment and Economically Disadvantaged Percentage of Ninth Grade Students in 2018-2019*

| School | Enrollment | Economically Disadvantaged % |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | 68 | 27% |
| 2 | 169 | 20% |
| 3 | 175 | 21% |
| 4 | 189 | 4% |
| 5 | 193 | 25% |
| 6 | 234 | 13% |
| 7 | 258 | 15% |
| 8 | 289 | 25% |
| 9 | 300 | 19% |
| 10 | 303 | 61% |
| 11 | 318 | 19% |
| 12 | 367 | 16% |
| 13 | 375 | 35% |
| 14 | 376 | 11% |
| 15 | 456 | 43% |
| 16 | 547 | 28% |
| 17 | 553 | 24% |

## Research Questions Analysis

I coded the data and entered it into SPSS for analysis, conducting a correlation for the following statistics:

- Failure percentage of ninth grade students in 2018-2019 and percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged in the 2018-2019 school year.
- Failure percentage of ninth grade students in 2018-2019 and the number of hours spent in a faculty mentoring program in the 2018-2019 school year.
- Failure percentage of ninth grade students in 2018-2019 and whether a school offered a faculty mentoring programs for ninth grade students.

I collected additional data during phone/email conversations with respondent schools that had faculty mentoring programs, making audio recordings of all conversations. These interviews focused on the characteristics of their faculty mentoring programs and their perceived effectiveness.

***RQ1.*** Is there a statistically significant correlation between the schools that offer faculty mentoring programs and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year?

An interpretation of results demonstrates that a slight negative correlation of -.181 exists between ninth grade failure rates and schools that offer a faculty mentoring program, with a $r^2$ of .033. This, however, is not statistically significant, but with a $r^2$ variance of .033, it is approaching significance. The alternate hypothesis ($H_A1$) that there is a statistically significant correlation between schools that have a faculty mentoring program and those that do not and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year is rejected. The null hypothesis ($H_01$) that no statistically significant correlation exists between schools that have a faculty mentoring program and

those that do not and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year is accepted.

***RQ2.*** Is there a statistically significant correlation between the number of hours spent in faculty mentoring programs and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year?

There is a slight negative correlation of -.203 between ninth grade failure rates and the number of hours that students spent in a faculty mentoring program with an $r^2$ of .041, which is approaching significance. This, however, is not statistically significant. The alternate hypothesis ($H_A2$) that there is a statistically significant correlation between the number of hours ninth grade students spent in a faculty mentoring program and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year also has to be rejected. The null hypothesis ($H_02$) that no statistically significant correlation exists between the number of hours ninth grade students spent in a faculty mentoring program and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year is accepted.

***RQ3.*** Is there a statistically significant correlation between the percentage of economically disadvantaged students and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year?

There is a slight positive correlation of .068 between ninth grade failure rates and the percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged with an $r^2$ of .005. This, however, is not statistically significant. The alternate hypothesis ($H_A3$) that there is a statistically significant correlation between the percentage of economically

disadvantaged students and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year is rejected. The null hypothesis ($H_0 3$) that no statistically significant correlation exists the percentage of economically disadvantaged students and the number of ninth grade course failures during the 2018-2019 school year is accepted.

**Table 3**

*Correlation between Schools that Offer Faculty Mentoring Program, Number of Hours Spent in Faculty Mentoring Programs, and Economically Disadvantaged Population with Ninth Grade Student Failure Rates in 2018-2019 School Year*

| Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Fail | 10.59 | 6.07 | ---- | -.181 | -.203 | .068 |
| Program | 1.29 | .470 | -.181 | ---- | .977** | -.256 |
| Hours | 32 | .529 | -.203 | .977** | ---- | -.317 |
| Econ % | 23.88 | 13.2 | .068 | -.256 | -.317 | ---- |

Note: n=17. Hours measured in half hour increments from .5 to 5.0 weekly. Schools without a mentoring program were coded "1", schools with a mentoring program were coded "2".

Research Question 4 – How do principals and assistant principals in schools with faculty mentoring programs perceive the characteristics and effectiveness of faculty mentoring programs?

I conducted informal, open-ended interviews via phone and email. I asked respondents describe their faculty mentoring programs and whether they found them effective, while I took notes on the conversations. Some of their observations appear below in condensed form.

**Characteristics of Mentoring Programs**

***School 4***. Each student is placed in an advisory group with one staff member and 7-12 other students. Advisors include academic teachers as well as art, music, physical education, and library teachers, and administrators.

- Every morning, the advisor's job is to meet with his or her group of students for 12 minutes, similar to the familiar homeroom period.
- The advisor meets daily with the group again for 15 minutes during advisory lunch. The advisory group discusses school issues, shares what has been happening to its members, plans group functions, and discusses current events. The group is a source of identity.
- Advisors have built into their schedules a conference period three mornings a week, specifically for meeting with advisees on a one-to-one basis or in small groups.
- On the fourth morning, the group of advisory teachers meets to discuss students. This conference period is held during the first period when music rehearsals are also scheduled. (There are two bus runs each morning.) This allows each child and advisor to be alone while the other students are still at home.
- During the conference period, the student and the advisor can discuss academic progress, work on a project together, or discuss home or school problems. The advisor is responsible for knowing enough about his or her advisees to make proper recommendations to parents and teachers about the children's programs.
- Emergency conferences may be called by either the advisor or the advisee and can take place at lunchtime, after school, or between classes.

- The advisor keeps the advisee's parents informed of academic progress or problems. Parents appreciate the fact that when they have questions about their child, they know whom to contact at the school.
- School 4 had a failure percentage of 6% for the 2018-2019 school year.

***School 9.*** Faculty mentoring program is set up with an advisory teacher and two peer mentors. Mentors meet with their mentees every Wednesday morning in small groups. During meetings, mentors encourage discussion about pertinent topics such as integrity, bullying, stereotyping, peer pressure, and substance abuse, as well as initiate team building activities to encourage communication and collaboration among the students.

- Peer leaders and faculty advisors should get to their advisory rooms at least ten minutes prior to the advisory session to set up the classroom, prepare for planned activities.
- Mentors or advisory teachers arrange all chairs in a circular formation, putting all bags, books, and iPads should be on the side, not on the desks, unless indicated otherwise.
- Peer leaders should not sit next to each other; they must spread themselves out within the group.
- Faculty advisor should also sit in the circle and be integrated within the group.
- Peer leaders and advisors should be actively involved in activities and remain in rooms for the duration of advisory meetings.

- A list of email addresses and phone numbers of all group members should be distributed to everyone.
- Attend weekly scheduled planning meetings between faculty advisor and peer leaders to process and plan for future advisory sessions.

Sample Advisory Schedule

- Session 1. Day Before School / Orientation
- Session 2. First Day of School / Icebreakers / Goals
- Session 3. Survival Kit / Peer Leader Contract Discussion
- Session 4. Freshmen R' Us
- Session 5. Freshmen Elections
- Session 6. Activity Fair
- Session 7. Impressions
- Session 8. Advisory Competition / Advisors Meeting
- Session 9. Bullying and Respect
- Session 10. Halloween Activities
- Session 11. Goals and Perseverance
- Session 12. Breaking Stereotypes
- Session 13. Values
- Session 14. Thanksgiving Advisory
- Session 15. Decision Making / Peer Pressure
- Session 16. Teen Issues / Advisors Meeting
- Session 17. Values / Secret Santa

- Session 18. Holiday Activity / Gift Exchange
- Session 19. Resolutions and Goals
- Session 20. Survival Kit
- Session 21. Advisory Celebration

School 9 had failure percentage of 17% amongst ninth grade students in the 2018-2019 school year.

***School 11.*** The Adult Mentoring Program pairs faculty mentors with students who would benefit from interaction with positive adult role models. Students selected to be part of this program are referred through a variety of sources. Not every student is assigned a faculty mentor. Parents may request that their child be considered for the program. Mentors build close working relationships with their students and guide them in addressing personal, academic, and emotional issues in a productive manner. Mentors encourage students to reach their best personal and academic potential through thoughtful and caring guidance. This school had a failure percentage of 12% for the 2018-2019 school year.

***School 16 and 17 (High Schools in the same district).*** Faculty mentors were students assigned homeroom teachers. There was a built in "advisory" homeroom session every day where teachers were given assigned topics to discuss such as bullying, kindness, peer mentoring, school events, and school testing calendars. Faculty mentors were expected to have open-ended discussions regarding the various topics with no real structure or curriculum to follow other than the topics assigned.

- School 16 had a failure percentage of 5% in the 2018-2019 school year.
- School 17. had a failure percentage of 5% in the 2018-2019 school year.

**Themes Regarding Characteristics of Faculty Mentoring Programs**

During our telephone discussions with survey respondents, several themes emerged regarding the characteristics of faculty mentoring programs.

- Four of the five schools have an "advisory" period built into their schedules allowing for mentors to meet with their mentees.
- Topics of faculty mentoring programs include bullying, kindness, school activities, peer mentoring, and so forth.
- Four of the five schools assigned all ninth-grade students a mentor. One school had students recommended for the program.
- Two of the five schools require communication between parents and mentors regarding students.
- Three of the five schools organize their programs with daily meetings between mentors and mentees (often during homeroom); the other two meet weekly.

**Feelings towards the Program**

As stipulated by Social Support Theory, providing support to people allows them to thrive and achieve success. In my survey of the administrators of schools that run faculty mentoring programs, one of the main emergent themes was that students develop

connections with mentors: “It is evident that social support emerges from substantial assistance by others – in the form of either informational, emotional, material, or/and companionship needs – which is recognized as support by both the provider and the recipient. (Nurullah, 2012, p. 173). While another theme that emerged was the need for strong structure in the organization of a faculty mentoring program, according to the theory, “what matters is the strength of ties, willingness to provide supports, and quality of such support rather than the number of ties that a person has in a network” (Nurullah, 2012, p.175). Regardless of the structure of a program, a key facet of Social Support Theory is that “receiving social support can also have positive effect on recipients’ health and well-being” (Nurullah, 2012, p. 175). Shrout et al. (2010) examined the impact of received and provided support on five different daily moods: anxiety, depression, anger, fatigue, and vigor. They found that receiving emotional support was associated with increased vigor and decreased anger (Nurullah, 2012, p. 180). Bolger and Amarel (2007) showed that invisible support, that is, support provided in such a subtle or indirect way that the recipient did not interpret it as support, was more beneficial to the emotional functioning of a recipient in stressful times compared social support that was visible to the recipient and no support at all.

***School 4.*** “Following implementation of the advisory program, we found that student discipline problems declined, staff morale improved, and parent involvement in the school including parent volunteers increased. We offer what we call “home base” where students meet with their mentors every day in the middle of the day. The school schedule builds it in, and it is a time for students and mentors to connect. Mentors keep

the same students throughout the four years in high school, so there is consistency and students always have a constant source of support. We have noticed that a lot of the discipline issues have declined because the mentors are so in tune to their students, they give a heads up to guidance and administration when things look like they might be brewing with a student. The program has allowed mentors to really get to know their students and connect them to the right support staff to make sure our kids are getting all the help they need day in and day out. So, from that sense, the program is very effective."

***School 9***. "Each Advisory group has a faculty advisor (mainly teachers, but some administrators and support staff). They are present at all of the Advisory meetings, as the adults who oversee the group. In addition, I currently oversee the Peer Leadership program where selected eleventh and twelfth grade students participate in a ninth-grade Advisory program. In this program, these leaders work in groups of 2 or 3 to facilitate lessons/discussion/activities related to specific freshmen issues for a group of 15 ninth grade students under the direction of a faculty advisor. In order to prepare for this, the eleventh and twelfth graders participate in a Peer Leadership Health course that uses Health information and concepts and learns how to facilitate and plan lessons for the advisory program. Spring of every year, the interested sophomores and juniors need to apply to become peer leaders. Administration, guidance department and Health department all collaborate to select these students for the peer leader roles. We collect feedback from current teachers, check attendance records, and recommendations from current peer leaders and meet for hours to make these decisions. At the end of the school year, the faculty are asked to volunteer for the Advisory programs (we also have a tenth-

grade program, but I am not involved in that) for the following school year. It has shown to be a very effective program. The program started before I arrived at the school, but it has been around for at least 20 years. This program has well over 200 hundred applicants almost every year and the peer leaders that I work with directly, have very fond memories of their own experience as freshmen."

***School 11***. Did not respond to several emails and phone calls asking for perceived effectiveness of program.

***School 16.*** "The program was effective when we had it only two years. We noticed a decrease in failures after year one and an increase when we did not have it. I do not necessarily know if that is related, or it just so happened to be a good group of kids that year. In terms of discipline, I felt the program was able to quickly identify kids that might need a little more "TLC." We are such a large district that sometimes kids do not pop up on our radar until they are in trouble or are failing courses. Not saying it is right, but just with the volume of kids we have, unfortunately, sometimes we do not identify kids that need help earlier. I felt this program was going to address that somewhat. Unfortunately, due to schedule constraints and other factors, we no longer do the program as a result of it going away with COVID and hybrid learning models, and it hasn't been brought back. I would like to see the program brought back with more structure. Homeroom teachers were just given topics to discuss with no set curriculum or lesson plans associated with it. Since it was a teacher the students already had for an academic class, it didn't really serve as a way to provide students another adult to confide in. And I do not necessarily know that the students really understood the program overall. Since it

was their homeroom teacher, I think they just assumed that they were reviewing certain topics. One thing I would like to see if they bring the program back is the involvement of other students with the faculty mentor. We run a peer mentoring program every year. I felt like the peer mentoring program and faculty mentoring program in the "advisory" period were operating simultaneously but without much interaction. I would have liked to have seen an "all hands-on deck" approach. The theory behind it was sound but the execution not so much."

***School 17.*** "I liked the program but didn't feel it offered much in the way of planning. It provided students more time with one of their actual classroom teachers, and I found that a lot of times it turned into an almost extra help type of session. If it comes back, it was cut during COVID and never brought back, we definitely need a set program to offer with training and lessons. A positive I found of the program was that I felt many parents appreciated it. Throughout the year, parents would call us to tell us that they felt it was helping their kid adjust to life in the high school. While we did not necessarily have the training for the program, it did help kids feel like they had a teacher to speak to about issues. A lot of teachers invited administration, guidance, nurses, librarians, and support staff into their homerooms to introduce themselves and let kids get to see their faces. That was very effective."

# CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Contrary to my initial hypotheses, I discovered no statistically significant correlation between hours spent in a faculty mentoring program, the existence of a faculty mentoring program, the number of students classified as economically disadvantaged, and the percentage of ninth grade students who failed a course in the 2018-2019 school year. The data does demonstrate that there is a result approaching significance when comparing schools that have a faculty mentoring program and the number of ninth grade students who failed a course in the 2018-2019 school year. There is also a result approaching significance between the number of hours spent in a faculty mentoring program and the number of ninth grade students who failed a course in the 2018-2019 school year, meaning that the likelihood of a student failing was slightly higher for those who did not spend much time in such a program. In the discussion, I will also discuss the themes which arose in the survey responses and perceived effectiveness of the respondent schools.

## Interpretation of Results

### *Themes Regarding Characteristics of Faculty Mentoring Programs*

In my discussions with survey respondents, several major themes emerged regarding the characteristics of faculty mentoring programs:

Four of the five schools have an “advisory”

- Four of the five schools have an “advisory” period built into their schedules allowing mentors to meet with their mentees.

- Topics of faculty mentoring programs include: bullying, kindness, school activities, peer mentoring, etc.
- Four of the five schools assigned all ninth-grade students a mentor. 1 school had students recommended for the program.
- Two of the five schools require communication between parents and mentors regarding students.
- Three of the five schools organize their programs with daily meetings between mentors and mentees (often during homeroom), two meet weekly.

***Themes Regarding Perceived Effectiveness of Faculty Mentoring Programs***

Respondents mentioned the following issues which seemed central to the effectiveness of faculty mentoring programs:

- Need for strong organization, curriculum in faculty mentoring or advisory programs.
- Feeling that stronger organization/curriculum led to increased participation in extra-curricular activities.
- Responsiveness of parents to the program being offered.
- Involvement of peer mentors in program would be beneficial.
- Need strong structure to avoid it becoming an "extra help" type session with the student's normal classroom teacher.
- All adults in the schools should be involved – including administration and support staff.

- Helped highlight students who needed "TLC" ahead of when they most likely would have been identified in large schools normally.
- School 4 identified that student discipline issues decreased.
- Allowed guidance and administration to hear of issues with students before they progress because of mentors developing relationships with their students.

**Table 4**

*Themes of Faculty Mentoring Programs Effectiveness according to Administrators of Respondent Schools*

| **Theme** | **Quote** |
|---|---|
| Organization/Structure | "I would like to see the program brought back with more structure." (School 16) |
| | "We definitely need a set program to offer with training and lessons." (School 17) |
| Parent Responsiveness | "Parent involvement in the school including parent volunteers increased." (School 4) |
| | "Throughout the year parents would call us to tell us that they felt it was helping their kid adjust to life in the high school." (School 17) |
| Peer Mentors Role | "Peer leaders work in groups of 2 or 3 to facilitate lessons/discussions/activities related to specific freshmen issues for a group of 15 ninth grade students under the direction of a faculty advisor." (School 9) |
| | "One thing I would like to see if they bring the program back is the involvement of other students with the faculty mentor." (School 16) |
| Students in Need | "The program has allowed mentors to really get to know their students and connect them to the right support staff to make sure our kids are getting all the help they need day in and day out." (School 4) |
| | "I felt the program was able to quickly identify kids that might need a little more "TLC." (School 16) |
| Faculty Collaboration | "Administration, guidance department and Health Department all collaborate on students for the Peer mentor roles." (School 9) |

> "A lot of teachers invited administration, guidance, Nurses, librarians, and support staff into homerooms to introduce themselves and let kids get to see their faces. (School 17)

## Implications of Findings

While the results were not statistically significant for the correlational analysis for the existence of a faculty mentoring program and the number of ninth grade course failures in the 2018-2019 school year, the correlation does approach a statistically significant level. This approaching significance is the result of a negative correlation The same is true for the number of hours spent in a faculty mentoring program and the number of ninth grade course failures in the 2018-2019 school year. This implies that with a larger sample of schools, a statistically significant correlation might be proven. While this cannot be discussed with any absolute certainty, the results signify that the number of hours spent in a faculty mentoring program has a direct impact on the ninth-grade failure rates of students in the 2018-2019 school year. The results also demonstrate, without any absolute certainty, that the number of hours spent in a faculty mentoring program has a direct impact on the ninth-grade failure rates of students in the 2018-2019 school year.

Another result is that there is no correlation between the percentage of students qualified as "economically disadvantaged" and the number of ninth grade course failures

during the 2018-2019 school year. This implies that the socio-economic status of districts does not have an impact on the number of students who fail courses, which suggests that other factors, unrelated to SES, can contribute to failure rates. Such factors could include, but are not limited to outside influences, such as teacher preparation, course rigor, and so forth.

Based on the survey of respondent schools with faculty mentoring programs, it is clear that strong, organized programs that included student mentors as well as faculty mentors have a positive impact on students. I have not been able to prove a statistical correlation between ninth grade failure rates and faculty mentoring programs, but the implication is that the benefits for students participating in mentoring or advisory programs are clear from a Social-Emotional Learning aspect.

The use of faculty mentoring programs allows students to develop close relationships with their teachers, which will lead to a stronger connection to the school environment, a key tenet of Social Support Theory. These close relationships become important because "close relationships promote well-being in many ways, not just as a resource in times of adversity" (Feeney & Collins, 2015, p. 1).

By making use of faculty mentoring programs, students can develop close relationships with their teachers, who will help them navigate the many trials and tribulations of entering high school, as evidenced by the topics providing during advisory periods in schools with faculty mentoring programs.

This allows for students to thrive in a high school setting because these mentoring relationships serve "two important support functions that correspond to the two life

contexts through which people may potentially thrive – coping successfully with adversity and participating in opportunities for grown and fulfillment in the absence of adversity" (Feeney & Collins, 2015, p. 6). While the development of close faculty mentoring relationships is clearly important, the current study was unable to determine a statistically significant correlation, between schools that offered faculty mentoring programs and the failure percentage of ninth grade students in the 2018-2019 school year.

Entering high school is a challenging time in one's life. As a result of all the social, mental, and physical changes that teenagers are going through, they are faced with increased adversity. "One important function that relationships serve is to support thriving through adversity, not only by buffering individuals from the negative effects of stress, but also by helping them to emerge from the stressor in a way that enables them to flourish either because of or despite their circumstances" (Feeney & Collins, 2015, p. 6). It is also true that faculty mentoring programs allow for the development of supportive relationships which "help people thrive by promoting engagement in opportunities that enable them to enhance their positive well-being by broadening and building resources and finding purpose and meaning in life" (Feeney, 2015, p. 9). In this study, I was not able to prove any statistically significant difference in student ninth grade failure rates during the 2018-2019 school year and schools that offered a faculty mentoring program. However, I did identify some key themes with respect to freshmen mentoring programs and perceived effectiveness of faculty mentoring programs.

One of the main arguments in favor of creating a faculty mentoring program is that "a student's perception of his or her teacher greatly affected his or her self-

perceptions and their academic performance (Wilson, 2011, p. 107). This conclusion agrees with the central arguments of Social Support Theory in that providing support allows people to thrive in the face of adversity. From a qualitative viewpoint, “kids need adults other than their parents, the teacher-student relationship is a very important one. When they feel alienated, they are not going to perform as well” (SchneiderN, 2021, p.1). This speaks to the need to include peer mentoring programs. This is demonstrated by the fact that “interpersonal social support process is predicted to have an important influence on immediate and relational outcomes that are both personal and interpersonal in nature – and these personal and relational outcomes are posited to influence future responses to life adversities and opportunities” (Feeney & Collins, 2015, p. 34) While I was not able to ascertain a correlation between the three factors I studied and failure rates, other factors, such as mentoring, advisory topics, club participation and parent involvement were noted by respondent schools as relevant to the freshmen transition.

**Significance of the Study**

While the study results demonstrated that no statistically significant correlation existed between faculty mentoring programs and ninth grade failure rates in 2018-2019, it is evident that schools need to implement strong, organized faculty mentoring programs, as discussed in Chapter 4. These programs assist in providing students a smooth transition from middle to high school certainly from a qualitative level. “The stronger the reported quality of the schools’ implementation of transition activities, the fewer students were reported to be struggling in the ninth grade; this suggests that more active and

systematic attempts to engage families in the transition could help mitigate the struggles so commonly experienced by ninth grades" (Mac Iver, 2015, Sp. 47).

Students "need to know how to achieve success and what others have learned about that process – they need respect while acknowledging their developing maturity – they need the questions answered that they are afraid or do not even know to ask – they need guidance from mature adults and help from older, more experience peers" (Benson, 2009, p. 55). Once again, this claim highlights the need for strong faculty mentoring programs during ninth grade. It is important to note that

> transition from middle to high school disrupts relationships with teachers and peers as students choose or are assigned to different high schools or different courses of study. This occurs at a time when adolescents are becoming more independent from their families and experience less parental involvement in their schooling. For some students, this is liberating; for others, particularly those who have struggled academically, the competitive and impersonal nature of high school takes a negative toll on their performance and behaviors. (Cohen, 179I)

**Relationship to Prior Research**

Faculty mentoring programs assist students in remaining in school, as "half of high school dropouts blame their decision to leave school on not getting along with their teacher" (Pokorski, 2011, p. 4). While I was unable to demonstrate a statistical significance between academic success and faculty mentoring programs, I still believe they are important because "high school dropouts indicated that many of them believed that with increased time spent with their teacher they could have remained in school"

(Pokorski, 2011, p. 5). According to another 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%, one-quarter (26%) named a teacher or guidance counselor as their designated mentor” (Pokorski, 2011, p. 34). While this study was unable to determine a correlation between faculty mentoring programs and ninth grade student achievement, it is clear that there are many benefits to providing teacher mentors to incoming students:

> 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. Students will emulate the behaviors they witness in their teachers. (Pokorski, 2011, p. 34)

Faculty mentors provide students the opportunity to “forge positive relationships with new sets of teachers and peers (or maintain positive relationships with friends from middle school who transition with them to high school), it is not surprising that this would ease the socioemotional burden of negotiating this school transition. This study was unable to prove a statistically significant correlation between schools that offer faculty mentoring programs and the percentage of students classified as economically disadvantaged and the percentage of ninth grade student failures in the 2018-2019 school year (Benner, 2011, p. 2138). That being said, the respondents, when they spoke of the perceived effectiveness of mentoring programs mentioned a fairly extensive impact on

aspects such as student participation, parent involvement, club participation, and so forth. In addition to providing students with routine transition information regarding schedules and lockers, "effective advisors are caring, supportive individuals whose job is to thoughtfully engage students in dialogue about academic and personal decision-making (Smith, 2006, p. 218). Having a positive interaction with high school teachers is beneficial to students, especially due to the fact that many have preconceived negative views towards teachers on the high school level:

> adolescents perceive lower support and caring from their high school teachers and principals as compared with their middle school educators (Barber & Olsen, 2004; Reyes et al., 1994; Seidman et al., 1996), and they rate their high school teachers, counselors, and administrators as less helpful than those at their middle schools (Reyes et al., 1994; Smith et al., 2008). Newman et al. (2000) found that adolescents' reports of teacher relations varied, although more students had increasingly negative (rather than positive) feelings about their teachers across the high school transition. (Benner, 2011, p. 312)

Faculty mentors and positive views of teachers will help students that are struggling the most. "All adolescents experienced increased depression across the transition, this increase was not as severe for adolescents with the most positive views of their teachers' supportiveness (Barber & Olsen, 2004). The quicker the intervention and ability to create a relationship with students, the better the overall outcome. "Although disengaged adolescents reported that teachers did not intervene when they began getting off track, particularly in relation to school attendance, resilient adolescents reported

seeking help from teachers when they experienced transition disruptions (Benner, 2011, p. 315). It is also evident "that the teacher–student relationship established between an adult and an adolescent determines, to a large extent, the degree to which students feel cared for and part of their school community" (Ellerbrock, 2015, p. 394). A structure faculty mentoring program with solid curriculum and structure is quite beneficial to students transitioning from middle to high school.

Students being paired with faculty mentors "is correlated with a number of positive results such as an increased likelihood to eventually hold a stable job and higher educational and professional aspirations" (Black, 1999). Unfortunately, there are a relative lack of school districts that are willing to commit the resources needed to make a mentor program a success (Adelman & Taylor, 2006). This is clearly evidenced by the fact that only five schools out of 17 responding schools offered a faculty mentoring program in the 2018-2019 school year.

As stipulated by Social Support Theory, all individuals have the need to belong and to form relationships with others, which can be provided by a strong faculty mentoring or advisory program. When these needs are fulfilled, we lead happier and healthier lives (Myers, 1999). These types of relationships are particularly crucial for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (The Institute for Research and Reform in Education, 2003). Croninger and Lee (2001) suggested that supportive relationships between teachers and students, which they defined as social capital, result in a 50% reduction in the probability of students dropping out of high school. Most mentor

programs do offer two critical components: one-on-one personal advisement and a place for group interaction between the mentor or mentors and a number of students.

**Limitations of the Study**

I analyzed data using Pearson Coefficients. The dependent variable was the number of ninth grade course failures in the 2018-2019 academic year. The independent variables included the number of hours, on average, ninth grade students spent weekly with their faculty or peer mentors during the 2018-2019 school year, the percentage of students who were classified as economically disadvantaged, and the existence or lack of mentoring program. The suggested sample size based on a p value of .05, and 20% probability of a Type II error was 15. This is suggested for a -.67, which is a moderately strong negative correlation. The survey yielded a sample size of 17, with only five participants responding that they had a faculty mentoring program. A Pearson coefficient determined that the degree of the relationship between the independent variables (hours spent in mentoring program, percentage of economically disadvantaged, and the existence of a mentoring program) and dependent variables (course failures) is not statistically significant. I sent out the survey via email to the high school principals and assistant principals in two suburban counties in New York. The email contained a link to a Google survey. I sent a follow up email three weeks later as a reminder. After 4 weeks the data were collected, coded, and assessed using SPSS.

The limitations of this study are numerous. Firstly, I only included data from the 2018-2019 academic year in the analysis. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic that resulted in school closures beginning in March of 2020, it was difficult to assess data from the

2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years due to the rise of hybrid and remote learning structures. These learning structures limited the number of students in physical school buildings, thereby making the transition data less accurate for the purposes of this study. Another limitation was that I looked solely at faculty mentoring programs' impact on ninth grade failure rates. In addition, in this study, I looked solely at faculty mentoring programs' impact on academic achievement, if any.

Research suggests that students who feel a connection to their teachers are more successful in school; therefore, a qualitative study regarding students' overall feelings about mentors and their impact on the Social-Emotional aspect of high school education would yield different results. Another limitation would be to look at the entirety of schools' middle to high school transition programs. While some schools might not have faculty mentoring programs, they might have strong peer mentoring programs, or other transition activities, such as the aforementioned Freshman Academy, which contribute to a successful ninth grade experience for students.

Another limitation is that out of 84 surveys sent, only 20 responses were received. Of those 20 responses, 3 were incomplete thus leaving 17 valid responses. Of the 17 responses, only 5 responded that they indeed had faculty mentoring programs. This led to significantly limited data for analysis. While this scarcity of data contributes to a lack of statistical significance in regard to the correlation between faculty mentoring programs and ninth grade failure rates in the 2018-2019 school year, it does also pinpoint a larger issue—that there is limited research on schools and faculty mentoring programs that currently exist. Ideally, the study will generate some interest for schools without a faculty

mentoring program to incorporate one into their middle to high school transition practices.

Other limitations include the choice to focus on one geographic location, two counties in suburban New York. Other geographic locations in the country might have strong faculty mentoring programs, which were not included in this study.

Additionally, limitations included the use of phone/email interviews with respondents. Certain time limitations did not allow for deep, extended discussions regarding the effectiveness and characteristics of some of the schools surveyed. It is also important to note that there might be an inherent need to flout the characteristics of one's school due to the fact that there is no relationship with the researcher.

**Recommendations for Future Practice**

Recommendations for future practice include schools creating structured, well organized faculty-student mentoring programs. Of the five schools responding they had faculty-student mentoring programs, all utilized advisory periods with faculty mentors. Each school had a different organization of the advisory period which demonstrates that, according to the Association for Middle Level Education, "advisory programs have proved difficult to successfully implement and maintain, much of this stems from the lack of a single set of best practices to use as a blueprint for setting up advisory programs." (Association for Middle Level Education). The challenges that exist in creating advisory periods are numerous. "Advisory coordinators at one school may have the time and resources to organize detailed activities, while at another school they may scramble to come up with lessons during their lunch period. One district may mandate 100 minutes of

advisory time each week, while another may only allow 20 minutes" (Association for Middle Level Education).

It is paramount for schools considering creating a faculty-student mentoring program to address key issues early on in the development process. These issues, as highlighted by interview results in Chapter 4, include the lack of curriculum, limited structure, and time constraints. A way to alleviate such problems would be "addressing these issues up front is critical to the success of advisories and is exactly what makes building successful advisory programs so hard" (Association for Middle Level Education).

It should be noted that an advisory program is not just an "add-on" to the curriculum: it requires a substantial investment of time, planning, and reflection. "Even schools that have maintained their advisories over many years constantly reconfigure them—often every year—in order to effectively address the needs of students and the school" (New Visions). Schools often assign the job of faculty mentors to those teachers who students have already developed a relationship with; however, other schools assign someone new, developing another trusted adult for students to confide in.
According to New Visions for Schools, advisors should:

- Serve as the primary point of contact with the school for parents of their advisees and need to communicate with parents regularly about their child's academic performance.
- Intervene in situations where a student's pattern of behavior is interfering with their academic performance. This may include

providing support, developing strategies to address the problem, or seeking out additional services.

- Document all meetings and communications regarding each student they advise.
- No advisor should be expected to address all of a student's needs. A good advisor, however, can identify those needs and help the student find the supports he or she needs to succeed.
- Often, however, teachers initially feel uneasy about being advisors. Some are concerned about acting as a student's advocate. Others see their role as that of a classroom teacher and building personal connections with students and their families makes them uncomfortable. Staff development is necessary for all staff, but especially for these staff. The school may want to conduct professional development workshops on topics such as building relationships with parents and strategies for gathering information from students. Some teachers may even require specific lesson plans and training in advisement.

Creating organized, structured faculty mentoring programs which also involve of peer mentors leads to increased parent responsiveness and the ability to identify issues that might be brewing with students. Consequently, future practice should include schools looking to create strong faculty mentoring programs and adopting strategies such as the ones outlined above in order to achieve success.

## Recommendations for Future Research

There are numerous studies that should be conducted to further understand the statistical impact of faculty-student mentoring programs on ninth grade failure rates during the transition from middle school to high school. Future studies should look at more data from other academic years to get a more complete picture of faculty mentoring programs impact on ninth grade failure rates. In this study, I looked solely at the 2018-2019 school year due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years. A longer study would serve as a further look at data to assess whether there is a correlation between faculty mentoring programs and student failure rates in ninth grade. Additional suggestions include looking at the qualitative impact on students being involved in a faculty mentoring program in ninth grade. Surveying students to gauge their feelings and perceptions would give a more complex understanding of the role mentoring programs play in providing students opportunities for success by allowing them to feel comfortable and providing outlets for them to discuss issues that are concerning to them. The added component of SEL learning in education would allow us to further understand the impact of mentoring programs on students.

Additional research also should be conducted on students involved in peer mentoring programs in the ninth grade to determine if there is any statistical correlation between participation in peer mentoring programs and ninth grade failure rates. Peer mentor programs are more prevalent in districts across these counties, and it would be

interesting to determine if they have more of an impact on the ninth-grade student achievement than faculty mentoring programs.

Overall, other key facets of middle to high school transition programs, such as Freshman Academy and Parent Engagement Theories, should be studied as well to determine if there is any correlation that exists between those programs and student failure rates. Freshman academies, which assign all students the same teachers and often dedicate a portion of the school building solely to ninth grade, would allow a researcher to determine if there was a correlation between increased focus on ninth grade students and student achievement.

A study on the impact of a faculty mentoring program impact on student discipline rates (as suggested by School 4) would be beneficial as well. While perhaps an impact on the academic performance of ninth grade students was not statistically significant, a study analyzing the correlation with student discipline rates would further help us understand whether there was a qualitative impact to these programs.

It would also be interesting to consider whether the number of transition activities a school can create an impact student achievement in ninth grade. Transition activities such as the aforementioned Peer Mentoring, Freshman Academy, Parent Engagement Strategies and Faculty Mentoring Programs are all considered key components of successful transition programs as seen in Chapter 2. Studying whether a school with more than one transition activity has a greater impact on ninth grade student achievement would be interesting.

As previously mentioned, districts with a single transition from elementary school to a middle/high school combination often have more students thrive than schools with multiple school-to-school transitions. A study looking at ninth grade student achievement in districts with differing amounts of transitions between school buildings would give us a more complete understanding of the impact a transition program has on its students.

**Conclusion**

Due to a low response rate on the survey, I was unable to prove a statistically significant correlation between the existence of faculty mentoring programs, the number of hours students spent in those programs, the percentage of economically disadvantaged students, and ninth grade student failure rates from the 2018-2019 school year. Interviews of school administrations with faculty mentoring programs demonstrated that structure is essential to these programs, as it allows them to be comprehensive and cover all aspects necessary to set students up for success in high school. That being said, respondents mentioned other benefits that were not measured in this study, such as parent involvement, extra-curricular participation, and Social-Emotional learning components as positive aspects of the effectiveness of the programs offered.

## APPENDIX A: INSTRUMENT

INSTRUMENT

Part I – Please answer "Yes" or "No" to the following questions:

1) Did your school offer a faculty mentoring program for ninth grade students in the 2018-2019 school year?

2) Were all ninth-grade students assigned a faculty mentor during the 2018-2019 school year?

Part II – please use the drop-down menu to choose total hours per week (on average) for each question. (Drop down will have hours listed in half hour increments from 0 to 5 hours)

1) If your high school has a faculty mentoring program, how many hours per week (on average) do ninth grade students spend weekly with their peer mentors?

Part III – please use the drop-down menu to choose the total number of course failures.

1) What is the total number of ninth grade students who failed a course during 2018-2019 school year in your school?

2) What was the total number of ninth grade students enrolled in your school during the 2018-2019 school year?

## APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL

Date: *6-29-2022*

IRB #: *IRB-FY2022-219*

Title: *The Statistical Impact of Peer and Faculty Mentoring Programs on 9th Grade Student Achievement*

Creation Date: *1-21-2022* End Date:

Status: Approved

Principal Investigator: *Kevin Miller*

Review Board: *St John's University Institutional Review Board*

Sponsor:

***Study History***

| Submission Type: *Initial* | Review Type: *Exempt* | Decision: Exempt |
|---|---|---|

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