


WORKING TO REDUCE NINTH
GRADE FAILURE RATES IN URBAN
SCHOOL SETTINGS: A MULTI-CASE
STUDY OF NINTH GRADE
TRANSITION PROGRAMS IN FOUR
HIGH SCHOOLS

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Research Questions

1. How did each of the four selected high schools plan the components that support the initial designs of its 9th grade transition programs?
 2. What elements make up the designs of the four selected 9th grade transition programs?
 3. What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four 9th grade transition programs?
 4. What factors facilitated the planning, implementation, and sustainability of 9th grade transition programs in the four selected high schools?
 5. What criteria did each of the four selected high schools use to determine the success of its transition programs?
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Methodology

- Access to School Staff
- Surveys
- Interviews
- Observations
- Analysis of material culture



Surveys

- All four schools participated
- 81% overall response rate
- Anonymous participants



Interviews

- Focused Interviews with a question guide
- Schools A and B – interviewed a pair of teachers
- Schools C and D – interviewed an individual teacher
- Member checked



Observations

- School A did not have an observation
- School B – weekly team meeting
- School C – end of quarter team meeting
- School D – goal setting meeting for end of the year and coming school year
- Member checked



Material Culture

- Agendas
- Accountability Plans
- Yearly Reports
- Logs
- Forms for addressing students' needs
- Member checked



Research Question 1

How did each of the four selected high schools plan the components that support the initial designs of its ninth grade transition program?



School A

- Contrasting perspectives of the school's planning and implementation efforts
 - Involvement from staff, students, administrators
 - Common planning time did not materialize
 - Benefit of program



School B

- Planning and Implementation
 - Teacher voice in planning and implementing
 - Pilot year followed by full implementation
 - Structure of team changed each year
 - Freshman seminar class
 - Lead teacher and administrator on each team



School C

- Planning and Implementation
 - Teachers and administrators planned program
 - Mixed results regarding program benefit



School D

- Planning and Implementation
 - Teacher voice
 - Program benefit



Research Question 2

What elements make up the designs of the four selected ninth grade transition programs?



School A

- Student academic progress consistently monitored
 - Academic support provided
 - Math, English, science, history, and electives
- Student social support provided
 - Assemblies, seminars, mentor programs, student assistance program



School B

- Program design
 - Structured study hall not highly recommended
 - System of interventions for academic and social support
 - General and Specific Academic – math, English, science, history, physical education, and electives
 - Social – positive relationships, basic needs, recognition, student-voice



School C

- Program Design
 - Student progress consistently monitored
 - Remediation opportunities
 - Addressed students' academic and social needs
 - Academic needs – interactive notebooks, guided reading, review strategies, alternative assessments
 - Social needs – student assistance program, classroom management, instructional methodology, incentives, parent day



School D

- Program Design
 - Student progress consistently monitored
 - Academic Strategies
 - Teacher assisted homework study groups, remediation sessions, no-zero policy
 - Math, history subject specific strategies
 - Social Strategies
 - Positive relationships
 - Community Service Projects



Research Question 3

What factors inhibited the planning, implementation, and sustainability of transition programs in the four ninth grade transition programs?



School A

- Inhibiting factors
 - Class size
 - Staff selection
 - Ability grouping
 - Funding – stipends for teachers
 - Total school support
 - Administrative duties
 - No desire to teach ninth graders



School B

- Inhibiting Factors
 - Least experienced teachers in the school
 - Lack of total school support
 - Teacher turnover
 - Lack of collegial respect
 - Micro-management by administrators



School C

- Inhibiting Factors
 - Inadequate funding
 - Least experienced teachers
 - Lack of time for collaboration
 - Lack of total school support
 - Issues with administration
 - Student motivation



School D

- Inhibiting Factors
 - Least experienced teachers
 - Lack of time
 - Lack of total school support
 - Issues with communication
 - Lack of administrative support



Research Question 4

What factors facilitated the planning,
implementation,
and sustainability of 9th grade transition
programs in the four selected high schools?



School A

- Facilitative Factors
 - Belief in students' ability to learn
 - Faculty support
 - Funding
 - Program structure
 - Teacher relationships
 - Counselor assignment
 - Academy approach



School B

- Facilitating factors
 - Belief in students' ability to achieve at high levels
 - Staff support
 - Professional development
 - Program structure
 - Team teacher relationships



School C

- Facilitating Factors
 - Faculty supported program (conflicting)
 - Professional development
 - Teacher relationships
 - Site visits
 - Team teacher relationships for special education students



School D

- Facilitating Factors
 - Strong belief that all students can achieve at high levels
 - Ongoing activities to connect students to high school community
 - Faculty support
 - Professional development
 - Use of data



Research Question 5

What criteria does each of the four selected high schools use to determine the success of its transition program?



School A

- Criteria used to determine success
 - Promotion rates by grade and by academic subjects
 - Pass rates on SOL tests
 - Mixed results regarding success



School B

- Criteria used to determine success
 - Promotion rates by grade and by academic subjects
 - Pass rates on SOL tests
 - Improved promotion rates
 - Discipline data
 - Participation in school activities
 - Student survey



School C

- Criteria Used to Determine Success
 - Promotion rates by grade and by academic subjects
 - Pass rates on SOL tests
 - Mixed results on program benefit



School D

- Criteria Used to Determine Success
 - Promotion rates by grade and by academic subjects
 - Pass rates on SOL tests
 - Student attendance
 - Discipline infractions
 - Teachers' relationships with students



Key Themes from Research Question 1

- Focus on improving ninth grade promotion rates
- Development of goals and objectives
- The need to tailor students' course offerings to positively impact student achievement and accreditation standings



Key Themes from Research Question 2

- Participants' reactions to structured study halls
- Reactions to how teachers' and students relationships developed



Key Themes from Research Question 3

- Lack of support
- Communication



Key Themes from Research Question 4

- All students can achieve at high levels
- Professional development opportunities



Key Themes from Research Question 5

- District, state, national benchmarks determined success/failure
- Student participation in school activities



Commonalities

- All Four Schools
 - Used data to monitor student progress
 - Focused on building positive relationships with students
 - Instituted after school remediation programs



Critical Differences

- Planning and Implementation
- Program Design
- Inhibiting Factors
- Facilitating Factors
- Criteria Used to Determine Success/Failure



Comparison of Findings to the Review of the Literature

- Well defined goals and objectives
- Block scheduling
- Teacher voice in planning and implementation
- Teacher teams
- Include all ninth graders/only first time ninth graders

(Kerr 2001 and 2002; Daggett 2005)



Comparison of Findings to the Review of the Literature

- Separate ninth grade area/facility
 - Effective dropout measures
 - Parental involvement
 - Pre-high school activities
 - Common planning for teachers
 - Students selected identified as at-risk
- (Kerr 2001 and 2002; Daggett 2005)



Implications for Future Research

- Ways to support instructional personnel involved in working with ninth graders
- Various strategies implemented across a single school district to address the ninth grade year
- Examining the challenges of educators in ninth grade transition programs
- Sharing a common goal of educating all students



Conclusion

- Programs have been implemented.
- Continuous improvement has not occurred on a consistent basis.
- Strategies implemented have yet to yield consistent, positive results.
- Replication and evidence of increased promotion rates must occur before any of the practices can be considered as universally acceptable.
- Visit www.nassp.org to view this dissertation in its entirety.

