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STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF A DROPOUT PREVENTION ACADEMY

by

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A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of
Doctor of Education

Grand Forks, North Dakota
December
2010
This dissertation, submitted by Dale Edward Miller in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

This dissertation meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

Dean of the Graduate School

Date

December 9, 2010
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF TABLES</th>
<th>viii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ACRONYMS</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>xii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION ................................................................................. 1
   - Background of Study ................................................................. 1
   - Fargo Public Schools ................................................................. 2
   - Need for the Study ................................................................. 9
   - Purpose of the Study ............................................................... 9
   - Research Questions ................................................................ 10
   - Delimitations ....................................................................... 10
   - Assumptions ......................................................................... 10
   - Definitions of Terms ............................................................. 11
   - Organization of the Study ..................................................... 12

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE ................................................................. 13
   - Consequences of Dropping Out ............................................... 15
   - Graduation Rates ................................................................ 17
   - Types of Dropout Prevention Programs ................................. 27
   - Early Identification and Tracking of “At-Risk” Students ....... 29
Block Scheduling ................................................................. 32
Homework Habits of “At-Risk” Students ......................... 34
Academic Rigor .................................................................. 34
Personalization .................................................................. 36
Transition for High School Students ................................. 37
Small Learning Communities ............................................. 39

III. METHODOLOGY ............................................................. 41
Purpose of the Study .......................................................... 41
The Instrument .................................................................. 41
Focus Groups .................................................................... 43
Selection of the Population ............................................... 43
Data Collection .................................................................. 45
Data Analysis ..................................................................... 46

IV. THE RESULTS .................................................................... 48
Graduation Rate .................................................................. 50
Elements of the Academy Program ................................. 52
Transition ........................................................................... 61
Focus Groups .................................................................... 70

V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY ........................................ 73
Discussion ........................................................................... 74
Graduation Rate ............................................................... 74
Elements of the Academy Program ......................... 77

Transition ................................................................ 79

Conclusions ................................................................ 80

Limitations ................................................................ 81

Recommendations for Fargo Public Schools .......... 82

Recommendations for School Districts .................. 84

Recommendations for Further Study ..................... 84

APPENDICES ................................................................................................................ 86

A. INVITATION TO ENROLL CHILD IN ACADEMY .......... 87
B. SURVEY INSTRUMENT .......................................................... 89
C. PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH ..................... 104
D. LETTER TO PARENTS ........................................................... 105

REFERENCES ............................................................................................................... 106
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. National Event Dropout Rates by Selected Characteristics:</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. National Status Dropout Rates by Selected Characteristics:</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. National Status Completion Rates by Selected Characteristics:</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2007</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. National and North Dakota AFGR Values for the Years, 2005-2008</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Letter Grades for Academy Students at the End of the First Semester</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Demographic Information ($N = 36$)</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Breakdown of Reasons for Not Graduating ($N = 91$)</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Average Freshman Graduation Rates (AFGRs) for the Class of 2010</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Responses to Survey Item 11 – The Academy Program Challenged</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Me Academically ($N = 36$)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Responses to Survey Item 12 – The Academy Program Allowed Me</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Earn More Credits Than I Would Have Without the Academy Program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>($N = 36$)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Responses to Survey Question 13 – How Did the Block Classes</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help You? ($N = 36$)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Responses to Survey Question 15 – How Did the Academy Program</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help You With Homework? ($N = 36$)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Responses to Survey Question 17 – Did the Academy Program</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motivate You to Stay in School? ($N = 36$)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. Responses to Survey Question 19 – Did the Academy Program Teachers Care About Your Academic Success? \(N = 36\) ........................................ 58

15. Responses to Survey Item 21 – The Academy Program Learning Labs Were Helpful \(N = 36\) ............................................................ 59

16. Responses to Survey Items 23 and 24 – The Transition Out of the Academy Program Was Difficult for Me and Why \(N = 36\) ........................................ 62

17. Responses to Survey Item 26 – Taking More Classes in the Junior Year Was Difficult \(N = 36\) ............................................................ 63

18. Responses to Survey Item 28 – I Had a Hard Time Finishing My Homework in My Junior Year \(N = 28\) ................................................... 64

19. Responses to Survey Item 30 – I Had a Difficult Time Earning Credits in My Junior Year \(N = 36\) ............................................................ 65

20. Responses to Survey Item 32 – I Considered Dropping Out of School in My Junior or Senior Year \(N = 36\) ................................................... 67

21. Responses to Focus Group Questions \(N = 12\) ........................................ 71
LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACR - The Adjusted Completion Rate is calculated by dividing the regular diplomas issued by an estimate of the number of students “at-risk” of receiving diplomas (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2009).

AFGR - “The averaged freshman graduation rate (AFGR) provides an estimate of the percentage of public high school students who graduate on time—that is, 4 years after starting 9th grade—with a regular diploma” (Cataldi, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2009, p. 9).

BCR - The Basic Completion Rate is calculated by comparing the number of enrolled public school 9th graders in the fall of one year to the number of public high school diploma recipients three years later based on when the 9th graders should have graduated (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2009).

CCD - Information on public schools, public school districts, and state education agencies including, among other types of fiscal and non-fiscal data, demographics and other information about students (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.)

CPI - The Cumulative Promotion Index, created by Swanson (2003), determines a state-level four-year high school graduation rate which approximates if a student entering 9th grade will complete high school on time with a diploma.
CPS - The Current Population Survey is a monthly survey of 50,000 households completed by the Census Bureau (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

ECR - The Estimated Completion Rate, computed by Warren (2005), attempts to conceptually represent the ratio of high school diploma recipients to the number of 9th graders enrolled in the same school three years earlier.

FTE - Full Time Equivalent (Encarta World English Dictionary, 2009)

GED - General Equivalency Diploma is a diploma for adults’ equivalent to a high-school diploma (Encarta World English Dictionary, 2009).
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this study would not have been possible without the assistance and support of many individuals. I would like to thank Dr. Gary Schnellert, my advisor, for his guidance and encouragement throughout this dissertation. His knowledge and experience helped make a difficult process easier.

I would also like to thank my doctoral committee members, Dr. Sherryl Houdek, Dr. Glenn Olson, Dr. Luke Huang, and Dr. Jared Keengwe for pushing me to do my best; I have grown in this process thanks to their support and feedback.

I would like to also thank my wife Heather, and my children Isabel and Addison. Without their understanding and sacrifice, I would not have made it through this process. I can now give my family the time and love they truly deserve.
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if the Academy Program of Fargo North High School helped students reach graduation, and to identify the respondents' perceptions of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School. This study examined the relationship between respondents' participation in the Academy Program in 9th grade and 10th grade and the Average Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) of their 9th grade cohort, respondents' perceptions of the Academy Program, and the transition to their 11th grade year.

The research questions which guided this study were:

1. What is the graduation rate of students in the Academy Program of Fargo North High School compared to their peers in their 9th grade cohort class four years after entering Fargo North High School?

2. What elements of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School do students perceive helped them achieve graduation?

3. What elements do students perceive having difficulty with as they transition out of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School into their 11th grade year in a traditional high school setting?

Out of the 68 students originally enrolled in the Academy Program during the 2006-2007 academic year, only 36 (52.9%) responded due to the limited ability of the researcher to collect data from transient students, transferred students, students who
completed a GED instead of earning a diploma, and students who participated in other alternative schooling within the last four years.

The results were Academy Program students of Fargo North High School who started 9th grade in 2006-2007 and graduated in 2010 graduated at a lower rate (52.9%) than non-Academy Program students (89.6%) who started 9th grade in 2006-2007 and graduated in 2010. For Academy Program students who reached graduation, increased time to work on homework during the school day supported them. Academy Program students indicated teachers cared about the academic success of the students. Modified block style classes which consisted of 100 minutes of instruction per day supported students. The Academy Program students would continue the program through the rest of their high school career if the program was offered in the junior and/or senior year.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"The bottom line is that this nation cannot rightfully expect to lead the 21st century’s information- and technology-driven global economy when we have upwards of 30 percent of our young people not even graduating from high school." - Thomas J. Donohue, president and CEO, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, as reported in Milliken (2007, p. xxiii). For the past four decades, the United States has boasted an increasing graduation rate. However, according to Warren and Halpern-Manners (2009), the actual graduation rate is much lower than previously thought. Due to many different graduation rate calculations which are used in the United States, and different types of data used for those calculations, Warren and Halpern-Manners (2009) have argued the rate to be as low as 70% and not 90% as previously reported by the Department of Education.

Background of Study

Drop-out prevention is a continual concern for any public school district in the country. Because of increasing demands and regulations for accountability, today’s public schools cannot ignore this crisis. Students are dropping out of school at an alarming rate at a time when the economy needs competent and educated youth to supply the next generation of the labor force (Dynarski et al, 1998; Dynarski & Gleason, 2002). Since the mid-1980s, the global world economy has led to many economic benefits for education (Milliken, 2007). However, there is concern from some researchers that we are
not correctly reporting graduation rates which are a tell-tale sign of our economy’s
demise. Warren & Halpem-Manners (2009) note, “If we are mischaracterizing the high
school dropout/completion rate (and trends in that rate), then we are mischaracterizing a
fundamental aspect of the nature of the American workforce” (p. 5). According to
Dynarski, Gleason, Rangarajan, and Wood (1998) and Warren and Halpem-Manners
(2009), schools in the United States have done little to decrease the number of students
who drop out every year.

A decade after state and federal leaders made lowering dropout rates a national
goal, it appears little progress has been made. The problem is most severe in 34
cities, where nearly half the schools graduate fewer than 50 percent of 9th
graders by the end of 12th grade, one study found. Researchers also contend
federal and state dropout data underestimate the number of students who drop out
and overestimate the number who earn high school diplomas each year, especially
minority students (Johnston, 2001, para. 2-4).

Fargo Public Schools

Fargo Public School District is located in the upper Midwest in a suburban
community of 90,599 people with a total metropolitan area population of approximately
175,000 (“About Our City,” 2010). At the time of this report, Fargo Public Schools
served over 10,000 students annually in kindergarten through 12th grade (Fargo Public
Schools Website, 2010). In 2010, the district consisted of one preschool, twelve
elementary schools, three middle schools, two traditional high schools, one alternative
high school, and a summer school focused on performing arts. In 2011-2012, Fargo
Public Schools will be opening a third traditional high school in the southern end of the

community (Fargo Public Schools Website, n.d.b.). The district offers 150 courses within 28 curriculum areas, including accelerated, advanced placement, and developmental courses. In 2011-2012, each high school will have less than 1300 students enrolled with an average class size 26 students or less per teacher. Fifty-three percent of the teachers in the district hold master’s degrees or higher (Fargo Public Schools Website, n.d.a) compared to 26% of teachers in the state of North Dakota who hold a master’s (B. Bucholz, personal communication, February 17, 2010). For the past 6 years, the school district has lowered the mill rates for taxpayers, which has created good rapport with the public (Fargo Public Schools Website, n.d.a.). The district boasts an average daily attendance rate of 95%, and a 2009 ACT composite score of 23.1.

Fargo North High School is located on the north side of the community and is 1 of 2 traditional high schools in the Fargo Public School District. During the 2006-2007 school year, Fargo North High School underwent a structural change from a 10th through 12th grade high school to a 9th through 12th grade school. In the 2009-2010 school year, Fargo North High School enrolled 1094 students, and the staff consisted of 88 teachers, 4 administrators, 4 counselors, a school resource officer, a nurse, and 45 support staff (A. Dahlen, personal communication, October 31, 2009). Students matriculate into Fargo North High School from 1 middle school, and that middle school serves 5 elementary schools which are located on the north side of the community. Student enrollment for Fargo North High School is declining with an expected population of 925 students by 2014-2015 (D. Huffman, personal communication, October 31, 2009).

To combat the high school dropout issue, a pilot program referred to as the "ABC" program was started in 2005-2006 at Fargo North High School. In 2006-2007,
the name of the program was changed to the “Academy Program of Fargo North High School.” According to Andy Dahlen (2005), principal of Fargo North High School during the period of this study, the goals of the Academy Program is to improve student academic skills and reduce the number of students who leave Fargo North High School before receiving a high school diploma. The Academy Program has the following specific goals:

1. To improve student achievement,
2. To improve attendance and reduce discipline referrals,
3. To increase the number of credits attained for students deemed “at-risk”,
4. To improve personalization for students,
5. To reduce the number of high school dropouts, and
6. To reduce the number of class changes.

The Academy Program uses the “school-within-a-school” concept. This school-within-a-school concept is a typical approach used by dropout prevention programs throughout the United States (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002). This approach creates a smaller educational unit or sub-school within a larger educational unit to help capture the benefits of a smaller school including increased personalization given to students attending the school. Both the sub-school and its larger host school are located on the same campus or within the same building (Dewes, 1999).

The Academy Program of Fargo North High School was initiated for incoming 10th grade students in 2005-2006 who were identified as “at-risk” for dropping out of high school. The mission of the Academy Program is to identify and provide intensive services to a group of “at-risk” students (Dahlen, 2005). Students are usually chosen or
considered "at-risk" based on particular characteristics or past school performance. Prior research has found particular behaviors correlate with dropping out (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002). Many different factors were used to identify "at-risk" students for the Academy Program:

- Teacher, counselor, and administrator recommendations from the feeder middle school;
- Grade Point Averages less than or equal to 2.75 in the first semester of a student's 8th grade year;
- One or more failed class(es) in core classes in a student's middle school career;
- Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) tests from 8th grade, which indicate a student needs in math and reading;
- State assessment reading scores from 8th graders which indicate students are at novice or partially proficient reading levels; and
- Special education students would also be considered in the program (Dahlen, 2005).

Thirty sophomore students, who were considered "at-risk" by these requirements, were selected in 2005-2006 to participate in this program. With the addition of 9th grade students to the high school in the following year, the Academy Program was extended to incoming "at-risk" 9th grade students (Dahlen, 2005). Sixty-eight students were identified as eligible for the Academy Program from the incoming 9th grade class for the 2006-2007 school year (A. Dahlen, personal communication, October 31, 2009). For the purpose of this study, 68 students comprise the study population. In comparison, the
cohort described in this study consists of all 9th graders who started Fargo North High School in 2006-2007 and graduated in 2010 from Fargo North High School.

There are numerous advantages to students participating in the Academy Program. The first advantage is students focus on fewer classes each day and each term. Students only take 2 core classes each semester choosing from English, math, social studies, and science. Classes use a modified block schedule to allow a student to take 3 to 4 classes (2 blocks plus 2 traditional) instead of 6 to 7 traditional (non-block) classes (Dahlen, 2005). A block class is a period of time during the school day for an Academy Program student in which he/she stays in the classroom for double the amount of time as compared to students in a traditional scheduling structure. In Fargo North High School, a block scheduled class meets for 100 minutes each day for a semester (A. Dahlen, personal communication, October 31, 2009).

The second advantage is that students are held accountable to a different attendance policy. All students are allowed to be absent 10 times and have 9 tardies before being withdrawn from a class in any given 18 week period (semester). The Academy Program of Fargo North High School students have the same number of absences or tardies as other students, but the attendance allowances would be for a 9 week time period instead of an 18 week time period (Dahlen, 2005).

A third advantage for students is an increased focus on homework during the school day. Prior research has indicated the amount of control a student exercises over homework completion can be attributed to the psychological perspective of self-worth (Covington 1998). For Academy Program students, more time is given to homework
during the class period. The time devoted to homework is usually double the time given for traditional classes (Dahlen, 2005).

A fourth advantage is the focus on personalization of the student’s academic day. Each Academy Program student is assigned a “learning lab” with less than ten students. A learning lab is similar to a study hall. A study hall is a period of time set aside to allow students to work on homework in a quiet place. In other words, in a learning lab, a student receives more personalized attention than students in regular study halls because there are fewer students per teacher in learning labs than in regular study halls. The teacher of the learning lab is 1 of the core Academy Program teachers. This facilitates interaction between students who need extra help but would not normally seek it out, and Academy Program teachers focused on wanting to help such students (Dahlen, 2005).

There are disadvantages as well to the Academy Program. The designated classrooms used for the Academy Program are one disadvantage of the program. These four classrooms are set aside for students of the Academy Program alone and are not used by non-Academy Program students which creates school scheduling issues for the school as a whole.

Another disadvantage is the loss of full-time equivalent educators (FTE’s) which creates an economic disadvantage. Seven teachers in the Academy Program for 9th and 10th grade teach only 4 periods per day compared to 5 periods per day scheduled for all other teachers. Teachers who teach in the Academy Program teach a total of 28 periods per semester compared to 35 periods seven regular teachers would teach. During the course of the year, seven regular education teachers would teach 14 more periods per year than seven teachers of the Academy Program. Based on the 2009-2010 teacher’s
negotiated contract, if one full-time teacher teaches 10 periods a year, than these 14 periods Academy Programs teachers are not required to teach would be equivalent to 1.4 teachers not being utilized every year. This translates to $48,075 lost every year in underutilized teachers based on the starting salary for a first year teacher (Fargo Public Schools, 2009). This dollar figure could be higher depending on the experience and/or education a teacher has at the time of hire.

A third disadvantage of this program is the administrative time used to place and schedule Academy Program students during registration. It takes more administrative time to create the best schedule for Academy Program students while trying to keep all of the classes required for the students to complete their studies.

A fourth disadvantage is because classes are block scheduled, the students do not always have the opportunity to take all the electives they want. The Academy Program classes are very small and are only offered at certain times of the school day which creates conflicts for the students who accept placement in the Academy Program.

Students were selected for the Academy Program based on identified criteria and were offered the opportunity to participate in the Academy Program through official letters mailed to the students’ homes from the high school (Appendix A). In addition, invitations to participate were extended during counselor-parent meetings at the end of a student’s 8th grade year at their Fargo Public Schools middle school. Parents and students were informed of the format, advantages, student disadvantages, and voluntary participation of the Academy Program during counselor-parent meetings. Of the 68 students who were offered placement in the Academy Program for the 2006-2007 school year, all accepted (Dahlen, 2005).
Need for the Study

The primary reasons for undertaking this study were school-related issues, district-related issues, and the ability to make recommendations to the school on how to improve the Academy Program. First, Fargo North High School needed to know if this program had met the mission and the goals for Academy Program students. Information gathered during a comprehensive evaluation process would help Fargo North High School administrators to determine whether or not to continue the Academy Program in its current fashion or revise key parts of its mission and initial goals established in 2005-2006 in order to better meet the needs of the students.

Second, Fargo Public Schools in which the high school resides will be moving from two traditional high schools and one alternative high school to three traditional schools and one alternative high school in the 2011-2012 school year. Course offerings and alternatives for "at-risk" students need to be examined before the new high school opens for the 2011-2012 school year. Alternatives such as the Academy Program of Fargo North High School need to be evaluated to plan for space, staffing, and economic issues at the new high school (D. Huffman, personal communication, October 31, 2009).

Finally, this study was carried out to provide recommendations to the school and school district on how to improve the Academy Program of Fargo North High School.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if the Academy Program of Fargo North High School helped students attain graduation, and to identify respondents' perceptions of the Academy Program. This study examined the relationship between respondents' participation in the Academy Program in 9th grade and 10th grade and the
Average Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) of their 9th grade cohort, respondents’ perceptions of the Academy Program, and elements of students’ transition to their 11th grade year.

Research Questions

The three research questions that guided this study were:

1. What is the graduation rate of students in the Academy Program of Fargo North High School compared to their peers in their 9th grade cohort class four years after entering Fargo North High School?

2. What elements of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School do students perceive helped them achieve graduation?

3. What elements do students perceive having difficulty with as they transition out of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School into their 11th grade year in a traditional high school setting?

Delimitations

This study was limited to 68 students who voluntarily started in the Academy Program of Fargo North High School as 9th graders in the 2006-2007 school year. Transient students, transferred students, and drop outs within the last four years at the time of the study limited the ability of the researcher to collect data from all 68 students.

Assumptions

1. The surveys contained accurate information

2. Respondents answered the surveys honestly

3. The Average Freshman Graduation Rate was the most accurate way of collecting dropout information.
Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined to support the reader’s understanding of the text:

**Academic Rigor** - “The English and mathematics [skills] that graduates must have mastered by the time they leave high school if they expect to succeed in postsecondary education or in high-performance, high-growth jobs” (The American Diploma Project, 2004, p. 10).


**“At-Risk” Students** – Students with a high probability of failing academically (Pallas, 1989).

**Block Scheduling** - A period of time during the school day for an Academy Program student in which he/she stays in the classroom for double the amount of time as compared to students in a traditional scheduling structure. In Fargo North High School, a block scheduled class meets for 100 minutes each day for a semester (A. Dahlen, personal communication, October 31, 2009).

**Cohort** - All 9th grade students who started in 2006-2007 at Fargo North High School and graduated four years later on May 30, 2010 from Fargo North High School.

**Learning Lab** - A period of time during the school day for an Academy Program student to work on homework and make up assignments (A. Dahlen, personal communication, October 31, 2009).
Restructuring Dropout Prevention Programs - Dropout prevention programs “focused on changing entire schools with dropout-prone populations” (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999, p. 3).

Targeted Dropout Prevention Programs - Dropout prevention programs “operated as smaller-scale programs within schools or community-based organizations, targeting “at-risk” students” (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999, p.3).

Traditional Scheduling - A period of time during the school day in which a student stays in the classroom for 50 minutes for each class on his/her schedule (A. Dahlen, personal communication, October 31, 2009).

Transfer Students - “A transfer out of a cohort occurs when a student leaves a school and enrolls in another school or in an educational program which culminates in the award of a regular high school diploma” (Wyoming Department of Education, 2009, p. 4).

Transient – “a person who stays in a place only briefly” (Encarta World English Dictionary, 2009).

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter I is the introduction to the study. Chapter II consists of the literature review related to this topic. Chapter III defines methods used in the study. Chapter IV is a presentation of the findings of this study in tabular and narrative form. Chapter V includes a discussion, conclusions, limitations, recommendations, and recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

What constitutes a high school dropout? A high school dropout can be defined as a student who withdrew from high school to go into the workforce, into the military, into the Job Corps, or obtained a GED as opposed to a high school diploma. Essentially, a dropout is someone who never received his or her high school diploma (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). This definition can be expanded to include a student who does not formally withdraw, but is removed from the attendance rolls due to lack of attendance, and a student who is incarcerated or expelled is also counted as a high school dropout (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). The “Common Core of Data” (CCD) collected by the National Center for Educational Statistics defines a dropout as:

A student who was enrolled at any time during the previous school year who is not enrolled at the beginning of the current school year and who has not successfully completed school. Students who have transferred to another school, died, moved to another country, or who are out of school due to illness are not considered dropouts. (Stillwell, 2010, p. 1)

According to Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) in a report commissioned for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation called The Silent Epidemic, personal perceptions of students dropping out of high school are of a great concern. The study
analyzed individual reports from 470 high school dropouts from around the country and established the followed findings:

- 88% had passing grades with 62 percent having C's and above.
- 58% dropped out two years or less short of completing high school.
- 66% would have worked harder if expectations were higher.
- 70% were confident they could have graduated from high school.
- 81% recognized graduating from high school as vital to their success.
- 74% would have stayed in school if they had to do it over again.
- 51% accepted personal responsibility for not graduating and an additional 26% felt the responsibility should be shared between themselves and their schools, leaving very few who blamed the schools alone. (p. 3)

There is no single reason why students drop out of high school. Bridgeland et al. (2006) noted that students have ideas on what administrators can do to keep them in school, and offers some reasons as to why high school students drop out that include:

- 47% of dropouts said classes weren’t interesting.
- 43% missed too much school and couldn’t catch up.
- 38% said they had too much freedom and not enough rules.
- 35% said they quit because they were failing.
- 32% said they had to get a job and earn money.
- 88% had passing grades.
- 70% said they could have graduated if they had tried.
- 69% were not motivated to work hard.
- 66% would have worked harder if more had been demanded of them. (p. 4)
Many factors affecting high school graduation rates cannot be addressed by schools themselves (i.e. individual, familial, and social issues). These factors, and “Specifically, the risk factors can include being male, socioeconomically disadvantaged, with a personal and family history of underachievement, conduct problems, and antisocial peer associations” (Janosz, Archambault, Morizot, & Pagani, 2008, p. 23).

Consequences of Dropping Out

Understanding what constitutes a dropout, risk factors, and what dropouts are saying regarding the dropping out process is important. However, what does the literature say about the consequences of not finishing high school? What impact does the high school dropout problem have for an individual and for society?

America’s 3.5 million high school dropouts between the ages of 16 and 25 are truly “have-nots.” These individuals are more likely to be unemployed, live in poverty, experience chronic health issues, depend on social services, and be incarcerated (Cataldi et al., 2009; Milliken, 2007; Monrad, 2007).

There is evidence to suggest that dropping out of high school is related to a number of negative outcomes. For instance, the cost to society for individuals who drop out of high school is estimated in the billions of dollars (Buckley, Storino, & Sami, 2003; Rouse, 2005). In 2006, the average income of persons aged 18 through 65 who had not completed high school was roughly $21,000. By comparison, the average income of persons aged 18 through 65 who completed their education with a high school diploma (including GED certificates), was over $31,400 (Cataldi et al., 2009).

On average, a male high school graduate will earn $333,000 more than a dropout over his lifetime (Wise, 2007). In 2004, an average high school dropout earned 37
cents for every dollar a high school graduate earned (Rouse, 2005). Based on the 1.3 million students who did not graduate in 2004, dropouts cost the United States $325 billion dollars in lost wages, taxes, and productivity over the average lifetime of the dropouts (Holt, 2006).

Along with the economic disadvantage of being a dropout, employment rates are dismal for high school dropouts. For adults aged 19 and older, a higher percentage of dropouts are unemployed compared to adults who earn a high school diploma (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Among adults aged 25 and older, a lower percentage of dropouts are in the labor force compared to adults who earned a high school diploma (Bureau of Labor Statistics, n.d).

The future health status for high school dropouts is slated to be wrought with issues as well. Dropouts aged 25 or older reported being in worse health than adults who were not dropouts, regardless of income. With poor health comes a shortened life span: a 45 year-old high school dropout is likely to be in worse health than a 65 year-old graduate of high school. The life expectancy for a high school dropout is almost a decade shorter than a high school graduate (Gibbons, 2006; Pleis & Lethbridge-Cejku, 2006).

The United States high school dropout problem affects other parts of society, such as the prison system. High school dropouts make up disproportionately higher percentages of the nation's prison and death row inmates. People who have achieved a high school diploma are less likely to commit crimes. “One in 10 young male high school dropouts are in jail or detention on an average day” (Gewertz, 2009, p. 5). If the United States was able to increase the high school completion rate by one percent for men ages 20-60, it would reduce the cost to the criminal justice system by $1.4 billion per year.
(American Youth Policy Forum, 2006; Kaufman, Naomi Alt, & Chapman, 2001). Forty percent of state prison inmates and thirty percent of federal inmates are dropouts (U.S. Department of Justice, 2002). The lack-luster high school graduation rate in our country might be contributing to the high costs in incarceration fees, health care, and social services (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Graduation Rates

To understand and effectively address the dropout issue requires an understanding of how graduation rates are calculated in the United States, elements of effective dropout prevention programs, and elements of an effective transitioning program for students transitioning between schools – grade school to middle school, middle school to high school, and high school to college or the work force. While the U. S. Department of Education has kept statistics on high school drop outs since 1972, challenges to compiling accurate statistics on dropout rates include, the lack of a uniform definition of a dropout, the lack of a uniform way to measure dropouts, and lack of a uniform calculation and data to calculate graduation rates in all fifty states. Issues arise not only from different data sets being used to calculate graduation rates, but also from different methods which can be used to calculate graduation rates.

The Current Population Survey (CPS), a monthly survey of 50,000 households (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010), or the decennial census, an official count of the population of the United States which occurs every 10 years (U. S. Census Bureau, 2008), is used to calculate the “event dropout rate,” “status dropout rate,” and “national completion rate.” Using CPS data, the national status dropout rate is calculated and marks the national graduation rate at approximately 90% (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2009).
A second data set used to calculate dropout rates is called the Common Core of Data (CCD). This data is collected as part of a program by the National Center for Education Statistics (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2007). CCD data includes information on public schools, public school districts, and state education agencies including, among other types of fiscal and non-fiscal data, demographics and other information about students (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Using the CCD data, numerous methods indicate the national graduation rate as closer to 70% (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2009).

The public has assumed the United States has been moving towards higher graduation rates for the past four decades. This optimistic view is due to an emphasis on the status dropout rate:

For many years, Americans read in their newspapers about high and rising high school graduation rates and took comfort the national rate was nearing 90%, based on reports from the U. S. Bureau of the Census. In the past four years, however, about a half-dozen studies by independent researchers have concluded that it simply isn’t so. (Barton, 2005, p. 7)

In 1970, only 15.0% of 16-24 year olds were considered status dropouts. In 2004, this number had decreased to 10.3% (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2009). Other researchers have estimated the true graduation rate at between 65% and 75%, and believe information used to calculate current graduation rates is flawed due to the variance in methodologies and data collection (Barton, 2002; Greene & Winters, 2006; Haney et al., 2004; Heckman & LaFontaine, 2007; Seastrom, Hoffman, Chapman, & Stillwell, 2005; Swanson & Chaplin, 2003; Warren, 2005).
Data, specifically methodologies used to calculate graduation rates, can vary (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2009) and there are different types of measures for quantifying graduation rates. Researchers, from the National Center for Education Statistics, reported four different rates or measures which attempt to describe different aspects of the dropout problem: event dropout rate, status dropout rate, status completion rate, and the averaged freshman graduation rate (Cataldi et al., 2009; Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2007). The first three graduation rates use CPS data, and the fourth graduation rate uses CCD data (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2009). Numerous other CCD methodologies have been used to calculate graduation rates, but very few are collected at the national or state level. This lack of data creates even more uncertainty as to which method being used is “right” (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2009).

An event dropout rate is calculated using CPS data by estimating the percentage of high school students in 10th and 12th grades who left high school from the beginning of one school year to the beginning of the next school year without earning a high school diploma or a GED. This type of dropout calculation has two advantages: a GED is considered as a diploma and not a dropout, and this data can be used to track annual changes in the United States. The national event dropout rate for 2007 was 3.5% (Cataldi et al., 2009). Table 1 depicts national event dropout rates for 2007.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Event dropout rate (percent)</th>
<th>Number of event dropouts (thousands)</th>
<th>Population enrolled(^1) (thousands)</th>
<th>Percent of all dropouts</th>
<th>Percent of population enrolled</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>10,967</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>5,548</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>5,419</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>49.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity(^2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>6,955</td>
<td>40.5</td>
<td>63.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>1,627</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>1,635</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


By tracking this type of dropout rate, a district can determine how many students are in need of intervention. A disadvantage of this type of calculation occurs as the data only provides the number of dropouts for a given year and does not take into account a dropout could return to school the following year and eventually graduate. This type of student, one who returns to school, would be considered a dropout during the year he/she left school (Neild & Balfanz, 2006).

A second graduation rate called the status dropout rate uses CPS data and reports the percentage of students in certain age ranges who are not in school at a given time and have not earned a high school diploma or its equivalency. In 2007, the national status dropout rate was 8.7% (Cataldi et al., 2009). An advantage of studying this type of
dropout rate is the focus on an age group as opposed to students who are enrolled in school systems. Table 2 depicts national status dropout rates for 2007.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Status dropout rate (percent)</th>
<th>Number of status dropouts (thousands)</th>
<th>Population (thousands)</th>
<th>Percent of all dropouts</th>
<th>Percent of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>3,278</td>
<td>37,480</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>1,859</td>
<td>18,940</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>1,419</td>
<td>18,541</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>49.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity¹</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1,210</td>
<td>22,962</td>
<td>36.9</td>
<td>61.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>451</td>
<td>5,363</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>1,422</td>
<td>6,632</td>
<td>43.4</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>1,545</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


A third graduation rate called the status completion rate uses CPS data, and is defined as the percentage of students in a certain age range who are currently not in school and have earned a high school diploma or GED no matter when the degree is attained. The national status completion rate in 2007 was 89%, with female students graduating at a slightly higher rate (90.6%) than male students (87.4%). An advantage of studying status completion rates is the ability to study general population trends among ethnicities, genders, and regions of the United States (Cataldi et al., 2009). Table 3 depicts status completion rates by gender and race/ethnicity in the United States for 2007.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Completion rate (percent)</th>
<th>Number of completers (thousands)</th>
<th>Population (thousands)</th>
<th>Percent of all completers</th>
<th>Percent of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>89.0</td>
<td>24,100</td>
<td>27,086</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>87.4</td>
<td>11,802</td>
<td>13,509</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>49.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>90.6</td>
<td>12,298</td>
<td>13,577</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>50.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>93.5</td>
<td>15,696</td>
<td>16,794</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>62.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>3,307</td>
<td>3,722</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>13.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>72.7</td>
<td>3,487</td>
<td>4,797</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic</td>
<td>93.1</td>
<td>1,058</td>
<td>1,136</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The Basic Completion Rate (BCR) uses CCD data and is calculated by comparing the number of enrolled public school 9th graders in the fall of one year to the number of diplomas earned three years later based on when the 9th graders should have graduated (Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2009). The BCR has two problems which introduce bias into this calculation: this equation does not take into account migration of students, and grade retention of students. This graduation rate does not account for students held back a grade from one year to the next.

\[
BCR = \frac{High School Completers_{Spring of Year X}}{E_{Grade 9}^{Fall of Year X - 3}}
\]

Migration and grade retention of students is extremely important, and the National Center of Education Statistics provides for these drawbacks of the BCR in another...
calculation called the average freshman graduation rate. “The AFGR is calculated as a
cohort group. The Averaged Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) provides an estimate of
the percentage of public high school students who graduate on time – that is, four years
after starting 9th grade – with a regular diploma” (Cataldi et al., 2009, p. 9). The AFGR
uses CCD data and is calculated by taking the number of graduates in a given year and
dividing that number by the average number of 8th graders enrolled five years earlier, 9th
graders enrolled four years earlier, and 10th graders enrolled three years earlier (Cataldi
et al., 2009). Warren and Halpern-Manners (2009) computed the AFGR as:

\[
\text{AFGR} = \frac{\text{Regular Diploma Recipients}_{\text{Spring of Year } X}}{\text{Smoothed } E^{\text{Grade 9}}_{\text{Fall of Year } X-3}}
\]

and

\[
\text{Smoothed } E^{\text{Grade 9}}_{\text{Fall of Year } X-3} = \frac{\left( E^{\text{Grade 8}}_{\text{Fall of Year } X-4} + E^{\text{Grade 9}}_{\text{Fall of Year } X-3} + E^{\text{Grade 10}}_{\text{Fall of Year } X-2} \right)}{3}
\]

This averaging or smoothing in the denominator is meant to adjust for higher
grade retention in 9th grade (Seastrom et al., 2005). The AFGR for public school
students in 48 states was reported in 2005-2006 to be 73.2%, in 2006-2007 to be 73.9%,
and in 2007-2008 to be 74.9% (Stillwell, 2010). In 2007-2008, state AFGR values
ranged from 51.3% in Nevada to 89.6% in Wisconsin with North Dakota towards the top
end with 83.8% (Stillwell, 2010). This means about three-quarters of our students are
graduating in the United States. In Nevada, however, little more than half of the high
school students are graduating. Highest graduation rates occur in Wisconsin. Table 4

Table 4. National and North Dakota AFGR Values for the Years, 2005-2008.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National AFGR</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>73.9%</td>
<td>74.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota AFGR</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
<td>83.1%</td>
<td>83.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One disadvantage in using the AFGR involves complications in trying to track students over multiple years. However, policymakers and researchers agree this type of calculation gives a clearer picture of how schools, districts, and states are doing in terms of graduation (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). In a survey conducted by the head principal at Fargo North High School in December of 2006, 98.3% of 9th grade Academy Program students indicated they planned to graduate from North High with their peers.

Another method for calculating graduation rates makes use of Greene and Winter’s (2005) method for estimating graduation rates. Warren and Halpern-Manners (2009) adapted Greene’s method to calculate the Adjusted Completion Rate (ACR). The ACR uses CCD data and is calculated by dividing regular diplomas issued by an estimate of the number of potential graduates in a given area or institution (Greene & Winters, 2005; Warren & Halpern-Manners, 2009). Warren and Halpern-Manners described the ACR in the following equation.

\[
ACR = \frac{Regular \ Diploma \ Recipients_{Spring \ of \ Year \ X}}{Smoothed \ Grade \ 9_{Fall \ of \ Year \ X-3} \times Migration \ Adjustment}
\]
The "Smoothed E" in the denominator is the same as the one used for the AFGR calculation in Equation 2 and Equation 3. The migration adjustment as determined by Warren and Halpern-Manners (2009) is calculated as:

\[
\text{Migration Adjustment} = 1 + \left( \frac{17 \text{ Year Olds}_{\text{Year } X-1} - 14 \text{ Year Olds}_{\text{Year } X-4}}{14 \text{ Year Olds}_{\text{Year } X-4}} \right)
\]

where X is the year a cohort graduates.

The Cumulative Promotion Index (CPI) uses CCD data. This indicator, created by Swanson (2003), is a state-level four-year high school graduation index or measure which rates the chances (probability) a student entering 9th grade will complete high school on time and earn a diploma. The CPI is calculated as follows:

\[
\text{CPI} = \left( \frac{\text{Regular Diploma Recipients}_{\text{Year } X}}{E_{\text{Grade 12} \text{ Year } X}} \right) \\
\times \left( \frac{E_{\text{Grade 12} \text{ Year } X+1}}{E_{\text{Grade 11} \text{ Year } X}} \right) \times \left( \frac{E_{\text{Grade 11} \text{ Year } X+1}}{E_{\text{Grade 10} \text{ Year } X}} \right) \times \left( \frac{E_{\text{Grade 10} \text{ Year } X+1}}{E_{\text{Grade 9} \text{ Year } X}} \right)
\]

where E is enrolled students in the fall, in the grade shown, and X is a given school year.

In 2005, Warren developed yet another method for measuring high school completion rates. The Estimated Completion Rate (ECR) uses CCD data and attempts to conceptually represent a ratio of the number of high school diploma recipients to the number of 9th graders enrolled in school three years earlier. The ECR also accounts for migration of students. Warren's method is illustrated in Equations 7 and 8.
ECR =

\[
\frac{Regular\ Diploma\ Recipients_{Spring\ of\ Year\ X}}{Estimated\ No.\ of\ 1st\ Time\ 9th\ Graders_{Fall\ of\ Year\ X-3} \times Migration\ Adjustment}
\]

where

\[
Migration\ Adjustment = 1 + \left[ \frac{(17\ Year\ Olds_{Year\ X-1} - 13\ Year\ Olds_{Year\ X-5})}{13\ Year\ Olds_{Year\ X-5}} \right]
\]

Warren (2005) estimates the number of first time 9th graders by simply calculating the number of 8th graders in the previous year. Warren and Corl (2007) found 8th grade retention rates tend to be low, even in states with high 9th grade retention rates. The approximate number of 8th graders compared to starting 9th graders the following year is often very close after adjusting for migration (Warren & Corl, 2007).

A more accurate calculation, according to the U. S. Department of Education (2008), is called the Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate, which was released in 2008, but does not require states to report until the 2011-2012 school year. This method is illustrated in Equation 9.

Four Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate =

\[
\frac{Number\ of\ cohort\ members\ who\ earned\ a\ regular\ high\ school\ diploma\ by\ the\ end\ of\ the\ 2011\ -\ 2012\ school\ year}{Number\ of\ first\ time\ ninth\ graders\ in\ fall\ 2008\ (starting\ cohort)\ plus\ students\ who\ transfer\ in,\ minus\ students\ who\ transfer\ out,\ emigrate,\ or\ die\ during\ school\ years\ 2008\ -\ 2009,\ 2009\ -\ 2010,\ 2010\ -\ 2011,\ and\ 2011\ -\ 2012}
\]
Using CCD data, this calculation is “the number of students who graduate in four years with a regular diploma divided by the number of students who form the adjusted cohort for the graduating class” (p. 2). The cohort is adjusted by subtracting students who transfer out, emigrate, or die during the four years. The cohort is similarly adjusted from the beginning of the 9th grade year by adding students who transfer into the school (Department of Education, 2008).

Types of Dropout Prevention Programs

Two main types of dropout prevention programs that exist in the United States include: targeted programs and restructuring programs. Targeted dropout prevention programs identify a group of students who are “at-risk” of dropping out and create a school within a school by putting interventions in place for the group. Restructuring dropout prevention programs focus on changing the whole school to combat a dropout prone area by offering systematic interventions and a change of pedagogical practice (Dynarski & Gleason, 1999). There are several systematic interventions and proven strategies for preventing a student from dropping out of school used in dropout prevention programs, such as attendance and behavior monitors, establishment of small learning communities for greater personalization, 9th grade academies, a focus on equal access to rigorous coursework and high expectations, and 8th-to-9th grade transition programs (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007).

With lower than desired graduations rates, districts must look at alternative programs to boost their graduation rates. The cost to school districts can vary depending on the type of dropout prevention program and the needs of the students. Spokane Public School’s dropout rate is nearly 29%. This district is collecting more taxes and will
spend $6 million from its savings in the upcoming year to promote its dropout prevention program to try and retain approximately 100 more graduates from the school district (Lawrence-Turner, 2010).

Many school districts cannot afford to fund their own programs through taxes alone, so more often school districts look for grant funding to help offset any type of cost for a larger dropout prevention program. The largest national dropout prevention program called the Community in Schools has more than 194 affiliates and serves 2.3 million young people. One such affiliate serves more than twenty schools located in and around Wichita, Kansas. Of the 2.1 million dollar budget for the Community in Schools project in Kansas, approximately 40% comes from grant funding. One of the schools served is Haysville School District that contributes $57,000 per year to help fund its share of the Communities in Schools project (Heck, 2009).

According to Deb Dillon, the dropout prevention coordinator for Fargo Public Schools until 2009, the Academy Program is one piece in the district’s strategic dropout prevention program. The funds associated with a comprehensive strategy can be quite large for a district (Deb Dillon, personal communication March 15, 2010). The costs for the Academy Program come from the extra staffing needed at the school level. Teachers in the Academy Program teach a total of 28 periods per semester compared to the 35 periods seven regular teachers would teach. During the course of the year, seven regular education teachers would teach 14 more periods per year than the seven teachers of the Academy Program.

Based on the 2009-2010 teacher’s negotiated contract, if one full-time teacher teaches 10 periods a year, than these 14 periods Academy Programs teachers are not
required to teach would be equivalent to 1.4 teachers not being utilized every year. This translates to $48,075 lost every year in underutilized teachers based on the starting salary for a first year teacher (Fargo Public Schools, 2009). This dollar figure could be higher depending on the experience and/or education a teacher has at the time of hire, and this is an economic disadvantage of the Academy Program. According to Dr. Robert Grosz, assistant superintendent of curriculum for Fargo Public Schools, other than staffing costs, other costs incurred is minimal and would be incurred with or without the Academy Program (Robert Grosz, personal communication, September 20, 2010).

Early Identification and Tracking of “At-Risk” Students

Once the decision has been made to create a dropout prevention program and the resources have been garnered, the next step is to create a process for identifying and tracking data on students who show early warning signs of being “at-risk”. Research has identified several key indicators which can reveal students who are “at-risk” for dropping out that include: poor grades in core subjects, low attendance, failure to be promoted to the next grade, and disengagement or behavioral problems (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007; Neild & Balfanz, 2006).

There appears to be a consensus amongst researchers dropout prevention strategies need to be specifically targeting “at-risk” grade levels, such as the 9th grade. There appears to also be a consensus regarding which factors are the best indicators of “at-risk” students. For example, grades, retention, attendance, and classroom behavior are better predictors of who will become high school dropouts than gender, race, and poverty (Jerald, 2006; Kennelly & Monrad, 2007; Rumberger, 2004). Ninth grade is a pivotal year in determining a student’s ability to be successful in high school.
In 2006, the Chicago Consortium on School Research created the “On-Track Indicator” for 9th graders by utilizing two highly predictive 9th grade “at-risk” factors. During the school year, in order for a 9th grader to fall into this “On-Track” category, the student must be taking enough credits to be considered a sophomore the following year and receive no more than one F in any core academic class. Monitoring grades of 9th grade students can give insight into the possibility the students will graduate from high school. Students who earn less than five credits during their 9th grade year have a higher probability of dropping out than those students who earn five credits or more (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). Of the students who have been retained or held back in their 9th grade year, 57% of those students fail to graduate in four years (Parthenon Group, 2005).

Researchers have focused on the 9th grade as the make or break year for reaching graduation because this is when many students have to have passing grades in classes for the first time in their educational experiences (Fulk, 2003). A disproportionate number of students who are held back in 9th grade dropout; and more students fail 9th grade than any other high school grade (Herlihy, 2007). According to Neild and Balfanz (2006), students who enter 9th grade without any risk factors and earn less than two credits have a one in four chances of graduating within eight years. A student who fails one core academic course (such as English, math, science, or social studies) is highly unlikely to graduate on time with his or her peers (Balfanz & Herzog, 2005). When a student fails one core academic course and that is coupled with not being promoted to the 10th grade, it is considered an accurate indicator that the student will not graduate on time (Allensworth & Easton, 2005).
According to Fargo Public School District data gathered in December of 2006 by Fargo North High School, first semester letter grades for 9th graders in the Academy Program were compared to letter grades for the same students received in their 8th grade year of school. All academic grades for 8th grade and 9th grade were calculated using a similar grading scale in which the cutoff scores used were 90% = A, 80% = B, 70% = C, 60% = D, and <60% = F (Dahlen, 2006). This information is illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5. Letter Grades for Academy Students at the End of the First Semester.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter Grade</th>
<th>9th Grade (Academy)</th>
<th>8th Grade (Same Students, One Year Earlier)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the same time of the students’ school experience, information was collected from 9th grade students to gauge their perceptions of how the Academy Program of Fargo North High School affected their academic grades. Of the 68 Academy Program students surveyed in 2006-2007, 89.8% believed the Academy Program had a positive effect on their academic letter grades (Dahlen, 2006).

Dropout prevention programs targeted for 9th grade “at-risk” students tend to show positive outcomes for struggling high school students. Creating a school-within-a-school to keep “at-risk” 9th graders segregated from the rest of the student population tends to increase the success rate of the 9th grade year and is a commonly used strategy in the United States (Reents, 2002). Students who are identified in 8th or 9th grade as
being absent one to two weeks during a semester decrease their probability of graduating from high school. 8th graders who miss five weeks of school have a 75% chance of dropping out of high school (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). In Allensworth and Easton’s (2007) study of the schools in the Chicago consortium, only 63% of students who missed approximately five to nine school days or one to two weeks of school in 9th grade graduated in four years. In comparison, 87% students in the same cohort, who missed less than one week of school, graduated on time.

Academic and attendance strategic support systems need to be in place to help improve outcomes for 9th graders regarding academic course credits earned and rates of promotion. According to a proposal given to the Fargo Public School Board by the head principal of Fargo North High School in the spring of 2006, support system proposed included the school-within-a-school concept, and block scheduling. The proposal also indicated that the proposed strategies would improve students focus on their studies enabling them to achieve higher numbers of completed credits towards graduation, and increase the rate of promotion to the next grade (Dahlen, 2005).

Block Scheduling

Alternative scheduling options for students to use their time effectively must be in place for “at-risk” students to be successful (Gullatt, 2006). Traditional schedules in high school which contain six or seven periods per day have been subject to scrutiny in recent years due to federal legislation (Dexter, Tai, & Sadler, 2006; Rettig & Canady, 1999). The traditional high school was once thought to be unchangeable, but the makeup of the school day is slowly changing (Nichols, 2005).
Block scheduling has been used in high schools throughout the United States for the past two decades. Many school leaders have adopted block scheduling with the purpose of increasing the quality of the high school student’s experience (Childers & Ireland, 2005). “A block schedule provided longer but fewer periods each school day and, throughout a school year, provided more time slots for courses than the traditional six- or seven-period daily schedule” (Gullatt, 2006, p. 251).

The results of the movement to block scheduling have been mixed and inconclusive (Key, 2004). Studies revealed that in institutions where block scheduling was implemented, grades improved for some students (Key, 2004). Further, failing grades decreased for some students but not for all students, and increased graduation rates for some schools. Block scheduling has an impact on non-academic factors: a calmer school atmosphere, better discipline, improved student attitudes, and for “at-risk” students, reduction in failure and dropout rates (Rice, Croninger, & Roellke, 2002). Additionally, it improves students’ self-efficacy – “Self-efficacy within the framework of social-cognitive theory is defined as beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Higher self-reported self-efficacy can improve student behavior and lead to a positive effect on student achievement (Biesinger, Crippen, & Muis, 2008; Crist, 1991).

There are mixed results in student reactions to the change to block scheduling. In schools with block scheduling, students enjoyed more hands-on projects and project-orientated classrooms (Rofes, 2001). Wilson and Stokes (2000) reported groups of students indicated teachers used more variety in their instruction techniques with block scheduling, and students also enjoyed greater one-on-one attention from the teacher.
Students also described how to improve block scheduling. Students indicated teachers needed to spend less time lecturing and offer different activities to break up the time, and block scheduling was also problematic for students who were absent to stay on track with the other students because of the intensity of the block schedule (Wilson & Stokes, 2000).

**Homework Habits of “At-Risk” Students**

Teaching students effective study habits is another academic support which can be included in dropout prevention programs. Fulk (2003) found 9th grade students self-rated themselves low in study skills. Homework gives students the chance to decide when, how, and to what extent to complete homework (Cooper, 1989; Corno, 1994, 1996, 2000; Corno & Xu, 2004; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2001; Warton, 2001; Xu, 2004, 2005; Xu & Corno, 1998, 2003; Xu & Yuan, 2003). The amount of control a student exercises over homework completion can be attributed to the psychological perspective of self-worth. Covington (1998) states this theory implies students are more concerned with their self-worth than succeeding in school. When a student’s self-worth is called into question, students employ defense strategies to exert control such as procrastination, intentional withdrawal of effort, avoiding the appearance of working, and promoting the appearance of effortless achievement (Jackson, 2002, 2003).

**Academic Rigor**

High schools must work hard on two fronts to keep students enrolled: increasing academic rigor while keeping students in school. These two goals need not be mutually exclusive. Many high schools facing insurmountable challenges due to low socio-economic status have managed to introduce a high level of rigor and keep students in school (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Essentially, high schools which offered a diminished
curriculum in math have higher dropout rates (Lee & Burkam, 2001) while in terms of
academic rigor, high schools which offer fewer math courses below Algebra I reduced
the odds of students dropping out of high school by 28% (Lee & Burkam, 2001). High
schools which offered calculus reduced the odds of dropping out by 55% (Lee &
Burkam, 2001).

Academic rigor is a major concern for parents. Parents from different
socioeconomic areas believe that the most important way to improve a school is to create
an engaging curriculum which offers challenging courses. Creating a curriculum and an
approach to learning which keeps students actively engaged is the leading response by
parents on how to improve schools (Bridgeland, Dilulio, Streeter, & Mason, 2008).
Additionally, keeping students challenged and supported go hand in hand – even the most
“at-risk” students need to feel they are being pushed to learn and master rigorous content
(Agodini & Dynarski, 2004). According to Bridgeland et al. (2006), 66% of dropouts
indicate they would have worked harder if more had been demanded of them which
included higher academic standards and more homework.

According to Bridgeland et al. (2008), there is dissonance between the parents’
point of view and the teachers. Of teachers surveyed, 75% of teachers indicated if schools
create a more challenging curriculum where higher standards were demanded of “at-risk”
students, students would not work harder to achieve those standards (Bridgeland, Dilulio,
& Balfanz, 2009). Teachers believed that increasing the academic rigor would not be
helpful to students. Ninth grade students reported in December of 2006 learned more with
the Academy Program of Fargo North High School. Of the 9th grade students surveyed
in 2006, 64.4% indicated they learned more due to the Academy Program than they
would have outside the Academy. Evidently, high standards for students can create learning for “at-risk” students (Dahlen, 2006). Similar sentiments are raised below:

A case study done by New Leaders for New Schools showed significant gains can be made once high standards and a rigorous curriculum are implemented. The principal of the examined school made a conscientious effort to improve the quality of instruction and created a school-wide expectation all students would be presented with a challenging curriculum. By the end of the year, the number of 8th grade students who passed the state reading exam increased by 27% and the number of students who passed the math portion increased from 5% to 48%. The danger of having low expectations for students was explained by one school board member in a focus group, “We weren’t requiring our teachers, our parents, our students, or our principals to account for their children. And so the bar went lower and lower and lower year by year.” (Bridgeland et al., 2009, p. 23)

Personalization

Many of the more successful dropout prevention programs assign an adult to work with a small number of students (Balfanz & Legters, 2006; Dynarski, Clark, Cobb, Fin, Rumberger, Smink, 2008). According to Bridgeland et al. (2006) in their report *The Silent Epidemic*, 65% of dropouts felt as if at least one staff member cared about their academic success, and 62% of dropouts indicated the school needed to do more to help students with problems outside of class. “Many students craved one-on-one attention from their teachers, and when they received it, they remembered it making a difference” (p. 21). Participants in focus groups recounted the best days were when teachers noticed them, got them involved in class, and told them they were doing well. Dynarski and
Gleason (2002) reported students were less likely to drop out if they experienced academic success or felt connected to an adult (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Students in the Academy Program were scheduled into classes of less than 20 students and each student was scheduled in a learning lab. A learning lab is a small study hall (less than eight students) with only other Academy Program students and an Academy Program teacher. This design was used to help teachers keep track of academics and develop relationships with their students (Dahlen, 2005).

Transition for High School Students

Transition can be difficult for students entering a new school or program. “Transition means that students’ needs are recognized and met as they progress” (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2006, p. 252). The 9th grade year has become a focal point of issues for transition of students from 8th to 9th grade, and researchers found the transition from middle school to high school is full of feelings of loneliness, isolation, and disconnection (Cantin & Bovin, 2004; Cooper & Liou, 2007). 9th-graders find new stressors and different expectations in high school that were different from middle school. These issues create mixed feelings, and students are not often prepared to deal with them (Smith, Akos, Lim, & Wiley, 2008).

During the transition period between middle school and high school, there is an opportunity to fully engage parents and students. The focus is to review impressions all students have of their schools during a transition. Parents and students should meet with school officials during a transition as much as possible, and it is important to gather information regarding student fears, and student perceptions of a new school or program.
Schools cannot effectively work with students during a transition unless they know the student's strengths and weaknesses (Fulk, 2003).

Middle and high schools cannot function as two separate entities. The philosophy of two different schools can vary to a large degree if expectations are not made clear and supports put in place to ease the transition of students from institution to institution (NASSP, 2006): “Schools with extensive transition programs have significantly lower failure and dropout rates than schools that provide students few articulation activities” (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000, p. 58). Schools need to do more to support students transitioning from middle school to high school than helping students pick courses and reviewing new policies. Transition approaches to ensure maximum student success include helping students develop a four-year plan with college as an expectation, put the best teachers with students of greatest need, identify students who need additional support, and create programs which reduce student anonymity (NASSP, 2006).

Schools have many options to help ease the transition for 9th graders. Earlier contact in 8th or 9th grade on what constitutes success in high school is beneficial. Fifty-two percent of all parents say it would be extremely helpful for schools to reach out to parents early (8th or 9th grade) to ensure they know what their child needs in order to be successful. Bridgeland et al. (2008) found many parents in focus groups highlighted the complex issue of transition from middle school to high school. They discussed the increasing demands for academic achievement, the uncertainty about whether parents still felt welcome in the schools, and the transitions their own students were experiencing as they entered high school.
Communication is imperative between the two different levels of schooling. Once 8th grade students enter high school, school attempts to ease the transition should not end, but should continue throughout the 9th grade year (Morgan & Hertzog, 2001). Miscommunication exists between teachers in 8th and 9th grade about the incoming students, and this miscommunication needs to be minimized as (Neild, Balfanz, & Herzog, 2007). Other researchers have similarly noted that:

In fact, opening the lines of communication from building to building is crucial to ease student transition and increase student success. It is important that both 8th-grade and 9th-grade teachers are on the same page with academic, social, and organizational school issues. (Akos & Galassi, 2004, p. 213)

Small Learning Communities

Some schools have built separate wings or buildings called "freshman academies" for incoming 9th grade students which allows the 9th grade year to be more of a transition and less abrupt (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Creating a school-within-a-school to keep "at-risk" 9th graders segregated from the rest of the student population tends to increase the success rate of the 9th grade year and is a commonly used strategy in United States Schools (Reents, 2002). The school-within-a-school approach creates a smaller educational unit, or sub-school, within a larger educational unit to help capture the benefits of a smaller school including increased personalization given to students attending the school. Both the sub-school and its larger host school must be located on the same campus or within the same building (Dewes, 1999).

In 2005-2006, 185 schools in the United States had created a school-within-a-school as described above to help ease the transition of 9th graders (Wheelock & Miao,
McIntosh and White (2006) reported the smaller freshman wings made the student population easier to handle for the school staff. While the primary goal of these freshman academies is the focus on student achievement, the academies also tend to focus on individual needs of the particular class (Clark & Hunley, 2007).

Chapter III describes the methodology used in this study, the process of selecting the survey instrument and subjects, and the data collections procedures. It concludes with a description of the data analysis.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if the Academy Program of Fargo North High School helped students attain graduation, and to identify respondents' perceptions of the Academy Program. This study examined the relationship between respondents' participation in the Academy Program in 9th grade and 10th grade and the Average Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) of their 9th grade cohort, respondents' perceptions of the Academy Program, and elements of students' transition to their 11th grade year.

The Instrument

The survey instrument (Appendix B) was designed in November 2009 by the Fargo North High School administrative team which consisted of the head principal and three assistant principals. The survey instrument was reviewed by the researcher's doctoral committee on February 2, 2010. Based on feedback from the doctoral committee, the survey instrument was revised to reflect a more qualitative approach. The survey instrument was again reviewed by the Fargo North High School administrative team in February 2010, and the assistant superintendent for curriculum in the Fargo Public Schools reviewed the survey instrument in March of 2010.
A random sample group of seventeen 11th grade respondents, who also participated in the Academy Program of Fargo North High School in 9th and 10th grade, were used to determine reliability of the survey instrument. These respondents completed the survey instrument on March 22, 2010, prior to the actual research taking place the week of May 3, 2010. The data from the pilot survey was reviewed by two assistant principals from Fargo North High School in April, 2010. A professor from University of North Dakota’s Education Foundations and Research department also reviewed the survey instrument and pilot data in April of 2010 to determine reliability and data analysis needed. The reviews indicated the survey was reliable; descriptive statistics and qualitative methods would be used to analyze the data.

Respondents were asked their perceptions of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School, and their perceptions of the academic challenges the students faced, teachers, format, and overall impressions of the participants retained in the Academy Program. Student perceptions of their transition out of the Academy Program to a traditional high school setting during their 11th grade year were also collected and analyzed. Respondents were asked to reflect on their transition to 11th grade, the schedule of school, and homework completion in a traditional school setting (outside the Academy Program), and the respondents’ thoughts regarding dropping out of high school.

The instrument consisted of thirty-four questions which included one question concerning the respondent’s participation in the survey. Nine questions were in regards to demographic information used: gender, special education status, ethnicity, free and/or reduced lunch status, single or double parent household, mother’s completion of high school.
school, father's completion of high school, the number of schools attended by the student since first grade, and graduation status as of June 1, 2010. Twelve questions pertained to the elements of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School which supported them and their ability to reach graduation. Respondents were asked to check the appropriate box for seven questions, and were asked to answer five of the twelve questions in an open-ended format. Additionally, eleven questions pertained to the respondents' transition out of the Academy Program. Respondents were asked to check the appropriate box for six questions, and were asked to answer five of the eleven questions in an open-ended format. Respondents were also asked to write comments on any aspect of the Academy Program in the final question on the survey.

Focus Groups

Three focus groups were conducted on May 11, 2010, by an assistant principal familiar with the Academy Program's expectations. The purpose of the focus groups was to ask respondents follow up questions to the survey they completed during the week of May 3, 2010. Questions focused on the respondents' perceptions of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School. Respondents were asked if they would conduct the Academy Program again if they had to live the last four years over again, or if they would recommend it to other students. Respondents were also asked about the possibility of extending the Academy Program into the 11th grade or 12th grade year.

Selection of the Population

In 2006-2007, 345 students registered for 9th grade at Fargo North High School. The study population was limited to the 68 students selected for the Academy Program of Fargo North High School who started as 9th graders in the 2006-2007 school year and
graduated in the 2009-2010 school year. Out of the 68 students originally enrolled in the Academy Program during the 2006-2007 academic year, only 36 (52.9%) responded due to the limited ability of the researcher to collect data from transient students, transferred students, students who completed a GED instead of earning a diploma, and students who participated in other alternative schooling within the last four years. For the purpose of this study, the 68 students in the Academy Program during the 2006-2007 school year are referred to as the study population. The “cohort” described in this study consists of all 9th graders who started Fargo North High School in 2006-2007 and graduated in 2010 from Fargo North High School. This data was gathered from the Fargo North High School registrar on May 1, 2010.

Students were selected based on identified criteria discussed in Chapter 1 and were offered the opportunity to participate in the Academy Program of Fargo North via letters mailed to the students’ home from the high school (Appendix A). The invitation was also extended during counselor-parent meetings during the end of the students’ 8th grade year at the feeder middle school. Parents and students were informed of the format, advantages, student disadvantages, and the voluntary nature of the Academy Program during counselor-parent meetings. Of the 68 students who were offered placement in the Academy Program for the 2006-2007 school year, all accepted (Dahlen, 2005).

Respondents in this study represented 36 of the original 68 students (52.9%) who accepted placement in the Academy Program of Fargo North High School. Of the 36 respondents, 32 (88.9%) were Caucasian and 22 (61.1%) of the respondents were male.
Over half (52.8%) lived with both parents. Thirty and six-tenths percent (30.6%) of the study population required special education services.

Data Collection

Approval by the researcher’s doctoral committee to do the research was granted on February 2, 2010. Approval for use of the data for this research study was granted by the principal of Fargo North High School on February 15, 2010 (Appendix C). A review of the study was conducted by the Institutional Review Board at the University of North Dakota on February 25, 2010. Institutional Review Board approved the study on March 2, 2010 (proposal number IRB-201003-263). The pilot survey was completed on March 22, 2010. The research took place on May 3, 2010 and May 5, 2010. The focus groups were conducted on May 11, 2010.

The research contains two distinct types of data collection: data used to answer Research Question 1 was gathered from the Fargo Public Schools District and the Adult Education Program to determine the graduation rate for Class of 2010 on June 2, 2010. Data was also collected via the survey instrument and three focus groups with students. Consent was granted by parents of respondents that were less than 18 years of age (Appendix D). These parents were mailed a letter describing the research sponsored by Fargo Public Schools. The letter asked parents to call Fargo North High School’s main office if they did not want their son/daughter participating in the survey. Respondents who were 18 years of age and older were given an opportunity to participate via the first question on the survey which asked for a student’s consent.

Respondents were called down to the Fargo North High School’s computer lab during a free period between May 3 and May 5, 2010, and were given a brief overview of
the purpose of the survey by an assistant principal with knowledge of the study. All responses were anonymous and the data was reported in aggregate form. The participants responded to survey questions via Survey Monkey software.

The survey instrument was followed up with three focus groups which were held on May 11, 2010, to gather further information. All respondents were told during the survey portion of the research they would receive a locker note the following week to attend one of three voluntary focus groups during the respondents’ lunch periods in which food would be provided. The focus groups were held in Fargo North High School’s counseling center conference room. Twelve out of 36 students (33.0%) participated in two focus groups. The third focus group was not conducted due to lack of respondents. Demographic data was not collected on those participating in the focus groups. The assistant principal with knowledge of the study kept all data on a flash drive in his office in a locked cabinet. The data was given to an assistant superintendent of Fargo Public Schools along with a copy of the research study.

Data Analysis

Results were compiled and analyzed using descriptive statistics, and where appropriate, cross-tabulation of the data. Quantitative data compiled is presented in table format in Chapter IV. Each question was broken down by the number of respondents and the percentage of each as compared to the whole. The open-ended survey questions were analyzed using qualitative methods of research. Codes, key words, patterns and other analytical data which emerged from the survey data were identified by the researcher. Data from the open-ended survey questions are reported in Chapter IV in narrative form.
Chapter IV is a presentation of the findings of this study in tabular and narrative form. Chapter V includes a discussion, conclusions, limitations, recommendations, and recommendations for further study.
CHAPTER IV
THE RESULTS

The data results are presented in this chapter in tabular and narrative form with demographic information first followed by the data in relationship to the topics in the research questions, and finally the focus group data. Respondents were not required to answer all the questions on the survey instrument as they could skip questions if they so desired. This fact explains why there were differences in the number of respondents for each question.

This study was limited to 68 students placed in the Academy Program at Fargo North High School as 9th graders in the 2006-2007 school year who graduated in 2009-2010 from Fargo North High School. Out of the 68 students originally enrolled in the Academy Program during the 2006-2007 academic year, only 36 (52.9%) responded due to the limited ability of the researcher to collect data from transient students, transferred students, students who completed a GED instead of earning a diploma, and students who participated in other alternative schooling within the last four years.

Nine questions regarding demographic information were used: gender, special education status, ethnicity, free and/or reduced lunch status, single or double parent household, mother’s completion of high school, father’s completion of high school, the number of schools attended by the student since first grade, and graduation status as of June 1, 2010. These results are displayed in Table 6.
Table 6. Demographic Information ($N = 36$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnicity</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
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<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
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<td>88.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
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<td>5.6</td>
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<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Female</td>
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<td><strong>Live With …</strong></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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<td><strong>Grade Level of Mother</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>12th Grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beyond High School</td>
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<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Level of Father</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Below High School Completion</td>
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<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12th Grade</td>
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<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beyond High School</td>
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<td>47.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
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<td>7-10</td>
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<td>8.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>10+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
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</table>

49
Of the 36 individuals surveyed, 32 (88.9%) were Caucasian. Male respondents comprised 22 (61.1%) of the sample. Ten respondents (27.8%) were on a free or reduced lunch program. Eleven special education respondents (30.8%) comprised of the Academy Program’s population. Nineteen respondents (52.8%) indicated their mother had some level of schooling beyond high school, and 17 respondents (47.2%) indicated their father had some level of schooling beyond high school.

Graduation Rate

Data was collected from Fargo Public Schools to answer research question one. In August of 2006, 345 students registered for 9th grade. Of the 345 students registered, 335 showed up on the first day of school. The graduating class of 2010 consisted of 270 students. Ninety-one students left the original 9th grade class while 16 students transferred into Fargo North High School from other schools. A breakdown of reasons why 91 students who started school in August of 2006 as freshmen did not graduate on May 31 with their cohort is provided in Table 7.

Table 7. Breakdown of Reasons for Not Graduating. \((N = 91)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Academy Students ((N = 32))</th>
<th>Academy Students (%)</th>
<th>Entire Cohort ((N = 91))</th>
<th>Entire Cohort (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Moved outside Fargo School District</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>21.9</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Received a GED or currently working on GED</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moved to another school within district</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dropped out</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registered for 9th Grade, but didn’t show</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This data was gathered from records stored in the Fargo Public Schools School District and the Adult Education Program. To be counted in the “moved” category, records must have been requested from the Fargo Public Schools by another school. Approximately half the students who left the 9th grade cohort moved to another school either inside or outside the Fargo Public School District which is consistent with the data from the Academy Program. Approximately one in five students received their GED through Fargo’s adult education office as compared to one in three in the Academy Program. Sixteen students were considered true dropouts of the entire cohort while only four were considered dropouts of the Academy Program. Seeing that the AFGR does not count a GED as a graduated student, the number of dropouts is actually 34 (GED plus dropouts) for the entire cohort and 16 (GED plus dropouts) for the Academy Program.

Data were collected from the Fargo Public Schools District on students who graduated from Fargo North High School in 2010. Fargo North High School graduated 270 students on May 30, 2010. Out of the 345 students who started 9th grade, only 254 graduated four years later. Sixteen students transferred to Fargo North High school after their freshman year and graduated were counted in the total of 270 graduates. Of the 68 students who started in the 9th grade Academy Program, 36 graduated from Fargo North High School.

In order to calculate the AFGR accurately, the number of 8th grade students in 2005-2006 (301), the 9th grade students in 2006-2007 (345), and the 10th grade students in 2007-2008 (342) must be added together and divided by 3 (Cataldi et al., 2009). When this was done, the number of students used in the denominator of the calculation was 329. The AFGR for the class of 2010 was 270/329 or 82.1%. When the AFGR was calculated
for Academy Program students, the number of students in the denominator was 68 as all 68 students started 8th grade, 9th grade, and 10th grade. The AFGR for the Academy Program students was 36/68 or 52.9%. When subtracting the sub-category of the Academy Program out of the cohort group, the AFGR was 234/261 or 89.6%. The AFGR was used to calculate graduation rates versus other graduation rates because this was the most accurate method of determining graduation rates given the data available to us. Information on AFGR rates is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Average Freshman Graduation Rates (AFGRs) for the Class of 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AFGR</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall (N = 329)</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academy (N = 68)</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Without Academy (N = 261)</td>
<td>89.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elements of the Academy Program

Research question pertained elements of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School which helped students reach graduation. The goal was to identify areas or systems in place the respondents believed helped them to be successful at Fargo North High School and to reach graduation. Survey questions 11 through 22 were used to answer this question. In Question 11, respondents were asked if they believed the Academy Program challenged them academically. Twenty-six students (72.2%) indicated some form of agreement (Table 9)
Table 9. Responses to Survey Item 11 – The Academy Program Challenged Me Academically ($N = 36$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some form of agreement</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>72.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some form of disagreement</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For Question 12, twenty-three of respondents (63.9%) indicated some form of disagreement. Students perceived they had earned more credits in the Academy Program than they would have otherwise (Table 10).

Table 10. Responses to Survey Item 12 – The Academy Program Allowed Me to Earn More Credits Than I Would Have Without the Academy Program ($N = 36$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some form of agreement</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some form of disagreement</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents described a wide range of reasons for how the block scheduling helped them reach graduation. This information is provided in Table 11.

Table 11. Responses to Survey Question 13 – How Did The Block Classes Help You? ($N = 36$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More time to get to know the teacher</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>59.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More time to complete homework</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>86.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less number of classes to take</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller number of students per class</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When asked how the block scheduling of classes helped them, 31 (86.1%) indicated they had more time to work on homework, while 19 (59.8%) indicated they had more time to get to know the teacher.

Question 14 provided the students the opportunity to clarify their responses for the “Other” category in the previous question. Respondents who selected “Other” indicated a wide range of issues which block style classes alleviated. For example, block classes helped students increase their familiarity with the same group of students; they had fewer classes to take; and, there was more time for the teacher to explain class topics. Many respondents also indicated the increased time for homework was beneficial and respondents were able to learn more.

Survey Question 14: If you answered OTHER, please specify how the Academy Program of block classes helped you. (N = 10)

1. The block classes gave me more time to complete my assignments and learn more.

2. I just moved back to Fargo so it allowed me to be in the same classes with some of the same people, so it was easier to get to know them. Plus, it worked allot[sic] like the alternative school that I came from, so I was able to adjust better and had time to get my work done because I was a slow worker.

3. I felt having the academy program gave the teacher more time to actually explain the problem during class and the explanation would actually stick with me, rather than being rushed though something in order to give us time to work like in other classes.

4. [It] gave me a chance to worry about only one or two core classes at a time instead of 4.

5. I feel as if the academy did not strengthen my abilities.

6. I really liked getting to be with the same group of students throughout my day. It felt like a little family.
7. It had me focus on just two main courses instead all four, which allowed me to really grasp what I needed out of these classes.

8. [It] helped me focus better.

9. More Quiet so I could work easier.

10. It helped me to attempt to fit more classes onto my class schedule. It also helped me to comprehend the material of study much easier than without the Academy Program. For instance, I had more time in one day to strictly focus on a particular or specific idea of the subject.

Two of the comments which stand out are in relationship to personalization and a family-like atmosphere. Four of the responses indicated some level of time as a factor for the block classes helping the student.

32 of the respondents (88.9%) believed the Academy Program helped them with homework by allowing more time to do homework while 20 of the respondents (55.6%) believed the smaller class size allowed the teacher to help them more. This information is provided in Table 12.

Table 12. Responses to Survey Question 15 – How Did the Academy Program Help You With Homework? (N = 36)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More time in class to do homework</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning labs helped me focus</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller class size allowed the teacher to help more</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey Question 16: Please specify how the Academy Program format helped you to complete your homework. (N = 4)

1. The learning labs were very helpful for my test scores and homework.

2. The teachers helped in the classes.
3. The learning labs were a great time not only to get my homework done, but also to bond with some of the other students in that class. Most of my really good friends were from the Academy Program.

4. We went over it in class so I understood it better.

Two of the respondents indicated learning labs allowed them more time for homework. One of the comments indicates the personalization of the learning lab was helpful. 22 of the respondents (61.1%) indicated that the Academy Program motivated them to stay in school while respondents who indicated “Other” cited that the Academy Program allowed them to stay motivated because of the relationships they built with teachers as well as the fewer classes. This information is provided in Table 13.

Table 13. Responses to Survey Question 17 – Did the Academy Program Motivate You to Stay in School? (N = 36)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>61.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey Question 18: Explain how the Academy Program motivated you to stay in school. (N = 16)

1. Well the academy was a lot easier than having normal classes, and if I didn't have the academy I wouldn't of been going to school.

2. It let me learn at my own pace so I wasn't behind and I could focus and understand better.

3. I really got to know the teachers and administrators so I began to believe they were really there to help me otherwise I wanted to drop out and go to Woodrow.

4. It didn't make me feel like a complete failure, and it gave me to time work at my own pace to get things done.
5. I think that the academy lets you get to know the teacher better, and you feel like they really want you to do better in school.

6. I didn’t have too many classes to worry about, so I had no pressure to leave school.

7. I would have stayed in school even if the Academy Program hadn’t been offered.

8. Yes, and the teachers were very helpful and easy to talk to.

9. I feel as if it was just a normal class. Nothing motivating. Personally, I did not enjoy these classes.

10. Less stress with less classes. Also, the classes were more like a family because I had the same people in every class and that made it easier.

11. Made it a little easier to go through school and gave a sample of how high school really goes.

12. It laid all of my work in front of me.

13. It was regular school.

14. It helped keep my school work organized with the smaller amount of classes to worry about.

15. Because the teachers made the classes fun to go to and made wanting to go to that class a lot easier. It made you say, "Oh, I can’t wait for English today."

16. I hadn’t intended to leave school in the first place.

Five respondents indicated that the personalization of for Academy Program students was there to help/motivate them to get through school while five of them indicated otherwise. Thirty-three of the respondents (91.7%) believed teachers working in the Academy Program of Fargo North High School cared about their academic success. This information is provided in Table 14.
Table 14. Responses to Survey Question 19 – Did The Academy Program Teachers Care About Your Academic Success? (N = 36)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey Question 20: Please explain your answer to the previous question. (N = 17)

1. All the teachers helped me and pushed me have better grades.
2. They helped me a lot and were there.
3. They didn’t give up on me no matter what I did. If they believed in me and told me I could make it here if I just tried and stuck with it.
4. It made the work and class easier to understand due to the more time to complete it.
5. Yes, because they’d take their time when explaining things to us to make sure we understood what was being taught.
6. Teachers seemed to pay more attention to students in this class because they had more time to get to know them.
7. They were always willing to help me and even though now that I don’t have them anymore, they still like to help me with my academic success.
8. … depending on the teacher.
9. They seemed to take more time to help and gave me more time to understand.
10. [Teacher A] is the first teacher that comes to mind for this question. He seemed to really take the time to get to know us and what our strengths and weaknesses were. He also didn't talk to us like we were stupid.
11. Some cared others I don’t really think they did. They were some-what only caring to those who were really good.
12. Yes, they all were very caring about their students and it helped out a lot in the end.
13. They just did.
14. My favorite teachers throughout high school are many of the teachers I had in the academy program.

15. Because they would try their hardest to make sure you got the grade you needed and helped you achieve that grade that you wanted.

16. They focused on the student as an individual because they were able to and so they were able to help me with my specific issues and problems.

While fourteen respondents indicated all the teachers cared about their academic success, it was not true for all. The teachers pushed the respondents to have better grades, seemed to understand the respondents better than teachers the students knew in previous years, and did not give up on them. Two of the comments which stand out indicate it depended on which teacher the respondents were asked to describe.

Table 15 shows responses to Question 21. Question 21 asked respondents if the learning labs were helpful and 23 of the respondents (63.9%) indicated they were.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey Question 22: Please explain how the Academy Program learning labs were helpful or not helpful to you. (N = 19).

1. They helped me learn.

2. I don’t think we needed a learning lab as well, I think the blocked classes were enough for us to be helped the way we needed to be helped.

3. It was very helpful during but my junior year I was completely lost and didn’t know what was going on.
4. They allowed some time to complete my work to the best of my abilities and the teachers were more available to help.

5. There wasn't that many kids in class, and I knew most of the kids and liked them so it made the labs easier to do and more enjoyable.

6. I think that the learning labs were just like any other study hall.

7. More time to work on homework, more time with teachers, less classes to worry about.

8. I never had a learning lab in 9th grade but I did have one in 10th grade. I didn't get much work done since there were a lot of talking and goofing off in my learning lab in 10th grade.

9. I did not have a learning lab but had normal study halls instead.

10. Most of the time.

11. They were not very helpful due to the fact that people just fooled around, despite efforts by the teacher. What should be done is take these "Problem" students and stick them in normal classes. Discipline, in the right way would work best. Take them out of the, "I don't care" environment.

12. I don't believe I had any learning labs.

13. The time to work on homework was helpful, but sometimes the learning labs got kind of loud.

14. More time to do homework and the teachers helped when you needed it.

15. We went over all of the same subjects but it was just presented different and more understandable

16. Felt they treated me handicap.

17. More time to get help from teacher when needed.

18. You got to really know your classmates more, you really could connect with the teacher and your fellow class mates. You could pay attention more without somebody interrupting the class.
19. They provided a time of which to do homework, ask my teachers questions, or even just to be able to relax for upcoming classes if I had nothing else to do.

Out of the nineteen responses, ten believed the learning labs were helpful and nine did not. Of the responses who indicated the learning labs were not helpful, the indication of disruptive behavior by some of the students seemed to be a pattern. Respondents indicated the more time to work with teachers and to work on homework were positive aspects of the learning labs. Many respondents indicated the learning labs were no different than any other study hall.

Transition

Research question three asked, "What elements do students perceive having difficulty with as they transition out of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School into their 11th grade year in a traditional high school setting? Survey questions 23 through 33 were used to answer research question three.

In survey questions 23 and 24, the respondents were asked about their transition out of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School into their junior year. Twenty-one of respondents (58.3%) indicated that their transition was not difficult for them. Twenty-four respondents (66.7%) indicated that there was less time to work on homework during the day which created a more difficult transition. A summary of these results are provided in Table 16.
Table 16. Responses to Survey Items 23 and 24 – The Transition Out of the Academy Program Was Difficult for Me and Why. (N = 36)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some form of agreement</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some form of disagreement</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>58.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why was the transition difficult

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More classes to take during the day</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less time for homework</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less time to get to know teachers</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey Question 25: Please explain how the transition was difficult for you. (N = 13)

1. Too fast paced and couldn’t follow along as well as in the academy program.
2. Just adjusting from less classes to more and more time to complete your work to less but even then the teachers would work with me on that if necessary.
3. Was use to the academy program and when I left the program it was harder to adjust to the schedule. Wasn’t use to having things due the next day.
4. Was not a hard transition.
5. Was not difficult.
6. I was a little overwhelmed at first, but I had gotten used to it.
7. It wasn’t difficult.
8. I didn’t think the transition out of the Academy was difficult.
9. None of the above.
10. The classes were more difficult after the academy.
11. Because it really helped me get to know my classmates better. The teachers were really fun to be around.
12. It was not difficult for me, because the Academy Program gave me more or less a chance to prepare to leave it.

13. It wasn’t.

In survey question 25, some respondents indicated the faster pace of classes outside the Academy Program and more classes were difficult. Eight of the thirteen respondents’ perception was the transition was not difficult for them. Thirty-one respondents (36.1%) answered question 26 by stating taking more classes during their junior year was difficult. This information is depicted in Table 17.

Table 17. Responses to Survey Item 26 – Taking More Classes in the Junior Year Was Difficult. (N = 36)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey Question 27: Please explain how or why the transition out of the Academy Program to the 11th grade was difficult. (N = 12)

1. Junior was just hard for me to begin with, I was swamped with homework and left with no time to do it but ILC.

2. Was a lot harder and couldn’t follow along as well as I could in the academy program.

3. I didn't know what to expect and when I figured it out I wasn't doing good in classes and I studied but failed cause I didn't get the attention from teachers I needed for help.

4. I was in the academy in just 9th grade, so when I got into 10th I wasn't expecting to have so there were too many classes in one day. I ended up failing some of them. I am taking them this year much homework, and I really wish I would have chosen to be in the academy again.

5. Hard to get homework done on time and hard to get use to the schedule.

6. Had to learn the schedule all over again.
7. Couldn't keep track of all assignments.
8. The classes were not long enough to get my things done.
9. It was difficult to go from getting to know a teacher so well and being comfortable with the classmates to not knowing teachers and having many more students in each class.
10. Just less time overall to do my work for each class.
11. I was out of the Academy in 10th grade, and I thought it wasn't much harder.
12. It wasn't TOO difficult; just a bit less time to work on homework.

Out of the 12 responses, five of them revolved around the idea of not enough time. Other respondents indicated the work was harder; there were too many classes, or not enough attention from teachers. In Question 28, respondents were asked to describe their ability to complete homework in their junior year. Some respondents (47.2%) indicated they did not have enough time to complete their homework and 11 respondents (30.6%) indicated they did not have enough help from teachers. These results are provided in Table 18.

Table 18. Responses to Survey Item 28 – I Had a Hard Time Finishing My Homework in My Junior Year. (N = 28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not enough time to finish my homework</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough help from teachers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was not motivated</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey Question 29 If you answered “Other” to Question 28, please explain. (N = 9).

1. I didn't have a hard time at all. I had a few open periods and that's where I did my homework.
2. I didn’t really have a hard time because I was in an inpatient treatment facility so I buckled down and learned to put my priorities first.

3. This did not apply to me.


5. [T]here were other circumstances that didn't pertain to the Academy Program that resulted in my difficulty to complete my homework junior year.

6. Neither of those.

7. I didn’t have a hard time doing my homework.

8. No problem finishing my homework.

9. Didn’t have a hard time.

For the majority of the respondents, homework completion in the junior year was not an issue. Two respondents indicated factors outside of the Academy Program made it difficult. Many respondents indicated they did not have difficulty or they had other influences outside that did not allow them to finish their homework. Twenty four of the respondents (66.7%) indicated that they did not have a difficult time with earning credits in their junior year. Since all of these students did graduate in four years, it appears the response coincides with the facts from research question one. This information is provided in Table 19.

Table 19. Responses to Survey Item 30 – I Had a Difficult Time Earning Credits in My Junior Year. (N = 36)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>66.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Survey Question 31 Please explain why you had difficulty earning credits in your junior or senior year. (N = 11).

1. Junior year I wasn’t motivated to do anything. It was a hard year. Senior I worked my butt off. It wasn’t hard to get my credits I just didn’t have a teacher nagging.

2. I studied in my classes my fresh. & soph. year but jun. & sen. I was on my own.

3. The only struggle was the comparison of my homework load got bigger.

4. My schedule was set up in a way that I had a lot of study halls one semester and hardly any the next, so I felt like I didn’t have time to do any of the work.

5. I had too many classes and not enough time.

6. more homework, less time

7. It seems like a much longer process and I don’t feel as involved with the teacher so it makes me a little less motivated

8. It was easier to skip because I didn’t see most of my teachers later on in the day, whereas in the Academy Program, I might have had a learning lab, so I didn’t feel right skipping the blocked class and the learning lab.

9. Work was harder and teaching was less spot lighted on me.

10. … cause there was not much help from teachers.

11. The Academy Program was over.

Of the 11 respondents, motivation, more classes, and more homework appeared to be themes. The 11 respondents indicated that their issues made it more difficult to earn credits.

Question 32 asked students if they considered dropping out in their junior and/or senior year of high school. Thirty-one respondents (86.1%) indicated that they had not considered that. This is reflected in Table 20.
Table 20. Responses to Survey Item 32 – I Considered Dropping Out of School in My Junior or Senior Year. (N = 36)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>86.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey Question 33: Please explain your answer to Question 32. (N = 15)

1. I want to graduate and have a normal easy life.
2. I did not consider dropping out of my high school career.
3. I have a good future ahead of me. I'm not about to blow it and let it go.
4. I considered dropping out my sophomore year but after returning to North and setting my priorities straight I changed my mind.
5. I thought about going to Woodrow instead of finishing up at north, and the only thing that really kept me here was the art department, because I knew I wouldn't be able to do that stuff if I switched school.
6. I want an education for my future.
7. I was discouraged with my low g.p.a and was told I could not get it back up because it was too late.
8. I figured that I already got so far and did so much work that I might as well stick it out even though it is much more difficult.
9. I felt like I had no motivation to do anything anymore
10. I thought about going to Woodrow, but my parents didn't approve of my idea.
11. It was no problem because I like the teachers I had and the school itself.
12. I had friends.
13. I want to graduate?
14. I hate school and always have hated it but nonetheless, I have to graduate.
15. I never planed [sic] on dropping out, because I have always wanted to try to do the best I can do in High-School.
Respondents overwhelmingly indicated they had not ever planned on dropping out. One respondent indicated they had come this far and were not going to quit while one other indicated the art program was the reason to stay.

In Question 34, students were asked to respond on any other aspect of the Academy Program of Fargo North. Responses were mostly positive. Four themes emerged from question 34 which are consistent with other questions in the survey: high achievement, time, personalization, and not helpful at all.

Survey Question 34: Do you wish to tell us anything about the Academy Program that we did not ask you? (N = 21).

1. It helped. Just some days the days got so long! And you didn’t have a variety of kids you were with or to be friends with so that was a little weird. Otherwise I think it helped.

2. I thought that the Academy Program was really helpful. It was success for me and gave me the time to do my homework and to understand what I was learning about.

3. It is a good program and I think it helps kids like myself that don’t learn as quickly as I do help get through their classes and pass with good grades. The teachers can help much more with questions that you have than in a regular class because there is much more time in the academy program.

4. I thought it was a great program especially for the kids that struggled like I did. It was an atmosphere that I could focus in and actually complete my work. I enjoyed it a lot and thought that it actually readied me for high school.

5. I really enjoyed the Academy Program. I got along with almost every teacher. I still talk to most of them to this day. It would be a real shame to see the …

6. I think that it is really important to have a program like this - especially for 9th and 10th grade. I had a hard time just starting high school, and in the academy you get to know everyone well because you're with them a lot during the day, you get to be really familiar with the teachers, and the work load isn't as much than if you took the regular approach. I think that the option for these kinds of classes should always stay in, because I know I
wouldn't have been successful in any of my core classes without those teachers in 9th grade.

7. Most of the students that were in my academy classes were the trouble makers and were goofing off all the time. Also I had no idea that I was in the academy until the beginning of my freshmen year and the other kids that were in the program knew from the year before. So I would like to say that, there was some information that wasn't given to me so you guys should really try from now on to get that kind of information to the students and their parents.

8. I did not find the Academy Program helpful to me. It didn't challenge me at all. I think it should remain an option, however. I know that many students find it helpful and beneficial to their education.

9. I feel as if the academy program was not effective. Its taking students who need a different approach to education, and putting them in an environment with people who are the same academic wise, but not personal. During my time, I was in these classes with no friends, and felt no need to study when I hated the course. Overall, made my high school experience less enjoyable. On top of that, education comes first. I did not think these classes prepared me. Granted, everyone has other problems on top, and the academy was not the only thing wrong at the time, but it was a factor. I think putting students in normal classes, but educating teachers on how to handle things with individual cases would be best.

10. All I would like to say is that I do think it is very helpful to students to have more time with the teacher and more time for homework. the small classes helped me concentrate more and I enjoyed having my friends in every class. the long class does get a little annoying but without it I wouldn't have had my homework done and more than likely would have dropped out.

11. Some teachers really took the time to get to know the students and make sure we felt comfortable but others just kind of let us do our own thing and didn't really care as long as we passed the tests. I would have also liked a smoother transition into 11th grade rather than feeling like I was just tossed in.

12. I feel that there were way to many students that had ADHD, ADD or whatever else anyone had in the same classroom. It was difficult if not impossible to learn.

13. I believe that this program should be offered, or recommended to students in the future because it is another alternative to getting a diploma without having to leave North High.

14. The teachers should treat us like we aren't handicap or retarded.
15. Nope.

16. Yes that I like the concept of the academy program and that it does help students achieve grades that they would not otherwise get. This is because their [sic] was time awarded to the students to do all of their work in class.

17. I felt that some of the teachers didn't really care about the students moving forward in their high school career. Felt like they didn't want to be there as much as we did.

18. It was a good system to get the homework done. Some of the classes I did not feel were challenging enough, but I got through them.

19. It was very helpful.

20. No but I must say, it was very beneficial to me.

21. It is a very effective program, however the only stipulation is the fact that it has to be two periods. Granted I can see the reasoning, if it is not going to be year round then it should be two periods long for half the semester. However this is a good thing for many people because in the long run you are able to fit a greater total of classes over the year; without worrying about having time for this that and the other thing. There is however one other negative point to the Academy Program, it cuts away from some possible classes, because of class and period availability. Those are the only bad things I can honestly say about it though. And I'd have to shake the hand of the sole individual who thought it up first, it was very helpful to me.

Out of the twenty-one respondents, twelve of them indicated that the Academy program was beneficial while only four felt negative feelings towards the Academy Program. In particular one comment made reference to not being informed prior to 9th grade. Two other comments indicated that the teachers did not treat the students with respect or the teachers did not care about the students.

Focus Groups

Three focus groups were convened on May 11, 2010 as a follow-up to the survey. Only two focus groups consisting of six academy students each were convened due to lack of participation in the third group. Students were asked five questions in
relationship to the survey data. Students would not only do the program again, they would recommend it to another student. All students in the focus group indicated the Academy Program helped them to reach graduation.

The final question during focus groups asked students to describe the best thing or the worst aspect of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School. Four of the students indicated the ability to complete homework during the school day was a positive aspect. Two students indicated the Academy Program’s teachers were the best part. Learning labs were indicated to be the worst thing by four of the students. Two students did not answer the question. Respondents had an overwhelming response to many of the questions. Table 21 summarizes the responses for the first four questions.

Table 21. Responses to Focus Group Questions. (N = 12)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would you do the Academy Program again?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you recommend the Academy Program to another student?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you have continued in the Academy Program in your 11th grade or 12th grade year, if it was offered?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 21 (cont.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did the Academy Program help you reach graduation?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information from the focus groups is consistent with the themes of time, homework completion, and personalization. Data presented in this chapter is summarized and discussed in Chapter V.

Chapter V includes discussions, conclusions, limitations, recommendations, and recommendations for further study based on the findings in this study.
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The purpose of this study was to determine if the Academy Program of Fargo North High School helped students attain graduation, and to identify respondents' perceptions of the Academy Program. This study examined the relationship between respondents' participation in the Academy Program in 9th grade and 10th grade and the Average Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR) of their 9th grade cohort, respondents' perceptions of the Academy Program, and elements of students' transition to their 11th grade year.

The study population was limited to 68 students who started the Academy Program of Fargo North High School as 9th graders in the 2006-2007 school year. Data was collected on the 36 students who started in 2006-2007 as 9th graders and graduated in 2009-2010 from Fargo North High School. Out of the 68 students originally enrolled in the Academy Program during the 2006-2007 academic year, only 36 (52.9%) responded due to the limited ability of the researcher to collect data from transient students, transferred students, students who completed a GED instead of earning a diploma, and students who participated in other alternative schooling within the last four years.

In this chapter, the results of the study along with the literature review are discussed along with conclusions drawn from the study based on the data and the
experience of the researcher as an assistant principal in the Fargo Public School District for the past four years working with the Academy Program. The limitations of the study are presented along with recommendations and recommendations for further study.

Discussion

In the United States, there are many types of dropout prevention programs which have been implemented in P-12 schools. Each has certain qualities which make a program successful or unsuccessful in their mission. Fargo North High School’s dropout prevention program, which was started in 2006, had never been evaluated for its impact on student graduation rates or based on student perceptions. Therefore, there was a need to determine if the dropout prevention program called the Academy Program of Fargo North High School had been effective in its mission. The following is a summary of the data on three topics: graduation rate, elements of the Academy Program, and transition.

Graduation Rate

This study used the most recent data available through the Common Core of Data (CCD) to calculate Average Freshman Graduation Rates (AFGR). National and state information through 2007-2008 was available at the time of this study. Information on AFGRs for North Dakota was consistent with the findings of this study for Fargo North’s class of 2010. In 2007-2008, North Dakota reported an AFGR of 83.8% (Table 4) while Fargo North High school reported an AFGR of 82.1% (Table 8) for the class of 2010, a difference of 2.0%. The AFGR for Fargo North High School’s class of 2009-2010 is equal to the North Dakota rate four years earlier in 2005-2006 (82.1%), and the lower than the North Dakota AFGR for the 2006-2007 school year (83.1%), and the 2007-2008 school year (83.8%). This study does not appear to indicate a significant
difference in the graduation rates of Fargo North High School and the state of North Dakota students when using the AFGR method of measuring graduation rates.

In comparison to the graduation rate of the entire 9th grade cohort (82.1%), the graduation rate for students enrolled in the Academy Program of Fargo North High School was 52.9%. This appears to indicate the Academy Program was, at best, not fully meeting its goals and at worst, a failure based on the cohort rate. If the researcher eliminates students enrolled in the Academy Program from the cohort, the overall AFGR climbs to 89.6%. According to these figures, the students who are identified as “at-risk” prior to 9th grade entry are still struggling to reach graduation; however, when the researcher examines the reasons the Academy Program students are not graduating, based upon the number of actual dropouts, a different picture emerges. Only 12.5% of Academy Program students who did not graduate actually dropped out of school compared to 17.6% for the entire cohort.

When the researcher isolated Academy Program students from non-Academy Program students, 20.3% were dropouts in the cohort which is almost twice the rate as students attending the Academy Program. This appears to support the Academy Program as at least partially reaching its goals. What is not known is the graduation rates for similar students prior to the 2006-2007 school year. As Fargo North High School starts to track students individually, better data will be available to help assess exact models for determining graduation rates compared to the other graduation models, like the AFGR, which use estimates of data in calculations. When this happens, it is possible schools will see lower graduation rates.
The positive economic advantages of preventing one more student from dropping out was discussed in Chapter II. If the Academy Program of Fargo North High School can keep one more male student from dropping out of high school it will add roughly $333,000 to the student’s earning potential during their lifetime. Taxes paid on this income, better health for the individual, a reduced toll on the prison system, and the overall societal benefit will easily account for the cost of paying for the Academy Program of Fargo North High School.

As stated in Chapter II, the cost to the district is $48,075 per academic year to run the Academy Program of Fargo North High School. The breakdown per student is $707 for two years based on the 68 original students while the breakdown per student is $1335 based on the 36 students who graduated. In the researcher’s opinion, the monetary cost should be calculated based on 68 students. The original 68 students would have been educated at Fargo North High School until they turned 16 years of age which is the mandatory compulsory education age for North Dakota. The cost of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School is worth the benefits to the student, the school district, and society.

After reviewing all different graduation rate calculations and methodologies, it is the researcher’s conclusion that the new four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate is a remarkable improvement for two reasons: each student will have to be accounted for over a four-year high school career and will not get conveniently lost in the calculations; the national graduation rate will now be calculated using a standard CCD model. Based on the literature review provided in Chapter II, it is this researcher’s opinion that this new model for calculating graduation rates will be important in the battle against students
dropping out of high school by giving school districts a realistic picture of how the district is doing. This will allow school districts to have more accurate information to make the best decisions for their students.

Elements of the Academy Program

Overall, students reported a high satisfaction level with many elements of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School. All of the respondents in the focus groups indicated they would do the program over again (Table 21), and they would recommend the Academy Program of Fargo North High School to another student (Table 21). Many of the respondents (72.2%) believed the program was academically challenging (Table 9). A dropout prevention program must be rigorous – previous research has shown 66% of high school dropouts would have worked harder if the school would have demanded more of them (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Approximately three out of five respondents (64.4%) indicated they learned more while enrolled in the Academy Program of Fargo North High School than they did during the previous school year (Dahlen, 2006). Rigor in the classroom for all students is imperative, especially for students who are considered “at-risk”. If schools do not keep rigor for all students, then schools are churning out graduates that are ill-prepared for the colleges or society.

When respondents were asked to reflect on the block-style format of courses in the Academy Program of Fargo North High School, there was overwhelming support from respondents for block style classes and numerous reasons why they enjoyed the course format: time to complete homework, more time to get to know the teacher, less number of classes to take, and smaller number of students per class. Table 11 indicates 86.1 % of respondents conveyed homework completion was considered a major reason
for the respondents’ success in the Academy Program of Fargo North High School. More
time to complete homework in class (88.9%) was the number one reason indicated in the
survey (Tables 12), and was a common theme in the focus groups data and open-ended
survey responses for respondents’ success. Respondents perceived extra time to work on
homework helped them reach graduation.

Time to get to know the teacher was in part attributed to the block format and the
success of these respondents in high school (Table 11). According to Bridgeland et al.
(2006) in *The Silent Epidemic*, 65% of dropouts felt as if at least one staff member cared
about their academic success and 62% of dropouts indicated the school needed to do
more to help students with problems outside of class. In Table 14, 91.7% of respondents
believed Academy Program teachers at Fargo North High School cared about the
respondent’s academic success. In survey question 20, respondents indicated the teachers
pushed the students to have better grades, seemed to understand the respondents better,
and did not give up on them. The data from this study and the information from
Bridgeland et al. (2006) are consistent with each other.

Many positive personal perceptions were indicated throughout the research. In
Table 13, 61.1% of respondents believed the Academy Program of Fargo North High
School motivated them to stay in school. Moreover, respondents indicated in survey
question 18, they were able to learn at their own pace, reduce their stress level because of
the format, and have a high sense of self-efficacy which helped them to stay in school.

Based on student responses and the literature, it is the opinion of the researcher
that the Academy Program of Fargo North High School has created a positive step
forward in dropout prevention. The Academy Program of Fargo North High School is a
dropout prevention program in which a select group of students are selected and targeted with specific strategies to help them reach graduation using a school-within-a-school concept as advocated by researchers (Dynarski & Gleason, 2002). The strategies of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School, which have been studied and discussed in previous research studies, have had a positive impact on the respondents of this study (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007; Reents, 2002; Wilson & Stokes, 2000). Specifically, the strategies which had an impact on the respondents of this study are block scheduling, establishment of small learning communities, and personalization with a focus on rigorous coursework.

Homework completion, caring teachers, and course format (block scheduling) were reported by respondents as also having a positive impact on the student’s self-efficacy which helped with respondents reports of increased achievement. In many of the open-ended response survey items, respondents indicated a higher level of achievement, personalization, and an overall sense of satisfaction with the program. Others reported that they felt the Academy Program of Fargo North High School should be continued (Table 20). In the focus groups (Table 21), 91.7% of respondents believed that the program should be expanded to include the junior and/or senior year.

Transition

Data collected concerning the transition out of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School as students entered their junior year was not conclusive. In Table 16, 58.3% of students reported some form of disagreement when asked if the transition out of the Academy Program was difficult for them. The transition, while not perceived difficult by most, was still a challenge to some of the respondents. Evidently, 66.7% of
respondents indicated that the transition was not easy due to less time to work on homework (Table 16). Homework completion was reiterated by the respondents as an issue during the transition out of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School.

While 41.7% indicated they were not motivated to do their homework, 47.2% indicated there was not enough time to complete homework assignments which was reiterated again in many of the responses from survey question thirty-one (Table 19).

Based on the results of the survey and the focus groups it is clear the Academy Program of Fargo North High School had a positive impact on students who successfully completed high school with a diploma. The relationships with the teachers and other students in the cohort had a positive effect and kept students motivated. The strongest indicator is 100% of the students in the focus groups believed the Academy Program helped them reach graduation.

Conclusions

1. Academy Program of Fargo North High School students would continue the program into their junior and/or senior year if it was offered, thus supporting a higher graduation rate.

2. The Academy Program of Fargo North High School students are still graduating at a lower rate (52.9%) than non-Academy Program students (89.6%). As a result, these students need to be offered more support than is currently being supplied through increased personalization.

3. Teachers in the Academy Program of Fargo North High School cared about the academic success of their students which has helped the students to reach graduation.
4. The increased time to work on homework during the school day helped Academy Program of Fargo North High School students reach graduation.

5. The block-style format of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School supported student efforts to reach graduation.

6. The Academy Program of Fargo North High School had a positive impact on students who successfully completed high school with a diploma.

Limitations

There are general limitations to the data generated by this study.

1. Sample size limited the ability of the researcher to generalize outside of Fargo North High School. Due to the small sample size, the data could be easily influenced by a few negative or positive responses.

2. The study was limited by its design as a survey and focus groups. Participants were asked to answer the survey questions honestly regarding their perceptions and the transition and were not required to answer all questions. The data produced may have been skewed by respondents who were not honest or who did not answer all of the questions.

3. Since the surveys were conducted by an assistant principal of Fargo North High School, the possibility of undue influence on participants must be considered as the assistant principal could produce an undesirable effect because of the power he had over the respondents.

4. Since there is no standard for calculating graduation rates in the United States, the data gathered may not be as accurate as other models. At the time of this study, information for calculating Average Freshman
Graduation Rates (AFGRs) was only current up to 2007-2008. A more accurate model for calculating graduation rates as established by the federal government in 2008 could be provide a better reflection of actual graduation rates. Schools are not required to report graduation rates using the newer model until the summer of 2012.

5. The respondents only included students who graduated. This may have skewed results in favor of the program since the program apparently worked for those individuals. A more representative sample would have included students who did not graduate from the school.

Recommendations for Fargo Public Schools

1. The Academy Program of Fargo North High School should be continued for freshman and sophomores based on the student responses in the survey.

2. The Academy Program should be extended into the junior and senior year to help more students reach graduation using the current format of block scheduling. This recommendation is strongly supported by the students’ perceptions of the program and of block scheduling.

3. The Academy Program of Fargo North High School should create individualized plans for students at the end of their 8th grade year that are identified as being “at-risk” before entering their 9th grade year to help ease the transition (and create a more personalized environment for students who need more one-on-one attention). It is the researcher’s conclusion that this should not only be done for the students of the Academy Program of Fargo North High School, but for all students entering 9th grade year.
4. Students should be evaluated yearly using the new four-year adjusted cohort graduation model for calculating graduation rates as established by the Department of Education to track trend data in all subgroups of students including Academy Program of Fargo North High School students. Since the schools Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) can be hindered by even a small subgroup, it is important to track all data for subgroups including graduation rates.

5. Information should also be presented to Fargo Public Schools and other school districts which include all stakeholders such as students, parents, school board, teachers, administration, and community members pertaining to the amount of time needed for homework. Schools should not only have specific time set aside for students to complete assignments, but this time should be structured with a core teacher who knows the student. This will foster self-efficacy of the student that could lead to improved student achievement.

6. The hiring process for teachers in the Fargo Public Schools should focus on applicants with caring attitudes and who focus on building effective and appropriate relationships with students.

7. Increase the communication between 8th grade and 9th grade teachers in all Fargo Public Schools to ease the transition to 9th grade for all students, but more specifically, students in the Academy Program of Fargo North High School. Since the personalization of school was important to all of the
students who are “at-risk,” it is the researcher’s conclusion that all students would benefit from this type of personalization.

Recommendations for School Districts

1. School districts should create individualized plans for students at the end of their 8th grade year who are identified as being “at-risk” before entering their 9th grade year to help ease the transition (and create a more personalized environment for students who need more one-on-one attention). It is the researcher’s belief this should be done for all students entering 9th grade year.

2. School districts should track the graduation rates for all subgroups using the new four-year adjusted cohort graduation model for calculating graduation rates as established by the Department of Education.

3. School district’s hiring processes need to emphasize the ability of the candidates to make connections/relationships with students.

Recommendations for Further Study

1. Further study should include a reproduction of this study with Fargo North High School to validate the methodologies and conclusion reached in this study.

2. A longitudinal study should be conducted at Fargo North High School to look at the graduation rates for similar students prior to the opening of the Academy Program of Fargo North High to compare data from this study to determine if the Academy Program is truly making a difference in the dropout rates of “at-risk” students.
3. This study should be replicated in other similar size districts in North Dakota and the upper Midwest with similar targeted dropout prevention programs.

4. Further study should include data from this study as a baseline to generalize what elements make students successful in “at-risk” programs.

5. Finally, a study should be conducted to determine if there is a connection between dropout prevention programs and the GED.
APPENDICES
April 1, 2009

To the parent(s) of ____________:

Four years ago Fargo North High School introduced a new program, a program called the Academy. The Academy gives select freshmen and sophomore students the opportunity to learn in an environment different than a traditional one. The core classes are taught in two hour blocks, allowing the student to focus on two core classes at a time instead of four. For example, a student would have math for two hours and science for two hours. The rest of the day would be spent in electives and/or a study hall. The next semester the student would be finished with math and science, and would move on to social studies and English. It truly is a wonderful opportunity for students who may have struggled in school or prefer to focus on fewer subjects at a time. Class sizes are smaller, thus making the teacher/student ratio smaller.

Students are selected for the Academy based on a variety of criteria. These criteria include: teacher recommendation, counselor recommendation, parent inquiry, student request, and the student’s test scores. (The test scores reviewed were Measure of Academic Progress (MAP), taken in the spring of 2008. MAP is a series of tests that measure general knowledge in reading, language usage, and math). A committee recently met to review all of these factors, to discuss which students would benefit from the Academy.

Your son/daughter has been recommended by the committee for the placement in the Academy. We value your input and want you to be part of this process. If you have questions concerning your student’s situation, contact your son or daughter’s high school counselor* calling their office at 446-2412.

If you decline these course selections, please return this form to the counseling office by Monday, April 9th.
We **decline** the above recommended placements.

---

**parent signature**  
**date**

---

**student signature**  
**date**

Sincerely,

Dale Miller,  
Assistant Principal

*FNH Counselors are:*

- Candace Shultz 446-2415 (A-F)  
- Janelle Stahl 446-2414 (Le-Rh)  
- Shirley McCaslin 446-2416 (G-La)  
- Steve Scott 446-2417 (Ri-Z)
APPENDIX B

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

* 1. As a participant in the Academy Program during your high school career, Fargo North is gathering students' perceptions of the Academy program. Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey. This survey should only take about 10 minutes. Please ask Mr. Miller if you have any questions. Thank you for your help.

☐ Next
☐ I do not agree to take the survey
8. What grade level did your mother complete?
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- Beyond High School
- Not sure

9. What grade level did your father complete?
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- Beyond High School
- Not sure

10. How many schools have you attended since 1st grade? (Count all elementary, middle schools, and high schools)
- 1-3
- 4-7
- 7-10
- 10+

11. The Academy Program challenged me academically. (Check one.)
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

12. The Academy Program allowed me to earn more credits than I would have without the Academy program. (Check one.)
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree
13. How did the Academy Program of block classes help you? (Check all that apply.)

- more time to get to know the teacher and how the teacher could help me
- more time to complete homework during the day
- less number of classes to take during the day
- smaller number of students per class
- other

14. If you answered OTHER, please specify how the Academy Program of block classes helped you.
15. How did the Academy Program help you with completing your homework? (Check all that apply.)
- more time in class to do homework
- learning labs gave me time to focus on my studies
- smaller class size allowed the teacher to help me more often
- other

16. If you answered OTHER, please specify how the Academy Program format helped you to complete your homework.
17. Did the Academy Program motivate you to stay in school? (Check one.)
- Yes
- No
- Other

18. Explain how the Academy Program motivated you to stay in school?
19. Do you think teachers in the Academy Program cared about your academic success? (Check one.)

- Yes
- No
- Other

20. Please explain your answer to the previous question.
21. The Academy Program learning labs were helpful to me. (Check one.)
- Yes
- No
- Other

22. Please explain how the Academy Program learning labs were helpful or not helpful to you? (smaller number of students, time to work on homework, other)
23. The transition out of the Academy Program was difficult for me. (Check one.)
- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

24. Why was the transition out of the Academy Program difficult? (Check all that apply.)
- more classes to take during the day
- less time for homework
- less time to get to know teachers
- other

25. If you selected OTHER, please explain how the transition was difficult for you.
26. Taking more classes in your junior year was difficult for you. (Check one.)

☐ Yes
☐ No

27. If you answered YES, please explain how or why the transition out of the Academy Program to 11th grade was difficult.
28. I had a hard time finishing my homework in my junior year due to: (Check all that apply.)

- [ ] there was not enough time to finish all the homework
- [ ] there was not enough help from teachers
- [ ] I was not motivated to do my homework
- [ ] Other

29. If you answered OTHER, please explain.

___________________
30. I had difficulty earning credits my junior and senior year compared to the time spent in the Academy Program. (Check one.)

- Yes
- No

31. If you answered YES, please explain why you had difficulty earning credits in your junior or senior year.

[Blank space]
32. I considered dropping out of high school my junior or senior year. (Check one.)
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

33. Please explain your answer to the previous question.

   [Blank space for explanation]
34. Do you want to tell us anything about the Academy Program that we did not ask you?
### Academy Program

Thank you for your help.

You may return to class.
Monday, February 15, 2010

To whom it may concern,

This letter is intended to give permission to Dale Miller to use information gathered by Fargo North High School from April 1, 2010 to December 1, 2010 on the Academy program. Information gathered by Fargo North High will be shared with Dale Miller for research and assessment purposes, but the information shared will be the sole property of Fargo Public Schools. All 39 students whose data will be collected will be 18 years old before May 1st when the data will be collected. The research project’s final manuscript entitled Student perceptions of the Academy: A dropout prevention program will also be shared with Fargo Public Schools.

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Andy Dahlen
Principal
April 15, 2010

Hello,

If you are receiving this letter, it is because your son or daughter participated in the Academy program at Fargo North High during his/her 9th or 10th grade year. As with any program, Fargo North High will be completing an evaluation of the Academy program. We would like your son/daughter to participate in a small survey which should take about 15 minutes and a small focus group during their lunch period where food will be provided.

This survey and focus group(s) will be conducted in early May and its purpose is to find out what elements or parts of the Academy program were useful for your son or daughter. Students will be asked to come to the computer lab in early May and take a small survey that will gauge their perceptions of the Academy program. All surveys completed will be confidential. The following week your son/daughter will be asked to participate in a small focus group during his/her lunch period in which food will be provided.

This research will help Fargo North High to evaluate the effectiveness of the Academy program and make changes if necessary. Your son/daughter’s participation in this survey is completely voluntary.

If you have further questions or if you do not want your son/daughter to participate in this survey, please call my direct phone line at 446-2499.

Sincerely,

Dale Miller
Assistant Principal
REFERENCES


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119


