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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARTICIPATION IN AN ACADEMIC
INTERVENTION PROGRAM AND PERFORMANCE IN COURSEWORK
FOR AT RISK EIGHTH-GRADE MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
in the College of Education and Human Performance
at the University of Central Florida
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Major Professor: Barbara A. Murray

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ABSTRACT

The focus of the research was to examine the academic intervention program implemented to address academic concerns in the middle grades in one large urban school district in central Florida. Educational leaders at all levels are concerned with the choice of one in four students who make the decision to not complete high school coursework, leaving before earning a high school diploma. The researcher examined to what extent, if any, participation in the middle grades academic intervention program affected academic success in coursework and what difference, if any, there were between academic coursework grade point averages and at-risk eligibility factors, for levels of student participation in the academic intervention program. The at-risk eligibility factors for placement into this middle grades intervention program included prior year retention, prior year course failure(s), and prior year grade point average of 2.0 or below on a 4.0 scale. The school district of study provided each middle grades school with one teaching allocation to support the academic intervention program. Data from six of the 12 middle schools that tracked students in the academic intervention program for the 2013-2014 school year were retrieved from the school district central office. Interviews were conducted with all 12 academic intervention program supervising administrators to determine the delivery method provided for the program at each school. The study provides information on the effectiveness of the academic intervention program, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

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CHAPTER 1 PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Introduction

As the state of Florida transitions from Next Generation Standards to Florida State Standards, the words from *Leaders of Learning* are applicable, “teachers and administrators are expected to meet these unprecedented standards while serving an increasing number of students who historically have struggled to find success in traditional schools” (Dufour & Marzano, 2010, p. 5). In the past, American schools established the global precedent for education and for producing the most capable and successful human capital in the world. At the time of the present study, the United States’ educational system was not as competitive as in generations past. “Four decades ago America had the best high school graduation rate in the world but by 2006 it had slipped to 18th out of 24 industrialized countries” (Jerald, 2008, p. 23). Dufour and Marzano presented this view of the American education system in 2010:

A system that has 30 percent of its students drop out of high school, that has one-third of its graduates who enter higher education requiring remediation, that has one of the highest college drop-out rates in the world, that contributes to enormous gaps in achievement for minority and poor students, and that has seen its relative success in education plummet compared to other nations cannot assume the position that all is well. (p. 9)

The American overall graduation rate in 2010 was approximately 75%, evidence of American schools moving in the right direction; however, that means that approximately

25% of eligible students leave the American education system before acquiring basic knowledge and skills (Sparks, 2013b). Society recognizes that students who do not meet minimum standards will most likely become a financial burden and that the loss of human capital is excessive. “The large number of students who drop out of school because their inability to find success there represents a continuing drain on the U.S. economy” (Dufour & Marzano, 2010, p. 9).

A question remains as to what fosters dropout of high school students who are intellectually capable of being successful in their academics, specifically in relation to their prior middle school academic performance. “Whether it’s failing a grade or a class, weak study skills, or just a rough transition to high school, many dropouts report that academic failure led them to abandon school” (Sparks, 2013a, p. 11). Traditionally, students who do not meet annual set requirements for grade promotion, be it minimum grades in coursework, or proficiency on high stakes testing requirements, are retained. “Retention is the practice of not promoting students up a grade level in school and it is based on the belief that children learn more academically by repeating a grade” (Hattie, 2009, p. 97). The primary problem with retention is that research does not support that as an effective strategy. In reference to retention, Hattie (2009) stated, “This is one of the few areas in education where it is difficult to find any studies with a positive ($d > 0.0$) effect, and the few that do exist hover close to a zero effect” (p. 97).

When students do not meet or struggle to meet the minimum basic requirements in a set grade level, they are typically labeled at-risk students and for a myriad of reasons are at greatest risk of not completing a K-12 education. These at-risk students require

additional interventions and an equitable education to ensure their success (Balfanz, 2009). Gallagher, Goodyear, Brewer, & Rueda (2012) defined the term equity with an educational slant, “For important segments of the education community equity has primarily come to mean the closing of the achievement gap” (p.120). With this definition, “The focus on equity as allocation of resources where most needed suggests a radical departure from equality as the framing concept of reform” (Gallagher et al., 2012, p. 120). It is a relatively new idea that providing academic interventions for at-risk students is considered fair and should be a priority for all schools, both scholastically and regarding the allocation of resources.

Increased accountability in PK-20 educational settings in the 21st century has prioritized student learning and achievement as the primary objective, especially in modern urban schools. Urban schools have unique obstacles. No one single definition exists to define the exact traits of an urban school, nor is there an all-encompassing set of solutions to remedy challenges evident in modern urban education (Gallagher et al., 2012).

Urban education has been the subject of ongoing discussion over the last 40 years, with vigorous debate over policies aimed at urban school improvement. As urban areas became increasingly poor and segregated, their school systems have come to mirror the problems of urban poverty, including low student achievement, high student mobility, high dropout rates, and high levels of school failure. (Gallagher et al., 2012, p. 29)

In urban educational settings, student learning and achievement have been accompanied by specific challenges. “Urban schools have diverse student bodies from different cultural, language, and learning backgrounds. Students are also more likely to experience hardships related to lower economic and educational opportunities” (Gallagher et al., 2012, p. 78). Educational leaders must access and understand research and implement procedures to provide the most effective learning environment to ensure student achievement and success in school.

Equity and excellence are topics of significance in American education, particularly in urban schools. Historically urban schools have struggled with unique challenges in offering students an equitable education in comparison to their non-urban counterparts (Gallagher et al., 2012). “Advocates for equity understand that closing the achievement gap necessarily implies the allocation of money, time, and teacher talent and skill where most needed” (Gallagher et al., 2012, p. 120). In urban settings, maximizing student learning is important.

Educational leaders have a responsibility to impart information regarding high effect behaviors for all teachers so they can become “actively engaged in and passionate about, teaching and learning” (Hattie, 2009, p. 36). Teachers need to be reminded of and practice high effect size strategies, be able to evaluate what is working for their students and what is not, and they need to discuss these best practices with their colleagues and implement them with their students (Hattie, 2009). “If there are certainties in education, one is that despite the best efforts of well-intentioned individual classroom teachers,

some students will struggle to acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions those teachers work so hard to convey” (Dufour & Marzano, 2010, p. 171).

In recent years, there has been heightened awareness of the importance of early childhood education and high school as intervention points in educational lives of children. Less attention has been paid to the importance of the upper elementary and middle school and the role they must play in the preparation of students for life after high school. (American College Testing [ACT], 2008, p. 37)

In its report, *The Forgotten Middle*, ACT (2008) wrote that “fewer than two in 10 8th graders are on target to be ready for college-level work by the time they graduate from high school” (p. 37). At-risk students should not continue to meet just the basic requirements; interventions should be in place to assist all students to maximize their individual potential, particularly for students who struggle in the transition from elementary school to middle school.

The transition from elementary to middle school is often the point where the first red flag is raised. No longer are students in self-contained classrooms with a single teacher who knows them like a parent. Now, they face the increased rigors of middle level curriculum, a flexible schedule. (Akmal & Larsen, 2004, p. 8)

Students who find it difficult to transition into middle school may face increasing difficulty in high school. “Research shows that under current conditions, the level of academic achievement that students attain by 8th grade has a larger impact on their college and career readiness by the time they graduate from high school than anything that happens academically in high school” (ACT, 2008, p. 38). If a student has academic

difficulties in middle school and interventions are not implemented until high school, this assistance may be too little, too late for the majority of at-risk students. Ultimately, it is critical that middle grade schools ensure that when students transition to high school, academically capable students earn that promotion with grade-level appropriate knowledge and skills (Balfanz, 2006). According to Balfanz, without middle school academic intervention/improvement programs, behaviors that result in students not completing high school will continue.

One necessary component of a successful middle grades academic improvement program (AIP) is to provide more time for academic learning. In 1992, the federal government established the National Education Commission on Time and Learning as an independent advisory body and called for a comprehensive review of the relationship between time and learning in the nation's schools. In its study, the National Education Commission (1994) found that most schools in America offer a six-period day, providing a little less than six hours of academic instruction each day. At the end of the two-year study, the Commission agreed that “if American students are to meet world class standards all children will need more academic time” (National Education Commission, 1994, p. 7). At-risk students especially have been perceived to need added time for academic instruction and learning (Woelfel, 2005). Programs professionally advocated that “have effectively extended or re-defined time to give struggling students that opportunity” (Woelfel, 2005, p. 19) include, Promoting Academically Successful Students (PASS), Academic Acceleration Academy, Knowledge is Power (KIPP), and

Middle-Grade Acceleration Project (M-GAP). All of these programs center on serving at-risk students with more time for learning in academics (Woelfel, 2005).

All Academic Improvement Programs necessitate early identification and tracking of at-risk students for placement and continued monitoring throughout their middle school years. “The sooner the process of identification begins, the easier it is to track a student’s progress and performance throughout the rest of the school year” (Akmal & Larsen, 2004, p. 4). A variety of methods may be used for tracking students’ performance including but not limited to; a daily, weekly, or bi-weekly progress report, before or after school meetings with assigned academic mentors, and progress meetings with parents, counselors, and administrators (Akmal & Larsen, 2004). Additional monitoring options could include a common homeroom for students in an academic intervention program, (Dillon, 2006) or periodic meetings with an academic advisor in small groups throughout the year on a weekly or bi-weekly schedule and/or individual student conferences with the guidance counselor and/or grade level administrator (Mason & McMahon, 2009).

“Another aspect of efforts to reform middle grades schools is the realization that continued parent involvement in education is crucial to early adolescents’ success” (Wigfield & Eccles, 1995, p. 7). For most students, especially at-risk students, parents become less involved in their children’s education as they transition from elementary school into middle school (Wigfield & Eccles, 1995). In their study, Akmal and Larsen (2004) found that at-risk students who have academic plans for improvement implemented with encouraged parental support, showed academic improvement.

Parental involvement is essential, and early communication in regard to academic concerns and parental support both at home and in school is crucial in an Academic Improvement Program. Parents and students should be included in the development and implementation of the academic improvement plan to the extent that, “teachers, the student, and the parent(s) sign the improvement plan” (Akmal & Larsen, 2004, p. 6). All parties then become an important component in the success of the student, with the primary responsibility residing with the student (Akmal & Larsen, 2004).

Equity includes the selection and placement of the best teachers using research-based teaching strategies for improved student learning in an assigned academic intervention program.

We believe the answer lies more in providing effective instruction in naturally occurring settings with neighbors and peers than in developing and supporting liberal or restrictive retention or promotion policies. District leadership should seek to identify research-based education interventions designed to improve effective instruction for struggling yet promoted students. (Tingle, Schoeneberer, & Algozzine, 2012, p. 184)

Considering effective research-based strategies, acceleration in school has a positive effect on student learning. In his synthesis of meta-analyses focused on achievement, Hattie (2009) cited another researcher who asked a related question:

Levin (1988) asked, if acceleration is so beneficial for gifted students, why could it not also be used with non-gifted students? Hence, his Accelerated Learning program aims to accelerate the learning of at-risk students so they are able to

perform at grade level by the end of elementary school. These programs provide high expectations, specified deadlines for meeting educational requirements, stimulating instructional programs, planning by all staff, and using all available community resources. The evidence, however is limited from meta-analysis standpoint: Borman and D'Agostino (1995) claimed Accelerated Learning had highly promising evidence of effectiveness, although the overall effect size was only $d=0.09$. (p. 101)

With highly promising evidence of effectiveness, the goal for all students to be at or above grade level before they leave middle school is encouragement enough to begin a process of acceleration to grade-level performance for students who are not yet at grade level or who are only meeting the basic requirements for grade level. For those students who exit elementary school without the appropriate skills or knowledge and enter middle school campuses already deficient, the district and individual school goal should be the accelerated learning of all middle school students to grade level proficiency or above, before transition to high school. For various middle schools, receiving sixth-grade students already at-risk, meeting grade level proficiency presents itself as an unreasonable expectation; however, "All leaders will confront conditions over which they have no control, but what they can control is how they respond to those situations" (Dufour & Marzano, 2010, p. 198). All academic interventions provided to at-risk students at the middle school level should be research-based strategies with best practices by highly effective teachers who can build relationships with students.

Modern urban school environments face ever-changing conditions and require continued enhancements (Gallagher et al., 2012). Urban schools must continually strive for research-based practices that will enhance equity and excellence, improve student learning, and meet the demands of increasing accountability, ideally to provide an outstanding education for every child who attends school. “The world, including the United States, is moving ever more rapidly in the direction of increasing urbanization and increasing diversity among populations, leaving little choice but to commit to providing the best education possible for everyone” (Gallagher et al., 2012, p. 280). ACT’s 2008 report best states the primary purpose of advocating for a middle school Academic Improvement Program:

Ultimately, we must reduce the number of students who are seriously underprepared by the end of middle school, which will require interventions well before grade 8. Furthermore, if we can improve students’ academic skills before grade 8, then the other high school-level enhancements will be far more effective. (ACT, 2009, p. 41)

Quality education has been the historical tradition of the American educational system. According to researchers such as Ravitch (2010), the U.S., once considered the best in the world, can regain the premier position of the primary producer and supplier of the world’s best global resource, human capital. As Ravitch explained, a properly educated population will also support and encourage freedom and a civil society:

Our public education system is a fundamental element of our democratic society. Our public schools have been the pathway to opportunity and a better

life for generations of Americans, giving them the tools to fashion their own life and to improve the commonweal. To the extent we strengthen them, we strengthen our democracy. (Ravitch, 2010, pp. 241-242).

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in the theoretical framework that considers adolescent developmental tasks and education, a theory developed by Havighurst (1974). Developmental tasks and education theory evolved from the influence of the theory of psychosocial development by Erikson and publications on adolescence and identity achievement (Havighurst, 1974). As stated by Havighurst, the theory of developmental tasks and education finds middle ground between two opposing theories in education, the theory of freedom and the theory of constraint. Subsequently, the theory of developmental tasks and education is the median between the individual need and the demands of society (Havighurst, 1974).

Student engagement, learning, and academic achievement are all interrelated to adolescent developmental tasks in education. Although certain developmental tasks primarily involve primary agents consisting of self, family, and peer group, specific tasks including basic intellectual skills, achieving the ability to ensure economic independence, and selecting and preparing for an occupation are the primary responsibility and activity of school (Havighurst, 1974). “A developmental task is a task which arises at or about a certain period in the life of the individual, successful achievement of which leads to his happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to unhappiness in the

individual, disapproval by the society, and difficulty with later tasks (Havighurst, 1974, p. 2).

Havighurst (1974) believed that there were sensitive time periods for learning and teachable moments “when the task should be learned” (p. 7). Developing fundamental skills in reading, writing, and mathematics are part of the developmental tasks associated with and primarily experienced in organized school environments. Adolescent developmental tasks, in which the school is not the primary agent but is a secondary agent, include vocational interests, emotional independence from parents, and learning to positively associate with peers (Havighurst, 1974).

School-based educational programs are administered in school settings involving teachers, administrators, counselors, and mentors whose goal is to assist students in achieving academic success. Through that success, the developmental tasks of personal independence, economic future independence and selecting a future occupation can be fostered (Havighurst, 1974). As part of those goals, the relationships students experience with their teachers have a direct effect on student success in academics. “Much of the success or failure of children on this task depends on the relationship between the teachers and the pupils” (Havighurst, 1974, p. 33). Students may benefit from academic programs where the developmental tasks of basic educational skills are met within the teachable moments during adolescence. Attention to the developmental tasks in an education setting will ensure instruction in basic skills, proper preparation for occupational choice, with an end goal of economic independence. The present study was conducted to examine one academic intervention program that may enhance student

success of at-risk students and contribute to improving academic performance of those students in the academic intervention program.

Statement of the Problem

At the time of the present study, little research had been conducted on the effects of an academic intervention program for at-risk eighth-grade middle school students. Educational leaders in a large urban district in Central Florida, both at the district office and school levels, were concerned with the choice students make not to complete high school coursework, thereby not graduating with a high school diploma. The average freshman “on time, regular diploma” graduation rate represents those students who graduate within the appropriate amount of time and do not require additional time to complete graduation requirements. As reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (2013) for the 2009-2010 school year, the graduation rate for this group of students was 78.2% which means that 21.9% of freshmen students transitioning from middle school to high school were not keeping academic pace with their peers and were failing in high school-level coursework. One primary concern of middle school leaders and district officials has been that of increasing the probability of academic success for at-risk students as they progress through the middle school years in preparation for high school-level coursework. At the time of the present study, the target school district endorsed a middle grade academic intervention program (AIP) and allocated one teaching position to every middle school in the district to support the program during the 2013-2014 school year.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the academic intervention program administered in all middle grade schools in one large urban school district in central Florida, to determine to what extent, if any, participation in the academic intervention program by at-risk eighth-grade students affected coursework success and academically earned promotion to high school, requiring an overall 2.0 grade point average (GPA). This research into the effectiveness of the academic intervention program was intended to provide information useful to school district officials and school board members in the decisions made regarding future allocations of resources for the academic intervention program in the middle school grades.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following four research questions and hypotheses:

1. What is the relationship, if any, between the levels of student participation in the middle grades academic intervention program and classification of student subgroups?

H₀₁ There is no relationship between the levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program and student subgroups.

2. To what extent, if any, does academic performance in coursework differ across levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program?

H₀₂ There is no difference in academic coursework performance based on the levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program.

3. What difference, if any, is there between academic coursework GPA and at-risk eligibility factors for levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program?

H₀₃ There is no difference between academic coursework performances for levels of participation in the academic intervention program based on course eligibility factors.

4. What delivery models are utilized in each of the 12 middle schools to provide for the academic intervention program?

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined in accordance with their importance and context within this particular study.

Academic intervention program (AIP)--A program for students who are provided academic and mentor support throughout the school year. As a result, students do not have to wait until the end of the school year before being provided interventions and remedial instruction. The program includes increased parent involvement, greater individual student accountability, academic interventions, study skills development, and systematic monitoring. AIP provides students the opportunity to earn delayed assignment to the next grade level during the first nine weeks or the beginning of the second semester. In order to be eligible to participate, parents and students are required to sign a performance contract agreeing to program expectations related to academics, attendance, and behavior. Each student is assigned a case manager so immediate and consistent

support can be provided throughout the school year. Students meet with their case manager on a regular basis to review and discuss their class grades, attendance, behavior, and overall performance. Students are assigned/retained at their grade level but enrolled in the next higher grade level courses. This allows the students to demonstrate they are capable of being successful at the next grade level and prevents them from falling behind their peers should they successfully complete the requirements for delayed assignment (Target School District, 2014, p. 43).

Asian--A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian Subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014)

At-Risk--A term applied to students who have not been adequately served by educational systems and who are at risk of failing to meet the state's academic achievement standards. These students have a high risk of dropping out or failing school (Florida Department of Education, 2014a).

At-Risk Eligibility Factors--Factors resulting in three groups of students: (a) students who have received a delayed assignment (less than a 2.0 GPA) to eighth grade, (b) students who received one or more Fs in academic core coursework during their seventh-grade school year, and (c) students who were retained in eighth grade from the previous school year.

Black or African American--A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

Coursework--For the purposes of this study, the eighth-grade subject courses taken on the student schedule with required academic core courses and electives.

Course Grades--*Florida Statute 1003.415* requiring the grading system and interpretation of letter grades used in Grades 6 through 8 to be as follows: No plus or minus marks will appear on the report card. Students shall be assigned the following quality point values for nine-week grades: A = 4 points (Outstanding Progress), B = 3 points (Above Average Progress), C = 2 points (Average Progress), D = 1 point (Lowest Acceptable Progress), F = 0 points (Failure). (Target School District, 2014, p. 45).

Delayed Assignment--Pertains to retained seventh-grade students who successfully complete Phase One of the academic intervention program and may be assigned to the next grade level. Delayed assignment decisions are made the ensuing year at the conclusion of the first grading period or the beginning of the second semester (Target School District, 2014, pp. 48-49).

English Language Arts (ELA)--For eighth-grade students, a year-long course that shall include experiences in reading, writing, speaking, listening and language (Target School District 2014, p. 37).

English Language Learners--1.a. An individual who was not born in the United States and whose native language is a language other than English; or b. An individual who comes from a home environment where a language other than English is spoken in the home; or c. An individual who is an American Indian or Alaskan native and who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on his or her level of English language proficiency; and 2. Who, by reason

thereof, has sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or listening to the English language to deny such individual the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; b) “Home language” or “native language,” when used with reference to an individual of limited English proficiency, means the language normally used by such individual or, in the case of a student, the language normally used by the parents of the student (Fla. Stat. §1003.56, p. 1).

Ethnicity--A person’s particular ethnic affiliation or group (Merriam-Webster.com, n.d.).

FCAT 2.0--The Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test® 2.0, which measures student success with the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, includes assessments in reading (grades 3-10), mathematics (grades 3-8), writing (grades 4, 8, and 10), and science (grades 5 and 8) in the 2013-2014 school year (Florida Department of Education, 2014b).

Gender--Identifies the state of being either male or female (Merriam-Webster.com, n.d.).

Grade Point Average--The numeric value (with an implied decimal point) of the student’s cumulative grade point average calculated on an un-weighted 4.0 scale, if different from the Grade Point Average District, Cumulative. The Grade Point Average State, Cumulative is used to determine if the student has met the state high school graduation requirements of a minimum of 24 credits and a 2.0 GPA based on a 4.0 scale. This grade point average is calculated as specified in Section 1003.437, F.S., by assigning

quality points of “A” = 4, “B” = 3, “C” = 2, “D” = 1, “F” = 0 (Florida Department of Education, 2014c).

Hispanic or Latino--A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

Level of Participation--Pertains to three levels of participation in an academic intervention program. The first level refers to students who are eligible and who participated in the middle grades academic intervention program, the second level refers to students who are eligible but did not participate in the middle grades academic intervention program, and the third level refers to students who were not eligible and did not participate in the middle grades academic intervention program.

Math--Eighth-grade students may enroll in Pre-Algebra, Algebra 1, or Geometry (Target School District, 2014, p. 36).

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander--A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

Promotion--Requires that middle grade students must earn a cumulative year-to-date 2.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale to be promoted. All courses taken in a school year, including courses taken for high school credit shall be included in the calculation of the cumulative year-to-date GPA (Target School District, 2014, p. 47).

Public School--A school that gets money from and is controlled by a local government (Merriam-Webster.com, n.d.).

Science--For eighth-grade students, shall include instruction in physical science (Targeted School District, 2014, p. 37).

Social Studies--For eighth-grade students, shall include the study of government, economics, geography, and history including World history (Target School District, 2014, p. 37).

Socioeconomic Status (SES)--Often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation. It is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. When viewed through a social class lens, privilege, power, and control are emphasized. Furthermore, an examination of SES as a gradient or continuous variable reveals inequities in access to and distribution of resources. SES is relevant to all realms of behavioral and social science, including research, practice, education, and advocacy (American Psychological Association, 2014).

Students with Disabilities (SWD)--The term “student with a disability” refers to any student who is documented as having an intellectual disability; a hearing impairment, including deafness; a speech or language impairment; a visual impairment, including blindness; an emotional or behavioral disability; an orthopedic or other health impairment; an autism spectrum disorder; a traumatic brain injury; or a specific learning disability, including, but not limited to, dyslexia, dyscalculia, or developmental aphasia (Fla. Stat. §1007.02).

Subgroups--For purposes of this study, are limited to gender, ethnicity, retained, students with disabilities (SWD), English Language Learners (ELL), and Socio-economic Status (SES).

Middle School--A school for children that includes Grades 6-8 (Merriam-Webster.com, n.d.).

White--A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

Methodology

Research Design

The methodology used in this study was a quasi-experimental design to allow for analyses of eighth-grade, at-risk students who participated in the academic intervention program (AIP) in one urban central Florida school district during the 2013-2014 school year. This group was compared with at-risk eighth-grade students who were eligible but did not participate in the AIP program, and to non-eligible eighth-grade students to determine if there was a relationship between academic achievement in coursework and participation in the academic intervention program provided by each middle school in the district. Student data were maintained by the target district in Central Florida. This research study did not implement any new program or treat any population. Data were compiled from a middle grades intervention program already developed and implemented by the target school district in the 12 middle schools. All Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) requirements were followed to guarantee student data confidentiality.

Participants

The population of this study was comprised of all eighth-grade students in one large, urban school district. The research subgroups included all eighth-grade student participants in the AIP program, all eighth-grade students eligible but non-participants in the AIP program, and all non-eligible program non-participant eighth-grade students within one large, urban school district in the state of Florida during the 2013-2014 school year. The purposive sample consisted of all eighth grade students who met the eligibility criteria and were enrolled in the academic intervention program. All data for this study were retrieved from the target school district's central office.

Instrumentation

The study was conducted using data retrieved from one large, urban school district in central Florida. The school district provided data for all eighth-grade students who participated in the academic intervention program, all students who were eligible but who did not participate in the program, and all non-eligible eighth-grade students for six of the 12 schools. Coursework grade point averages from each of the 12 middle schools in the district for the 2013-2014 school year were provided to the researcher. Only six of the 12 schools used a course code associated with participation in the AIP program. The other six schools offered the academic intervention program but did not utilize the district student management system, Skyward, to track those students. Only the six schools with complete data were used in this study. This information was maintained by the school district as part of student scheduling, course history and records information.

Procedures

The researcher completed the appropriate school district Research Permission Request (IRB) application to request access to the school district data for this study and received permission to receive the data (Appendix A). The researcher completed the appropriate research request from the University of Central Florida's (UCF) Institutional Review Board and received permission to conduct the study (Appendix B). The data for this research study came from the target school district central office including student demographic information, coursework grades, coursework grade point averages, retentions, course failures, and participants/non-participants in the academic intervention program. Additional data for this research study came from the school district data provided to the Florida Department of Education for eighth-grade students for the 2013-2014 school year. Interviews were conducted with the supervising administrators of the academic intervention programs for each of the twelve schools. Any information that identified students in the target school district was removed to ensure anonymity of schools and participants.

Data Analysis

The research data consisted of Grade Point Average (GPA) calculations earned in academic coursework for students participating in the academic intervention program, eligible non-participants in the program and non-eligible, program non-participant eighth-grade students. Student subgroups were analyzed to determine characteristics of: gender, ethnicity (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian, other), students with disabilities (SWD),

English language learners (ELL), socio-economic status (SES), and students who met any or all three of the at-risk eligibility factors of retention, delayed assignment, or course failure. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 22 software. Table 1 displays the independent and dependent variables for each of the three quantitative research questions with the accompanying data sources and statistical methods that were used in the analysis. Research Question 4 was answered through an interview process, and the qualitative data obtained in the interviews were analyzed and are reported in Chapter 4.

Table 1

Research Questions, Data Sources, Variables, and Data Analysis

Research Questions	Data Sources	Study Variables	Data Analysis
1. What is the relationship, if any, between the levels of student participation in the middle grades academic intervention program and classification of student subgroups?	academic intervention program, student demographics, economic status, exceptional student education and English language learners data provided by the target school district.	Dependent: Level of participation in AIP program (3 levels) Independent: participants of demographic subgroups (as defined) for academic intervention program.	A series of Cramer's V tests by separate subgroups
2. To what extent, if any, does academic performance in coursework differ across levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program?	academic intervention program, academic grades in coursework for AIP participants and non-participants provided by the target school district.	Dependent: Calculated GPA for academic coursework. Independent: Level of participation for the academic intervention program.	One Way ANOVA
3. What difference, if any, is there between academic coursework GPA and at-risk eligibility factors for levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program?	academic intervention program, demographics, delayed assignments to eighth grade, academic failed courses, retention, data provided by the target school district.	Dependent: calculated GPA for academic coursework. Independent: at-risk factors (as defined) for the academic intervention program eligibility.	Independent <i>t</i> test
4. What delivery models are utilized in each of the twelve middle schools to provide for the academic intervention program?	Interview of all current supervising administrators for 12 AIP programs.	Qualitative Data	Interview results will be presented

Significance of the Study

It was anticipated that the findings of this study would add research to the limited existing literature concerning the relationship of a middle-grade academic intervention program, specifically with at-risk eighth-grade students in a large urban school district in the southern region of the United States. Every middle school in this particular school district received an allocation to provide one teaching position to support the academic intervention program during the 2103-2014 school year. Results of this research are available to be used by school district leaders to assist in determining the effectiveness of the academic intervention program with at-risk eighth-grade students. The findings of this study may be used to identify academic successes in academic coursework due to the already established academic intervention program. The findings also provided additional statistical information for district leaders to consider when making decisions about resources that pertain to this existing program.

Additionally, this research can aid school district leaders in decision-making regarding a similar type of program in the elementary levels and other secondary levels of education. Results from this study allow school district leaders to determine areas of success and opportunities for growth in this pre-existing program. Information from this study may assist other school districts with similar populations to determine the effectiveness or usefulness of implementing a similar program based on determined needs.

Delimitations

The study was delimited to include all eighth-grade students in middle school assigned to participate in the academic intervention program, eligible but not assigned, to the program and not eligible to participate in the AIP program in one urban school district in the state of Florida during the 2013-2014 school year.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included the following.

1. Because only one school district in the state of Florida was studied, results should be generalized only to other school districts with similar populations as the target school district.
2. The validity of this study was dependent on accurate information of course grade results from the providing district office.
3. Attrition was not monitored and may have affected program member and non-member group population size.
4. The validity of this study was dependent on the accuracy of information obtained about program and non-program participants.
5. All middle schools in the target school district did not incorporate the same delivery model of the academic intervention program.

Summary

The intention of this study was to determine to what extent, if any, participating in a middle grade academic improvement program affected the academic achievement of at-risk eighth-grade students. As the demand for accountability in American education increases along with the rising rigor and standards of core coursework, educational leaders must be prepared to offer an excellent and equitable education to all students, especially those in urban populations that may require additional interventions.

This chapter has provided a brief introduction to the components of the study, namely the theoretical framework, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and the research questions which guided the study. Key definitions associated with the research were also shared along with the methodology used to conduct the study, its delimitations, limitations and significance.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The review of literature was completed through compiling information from research databases through the University of Central Florida library. The sources of research databases accessed through the University of Central Florida library included ERIC-EBSCO host, National Center for Education Statistics, PsychInfo, and Dissertations and Theses. Searching databases for the following topics yielded information for the literature review: (a) academic intervention programs, (b) Grade 8 academics, (c) high school graduation, (d) high school dropouts, (e) middle grades academic support, and (f) middle school academic at-risk factors.

This chapter contains a review of the literature on selected topics related to the importance of academic success in middle grades in preparation for high school level coursework. Published research examining effects of middle grades skill mastery, academic success and failure, middle grades academic intervention programs, middle grades academic intervention program components, transition from elementary school to middle school, transition from middle school to high school, and student relationships with teachers as a component part of middle school intervention programs were reviewed.

Middle school academic success is imperative for students to be adequately prepared for the demands of high school coursework. Middle school academic experiences and mastery of skills and knowledge strongly impact students' probabilities

of not dropping out of high school (ACT, 2008; Balfanz, 2009). For every academic course an eighth-grade student fails, the odds of non-promotion from ninth grade to tenth grade increases by 16% (Christie & Zinth, 2008). Eighth grade is an important academic year as students prepare to transition from middle school to high school. Eighth-grade students who leave middle school and transition to high school academically prepared for the challenges of the increased rigor of high school level coursework are more likely to graduate from high school and be ready for college and career (ACT, 2008).

Public School Enrollment

National

Public school enrollment throughout the United States has experienced cycles of decline and increase over the last 40 years. According to Aud et al. (2013), “Public school enrollment declined during the 1970s and early 1980s and rose in the latter part of the 1980s. Enrollment continued to increase throughout the 1990s and early 2000s” (p. 46). During the 2010-2011 school year, the total enrollment for public schools in the United States reached 49.5 million, an increase of 0.2% from the previous, 2009-2010 school year. Of the 49.5 million total student enrollment for pre-kindergarten through Grade 12, 34.6 million students were enrolled in prekindergarten through Grade 8 (Keaton, 2012). The overall projected student enrollment in American public schools is expected to increase by 7% to an overall total of 53.1 million students in the United States’ public school system by 2024 (Aud et al., 2013).

State

During the 2010-2011 school year, the total student enrollment in the state of Florida's public school system included 2,643,347 students (Keaton, 2012). Of the over 2.5 million students enrolled in the Florida public school system in the 2010-2011 school year, there were 202,303 students in Grade 6; 200,147 students in Grade 7; and 201,676 students in Grade 8 for a total of 604,126 students enrolled in the middle grade levels (Keaton, 2012). The student public school enrollment in the state of Florida is expected to increase 5% to 20% by 2024 (Aud et al., 2013).

High School Dropout

National

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 81% of all high school students graduating in 2012 did so on time with their cohort group. The overall national high school graduation rate was 94.4% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013c). The national high school dropout rate has steadily declined over the last 22 years. From 1990 until 2012, the number of high school dropouts decreased from 12% to 6.6%. The number of male dropouts from 1990 to 2012 declined from 12% to 7%, and female dropout rates declined from 12% to 6%. Student minority subgroups experienced a similar decline with Black student dropouts decreasing from 13% in 1990 to 8% in 2012. The number of Hispanic high school dropouts also declined from 23% in 1990 to 8% in 2012 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013b). Despite the decline in high

school dropout percentages, one in four children was reported at the end of the first decade of the 21st century as failing to graduate from high school on time with their cohort (Bruce, Bridgeland, Fox, & Balfanz, 2011, Dufour & Marzano, 2009). High school students from low-income families (with low income consisting of the lowest 20%) were six times more likely to drop out of high school than students from higher income families (Monrad, 2007). The National Center for Education Statistics (2014) defined the Average Freshman Graduation Rate (AFGR), Dropout and Dropout Rate as follows:

The AFGR provides an estimate of the percentage of high school students who graduate on time. The rate uses aggregate student enrollment data to estimate the size of an incoming freshman class and aggregate counts of the number of regular diplomas awarded 4 years later.

Dropout: Includes students who were enrolled in school at some time during the school year; expected to be in membership the following school year; and not enrolled in grades 9-12 by October 1 of the following year.

Dropout Rate: The number of dropouts divided by the number of students enrolled in grades 9-12 at the beginning of that school year. (NCES, 2014, pp. B-3, 4)

Under a new Federal accountability system, the United States Department of Education required states to calculate the graduation rate using the federal graduation rate calculation method, replacing the National Governors' Association (NGA) rate beginning with the 2011-2012 school year (Florida Department of Education, 2013a). These new

higher standards calculate the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate that includes only standard diplomas and does not include General Education Diplomas (GED) or special diplomas (Florida Department of Education, 2013a). Relevant definitions follow:

A cohort is defined as a group of students on the same schedule to graduate. The graduation rate measures the percentage of students who graduate within four years of their first enrollment in ninth grade. Subsequent to their enrollment in ninth grade, exiting transfers and deceased students are removed from the calculation. Entering transfer students are included in the count of the class with which they are scheduled to graduate, based on their date of enrollment.

Single year dropouts is the percentage of ninth through twelfth-grade dropouts compared to ninth- through twelfth-grade total, year-long student membership. A dropout is defined as a student who withdraws from school for any of several reasons without transferring to another school, home education program, or adult education program. (Florida Department of Education, 2013, p. 2)

Students who do not graduate from high school dramatically reduce their chances to become economically self-sufficient and frequently find it more difficult to secure a job, especially in a difficult economic environment than do those with a high school diploma. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), the average unemployment rate for high school dropouts in 2013 was 11%. The unemployment rate for people with a high school diploma was 7.5 %, 7.0% for individuals with some college, 5.4% for individuals with an associate's degree, 4.0% for individuals with a

bachelor's degree, and 3.4% or less for individuals with a master's degree or higher, averaging 6.1 % for all workers regardless of educational attainment (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). The rate of unemployment for individuals without a high school diploma was nearly double the rate for all workers. Thus, the lack of earning a high school diploma has been shown to severely hinder individual opportunities for personal career stability and steady employment.

State

In the state of Florida, the high school graduation rate has steadily increased since the millennium. In 2003, the federal graduation rate for the state of Florida was 56.5%. In 2013, Florida's federal graduation rate, using the new federal graduation rate calculation method, was 75.6%, an increase of almost 20%, using the stricter guidelines for the definition of a high school graduate. Florida's student subgroups graduation rates, reported for the 2012- 2013 school year were as follows: 80.5% for White, 64.6% for Black, 74.9% for Hispanic, 88.4% for Asian, 76.8% for American or Alaskan Native, and 79.7% for two or more races (Florida Department of Education, 2013a). Of those percentages, additional categorization by gender showed 84.4% for white females, 76.7% for white males, 70.5% for Black females, 58.9% for Black males, 78.0% for Hispanic females, 71.9% for Hispanic males, 90.8% for Asian females, 86% for Asian males, 83.5% for American or Alaskan Native female, 70.9% for American or Alaskan Native male, 83.1% for two or more races female, and 76.3% for two or more races male (Florida Department of Education, 2013a). Florida's graduation rate report would appear

to indicate fewer males than females graduated from high school in 2013 and among all of the student subgroups, Blacks, specifically Black males, had the lowest graduation rates in 2013.

Florida's U.S. Department of Education (USED) calculated graduation rate appeared to have a 24.4% dropout rate for the graduation cohort for the 2012-2013 school year; however, in Florida's 2012-2013 cohort, 4.6% of the students dropped out and 19.8% were retained or earned a certificate of completion, special diploma, or GED-based diploma. In a cohort, students can be classified as graduates, dropouts, and non-graduates. Non-graduates include students who have been retained and are still in school, receive certificates of completion or receive GED-based diplomas. (Florida Department of Education, 2013, p. 5)

The target school district's USED graduation rate for the 2012-2013 school year was 83.8%. When graduation rates were reviewed for the school district by student subgroups for the 2012-2013 school year, graduation rates were 87.1% for Whites, 71.9% for Blacks, 79.0% for Hispanics, 92.3% for Asian, and 83.3% of two or more races (Florida Department of Education, 2013a). Though the school district's graduation rates were higher than the average in the state of Florida, there is still work to be done to ensure that all students acquire the knowledge and skills required to earn and graduate with a high school diploma.

Cost of High School Dropouts

National

When students choose to leave school without a high school diploma they are making a decision that not only affects them personally. It affects the nation as a whole.

At the present time and for the foreseeable future;

the majority of the fastest-growing jobs require a high school diploma, pay a salary above the poverty line for a family of four, and provide opportunities for career advancements require knowledge and skills comparable to those expected of the first year college student. (ACT, 2008, p. 1)

After an individual drops out of high school, opportunities leading to financial stability and career opportunities are rarely available.

As noted by numerous researchers (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011b; Aud et al., 2013; Bruce et al., 2011; National High School Center, 2007), students who do not graduate from high school on average earn less money during their lifetime compared to their peers who earned a high school diploma or higher education degrees. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), the median weekly earnings for a high school dropout in 2014 was approximately \$472 compared to the weekly median earning of \$651 for an individual who had earned a high school diploma. Weekly median earnings for individuals with Bachelor's degrees averaged \$1,108. Additional fiscal impacts, other than that of personal income have been experienced by the nation as a whole. Lower

wages and less income result in less national, state, and local taxes paid over the lifetime of individuals who dropped out of high school (Bruce et al., 2011).

The loss of personal income and lower wages are not the only effects on individuals who do not earn a high school diploma. As a unit, high school dropouts tend to experience poorer health, have shorter life expectancies, incur higher rates of public and governmental assistance for daily support necessities ranging from food stamps to health care, and have increased arrests and incarcerations compared to their age appropriate peers with a high school diploma or higher education. Situations such as these not only deprive the individual of earning wages, but also require additional expenditures from local, state and federal coffers to pay for the criminal justice system, the welfare system and provide healthcare services (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011b, 2013; National High School Center, 2007; Ryan, 2011). In recent history, the impact of economic downturns have affected dropouts more severely, because people who have not earned a high school diploma are more likely to be unemployed or under employed (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011b, 2013; National High School Center, 2007; Ryan, 2011).

In its report on education and the economy, the Alliance for Excellent Education (2011a) stated that if the 2010 national graduation dropout rate was cut in half, this single class of reduced dropouts would have provided the following monetary infusions into the economy: \$7.6 billion in increased personal wage earnings, \$5.6 billion in increased national spending, \$2 billion in increased personal investments, \$19 billion in increased national home sales, \$741 million in increased auto sales, \$713 million in increased tax

revenue, and an overall \$9.6 billion in overall national economic growth. A 50% cut in the number of high school dropouts in the 2009-2010 school year alone would have supported as many as 54,000 new jobs, not to mention the decrease in additional nationwide expenditures involving government assistance, criminal justice expenses, and the overall cost of crime and unemployment (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011a).

Addressing the high school dropout crisis is a key strategy for economic growth. Years of research repeatedly highlight the link between education and the economy. Indeed, raising educational outcomes not only boosts incomes for individuals who earn degrees, but these individual gains also compound to improve local, state, and national economies. (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011a, p. 1)

As early as 1974, Havighurst noted that for individuals to participate in the current and future workforce, they would need to ensure successful completion of developmental tasks including basic skills and knowledge and selection and preparation for a chosen occupation. In contemporary times, that includes earning a high school diploma.

Everyone benefits from increased graduation rates. The graduates themselves, on average, will earn higher wages and enjoy more comfortable and secure lifestyles. At the same time, the nation benefits from their increased purchasing power, collects higher tax receipts, and sees higher levels of worker productivity. (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011b, p. 1)

State

The state of Florida is not exempt from the high school dropout predicament. In 2011, the number of high school dropouts in the state of Florida was calculated at 83,516. Florida ranked 48th of the 50 states, with only California and Texas experiencing a larger number of dropouts (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011b). The Alliance for Excellent Education (2011b) calculated the monetary benefits for the state of Florida that would have accrued over the lifetimes of the number of dropouts and average earnings for that group by educational level. The calculated total of additional state income that could have been earned if those 83,516 dropouts during the 2010-2011 school year had graduated from high school was \$9,478,000,000. Moreover, an extraordinary amount of money would have been infused into the state's economy through the purchasing of homes, cars, paying of taxes, personal purchases, and investments. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2011b) stated that if the 2010 graduation dropout rate in Florida was cut in half, this single class of reduced dropouts would have contributed \$461 million in increased spending and created 4,000 new jobs in the state of Florida. Additionally, there would have been revenue saved from the reduced numbers of people who would require governmental assistance and a reduction of individuals being processed through the criminal justice system.

Middle Grades At-Risk Characteristics

Classified as at-risk of dropping out of high school for the purposes of this study were students who were not eligible for grade-level promotion but were assigned from

seventh grade to eighth grade because they did not earn a 2.0 GPA (delayed assignment), were retained in eighth grade, or failed one or more classes in of their seventh-grade year. Identification of these at-risk students allowed schools to take targeted action to support at-risk students in their education. Eighth grade, the last year of middle school, is a critical time for meeting the academic needs of students preparing to transition to high school. This is especially important in that the rate of grade-level retention is the highest in ninth grade among all grades (Haney et al., 2004). Additional at-risk characteristics for middle school students include transition from elementary school to middle school, middle grade retention, relationships with teachers and parents, and academic failure (Akmal & Larsen, 2004; Balfanz, 2009; Bruce et al., 2009; Davis, Herzog, & Legters, 2013; Hattie, 2009).

Middle Grade Transition

The importance of students experiencing a successful transition from academic levels, especially from middle school to high school, is well known. Less attention and research has been focused on the transition from elementary school to middle school (Balfanz, 2009, Bruce et al., 2009).

The transition from elementary to middle school is often the point where the first red flag is raised. No longer are students in self-contained classrooms with a single teacher who knows them like a parent. Now they face the increased rigors of middle level curriculum, a flexible schedule, and bodily changes over which they have no control. (Akmal & Larsen, 2004, p. 8)

Sixth grade, very much like ninth grade as part of the overall change in education levels, appears to be the most important year for transition, especially if the transition is to a new school (Balfanz, 2009).

A student's middle school grades experience is critical to his or her life's chances. It is during the middle grades that students either launch toward achievement and attainment, or slide off track and placed on a path of frustration, failure, and, ultimately, early exit for the only secure path to adult success. (Balfanz, 2009, p. 13)

Off-track indicators can be identified as early as late elementary school and during middle school years. The earlier students develop off track indicators, the lower the odds of high school graduation appear to be (ACT, 2008; Balfanz, 2009; Bruce et al., 2011).

Often, the transition between elementary and middle school causes a decrease in academic motivation that leads to early disengagement in school. This decrease in motivation has been found in numerous studies. Compared to elementary schools, the middle school education environment is less personal with fewer positive teacher and student relationships; provides more public evaluation of school work; and is more teacher directed. (Davis et al., 2013, p. 87)

Adolescent Relationships

Adolescent relationships with all adults important to the student are crucial to social abilities and academic success. According to Havighurst (1974), in order for

children to achieve emotional independence from parents and other adults they should “become free from childish dependence upon them; to develop respect for older adults without dependence on them” (p. 55). In the academic environment, relationships between students and teachers are paramount. Teachers’ beliefs and attitudes have a large influence on students (Havighurst, 1974; Wigfield & Eccles, 1995). “Teachers should be selected who have qualities (a) that make them admired and attractive to students, and (b) that students should imitate” (Havighurst, 1974, p. 73). Addressing the teacher-student relationship, Hattie (2009) stated:

Building relations with students implies agency, efficacy, respect by the teacher for what the child brings to the class (from home, culture, peers), and allowing the experiences of the child to be recognized in the classroom. Further, developing relationships requires skill by the teacher - such as the skills of listening, empathy, caring and having positive regard for others. (p. 118)

In a meta-analysis conducted by Hattie (2009), teacher-student relationships were shown to have an effect size of $d=0.72$.

Davis et al. (2013) supported Hattie’s earlier observations noting the importance of students relationships with adults in the school setting:

Forming connections with teachers and adults in the school has been shown to be an important factor in keeping students engaged in school. A respected adult can continually send the message to a student that although school can be difficult at times, it is vitally important. (p. 97)

Equally important as relationships between students and teachers continued parent involvement is crucial in education especially during the middle grades (Wigfield & Eccles, 1995). In order to maximize the probability of academic success, all three groups, parents, teachers, and students should work together to support each other.

Ideally, middle school grades students are strongly supported by their parents/families and their teachers, with the teachers and parents supporting each other. In practice, often as the result of miscommunication or lack of communication, more of these relationships breaks down or is not sufficiently strong. (Balfanz, 2009, p. 13)

It is important that teachers and parents work together to support students in their academic endeavors, both struggles and triumphs. In their study, Akmal and Larsen (2004) concluded that, “students tended to develop the strongest sense of intrinsic motivation to study when the teacher created a climate of high expectations in the classroom and when these expectations were supported through encouragement at home” (p. 3).

Retention/Acceleration

Traditionally, students who do not meet the annual academic promotion requirements, e.g., minimum grades in coursework and/or grade level proficiency on high stakes standardized assessments, have been retained in the current grade level.

“Retention is the practice of not promoting students up a grade level in school and it is based on the belief that children learn more academically by repeating a grade” (Hattie,

2009, p. 97). The primary problem with retention is that researchers have not supported the action of retention as an effective strategy with students. In reference to retention, Hattie (2009) stated, “This is one of the few areas in education where it is difficult to find any studies with a positive ($d > 0.0$) effect, and the few that do exist hover close to a zero effect” (p. 97).

In a study conducted by Akmal and Larsen (2004), students were identified for possible retention, provided intervention supports, and were consequently retained for not making adequate progress during the school year. In their study, the researchers’ findings supported previous research that showed the practice of retention was disproportionality applied to students who already lacked social abilities and were economically disadvantaged, concluding that retention rarely achieves the desired outcome.

Estimates concerning the number of students annually retained in the United States vary from 7% to 15%, and retention numbers have differed across gender, ethnic, and demographic groups as well as by local communities (Akmal & Larsen, 2004; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Tingle et al., 2012). Male students and students who were the youngest age in a given grade have tended to be recommended for and retained more often (Akmal & Larsen, 2004; Tingle et al., 2012). Due to limited alternatives, the decision to retain students has continued to be the primary practice in education as a solution for students who do not master grade skills.

Academic Failure

In his work on at-risk middle school students, Balfanz (2009) determined that it was possible to identify up to half of the number of students who would eventually dropout of high school while they were still in middle school. In its longitudinal study, by the Baltimore Educational Research Consortium [(BERC) (2011) confirmed the findings of Bruce et al. (2011) that large percentages of future high school dropouts could be identified as early as the sixth grade. There are many contributing factors to academic failure. Unfortunately, according to Balfanz (2009), “less than 1 of every 4 students with at least one off-track indicator graduated within one extra year of on-time graduation” (p. 4). Off-track indicators in middle school signify a large percentage of students who will not graduate with their cohort without appropriate interventions in Grades 6 through 8. Middle school students with off-track indicators do not typically correct these behaviors without successful intervention (Balfanz, 2008). The most common academic indicators are the ABCs: poor attendance, poor behavior and failing coursework (ACT, 2008; Balfanz, 2009; Bruce et al., 2011; Casillas, Robbins, Hanson, Schmeiser, & Kuo, 2012).

The term, poor attendance, has generally been used to describe students with attendance issues, primarily missing 20 or more school days or more than 10% of school days in a particular school year (Balfanz, 2009; Bruce et al., 2011). Attendance becomes a primary off-track indicator with the simple fact that if students are not in class, they are not present for instruction, cannot keep up with the coursework, and are less able to master the skills required for that grade level. Absenteeism tends to begin in the middle grades when students, especially in urban areas, become increasingly more responsible

for getting themselves to school on time every day. For the majority of students in the middle grades, personal transportation to and from school involves walking, riding bicycles, taking school district-provided school buses and in some circumstances using some form of public transportation to get to school with little or no supervision (Balfanz, 2009).

Behavior off-track indicators for students can usually be observed when two or more mild or more serious behavior infractions take place in a given school year (Bruce et al., 2011). Students need to be rewarded for positive behavior, and schools should not be a place where negative behavior receives positive attention.

Of the ABC gauges, course grades appear to be a better indicator as well as a more reliable and greater predictor and identifier of potential high school dropouts (ACT, 2008; Balfanz, 2009, Bruce et al., 2011; Casillas et al., 2012).

Grades, in particular course failures, are better predictors of a student's likelihood of graduating on time than achievement test scores. There are several reasons for this. For example, achievement tests are given at one point in time, and for a single individual judgment of a semester's or year's worth of work, capturing student performance, effort, motivation, and attendance over time. At the high school level, course passing is directly tied to credit attainment, which in turn is linked to grade promotion and high school graduation. Grades, moreover, are continuously available, and hence can be used to monitor progress or decline, whereas tests are often given only once a year, and even less frequently in high school. Some have argued that test scores should have greater weight than grades

because test scores are less arbitrary than grades, even if they are weaker predictors. This concern, however, at some level is comparing apples to oranges. Both are important. Test scores, are important for accountability and to see if students and schools are achieving at desired standards. Grades, however, can help tell us if a student is on track to graduate high school, prepared for college and career success. (Bruce et al., 2011, p. 16)

In a study conducted in partnership with ACT, Casillas et al. (2012) studied 4,660 students across 24 middle schools within 13 different school districts in the Midwest and Southern regions of the United States. The study was conducted to determine the impact of prior academic achievement as a predictor for future academic success. In this study “the findings confirm that academic achievement indicators are among the strongest predictors of future academic success” (pp. 414-415). This indicated that middle grades students who were struggling with the developmental task of mastering basic grade level coursework were directly exhibiting the most identifiable factor in determining future high school graduation. Simply stated, academic interventions to support struggling or at-risk students must happen before high school (Balfanz, 2009; Bruce et al., 2011; Casillas et al., 2012; Education Commission of the States, 2009).

Academic Intervention

The Importance of Eighth Grade

The importance of intervention services for at-risk students in high school are well known and have been subjected to research, and most academic intervention programs in educational settings have been reserved for academically struggling students when they enter high school. High schools have offered intervention services ranging from transition programs for incoming ninth-grade students to remedial classes in all subjects in Grades 9-12. Until recently, less importance has been placed on intervention programs for students at early points in their educational paths, i.e., late elementary school and middle school grades (ACT, 2008; Balfanz, 2011). “Students who leave eighth grade without the essential skills they need to be on target for college and career readiness too often leave high school not ready for any kind of meaningful future” (ACT, 2008, p. 3). The need to intervene with struggling and at-risk students at an earlier stage of education, before high school, to ensure all students attain the appropriate grade level skills and academic knowledge has been recognized.

ACT (2008) conducted a research study and concluded that the majority of eighth-grade students nationwide were not academically prepared for high school. “More than eight of ten eighth-grade students do not have the knowledge and skills they need to enter high school and succeed there” (ACT, 2008, p. 5). The research conducted by ACT in 2008 separated eighth-grade students for study into separate subgroups by socio-economic status and race/minority categories. In its research, ACT found that three of

five eighth-grade students who came from families making less than \$30,000 a year and whose parents did not attend college were not on target for college level skills by the time they graduated from high school (ACT, 2008). Additionally, it was found that one in four eighth-grade students in the study who came from families with an annual income exceeding \$100,000 a year and whose parents both attended college were also not on target for college level skills by the time they graduated from high school. These results implied that family income and parent education did not determine the likelihood of students not performing at grade level in eighth grade, which ultimately has been predicted to have the greatest impact on high school acquisition of skills and knowledge to be college and career ready (ACT, 2008).

In the 2008 ACT study, six predictors that are commonly used to determine college and career readiness and success in high school were predicted and tracked. The six predictors included (a) background characteristics of individual students, (b) participation in standard high school coursework, (c) participation in advanced classes in high school, (d) students' high school grade point average, (e) student testing behaviors in high school, and (f) academic performance in eighth grade core classes. Of the six predictors, eighth-grade achievement in core academic coursework was the single most predictive factor in determining students' college and career readiness by the end of high school. ACT (2008) determined that the eighth-grade achievement magnitude of effect in predicting 11th/12th-grade college and career readiness was 54% for English, 60% for reading, 42% for mathematics, and 49% for science for all students. When the study was conducted to analyze data for racial/ethnic minority student groups, the relative

magnitude of effect in predicting 11th/12th-grade college and career readiness based on eighth-grade core academic performance was even higher; 56% for English, 65% for reading, 43% for mathematics, and 52% for science, leaving researchers to conclude that “improvement in eight-grade academic achievement and being on target for college and career readiness in eighth grade are more beneficial than any high school level academic enhancement” (ACT, 2008, p. 11). These results suggest that academic interventions for the core academic subjects need to occur before eighth grade to ensure students are on or near grade level academic mastery to achieve success in transitioning from middle school to high school and performance in high school core coursework and beyond.

Under current conditions, increasing eighth-grade students’ academic achievement and helping them get on target for college and career readiness would have a substantially larger impact on students’ readiness for college than any single academic enhancement undertaken during high school, whether it be taking a minimum core curriculum, increasing course grades or maintaining a B average, or taking additional standard or advanced/honors courses. Such increases in students’ academic skills by grade 8 would continue to pay benefits beyond high school, by increasing the number of students graduating from college and decreasing the number of college dropouts. (ACT, 2008, p. 24)

Early Warning Systems

Educational leaders need to become aware of key components that are essential to successful academic intervention programs. Far too often educators wait to offer

academic interventions to students in high school when it is discovered students may not be on track to graduate with their cohort. For many struggling and at-risk students, that is too late to offer the necessary interventions required for academic achievement.

The first key component of a successful academic intervention program is to identify students who are exhibiting signs of becoming part of the at-risk population. Students routinely exhibit early warning signs that can be detected and tracked through an early warning system as early as late elementary school. An early warning system (EWS) “is an intentional process whereby school personnel collectively analyze student data to monitor students at risk of falling of track for graduation” (Davis et al., 2013, p. 84). Academic early warning system indicators include poor attendance, behavior issues, low grade point averages, below proficient on standardized assessments, and discipline issues including suspension (Data for Quality Campaign, 2013; Davis et al., 2013; The Progress of Education Reform, 2009; Ryan, 2011). The purpose of using an early warning system is to identify students who may need additional support and intervention so that help can be provided in a timely manner to ensure student academic success in the current grade level (Data Quality Campaign, 2013; Davis et al., 2013).

Davis commented on the value of early warning systems arrived at collaboratively by school district stakeholders.

Early Warning Indicator and Intervention Systems represent a collaborative approach among educators, administrators, parents, and communities to using data effectively to keep students on the pathway to graduation. The best EWS are characterized by a combination of features that enable rapid identification of

students who are in trouble; rapid interventions that are targeted to students' immediate and longer-term need for support, redirection and greater success; the frequent monitoring of the success of interventions; a rapid modification of interventions that are not working; and shared learning from outcomes. These systems are implemented at the school level, sometimes in conjunction with community partners, and are sometimes supported with data supports and analysis from districts and/or states. In some emerging cases, these systems are also being used at the district level to organize and allocate resources and monitor the effectiveness of interventions. (Bruce et al., 2011, p. 11)

According to Data Quality Campaign (2013), the advantage of early warning systems is the use of multiple data points in identifying predictive indicators.

Early warning systems, can combine multiple data points and translate them into predictive indicators that are based on research, and proactively communicate them to stakeholders so they can examine which students are or are not on track for post-secondary success and intervene accordingly. (Data Quality Campaign, 2013, p. 1)

Early warning systems are designed to easily identify students who are at risk of dropping out of school for the purpose of providing targeted supports to get them back on track for high school graduation (Bruce et al., 2011; Data Quality Campaign, 2013; Ryan, 2011). Early warning systems can assist in gathering and collecting specific data on the student predictors of success in school. Researchers have shown that the ABCs of attendance, behavior and course performance are more predictive indicators of student

outcomes in education than are standardized assessment scores (ACT, 2008; Balfanz, 2009; Bruce et al., Casillas et al., 2012). Early warning systems can also assist in identifying secondary and tertiary indicators including state and/or district progress monitoring and assessments scores, overage for current grade level, social situations including homelessness, foster care, juvenile justice involvement, and other factors which can in turn provide proper context to individual student situations when trying to determine proper interventions for every individual circumstance (Bruce et al., 2011). Utilizing early warning systems can identify key indicators for future at-risk students including academic concerns of failing coursework in English and/or mathematics or a failing combination of English, mathematics, social studies and science, as predictors for identifying large percentages of future high school dropouts, as early as in the sixth grade (Bruce et al., 2011).

“In 15 states, the state education agency (SEA) collects, stores, and analyses early warning data and provides information to schools and districts” (Data Quality Campaign, 2013, p. 2). On June 6, 2014, Florida Governor Rick Scott signed Florida Senate Bill 850 into law. Florida Senate Bill 850 listed the new middle grades requirements for using an early warning system in Florida. Senate Bill 850 required school districts in the state of Florida to incorporate and include an academic early warning system in the middle grades as part of the state’s education laws. As part of the system, early warning indicators noted by the Education Commission of the States [ECS] (2014) were also to be addressed. These included attendance, suspensions, academic failure in English and/or mathematics, and low scores on statewide high stakes assessments in English and/or

mathematics are to be collected, monitored, and analyzed to help determine and identify students that may possibly need academic interventions. Senate Bill 850 stated, “A school that includes any grades 6, 7, or 8 shall implement an early warning system to identify students in grades 6, 7, or 8 who need additional support to improve their academic performance and stay engaged in school” (Fla. Stat. §1001.42).

An earlier ECS (2009) report observed that early warning mechanisms, based on at-risk indicators, should:

ensure that the student information systems regularly collect such data throughout the school year. This data should be readily accessible, or be provided regularly to teachers and administration in a clear and easily understandable format. . .

[and] provide targeted, intensive academic support to students in need, as soon as they are identified. . . . Teachers, counselors, and administrators should be allocated time to meet to go over student data. (ECS, 2009, p.2)

Davis et al. (2013) reinforced the value and promise of early warning systems as follows:

The promise of these early warning systems is that they (a) use readily available, low-cost data to identify students who, absent intervention, are likely to drop out; (b) enable teachers and administrators to cut through the massive amounts of data they receive to focus in the most important indicators; (c) can be incorporated into real-time data systems to permit monitoring of student progress during the school year; and (d) allow districts to monitor how well schools are helping students stay on track to graduation. Most important these indicators can accurately identify

students at high risk of dropping out years before they leave school, providing educators and administrators with time to intervene to get students back on track.

(Davis, et. al., 2013, p. 86)

The intended goal of using an academic early warning system is to provide struggling and at-risk students with interventions at the time of difficulty, not waiting until the student enters high school to provide intervention services.

Middle Grades Academic Interventions

In a study conducted by Akmal and Larsen, intervention programs that assisted students in jeopardy of being retained in seven middle schools (five schools in Washington state and two schools in northern California) were analyzed for success. As part of the intervention process, parents and students received information at the end of the first grading period of the current year that their student was at-risk for possible grade retention the following year. Students meeting specific criteria including two or more F's in core academic classes (language arts, reading, mathematics, science, and social studies) were identified and categorized on the level of need for academic intervention. A student intervention team was selected and assembled for each at-risk student. Meetings were conducted that included team members, parents and grade level guidance counselor to develop an action plan for improvement for each student. "These plans included the expectations the school holds for the student, the kinds of support the school will provide, the necessary student behaviors to avoid retention, and what the parents should do to support the student's success" (Akmal & Larsen, 2004, p. 5). The

improvement plan interventions included progress reports (daily, weekly, or biweekly), before and after school tutorial classes, progress meetings with students and parents, counseling on issues of home life, and study skills. An additional option of a supervised independent study class during the day was offered, but not required. Every month administrators and grade level counselors met with grade level teams to discuss the students at risk for retention. In this study, researchers determined that early communication with teachers, students, and parents was crucial and identified that early warning tracking combined with regularly monitoring and a plan of intervention provided a foundation for student success (Akmal & Larsen, 2004).

Mason and McMahon (2009), in their action research study, concluded that at-risk students participating in a middle grades intervention program improved their core course grades. In this study, one urban middle school with approximately 1,400 students identified 52 students who were failing at least three academic classes by the end of the first grading period of the school year. As part of the intervention program students met every other week in small groups with guidance counselors who served as intervention facilitators. The small group meetings included recognition, student discussions, and teaching of success skills. Additionally, students met individually with a guidance counselor or participating teacher on alternate weeks to review current grades. Students were taught how to calculate their own grade point averages and how to predict what grades needed to be achieved to meet grade level promotion criteria. Results of this study showed that 21 students (64%) improved their overall academic performance from the first to fourth grading period (Mason & McMahon, 2009).

In their study of early warning indicators, Davis et al. (2013) monitored, “the early warning indicators and implementing interventions to ascertain common practices and challenges” (p. 84). As part of this study, researchers selected and visited 10 Diplomas Now pilot schools in seven cities across the United States, ranging from elementary to high school levels. During these visits, researchers met with the EWI teams and conducted interviews with members of those teams, including administrators, teachers, school counselors, teachers, and other team members. Students were selected for participation by identifying early warning indicators. “Students with one or more of these indicators are considered for inclusion, with priority given to students with two or more indicators” (Davis et al., 2013, p. 90). The indicators selected to monitor included but were not limited to attendance, behavior and academic course performance. Students selected for inclusion at the differing schools received interventions that ranged from increased parental involvement led by school personnel to tutoring and counseling. In some instances, consequences such as detention were assigned; in other situations, positive reinforcement was provided for meeting the set goals. Researchers concluded, “Matching interventions to students is a very important step in the EWI process. To make this process easier, many teams formed lists of well-tested and commonly used interventions of their team and school” (Davis et al., 2013, p. 97).

In 1980, an English department chair at a high school in San Diego, California developed an academic elective entitled Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) to serve as support for students in need of skills and behaviors to ensure academic success.

AVID is a college-readiness program whose primary goal is to prepare middle and high school students for enrollment in four-year colleges through increased access to and support in advanced courses. The program, which focuses on underserved, middle-achieving students (defined as students earning B, C, and even D grades), places students in college preparatory classes (e.g., honors and Advanced Placement classes) while providing academic support through a daily elective period and ongoing tutorials. (What Works Clearinghouse, 2010)

The program currently serves more than 700,000 students in 45 states (AVID, 2014a).

The AVID program is available to schools that wish to participate through becoming certified through the program and satisfying the following 11 AVID essentials:

1. AVID student selection must focus on students in the middle, with academic potential, who would benefit from AVID support to improve their academic record and begin college preparation.
2. AVID program participants, both students and staff, must choose to participate in the AVID program.
3. The school must be committed to full implementation of AVID, with students enrolled in the AVID year-long Elective class(es) available within the regular academic school day.
4. AVID students must be enrolled in a rigorous course of study that will enable them to meet requirements for university enrollment.
5. Instructional strategies are taught in the AVID Elective class to develop students' organizational skills that promote academic self-management.

6. A strong, relevant writing and reading curriculum provides a basis for instruction in the AVID Elective class.
7. Inquiry and collaboration are used as a basis for instruction in the AVID Elective class and to promote critical thinking.
8. A sufficient number of tutors must be available in the AVID Elective class(es) to facilitate student access to rigorous curriculum. Tutors should be students enrolled in colleges and universities, who can mentor students and facilitate tutorials, and they must be trained to implement the methodologies used in AVID.
9. AVID program implementation and student progress must be monitored through the AVID Center Data System, and results must be analyzed to ensure success.
10. The school or district has identified resources for program costs, has agreed to implement all AVID Essentials and to participate in AVID Certification. It has committed to ongoing participation in AVID professional learning.
11. An active, interdisciplinary AVID site team collaborates on issues of student access to and success in rigorous college preparatory courses. (AVID, 2014b)

A considerable amount of data has been collected by researchers concerning the AVID program at both middle and high school levels to determine the effectiveness of the program in increasing student achievement. Special attention was devoted to at-risk students (Cunningham, Redmond, & Merisotis, 2003; Guthrie & Guthrie, 2000; Huerta,

Watt, & Butcher, 2013; Watt, Huerta, Alkan, 2011; Watt, Huerta & Lozano, 2007; Watt, Powell, Mendiola, Cossio, 2006).

Cunningham et al. (2003) studied 17 intervention programs including AVID in 12 states. The researchers concluded that overall AVID was an effective intervention program and that students who participated in the AVID program were more likely to earn higher grade point averages, were more likely to take advanced level coursework in high school, and were more likely to attend college.

Guthrie and Guthrie (2000), in their longitudinal study of AVID, tracked over 1,000 middle school students who participated in the AVID program as they transitioned to high school in California. They studied the effects of middle school AVID on high school performance by examining high school grade point averages, SAT scores, credits earned, and advanced placement classes taken, and compared the results of AVID and non-AVID students. They concluded that the middle school AVID program had a positive effect on student achievement after students had transitioned to high school. They noted that the key factor in AVID, was coursework in algebra. Researchers reported that students who took algebra in middle school earned significantly higher grade point averages in overall high school coursework (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2000). They also found that students who took algebra in middle school accumulated more college credits through advanced placement coursework and scored higher on standardized tests than those who did not take algebra in middle school (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2000). Finally, students who participated in two years of AVID at the middle school level participated in

more advanced placement courses than students who participated for only one year (Guthrie & Guthrie, 2000).

Watt et al. (2006) conducted a four-year study of the implementation of the AVID program in 10 high schools, in five different districts in Texas “to determine if school wide or district-wide accountability measures have improved over the period of study with at-risk students, compared to 10 selected counterparts that were non-AVID high schools and districts” (Watt et al., 2006, p. 57). These researchers concluded that the high schools that implemented the AVID program improved in the areas of advanced placement course enrollment, advanced placement standardized testing, and high school graduation rates over schools that did not implement the AVID program over the four-year period (Watt et al., 2006). Additionally seven of the 10 schools that implemented the AVID program increased their state accountability rating, but only two of the 10 non-AVID high schools improved their state accountability rating (Watt et al., 2006).

Huerta et al. (2013) examined “the impact of AVID in middle school on middle school course rigor and students’ high school performance and college readiness” (p. 1). Students who participated in AVID in middle school and high school were compared to students who only participated in AVID during high school. Students who participated in AVID in both middle school and high school achieved higher academic performance in coursework, were more likely to take advanced level classes, took more advanced placement courses and exams compared to students who only participated in AVID during high school (Huerta et al., 2013).

In 2010, 66 studies of the effects of AVID on adolescent learners were reviewed in the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) with the following result: “One of these studies meets WWC evidence standards with reservations; the remaining 65 studies do not meet either WWC evidence standards or eligibility screens. Based on one study, the WWC found no discernable effects on comprehension for adolescent learners” (What Works Clearinghouse, 2010, p. 4).

Intervention Program Components

As part of middle grades intervention, a primary focus should be academic goals and expectations of students in school. In Hattie’s (2009) research, goals were shown to have an effect size of $d = 0.56$. The importance was explained as follows:

A major reason difficult goals are more effective is that they lead to a clearer notion of success and direct the student’s attention to relevant behaviors or outcomes, whereas ‘doing your best’ can fit with a very wide range of goals. It is not the specificity of the goals but the difficulty that is crucial to success. There is a direct linear relationship between the degree of goal difficulty and performance.

(Hattie, 2009, p. 164)

Personal goals and educational goals combined with individual goals of each academic class for the school year can encourage students to set personal expectations for success. Hattie (2009) advocated for teachers to review and monitor academic goals set by students and encourage students to meet those established goals. The effect size of teacher expectations was $d = 0.43$ (Hattie, 2009).

Other research-based components of an academic intervention program should be focused on student mastery of specific study skills. “Study skills interventions are programs that work on improving student learning using interventions outside what the teacher or teachers involved would normally undertake in the course of teaching” (Hattie, 2009, p. 189). In this study, study skills had an effect size of $d = 0.59$ (Hattie, 2009).

One of the last factors to be considered as a component part of a middle grades academic intervention program in Hattie’s (2009) research was academic feedback. According to Hattie, feedback from teacher to student had a research based positive effect size of $d = 0.73$, one of the highest effect sizes found. Hattie commented on the importance of academic intervention support personnel to promote student learning in all classes the student was enrolled in during the current school year. Support was also required for academic intervention personnel to successfully communicate with other teachers, parents, and students. Teachers should understand the concept, “feedback is more effective when it provides information on correct rather than incorrect responses and when it builds on changes from previous trials” (Hattie, 2009, p. 175). Hattie defined the critical component of feedback, to ask the right questions and incorporate other highly effective strategies that support student learning.

The major feedback questions are “Where am I going?” (learning intentions/goals/success criteria). “How am I going?” (self-assessment and self-evaluation), and “Where to next?” (progression, new goals). An ideal learning environment or experience is when both teachers and students seek answers to each of these questions. (Hattie, 2009, p. 177)

The ACT (2008) report best states the primary purpose of successful middle school intervention programs:

Ultimately, we must reduce the number of students who are seriously underprepared by the end of middle school, which will require interventions well before grade 8. Furthermore, if we can improve students' academic skills before grade 8, then the other high school-level enhancements will be far more effective. (ACT, 2008, p. 41)

The Target School District's Academic Intervention Program

In the target school district for the present study, each of the 12 middle schools were provided one teaching allocation by the target school district office to provide a middle grades academic intervention programs (AIP) to struggling and at-risk students during the 2013-2014 school year. The school district did not direct the use of a specific delivery model; therefore, each school selected a delivery model that best met the needs of students at each individual school. The school district incorporated the use of early warning system indicators, including attendance and failing course grades, to assist in the identification of students in Grades 6-8 who needed academic assistance to master grade level skills and knowledge and subsequently master core academic coursework. Students who did not meet grade level promotion criteria were identified at the end of the 2012-2013 school year, received delayed assignment or retained, and were eligible to be enrolled into the academic intervention program. At the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year, struggling students who failed one or more academic courses during the first

grading period were also eligible to be assigned to the academic improvement program in order to receive assistance with academic coursework.

The Cost of the Target District's Academic Intervention Program

During the 2013-2014 school year, the target school district provided each of the 12 middle schools with one teaching allocation in order to provide the middle grades academic intervention program. The average salary of a teacher in the target school district was \$46,283 for the 2013-2014 school year, \$300 under the Florida state average for teacher salaries for that particular school year (Florida Department of Education, 2013b). The total cost to provide one teacher allocation at each of the 12 middle schools for the school district of study for the academic intervention program was \$555,396 for the 2013-2014 school year.

Summary

This review of the literature has presented the problematic nature of the academic challenges facing at-risk students in public schools in the 21st century. In this review, the dilemma of problems associated with at-risk students and those dropping out have been highlighted. The challenges that middle school students bring to the issue have been highlighted, and the complexities of academic intervention have been discussed.

Schools in the United States of America continue to face the extraordinary challenge of providing adequate supports and interventions for all students to be academically successful and compete in a globally competitive marketplace. The need to

acquire and master appropriate middle grades-level skills before entering high school to ensure opportunities for students to earn a high school diploma has been established in this review of research, and other researchers have noted the tremendous importance of academic achievement in the middle grades. Additionally, researchers have indicated that successful coursework in eighth grade is the greatest predictor of high school graduation rates (ACT, 2008; Balfanz, 2009; Bruce et al., 2011). Identifying students as they are beginning to exhibit off-track indicators enables schools and school districts to use targeted resources effectively and provide appropriate levels of intervention with the intention of preparing all students to earn a high school diploma.

It is clear that warning signs of dropping out are apparent well before students actually leave school, signaling the gathering storm of trouble for some as early as the elementary or initial middle grades. Research also shows that most students at risk of falling off track could graduate if they were provided with the appropriate supports early enough and those supports were sustained. (Bruce et al., 2011, p. 7)

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study was conducted to investigate student participation in a school district academic intervention program for at-risk eighth-grade students in a large urban school district. The primary focus of the study was on determining if a relationship existed between student participation and academic success in course work.

This chapter contains a description and explanation of the methodology used to test the four research question which guided the study. The purpose of the study, selection of participants, data collection and analyses procedures are also discussed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to analyze the pre-existing academic intervention program (AIP) administered in all middle grade schools in one large urban school district in central Florida to determine to what extent, if any, participation in the pre-existing AIP program by at-risk eighth-grade students affected coursework and subsequent grade point averages. Research results provided information concerning program effectiveness of the academic intervention program and will offer useful information to school district officials and school board members to determine future allocations of resources for the AIP program in the middle school grades and to assist at-risk students with middle grades coursework and academic preparedness for high school coursework.

Selection of Participants

The population for this study included all eighth-grade students in the target school district during the 2013-2014 school year. The purposive sample included all eighth-grade student participants in the academic intervention program (AIP), all eighth-grade students who were eligible but were non-participants in the AIP program, and all non-eligible, non-participant eighth-grade students within one large urban school district in central Florida. Students in the target school district were eligible to enroll in the academic improvement program for at-risk students if (a) they had less than a 2.0 GPA and received delayed assignment to eighth grade or (b) if they had failed one or more academic core classes but had a higher than 2.0 GPA, or (c) they were retained in eighth grade from the previous year (Target School District, 2014). Students who participated in the AIP program were identified by each of the 12 middle schools for 2013-2014 school year. The identified students and their parents were notified that students were assigned to the academic intervention program as a requirement for their eighth-grade year.

Interview participants were selected using criterion sampling, the criterion being the current supervising administrator overseeing the academic intervention program. The supervising administrators of the academic intervention program at each of the 12 middle schools in the target school district were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews regarding the delivery model of the program at their respective schools.

Intervention

The target school district provided a middle grade academic intervention program during the 2013-2014 school year. Every middle school in the district received one teacher allocation to support and provide delivery of the AIP program. Students eligible to participate in the AIP program were identified either at the end of the seventh-grade year or at the beginning of the eighth-grade year. Parents and students identified at the end of the seventh-grade year received notice of delayed assignments, or grade retention and that participation in the AIP program was required as part of the student schedule for eighth grade. Students assigned to the program at the end of the previous school year and students identified to participate at the beginning of the eighth-grade year were enrolled in the academic intervention program. The school district did not have a single model of delivery for the AIP program and, therefore, did not require uniform programs in the 12 schools.

As part of the academic intervention program in the target school district, the school district expectation was that students would be provided academic and mentor support throughout the eighth-grade year. The program components included increased student accountability, tracking of student performance, study skills and systematic monitoring by the AIP coordinator or case manager. Eligibility required parent agreement to program expectations for students as related to academics, classroom behavior, and attendance (Target School District, 2014, p. 43).

Sources and Collection of Data

Quantitative Data

Archival data from the target school district served as the primary source of quantitative data for the academic intervention program, eighth-grade students' grade point averages, and their level of participation for the 2013-2014 school year. These data were retrieved from the school district office that houses student information in the student management system, Skyward. This system has been used by the target school district to archive and store student information including demographics, attendance, discipline, grades, and testing history.

For Research Question 1, the school district provided the subgroup demographics for all levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program for the 2013-2014 school year as well as additional archival data that included AIP numbers of program participants and non-participants. In responding to Research Questions 2 and 3 regarding academic performance and at-risk factors, archival data including coursework grades, calculated GPAs for students, their levels of participation in the middle grades AIP program, and at-risk eligibility factors to qualify for the AIP program were accessed.

Qualitative Data

Though there was no uniform delivery model for the AIP program in the target school district, all supervising administrators of the district middle grades academic intervention program were interviewed using the same process: a face-to-face semi-

structured interview. A semi-structured interview is a formal interview that combines a series of pre-determined questions designed by the researcher with open-ended questions (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012). The Academic Intervention Program Supervising Administrator Interview Questionnaire (Appendix C) was a semi-structured, open-ended interview developed by the researcher for use with the 12 academic intervention program supervising administrators. One set of interview questions was developed to allow participants to explain and describe the current practices of the AIP program at their respective schools. This semi-structured interview allowed for flexibility to ask all administrators the same specific questions in regard to the overall program model and delivery method as well as to explore differences and similarities in implementation procedures of the AIP program at each middle school. It allowed for follow-up questions that became pertinent to clarify responses to determine the exact procedures and practices that may have been unique to the specific delivery model at an individual school or schools. Demographic information for the supervising administrators was collected at the time of the face-to-face interview. Prior to conducting any interviews, informed consent forms were given and reviewed with all interview participants (Appendix D).

Research Questions

Following are the four research questions (three quantitative and one qualitative) and the null hypotheses, which were formulated to guide this research study.

1. What is the relationship, if any, between the levels of student participation in the middle grades academic intervention program and classification of student subgroups?

H₀₁ There is no relationship between the levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program and student subgroups.

2. To what extent, if any, does academic performance in coursework differ across levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program?

H₀₂ There is no difference in academic coursework performance based on the levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program.

3. What difference, if any, is there between academic coursework GPA and at-risk eligibility factors for levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program?

H₀₃ There is no difference between academic coursework performance for levels of participation in the academic intervention program based on program eligibility factors.

4. What delivery models are utilized in each of the 12 middle schools to provide for the academic intervention program?

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed to respond to each of the four research questions. Steinberg (2011) served as a resource to the researcher in determining the appropriate statistical test

to use in the data analyses. SPSS version 22 was used to conduct all statistical tests and calculations.

To respond to Research Question 1, as to the relationship, if any, between the levels of student participation in the middle grades academic intervention program and classification of student subgroups, data were analyzed using categorical variables and the relationship to participation in the academic intervention program, e.g., level of participation by gender. The independent variables for Research Question 1 were: gender, ethnicity, retention, students with disabilities, English language learners, and socio-economic status. The dependent variable for Research Question 1 was the student level of participation in the academic intervention program, program participant, program eligible non-participant and non-eligible non-participant.

The statistical method of analysis that was used to answer Research Question 1 consisted of a series of Cramer's V tests conducted for the individual subgroups. Cramer's V test answers a Chi-square X^2 test of independence with more than two categories or variables (Steinberg, 2011).

For Research Question 2, as to the extent, if any, that academic performance in coursework differed across levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program, data were analyzed comparing level of student participation in the program and mean coursework grade point averages. The independent variable in the analysis was the level of student participation in the AIP program. The dependent variable was the mean core coursework GPA calculated from the end-of-year grade for the 2013-2014 school year.

Data to respond to Research Question 3, as to differences between academic coursework GPA and at-risk eligibility factors for levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program, were analyzed using independent *t* tests to compare the means of the calculated grade point averages of eighth-grade students who participated in the academic intervention program and those who did not participate. The independent variables for Research Question 3 were the defined at-risk factors for participation in the academic intervention program, retention, below a 2.0 GPA (delayed assignment, and course failure). The dependent variable was the calculated grade point average for academic coursework. The statistical method of analysis used in responding to Research Question 3 was independent *t* tests with unequal sample sizes. *t* tests are used to identify the observed difference between the samples with differing sizes when the standard deviation is not known. *t* tests also allow the researcher to accept or reject the null hypothesis based on the confidence, or probability that the effect is real and not based on sampling error (Steinburg, 2011).

The data collected to answer Research Question 4, as to the delivery models utilized in each of the 12 schools, were qualitative using a semi-structured face-to-face interview process via the Academic Intervention Program Supervising Administrator Interview Questionnaire. The responses to the interview questions were analyzed, comparing similarities and differences in delivery models used to provide the academic intervention program services to participating at-risk eighth-grade students in each of the 12 middle schools. Program similarities and differences in delivery methods are presented and discussed in Chapter 4.

Approval of the Study

Prior to the initiation of the study, the researcher submitted a proposal for research to the target school district (Appendix A). After receiving school district approval, the proposal was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of Central Florida (Appendix B).

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the purposive population for the research study. The four research questions that were used to guide this study were restated, along with the corresponding null hypotheses, variables, and statistical tests used. The mixed method approach was detailed as it related to the collection and analysis of data to respond to the four research questions. The instrumentation and archival data needed for quantitative analysis of data from the target school district were discussed. The procedures for collecting and analyzing the qualitative data using personal interviews was also explained.

Chapter 3 provided valuable information concerning the research questions, hypotheses, population, data collection, data sources, and data analysis for the present study. The study was performed to determine the impact of the academic intervention program in one school district in Central Florida on the academic success of eighth-grade at-risk middle grade students. Chapter 4 contains a summary of the results of the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected to respond to the four research questions.

CHAPTER 4 PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze the academic intervention program administered in all middle grade schools in one large urban school district in Central Florida, to determine to what extent, if any, participation in the academic intervention program by at-risk eighth grade students affected coursework success and academically earned promotion to high school, requiring an overall 2.0 Grade Point Average (GPA). The research generated in this study regarding the effectiveness of the academic intervention program will provide useful information in order for school district officials and school board members in the targeted school district to determine future allocations of resources for the AIP program in the middle school grades to assist at-risk students with coursework and subsequent academic preparedness for high school level coursework.

In this study, archival data were collected for all three levels of participation in the targeted school district's academic intervention program for all eighth grade students during the 2013-2014 school year. The archival data were provided by the school district central office which houses student information in the student management system, Skyward. This system has been used to archive and store student information including demographics, attendance, discipline, grades, and testing history. Data collection for specific methods of delivery for the academic intervention program was collected through interviews with current program supervising administrators.

This chapter presents the analysis of data to respond to the four research questions which guided the study. Data analyzed included archival data and results of the data collected from the Academic Intervention Program Supervising Administrator Questionnaire (Appendix C). The first part of this chapter presents and describes the descriptive statistics for the population and targeted purposive sample. The next section contains the analyses of the data for each of the three quantitative and one qualitative research questions. The last section of the chapter presents analysis of the data gathered from semi-structured interviews. Transcripts for the interviews are contained in their entirety in Appendix E.

Descriptive Statistics

The population for this study consisted of all eighth-grade students from six of the 12 middle schools in the district. These six middle schools used the district student management system, Skyward, to track participants in the academic intervention program during the 2013-2014 school year using a course code for the AIP course. The other six schools in the targeted district did not track which students participated in the district academic intervention program using the district student management system. Student data information used in the data analyses were provided from archival data from the school district central office. The demographic data for the population and the purposive sample are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Demographic Data for Total Population and Purposive Sample

Descriptors	Population <i>n</i> (%)	Purposive Sample <i>n</i> (%)
Total Population	2,263 (100.0)	161 (100.0)
Gender		
Female	1,164 (51.5)	47 (29.2)
Male	1,099 (48.5)	114 (70.8)
Ethnicity		
Asian	8 (0.4)	0 (0.0)
Black	352 (15.6)	35 (21.7)
Hispanic	523 (23.1)	40 (24.9)
Multiracial	137 (6.0)	5 (3.1)
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	5 (0.2)	0 (0.0)
White	1,238 (54.7)	81 (50.3)
Gifted	179 (7.9)	5 (3.0)
Students with Disabilities		
Yes	284 (12.6)	37 (22.9)
No	1,979 (87.4)	124 (77.1)
English Language Learners	55 (2.4)	6 (3.7)
Free or Reduced Lunch		
Yes	1,160 (51.3)	117 (72.6)
Gender of Free and reduced Lunch		
Male	564 (24.9)	82 (50.9)
Female	596 (26.3)	35 (21.7)
Retained Prior Year		
Yes	57 (2.5)	41 (25.5)
No	2,206 (97.5)	120 (74.5)

The target population of eighth-grade students for the six schools with a course code for the AIP course during the 2013-2014 school year was 2,263. This population had a gender make-up of 48.5% male ($n = 1,099$) and 51.5% female ($n = 1,164$). The ethnic make-up of this population was 0.4% Asian ($n = 8$), 15.6% Black ($n = 352$), 23.1% Hispanic ($n = 523$), 6% Multiracial ($n = 137$), 0.2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ($n = 5$), and 54.7% White ($n = 1,238$). Gifted students comprised 7.9% ($n = 179$) of the population, and students with disabilities (SWD) consisted of 12.6% ($n = 284$) of the population. Students not classified as gifted or SWD totaled 79.5% ($n = 1800$) of the population. Students classified as English language learners (ELL) accounted for 2.4% ($n = 55$). Students with low socio-economic status (SES), as determined by qualification for free and reduced lunch, totaled 51.3% ($n = 1,160$) of the population. Of the SES population, 48.6% were male ($n = 564$) and 51.4% female ($n = 596$). The number of students retained in eighth grade for the 2013-2014 school year was 2.5% ($n = 57$).

The purposive sample of eighth-grade students who participated in the academic intervention program at one of the six schools included in the data set provided was 161. The purposive sample had a gender make-up of 70.8% male ($n = 114$) and 29.2% female ($n = 47$). The ethnic make-up of the purposive sample was 0% Asian ($n = 0$), 21.7% Black ($n = 35$), 24.9% Hispanic ($n = 40$), 3.1% Multiracial ($n = 5$), 0% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander ($n = 0$), and 50.3% White ($n = 81$). Gifted students comprised 3% ($n = 5$) of the purposive sample, and students with disabilities (SWD) comprised 23% ($n = 37$). Students not classified as gifted or SWD totaled 74% ($n = 119$). Students classified as English language learners (ELL) accounted for 3.7% ($n = 6$). Students with low socio-

economic status (SES) as determined by qualification for free and reduced lunch for this purposive sample was 72.6% ($n = 117$) with 70.1% male ($n = 82$) and 29.9% female ($n = 35$). The number of students retained in eighth grade within the purposive sample for the 2013-2014 school year was 25.5% ($n = 41$).

All 12 middle school administrating supervisors for the academic intervention program participated in a face-to-face interview as part of the data collection regarding program delivery models. Interview participants for the 12 middle schools consisted of 11 assistant principals and one principal in the targeted school district at the time of the interviews. Gender subgroups consisted of six females and six males. Ethnicity of the 12 consisted of seven Whites, four Blacks, and one Hispanic. Five of the interviewees were the supervising administrator over the academic intervention program at their respective middle schools during the 2013-2014 school year. Seven interviewees did not supervise the AIP program during the 2013-2014 school year but were the current supervising administrators for the academic intervention program at the time of the interview. The demographic data for the supervising administrators is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Demographic Data for Supervising Administrators of Academic Intervention Programs

Interviewee	School Level	Position	Gender	Ethnicity	Interviewee Identification
1	Middle	Assistant Principal	Female	White	APmiddleschool1
2	Middle	Assistant Principal	Male	Black	APmiddleschool2
3	Middle	Assistant Principal	Female	White	APmiddleschool3
4	Middle	Assistant Principal	Male	White	APmiddleschool4
5	Middle	Assistant Principal	Male	Black	APmiddleschool5
6	Middle	Assistant Principal	Male	Black	APmiddleschool6
7	Middle	Assistant Principal	Female	White	APmiddleschool7
8	Middle	Assistant Principal	Male	Hispanic	APmiddleschool8
9	Middle	Assistant Principal	Female	White	APmiddleschool9
10	Middle	Assistant Principal	Female	White	APmiddleschool10
11	Middle	Principal	Male	Black	Pmiddleschool11
12	Middle	Assistant Principal	Female	White	APmiddleschool12

Testing the Research Questions

Four research questions directed the focus of this study. The three quantitative research questions were answered using archival data acquired from the targeted school district. The fourth research question required qualitative data and was answered using data gathered in semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher with the supervising administrators from each of the 12 middle schools. Complete transcripts of the interviews are included in Appendix E. Each of the research questions and the corresponding data analyses are presented in the following sections of this chapter.

Research Question 1

What is the relationship, if any, between the levels of student participation in the middle grades academic intervention program and classification of student subgroups?

This research question was answered in two parts, first with descriptive statistics identifying student subgroups (gender, ethnicity, SWD, ELL, low socio-economic status, retention) and participation level (program participant, eligible program non-participant, non-eligible non-participant) and subsequent determination of a relationship, if any, using the statistical test Cramer's V, a chi-square test for a measure of association. The data for this analysis were nonparametric, thereby requiring a nonparametric statistical test to answer the research question. The test method chosen was a chi-square (X^2) test of independence, using the frequency of participation observed and the calculated frequency of participation expected of the demographic subgroups and levels of participation in the academic intervention program of the target district. These data were used to determine

whether a demographic subgroup was related to or independent of the level of participation in the academic intervention program for the target district for the 2013-2014 school year.

The descriptive statistics showed the population of the six schools as 2,262. Females represented 47 academic intervention program participants, 21 eligible non-participants and 1,095 non-eligible non-participants ($n = 1,164$). For males there were 114 academic intervention program participants, 48 program eligible non-participants and 937 non-eligible non-participants ($n = 1,099$). The 55 English language learners (ELL) consisted of six academic intervention program participants, three program eligible non-participants and 46 non-eligible non-participants. The 284 students with socio-economic status (SES) were comprised of 117 (10.1%) academic intervention program participants, 52 (4.5%) program eligible non-participants, and 990 (85.4%) non-eligible non-participants. Of the 284 students with disabilities (SWD), 37 (13%) were academic intervention program participants, 22 (7.7%) were program eligible non-participants, and 225 (79.2%) were non-eligible non-participants. There were 57 retained students consisting of 41 (71.9%) participants, 16 (28.1%) program eligible non-participants, and no non-eligible non-participants.

In regard to ethnicity, the 161 program participants consisted of the following students: Black (35, 9.9%); Hispanic (40, 7.6%); Multiracial (5, 3.6%); and White (81, 6.5%). The ethnicity of the 69 program eligible non-participants was as follows: Black (18, 5.1%); Hispanic (22, 4.2%); Multiracial (3, 4.2%); and White (26, 2.1%). For the 2,032 program non eligible non participants, ethnicity distribution was: Asian (8, 100%);

Black (299, 84.9%); Hispanic (461, 88.1%); Multiracial (129, 94.2%); Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (5, 100%) and White (1,130, 91.4%). The descriptive statistics for the levels of participation in the academic intervention program and the subgroups of gender, ethnicity, students with disabilities, English language learners, socio-economic status and retention are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Levels of Participation in an Academic Intervention Program by Subgroup

Descriptor	Participant n (%)	Eligible Non- participant n (%)	Non-eligible Non- participant n (%)
Total Population	161 (100.0)	69 (100.0)	2,032 (100.0)
Gender			
Female	47 (4.0)	21 (1.8)	1,095 (94.2)
Male	114 (10.4)	48 (4.4)	937 (85.3)
Ethnicity			
Asian	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	8 (100.0)
Black	35 (9.9)	18 (5.1)	299 (84.9)
Hispanic	40 (7.6)	22. (4.2)	461 (88.1)
Multiracial	5 (3.6)	3 (2.2)	129 (94.2)
Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (100.0)
White	81 (6.5)	26 (2.1)	1,130 (91.4)
Students with Disabilities	37 (13.0)	22 (7.7)	225 (79.2)
English Language Learners	6 (10.9)	3 (5.5)	46 (83.6)
Free or Reduced Lunch	117 (10.1)	52 (4.5)	990 (85.4)
Retained Prior Year	41 (71.9)	16 (28.1)	0 (0.0)

In the Chi-square (X^2) test for independence that was conducted in a series of Cramer's V tests, the independent variables were gender, English language learners (ELL), socio-economic status (SES), students with disabilities (SWD), retained for 2013-2014, and ethnicity. The dependent variable was the level of participation in the academic intervention program, program participant, program eligible non-participant, or non-eligible non-participant. The calculated X^2 test of independence for the gender subgroup and level of participation ($n = 2,262$) with two degrees of freedom (df) equaled 48.96 which exceeded the calculated critical value of 0.05% at 10.60. For the independent variable of gender, $X^2(2, n = 2262) = 48.96, p < .005$, there was less than a .5% chance that this outcome occurred by chance alone. Placement in the academic intervention program was related to gender.

Effect size statistics for a test of independence are interpreted using the same guidelines as chi-square. As stated by Steinburg (2008), definitions of effect size are as follows: less than .30 is small, .30 to .50 is medium, and greater than .50 is large. Using the Cramer's V test, the calculated effect size of .15 was small for gender and participation in the targeted district's academic intervention program.

The calculated X^2 test of independence for the subgroup of English language learners for level of participation ($n = 2,262$) and two degrees of freedom (df) equaled 2.45 and did not meet or exceed the calculated critical value of 0.10 at 4.61. The independent variable of the English language learner subgroup of $X^2(2, n = 2262) = 2.49, p > .10$, meant there was more than a 10% chance that this outcome occurred by chance alone. Therefore, placement in the academic intervention program was not related to the

English language learner subgroup. In the targeted district's academic intervention program, the calculated effect size of .03 for the English language learner subgroup and level of participation, using the Cramer's V test, was small.

The calculated X^2 test of independence for the socio-economic status (free/reduced lunch) subgroup and level of participation ($n = 2,262$) with two degrees of freedom (df) equaled 50.83 and exceeded the calculated critical value of 0.005 at 10.60. The independent variable of socio-economic status was $X^2(2, n = 2262) = 50.83, p < .005$. This indicated that there was less than .5% chance that this outcome occurred by chance alone. Placement in the academic intervention program was, therefore, related to socio-economic status. In the targeted district's academic intervention program, the calculated effect size of .15 for the socio-economic status subgroup and level of participation, using the Cramer's V test, was small.

The calculated X^2 test of independence for students with disabilities and level of participation ($n = 2,262$) with two degrees of freedom (df) equaled 43.49 and exceeded the calculated critical value of 0.005 at 10.60. The independent variable of students with disabilities, $X^2(2, n = 2262) = 43.49, p < .005$ indicated that placement in the academic intervention program was related to the subgroup of students with disabilities. In the targeted district's academic intervention program, the calculated effect size of 0.14 for the subgroup of students with disabilities and level of participation, using the Cramer's V test, was small.

The calculated X^2 test of independence for the retained students subgroup and program level of participation ($n = 2,262$) with two degrees of freedom (df) equaled

549.85 and exceeded the calculated critical value of 0.005 at 10.60. For the independent variable of students retained the prior year, $X^2(2, n = 2262) = 549.85, p < .005$. Thus, there was less than a .5% chance that this outcome occurred by chance alone; consequently, placement in the academic intervention program was related to students retained in eighth grade from the prior year. The calculated effect size of .35 for retained students and level of participation in the targeted district's academic intervention program, using Cramer's V test, was a medium effect size.

The calculated X^2 test of independence for ethnicity subgroups and program level of participation ($n = 2,262$) with two degrees of freedom (df) equaled 21.40 and exceeded the calculated critical value of 0.005 at 10.60. The independent variable of ethnicity, $X^2(2, n = 2,262) = 21.40, p < .005$ determined that placement in the academic intervention program was related to ethnicity. The calculated effect size of .07 for the ethnicity subgroup and level of participation in the targeted district's academic intervention program, using Cramer's V test, was a small effect size.

In summary, five of the six independent variables were determined to have a direct statistical relationship to placement in the academic intervention program, and students in the respective subgroups were more likely to qualify for admission into the program. Those subgroups include gender, specifically males, students with a lower socio-economic status identified by qualification for free or reduced lunch, students with disabilities, students who were retained the previous year, and students of minority ethnicities. These results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Chi-square Test of Independence: Independent Variables by Level of Program Participation

Independent Variables	X ²	Effect Size	
Gender	48.96 *	0.15	Small
English language learners	2.45	0.03	Small
Socio-economic status	50.83*	0.15	Small
Students with disabilities	43.49*	0.14	Small
Retained prior year	549.85*	0.35	Medium
Ethnicity	21.40*	0.07	Small

*p < .005

Note. Calculated X² of n=2,262 with 2 degrees of freedom

Research Question 2

To what extent, if any, does academic performance in coursework differ across levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program?

Data for Research Question 2 were analyzed by conducting a one-way ANOVA to compare student academic performance with the level of participation in the academic intervention program of the targeted school district. All of the data used in this analysis were retrieved from archival data provided by the targeted school district. Eighth-grade students from the population with a grade point average for the entire 2013-2014 school year were used as part of the data set for analysis. Only students who were enrolled at one of the six schools that tracked participation in the academic intervention program,

using a course code were used as part of the data set for analysis. Eligible academic intervention program participants totaled 161; program eligible non-participants, 69; and non-eligible non-participants, 2,033. This can be considered a limitation of the data set.

Grade point averages scores ranged from a 0.5 to 4.0 on a scale of 0.0 to a 4.0. Students received letter grades that ranged from A through F in each of their courses with each letter grade receiving quality points as follows: A (4), B (3), C (2), D (1) and F (0). The quality points earned divided by the number of courses taken resulted in the grade point average for each student. This calculated grade point average was provided as part of the data set from the targeted school district's central office.

The one-way ANOVA results, $F(2, 2559) = 100.68, p < .01$, indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the grade point averages of students across the three different levels of participation in the academic intervention program. The F calculated at 100.68 exceeded the critical F at the 0.01 value at 99.50. The one-way ANOVA results are presented in Table 6.

Table 6

One-way Analysis of Variance: Difference in Grade Point Averages by Level of Participation (N = 2,261)

Level of Participation	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>
Between	123.46	2	61.73	100.68**
Within	1385.10	2259	.61	
Total	1508.56	2261		

** $p < .01$

The one-way ANOVA results indicated statistical significance in the three different levels of participation and calculated grade point averages. To determine between which levels of participation the significant difference occurred, a post hoc analysis was conducted to determine which means differed significantly from one another using a Tukey Honestly Significant Difference (HSD) Test. The mean differences for each level of participation are shown in Table 7. The eligible academic intervention program participants showed a mean grade point average ($M = 2.07$, $SD = 0.65$), higher than the program eligible non-participants, but lower than non-eligible non-participants. The program eligible non-participant subgroup showed the lowest grade point average of the three levels of participation ($M = 2.06$, $SD = .74$). The non-eligible non-participants exhibited the highest grade point average, significantly higher than the other two levels of participation groups ($M = 2.84$, $SD = .79$). This indicates that there was a significant difference between the non-eligible non-participant group and both of the other two

subgroups. There was no statistical difference between the program participant and program eligible non-participant subgroups.

Table 7

Tukey HSD for Levels of Participation in an Academic Intervention Program

Level of Participation	Mean Difference		
	Eligible Participants	Eligible Non-participants	Non-eligible Non-participants
Eligible Participants	---	0.013	-0.769*
Eligible non-participants	0.013	---	-0.782*
Non-Eligible non-participants	-0.769*	-0.782*	---

*p < .05

In summary, the subgroup of students that did not meet the eligibility criteria for participation in the academic intervention program earned the highest grade point average of the three subgroups of students. The subgroup of the students that met one or more qualifications to participate in the academic intervention program and participated in the program had the second highest grade point average. The subgroup of students that met one or more at-risk criteria to participate in the program, but did not participate, earned the lowest grade point average of the three subgroups. There was no statistical significance between the grade point averages of the subgroup of students eligible for the academic intervention program who did participate in the program and the subgroup of students who were eligible for the program but did not participate in the program. There

was a statistical difference between the mean grade point average for students who did not meet program eligibility at-risk criterion and the mean grade point averages for the two subgroups who did meet one or more at-risk criterion factor regardless of participation in the academic intervention program.

Research Question 3

What difference, if any, is there between academic coursework GPA and at-risk eligibility factors for levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program?

Data used in responding to Research Question 3 were analyzed by conducting independent *t* tests for each of the program at-risk eligibility factors. The dependent variable in all three independent *t* tests was the accumulated year-end grade point average. The independent variables were the at-risk eligibility factors for participation in the academic intervention program. The at-risk eligibility factors consisted of grade level retention from the previous school year, course failure in one or more courses for the previous school year, and/or having earned a cumulative grade point average below a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale during the previous school year. All data used in the analysis to respond to Research Question 3 were retrieved from archival data provided by the targeted school district. Only eighth-grade students from the population with a final grade point average for the 2013-2014 school year were used as part of the data set for analysis. Grade point averages ranged from a 0.5 to 4.0 on a scale of 0.0 to 4.0. Students earned letter grades in each of their courses that ranged from A through F, with each letter grade assigned the quality points as follows: A (4), B (3), C (2), D (1) and F (0). The quality points earned

divided by the number of courses taken yielded the year-end grade point average for each student.

The academic intervention program participant subgroup ($n = 161$) had an overall mean GPA of 2.07. The subgroup of students who were eligible for the academic intervention program by meeting one or more of the risk factors but were non-participants ($n = 69$) had a mean GPA of 2.06. Non-eligible non-participants ($n = 2,032$) had a mean GPA of 2.84. The descriptive statistics for the level of participation and grade point average for the academic intervention program are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Level of Participation and Grade Point Average

Status (n)	M	SD	Confidence Interval	
			Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Participant (161)	2.07	.65	1.97	2.17
Eligible non-participant (69)	2.06	.74	1.88	2.23
Non-eligible non-participant (2,032)	2.84	.79	2.80	2.87

For the independent variable at-risk eligibility factor of retention, there were 41 retained academic intervention program participants and 16 retained program eligible non-participants. For the independent variable at-risk eligibility factor of course failure, there were 24 academic intervention program participants and 15 program eligible non-participants who had failed one or more courses. For the independent variable at risk eligibility factor of below a 2.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale, there were a total of 141, 81 of which

were academic intervention program participants and 61 were eligible program non-participants.

For the first independent variable of the at-risk eligibility factor of retention, calculation of the population data showed, $t(2259) = 9.34, p < .005$. This indicated that there was a significant difference in overall grade point averages in the population between retained students and non-retained students regardless of level of participation. The retained subgroup showed a lower grade point average ($M = 1.73, SD = 0.69$) than non-retained students ($M = 2.78, SD = 0.80$) in the population. Cohen's d , a measure of significance, was calculated to be 0 .39, a small effect size.

The t -test for the eligibility factor of retention for program participants and program eligible non-participants showed $t(55) = 1.58, p > .05$. This indicated that there was no significant difference in grade point averages of retained academic intervention program participants and program eligible non-participants. Retained program participants showed a slightly lower grade point average ($M = 1.95, SD = .77$) than retained program eligible non-participants ($M = 1.71, SD = .66$). The descriptive statistics for the independent t test of retained and non-retained students are shown in Table 9.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics for Independent t-test: Grade Point Averages for Retained and Non-retained Participants.

Status (<i>n</i>)	M	SD	Confidence Interval	
			Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Retained participants (41)	1.71	.66	1.50	1.91
Retained Non-participants (16)	1.95	.77	1.56	2.29
Non-retained (2,202)	2.79	.80	2.75	2.82

For the second independent variable, the eligibility factor of course failure, calculation of the population data showed the *t*-test, $t(2259) = 7.86$, $p < .005$. This indicated that there was a significant difference in overall grade point averages in the population between students who failed one or more courses and students who had no course failures for the 2013-2014 school year. The independent *t* test for the eligibility factor of course failure variable revealed that students who earned a failing grade in at least one course, overall earned a lower grade point average ($M = 1.75$, $SD = 0.70$) than students who did not have a course failure ($M = 2.78$, $SD = 0.81$) for the 2013-2014 school year. Cohen's *d* was calculated at 0.33, a small effect size.

The *t*-test for program participants and program eligible non-participants with a previous year course failure showed $t(37) = 2.14$, $p < .025$. This indicated that there was a significant difference in grade point averages for program participants with the at-risk eligibility factor of course failure and program eligible non-participants. AIP program participants with a previous year course failure earned a lower grade point average ($M =$

1.57, SD = .64) than program eligible non-participants (M = 2.04, SD = .71). Cohn's *d* was calculated at 0.70. The results for the independent *t* test are shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics for Independent t-test: Grade Point Averages for Course Failure and Non-course Failure

Status (<i>n</i>)	M	SD	Confidence Interval	
			Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Course failure participants (24)	1.57	.64	1.33	1.80
Course failure eligible non-participants (15)	2.04	.71	1.68	2.40
Non-eligible non-participants (2,220)	2.78	.81	2.74	2.82

For the third independent variable at-risk eligibility factor of below a 2.0 grade point average, calculation of the population data showed $t(2259) = 12.825$, $p < .005$. This indicated a significant difference in overall grade point averages of the population between students with below a 2.0 GPA and students at or above a 2.0 GPA. The independent *t* test for the variable of accumulated grade point average below a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale determined that the grade point average for students with below a 2.0 GPA (M = 1.93, SD = 0.67) and for students at a 2.0 or higher GPA was (M= 2.81, SD = 0.80). Cohen's *d* was calculated at 0.54. This indicated a medium effect size.

The *t*-test for academic intervention program participants and program eligible non-participants with the eligibility factor of below a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale as, $t(139) = 1.35$, $p > .05$. This indicated that there was not a significant difference in grade point averages of program participants and program eligible non-participants with this at-risk eligibility

factor. Academic intervention program participants with less than a 2.0 grade point average eligibility factor earned a lower grade point average ($M = 1.43$, $SD = .41$) than eligible program non-participants ($M = 2.02$, $SD = .75$). The results of the independent t test for program eligibility factor of grade point average is shown below in Table 11.

Table 11

Descriptive Statistics for Independent t-test: Grade Point Averages for Below 2.0 and 2.0 and Above

Status (n)	M	SD	Confidence Interval	
			Lower Limit	Upper Limit
Below 2.0 GPA participants (81)	1.43	.41	1.35	1.53
Below 2.0 GPA Non-participants (61)	2.02	.75	1.84	2.21
2.0 and above GPA (2,117)	2.81	.80	2.78	2.85

In summary, there were three independent variables related to Research Question 3: (a) prior year retention, (b) prior year course failure, and (c) prior year student grade point average below a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale. For all three independent variables, the subgroup with the lowest mean grade point average after participation in the academic intervention program was the subgroup of eligible participants in the program. The subgroup of eligible program non-participants earned the second highest grade point average for all three of the independent variables, and the non-eligible non-program participants earned the highest mean grade point average for all three independent variables.

Research Question 4

What delivery models are utilized in each of the 12 middle schools to provide for the academic intervention program?

This research question was answered by conducting a face-to-face, semi-structured interview with each of the supervising administrators of the academic intervention programs at the 12 middle schools in the target school district. The Academic Intervention Program Supervising Administrator Questionnaire was used to guide the interviews is contained in Appendix C. All interviews were conducted by the researcher, audio recorded, and transcribed. The transcriptions are provided in Appendix E. The first interview question asked was, “Did you supervise the academic intervention program during the 2013-2014 school year?” Of the 12 current middle school supervising administrators for the district middle grades academic intervention program, seven administrators indicated they did not supervise the academic intervention program for the 2013-2014 school year. Five administrators, however, reported that they did supervise the program during the 2013-2014 school year.

The second interview question which asked “What program model did you use to provide this program to students at your school?” provided data to respond directly to Research Question 4. Supervising administrators interviewed reported that of the 12 schools, five schools used a face-to-face delivery model where the academic intervention program was provided as a course that replaced a student chosen elective class in the student schedule. Six schools used a pullout program delivery model where students were pulled out of an academic or elective class one or more times a week as needed, determined by the academic intervention program teacher. One school offered a push

in/pullout program model where the academic intervention teacher pulled students out of an academic or elective class to meet. The teacher also attended classes as a support facilitator to support AIP students in courses as need was determined by the teacher.

The third interview question asked, “How did you use the AIP allocation provided by the school district for the 2013-2014 school year?” Of the 12 schools, 11 used the teacher allocation provided by the targeted school district to pay for a full time teacher position to facilitate the academic intervention program. One school used the allocation to hire a half-time teacher and supplemented other teachers with an additional period supplement to offer the academic intervention program class.

The fourth interview question asked was “Who was responsible for tracking student performance in the AIP program for the 2013-2014 school year?” Of the 12 schools, eight required the academic intervention program teacher to track student progress during participation in the AIP program. Three supervising administrators stated that both the academic intervention program teacher and the supervising administrator were responsible for tracking student progress in their schools. One supervising administrator reported that each of the multiple academic intervention program teachers were responsible for tracking student progress for students assigned to them.

The fifth interview question asked, “If you used a face-to-face teacher model, was the teacher rated as Highly Effective for the 2013-2014 school year?” Of the five schools that offered a face-to-face academic intervention program model, four of the supervising administrators indicated that their teachers were rated as highly effective overall on the

annual teacher district evaluation system for the 2013-2014 school year. One supervising administrator stated that the teacher was rated as effective overall. For the seven schools that did not use a face-to face program delivery model, three academic intervention teachers were rated as highly effective and one was rated as needing improvement. Three of the supervising administrators indicated that they did not know the overall rating for their academic intervention teachers for the 2013-2014 school year.

The last interview question asked, “Do you have any additional comments pertaining to the implementation and procedural steps concerning the delivery method of the academic intervention program at your school?” Four supervising administrators reported that they had switched the delivery method of the program from pullout or push in/ pullout in 2013-2014 school year to a face-to-face model for the 2014-2015 school year.

In summary, 11 of the 12 schools had one primary teacher facilitating the academic intervention program. Five of the 12 schools offered a face-to face program, six of the schools offered a pullout program, and one school offered a push-in/pullout program as the delivery method for the academic intervention program for the 2013-2014 school year. Table 12 contains a summary of the responses of the supervising administrators to the five questions posed by the researcher in each interview.

Table 12

Supervising Administrator Interviews: Responses to Academic Intervention Program Questionnaire (n = 12)

Question #	Interview Question	<i>f</i>
1	Academic intervention program supervision for 2013-14	
	Current administrator supervised	5
	Current administrator did not supervise	7
2	Program model	
	Face-to-face (Schools 1, 2, 6, 10, 12)	5
	Pull out (Schools 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9)	6
	Push in/pull out (School 11)	1
3	Teacher position allocation	
	Full-time teacher position allocated	11
	Part-time teacher and additional supplements to other teachers	1
4	Responsible for tracking student progress	
	Teacher over program	8
	Teacher and administrator	3
	Teacher for individual class	1
5	Annual face-to-face teacher evaluation ratings	
	Highly effective	4
	Effective	1
	Annual not face-to-face teacher evaluation ratings	
	Highly effective	3
	Needs improvement	1
Did not know	3	

Summary

This chapter began with a restatement of the purpose for conducting this research study--to determine if a relationship exists between levels of participation in a middle grades academic intervention program and course performance. Also included was information about the retrieval of the archival data required for analyses from the target school district. A description of the population and purposive target population was given along with demographic information about both the population and purposive population. The purposive sample was defined. Demographic data was provided for the supervising administrators who participated in the semi-structured interviews.

The next section included discussion of the four research questions, three quantitative and one qualitative. First, results for the data analysis concerning level of participation in the academic intervention program and student subgroups were described. Student subgroups consisted of gender, ethnicity, students with disabilities (SWD), English Language Learners (ELL), socio-economic status (SES) and retention. Descriptive statistics for the three levels of participation and related student subgroups were presented to respond to Research Question 1. The measure of association to determine if a relationship existed between the levels of participation and student subgroups were determined. Cramer's V results revealed a statistically significant measure of association for participation in the academic intervention program and the subgroups of gender, socio-economic status, students with disabilities, retained students, and ethnicity. Cramer's V results revealed that there was not a statistically significant

measure of association for levels of participation in the program and the subgroup of English language learners.

A one-way ANOVA to compare student academic performance using grade point average and level of participation in the AIP program was used in the analysis of data to respond to Research question 2. Results indicated there were statistical significance in the grade point average differences for the population across the levels of participation. The subgroup that did not meet one or more of the at-risk eligibility factors, and therefore considered program non-eligible non-participants, had the highest mean grade point average of 2.84. The level of participation subgroup that met one or more of the at-risk factors for eligibility that participated in the AIP program had a GPA with a mean of 2.07. The subgroup of students that met one or more of the at-risk eligibility factors but did not participate in the academic intervention program showed the lowest grade point average with a mean of 2.06. A post hoc analysis, using a Tukey HSD was conducted to determine between which of the levels of participation the statistical significance occurred. The difference for the program participant subgroup and the program eligible non-participant subgroup showed no statistical difference between the mean grade point averages. The statistically significant difference was shown between program non-eligible non-participants and the other two levels of participation, program participants and program eligible non-participants. This was followed by the descriptive statistics for program level of participation and the corresponding mean grade point average.

In responding to Research Question 3, data were analyzed to determine if a difference existed between grade point averages and eligibility factors of participation in

the AIP program. The at-risk eligibility factors consisted of retention in eighth grade, a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or less earned the previous year, and one or more course failures in the previous year. Results of this analysis revealed that there was a significant difference in the population mean GPA between retained and non-retained students. For purposes of program eligibility for the at-risk factor of being retained in eighth grade, 55 students exhibited this eligibility factor. Of those 55 students, 41 participated in the academic intervention program with a mean grade point average of 1.71. The 16 students who were retained but did not participate in the AIP program earned a mean GPA of 1.95. There was no statistical significance between the eligibility factor of retention and program participation.

The at-risk eligibility factor of course failure showed a significant statistical difference in the population between students who had and had not received one or more course failures for the 2013-2014 school year. There were 39 students with the at-risk eligibility factor of course failure. Of those 39 students, 24 participated in the AIP program. The program participants earned a mean GPA of 1.57. Program eligible non-participants earned a mean GPA of 2.04. There was a statistical significance in earned GPA between those with the at-risk eligibility factor of course failure that participated in the academic intervention program and students with the same eligibility factor that did not participate in the program.

The at-risk eligibility factor of students with below a 2.0 GPA showed significant difference between the total population and the subgroup for students with the eligibility factor. The mean grade point average for students with a 2.0 GPA or above was 2.83.

Additionally there was a significant difference between the 81 academic intervention program participants with a mean grade point average of 1.43 and the 60 program eligible non-participants who earned a mean GPA of 2.02 for the 2013-2014 school year.

Qualitative data obtained through interviews were analyzed to respond to Research Question 4. Data included responses to six questions in a semi-structured face-to-face interview conducted with the 12 current supervising administrators at the time of the interview. Interview data revealed that five schools used a face-to-face delivery model, six schools used a pullout program delivery model, and one school used a push in/pullout delivery model.

Additional analysis of the interview questions to respond to Research Question 4 indicated that at the time of the interview, seven of the 12 supervising administrators were the academic program supervisors and that five of the interviewees had not supervised the AIP program during the 2013-2014 school year. Each school received a teacher allocation from the school district for the program for the 2013-2014 school year to provide the AIP program. Of the 12 schools, 11 used the allocation to pay for a full-time program teacher, and one school hired a part-time teacher and paid for additional teachers to have an extra period supplement to offer the program. Though tracking student progress was the responsibility of all program teachers, three schools required the supervising administrator to be part of the tracking of student progress.

Discussion of the annual evaluations revealed that eight program teachers were rated as highly effective for the 2013-2014 school year: one teacher was rated effective, one teacher was rated as needs improvement, and three administrators who participated in

the interview process did not know the annual evaluation rating of the 2013-2014 AIP program teacher.

The data analyses presented in this chapter are summarized and discussed further in Chapter 5. This information may also be pertinent to other school districts using or considering implementation of a similar program. Discussion of the results of the research and implications and recommendations for practice are provided along with recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

Introduction

A summary of the data collected in this study and the subsequent data analyses were presented in Chapter 4. The first section of this chapter provides a brief summary of the research study and a review of the purpose of conducting the study, the population, and the research questions. The following sections contain a discussion of the findings for each of the four individual research questions that guided this study, implications of continuing the middle grades academic intervention program, recommendations for further research within the topic, and a concluding summary based on the data collection, data analyses, and findings.

Summary of the Study

Middle school academic success is imperative for students to be adequately prepared for the coursework demands experienced at the high school level. Middle school academic experiences involving mastery of grade level skills and knowledge directly impact students' likelihood of not dropping out of high school (ACT, 2008; Balfanz, 2009). Fewer than two in 10 eighth-grade students are on track to be ready for college level academics by the time they graduate from high school (ACT, 2008). Eighth grade is an important academic year as students prepare for the transition from middle school to high school.

Over the past 20 years, there has been a steady decline in the national and Florida state calculated rates of high school dropouts (Florida Department of Education, 2013a; National Center for Education Statistics, 2013b). Yet, despite that decline in high school dropout rates, one in four children were reported at the end of the first decade of the 21st century as failing to graduate from high school on time with their graduating cohort (Bruce et al., 2011, Dufour & Marzano, 2009). The overall concern of educators is with the effect on society. Students who do not graduate from high school and do not earn a high school diploma dramatically reduce their opportunities to become economically self-sufficient. They frequently find it more difficult to secure a job, especially in a difficult economic environment, than do those who have earned a high school diploma (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2011b; Aud et al., 2013; Bruce et al., 2011; National High School Center, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to analyze a middle grades academic intervention program (AIP) administered in all middle grade schools in one large urban school district in central Florida to determine to what extent, if any, participating in a middle grade academic intervention program by at-risk eighth-grade students affected academic coursework. The findings generated in this study regarding the effectiveness of the academic intervention program will provide useful information for school district officials and school board members in the targeted school district as well other school districts that are considering implementation of an academic intervention program as they determine the allocation of resources to assist at-risk middle grades students with

coursework and subsequent academic preparedness for high school. The following four research questions guided this study:

1. What is the relationship, if any, between the levels of student participation in the middle grades academic intervention program and classification of student subgroups?

H₀₁ There is no relationship between the levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program and student subgroups.

2. To what extent, if any, does academic performance in coursework differ across levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program?

H₀₂ There is no difference in academic coursework performance based on the levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program.

3. What difference, if any, is there between academic coursework GPA and at-risk eligibility factors for levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program?

H₀₃ There is no difference between academic coursework performance for levels of participation in the academic intervention program based on program eligibility factors.

4. What delivery models are utilized in each of the 12 middle schools to provide for the academic intervention program?

The population for this study consisted of all eighth-grade students from six of the 12 middle schools in the school district of study. These six middle schools used the district student management system to track participants in AIP during the 2013-2014 school year. All 12 supervising administrators of the middle grades AIP participated in a face-to-face interview as part of the data collection regarding specific program delivery models used at each school. Demographic information describing the participants and interviewees was collected and presented in Chapter 4.

To respond to Research Question 1, descriptive statistics identifying student subgroups and participation levels were presented, and a chi-square test for measure of association, Cramer's V test was used to determine a relationship, if any, between the two for the 2013-2014 school year. This provided a determination as to whether one or more specific subgroups had a direct relationship with participation in the middle grades academic intervention program.

In responding to Research Question 2, the researcher conducted a one-way ANOVA to compare student academic performance with the level of participation in the academic intervention program of the targeted school district for eighth-grade students to determine the relationship, if any, between levels of student participation in the academic intervention program and student grade point averages.

To answer Research Question 3, data were analyzed using independent *t* tests for each of the at-risk eligibility factors from the previous school year, grade level retention, course failure in one or more courses, and/or a cumulative grade point average below a 2.0 on a 4.0 scale. This analysis enabled a determination as to whether there was a direct

relationship of at-risk eligibility factors and overall grade point averages for eligible students who did and did not participate in AIP.

To respond to Research Question 4, data gathered in face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with each of the supervising administrators of the academic intervention program at the 12 middle schools in the target school district were analyzed. The interviews provided information as to the specific program delivery model used at each of the individual middle grades schools. All interview questions and transcribed interviews are contained in Appendices C and E, respectively.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

Previous researchers studied the effects of academic interventions and ultimately the impact of those interventions on student academic performance (Akmal & Larsen, 2004; Cunningham et al., 2003; Davis et al., 2009; Guthrie & Guthrie et al., 2000; Huerta et al., 2013; Mason & McMahon, 2009; Watt et al., 2006). The goal of this study was to determine the relationship, if any, of participation in a middle grades academic intervention program and student academic performance. This section presents the findings of the study organized around the four research questions that guided the study. Additional findings related to data collected in the face-to-face interviews with supervising administrators of the middle grades academic intervention program are also presented.

Research Question 1

What is the relationship, if any, between the levels of student participation in the middle grades academic intervention program and classification of student subgroups?

H₀₁ There is no relationship between the levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program and student subgroups.

The findings for Research Question 1 indicated a direct statistical relationship between placement in the academic intervention program and classification of student subgroups; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The student subgroups consisted of gender, ethnicity (Asian, Black, Hispanic, Multiracial, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, White), students with disabilities (SWD), English language learners (ELL), socioeconomic status determined by free or reduced lunch, and retained prior year.

Findings in the study indicated that five of the six variables including males, students with low socio-economic status, SWD, retained students and students of minority ethnicities (specifically Black and Hispanic), similar to the state and national concerns with at-risk subgroups, were more likely to be determined at-risk and selected to participate in the academic intervention program. This finding complemented the findings of numerous other researchers (Akmal & Larsen, 2004; Monrad, 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 2011; Tingle et al., 2012).

One specific finding for Research Question 1 revealed that 71.9% of students retained the prior year participated in the academic intervention program. This means that almost 30% of students who were retained from the prior year, who were eligible for AIP and who were in the targeted population of the program, did not participate in the

middle grades academic intervention program. It was apparent that there was a lack of understanding and attention by individual schools to students who were retained and therefore eligible for AIP. The sheer volume of retained eighth-grade students who did not participate in AIP was an indicator that individual schools were not focusing on proper support for their at-risk populations. This may be due to little or no oversight of the program at both the school and district levels. In previous studies, the act of retention alone has been shown to be an ineffective intervention (Akmal & Larsen, 2004; Hattie, 2009; Tingle et al., 2012).

Research Question 2

To what extent, if any, does academic performance in coursework differ across levels of participation in the middle grades Academic Intervention Program?

H₀₂ There is no difference in coursework performance based on the levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program.

As in the findings for Research Question 1, the findings for Research Question 2 showed that academic performance did statistically differ across the three levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. As expected, the students who were not eligible for AIP earned the highest overall mean GPA (2.84) which was significantly different and statistically higher than the grade point averages of students in the other two levels of participation. The result that was not expected was the lack of statistical difference between the two levels of participation of program eligible participants and program eligible non-

participants. Statistically, findings indicated that participation in the district provided academic intervention program did not result in any more success or higher mean grade point average than did nonparticipation in the program. Both subgroups consisted of students who met the eligibility factors the prior year, i.e., course failure, below a 2.0 overall GPA, and/or retention. The findings of no statistical difference in coursework grades for students who participated in AIP and eligible students who did not participate revealed that this program appears to be ineffective. These findings do not align with prior results of research of academic intervention programs that showed academic success with at-risk students (Akmal & Larsen, 2004; Davis et al., 2013; Mason & McMahon, 2009).

One reason for caution in interpreting the results is the fact that not all students, approximately 30%, who met the program eligibility factors participated in the academic intervention program. Another reason for caution in interpreting the results is due to sampling. Only six of the 12 middle schools in the school district tracked students who participated in AIP. Therefore, six schools (50%) were not included in the study. The implication was that not all schools were monitoring AIP and program participants. The academic intervention program costs the school district of study in excess of \$500,000 a year, and results indicated that the program did not make a difference in student coursework performance for those most at-risk of dropping out of school. There must be accountability for individual schools, adherence to proper placement expectations and oversight of the program. It is imperative that an academic intervention program offers proper support to ensure the success of at-risk students. Researchers have shown that one

of the most common academic indicators of future struggles in school and dropping out is failing coursework (ACT, 2008; Balfanz, 2009; Bruce et al., 2011; Casillas et al., 2012).

Research Question 3

What difference, if any, is there between coursework GPA and at-risk eligibility factors for levels of participation in the middle grades academic intervention program?

H₀₃ There is no difference between coursework performances for levels of participation in the academic intervention program based on eligibility factors.

The findings for Research Question 3 revealed that there was no statistical difference between coursework GPA and at-risk eligibility factors for levels of participation in the program. Therefore, the null hypothesis could not be rejected. The at-risk factors for AIP eligibility consisted of the prior year elements of retention, course failure, and/or below a 2.0 grade point average on a 4.0 scale. Findings for Research Question 3 did not align with the findings of other researchers that showed intervention programs had a statistically significant positive relationship between at-risk factors and performance in coursework (Akmal & Larsen, 2004; Davis et al., 2013; Mason & McMahon, 2009).

One significant factor that should be considered when interpreting the findings is that 30% of program eligible students with one or more of the aforementioned eligibility factors did not participate in AIP. These at-risk eligibility factors identified students who possessed attributes for increased probability of dropping out of high school (ACT, 2008; Akmal & Larsen, 2004; Balfanz, 2009; Bruce et al., 2011; Davis et al., 2013, Monrad,

2007). Yet, these students were not served in the district-wide, middle grades academic intervention program for the 2013-2014 school year.

Eighth grade is a crucial time for meeting the academic needs of all students preparing to transition from middle school to high school. This is especially important considering that the rate of grade-level retention is the highest in ninth grade among all grades (Haney et al., 2004, Tingle et al., 2012). Additional at-risk characteristics for middle school students include middle grade retention and academic failure (Akmal & Larsen, 2004; Balfanz, 2009; Bruce et al., 2009; Davis et al., 2013; Hattie, 2009).

Research Question 4

What delivery models are utilized in each of the 12 middle schools to provide for the academic intervention program?

The findings for Research Question 4 revealed that three delivery models were utilized for the academic intervention program in the 12 middle grades schools in the school district of study. The district office did not require one uniform model of delivery for AIP and, therefore, each school was authorized to develop and implement a delivery model that was perceived to be the best fit for each school by the current school administration. Five of the 12 schools used a face-to-face delivery model. Six of the 12 schools used a pullout program delivery model. One school used a program delivery model of a push-in/pullout. The length of time students participated in the academic intervention program varied from school to school.

The implication here is that students were not receiving the same delivery model or allotted time for academic support throughout the school district. Even within schools offering the same type of delivery method, students were not receiving the same amount of time or support in the program district-wide. Some schools scheduled AIP for a semester or year, and other schools utilized the program on a temporary basis, sometimes for just a few weeks to allow for students to receive some extra support until they had caught up with missing work. This inequity happened with virtually no oversight of the individual programs throughout the district. Individual schools were given complete autonomy over AIP, thereby affording individual choice as to structure, delivery method, time required in the program, and requirements for teacher selection. After conducting face-to-face interviews, it was revealed that individual schools changed the delivery model of AIP based on the choice of the current administration rather than on research of best practices. Intervention program components of individual goals, educational goals, expectations and teacher student relationships (Hattie, 2009) should all be taken into consideration when determining the AIP delivery method and teachers rather than administrative ease or convenience.

Additional Findings from Interviews

Responses to the face-to-face semi-structured interview questions provided additional information to respond to Research Question 4 and further clarified the program delivery model used at each individual middle grades school. Of the 12 schools, only six schools tracked their academic intervention participants using a course code. Of

the remaining six schools, some schools tracked the data within the school, and some schools did not track the students in the program at all. In one particular case a school reported that the AIP teacher and supervising administrator had both retired the previous year; therefore, no one knew which students had participated in AIP during the previous years. This required that school to rebuild its academic intervention program from the foundation level.

Additional findings from face-to-face interviews revealed that middle grades schools in the target school district might not be focused on placing a strong and capable teacher with competence and best practices in the teacher role for the AIP program. In the academic environment, relationships between students and teachers are paramount, and teachers' beliefs and attitudes have a large influence on students (Havighurst, 1974; Wigfield & Eccles, 1995). Teacher annual evaluation ratings in reporting AIP schools included one (1) needs improvement and one (1) effective for AIP teachers. Three schools could not provide the teacher rating during the researcher's interview. At one school, the AIP teacher allocation provided from the school district was used to hire a half-time teacher. Three other teachers already employed at the school were given an extra period supplement to teach the course, resulting in a total of four teachers providing one intervention program. This does not align with the research of equity and excellence (Gallagher et al., 2012). The goal of equity requires the understanding that additional resources are required to help close the achievement gap for at-risk students. Equity includes the selection and placement of the best teachers using research-based teaching strategies for improved student learning in an assigned academic intervention program

(Gallagher et al., 2012). Furthermore, not one of the 12 schools provided any additional time or allocations to the academic intervention program from their own resources. Each of the 12 schools only offered what the school district central office allocated--one teacher per school to provide an academic intervention program to meet the needs of academically challenged and struggling students. That does not meet the definition of equity and excellence which has been put forth by Gallagher et al. (2012) that providing academic interventions for at-risk students is only fair and should be a priority for all schools, both scholastically and in regard to the allocation of resources. This, however, is still a relatively new concept. The school district of study should ensure that in the future each school has the appropriate amount of resources to provide an equitable academic intervention program to serve all academically struggling students based on the needs of each individual school.

When comparing the interview questions and answers to the data collected, it was apparent that information provided by word of mouth was not always accurate and that processes for monitoring the academic intervention program should be put into place. One significant problem was that there were no specific guidelines provided by the school district as to teacher requirements, student contact time, or delivery methods for the district-wide academic intervention program.

Conclusions from the responses of participants indicated a need for an improved identification process for targeted students and subsequent monitoring of proper placement for those identified students to align with previous research (Bruce et al., 2011, Data Quality Campaign, 2013; Davis et al., 2013; Ryan, 2011). With the new Florida

state requirements of Senate Bill 850, (i.e., using an early warning system in Grades 6-8 to help identify at-risk students), middle grades schools in the target school district should be able to more easily identify at-risk students, offer needed services, and track academic achievement of students in the academic intervention program (Fla. Stat. §1001.42).

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

An effective middle grades academic intervention program should include academic interventions to support struggling or at-risk students and must happen before high school. Far too often educators wait to offer academic interventions to students in high school. For many struggling and at-risk students, high school is too late to offer the necessary interventions with skills and knowledge required for academic achievement (Balfanz, 2009; Bruce et al., 2011; Casillas et al., 2012; Education Commission of the States, 2009).

Taking into account the non-uniform model of delivery of the academic intervention program for this study, the analyzed data appeared to indicate that implementation and continuation of the academic intervention program did not yield the positive desired results that were expected. This may be a result of variances in the tracking of student participation, the lack of proper placement for all students that exhibited at-risk eligibility factors, a specific program delivery model, student contact time in the program at individual schools, as well as the effectiveness of individual AIP teachers. The target school district invested a rather large sum of money, \$555,396, to fund the middle grades academic intervention program for the 2013-2014 school year for

what results indicated, specifically for 8th grade students, was less effective than desired, therefore not a cost-effective program.. A return on that investment would require an increase in overall academic performance of AIP participants. The following recommendations are presented for consideration regarding the academic intervention program in the school district of study:

1. Implement district-wide policies and guidelines for individual schools to adhere to for the academic intervention program.
2. Require monitoring of each academic intervention program by county level administrator(s).
3. Require all academic intervention programs to provide a highly effective teacher with a proven history of increasing student achievement.
4. Use the early warning system indicators with students in Grades 6-8 to more accurately determine students with one or more “off-track” indicators for selection and participation in the academic intervention program.
5. Require all students who have been retained from the previous year to participate in the academic intervention program.
6. Track students who participate in the academic intervention program through the school district student database.
7. Consider implementation of one specific delivery model that fits with best practice and increased student achievement at every middle grades school.
8. Use the allocation provided by the district to every middle grades school for one full-time academic intervention teacher.

Recommendations for Future Research

Following are suggestions of topics that could be further explored by researchers in future studies related to this research.

1. Analyze the types of delivery models used at each school and compare the results for each type of delivery model and to identify best practices in administering the academic intervention program.
2. Analyze why students with at-risk eligibility factors are not participating in the academic intervention program as part of the requirements in the school district Pupil Progression Plan.
3. Investigate the process of identifying elementary students with “off track” indicators as they enter middle school and follow those students throughout middle school as part of the academic intervention program.
4. Focus a study on core academic coursework (language arts, mathematics, science, social studies) to determine relationships between participation in the academic intervention program and student achievement in core courses.
5. Investigate the relationship between participation in academic intervention programs at all 12 middle grade schools and academic achievement of those enrolled.
6. Study the overall effects of attendance by program participants in the academic intervention program compared to non-participants who were eligible with at-risk “off track” behaviors.

7. Investigate the actions taken in other school districts in Florida to identify, provide interventions for, and track students with at-risk, “off track” indicators.
8. Explore the relationship, if any, between time spent in the academic intervention program and student achievement.

Summary

The findings of this study have added to previous research on middle grades academic intervention programs and their effect on academic success for eighth-grade students as they prepare to transition from middle level schools to high school. A district middle grades level academic intervention program, specifically for eighth graders was the focus of this study. In this study, it was determined that the middle grades academic intervention program in the target district has potential for growth but that additional review of the program should be conducted to specifically identify effective and non-effective components of the district wide program, specifically in regard to Grades 6 and 7.

As the demand for accountability in American education continues to be a prominent topic at the state and national levels, along with the rising rigor and standards of academic coursework, educational leaders must be prepared to offer an excellent and equitable education to all students, especially those in urban populations that may require additional interventions for success (ACT, 2008; Balfanz, 2006; Dufour & Marzano, 2010; Gallagher et al., 2012; Hattie, 2009). Simple grade retention and/or course failure

of students who are not at mastery of grade-level knowledge and skills are an insufficient intervention to ensure academic success (Akmal & Larsen, 2004; Hattie, 2009; Tingle et al., 2012). Students rising from the elementary and middle school grades need to be, at minimum, proficient in grade-level coursework to be academically prepared for the impending demands of rigorous high school coursework.

As early as 1974, Havighurst noted that for individuals to participate in the current and future workforce, they would need to ensure successful completion of developmental tasks, including basic skills and knowledge and selection and preparation for a chosen future occupation. In contemporary times, that includes earning a high school diploma. As part of the goal for every student to earn a high school diploma, educators must always strive for continuous improvement in providing the nation's diverse population with required support and encouragement for success. An effective middle grades academic improvement program can offer that additional support, encouragement, and resources required by middle grade at-risk students. Such a program can help students maintain their focus on their education, reaching the ultimate goal of a high school diploma, with the additional hope that they may be stimulated to continue their education at the post-high school level. The information from this study is useful in planning for continued improvement of the middle grades academic intervention program. The findings and implications can be useful to any school district working to implement or improve its own middle grades academic intervention program for at-risk students.

APPENDIX A
SCHOOL DISTRICT APPROVAL OF RESEARCH



WALT GRIFFIN
Superintendent

Educational Support Center
400 E. Lake Mary Boulevard
Sanford, Florida 32773-7127
Phone: (407) 320-0000
Fax: (407) 320-0281

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October 26, 2014

Ms. Victoria Hyatt
424 Citrus Lane
Maitland, FL 32751

Dear Ms. Hyatt,

I am in receipt of the proposal and supplemental information that you submitted for permission to conduct research in the Seminole County Public Schools. After review of these submissions, it has been determined that you are granted permission to conduct the study described in these documents.

I appreciate you resubmitting your Research Permission Request form and addressing the questions related to specific study details. As soon as you are prepared to do so, please contact Kelly Thompson, SCPS Coordinator of Assessment and Accountability, to determine district data support.

Best of luck with your research. Please provide me with a copy of your study upon completion.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Anna-Marie Cote'.

Anna-Marie Cote, Ed.D.
Deputy Superintendent, Instructional Excellence and Equity

cc Dr. Robin Dehlinger, Executive Director, Middle Schools
Ms. Linda Mumey, Principal, Lawton Chiles Middle School
Ms. Kelly Thompson, Coordinator, Assessment and Accountability

APPENDIX B
UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL FLORIDA IRB APPROVAL



University of Central Florida Institutional Review Board
Office of Research & Commercialization
12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501
Orlando, Florida 32826-3246
Telephone: 407-823-2901 or 407-882-2276
www.research.ucf.edu/compliance/irb.html

Approval of Exempt Human Research

From: **UCF Institutional Review Board #1
FWA00000351, IRB00001138**

To: **Victoria Hyatt**

Date: **September 01, 2014**

Dear Researcher:

On 9/1/2014, the IRB approved the following activity as human participant research that is exempt from regulation:

Type of Review: Exempt Determination
Project Title: The Relationship of Participation in an Academic Intervention Program for At Risk Eighth Grade Middle School Students and Their Performance in Core Coursework.
Investigator: Victoria Hyatt
IRB Number: SBE-14-10520
Funding Agency:
Grant Title:
Research ID: N/A

This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these changes affect the exempt status of the human research, please contact the IRB. When you have completed your research, please submit a Study Closure request in iRIS so that IRB records will be accurate.

In the conduct of this research, you are responsible to follow the requirements of the Investigator Manual.

On behalf of Sophia Dziegielewski, Ph.D., L.C.S.W., UCF IRB Chair, this letter is signed by:

Signature applied by Joanne Muratori on 09/01/2014 04:36:59 AM EDT

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Joanne Muratori'.

IRB Coordinator

APPENDIX C
ACADEMIC INTERVENTION PROGRAM
SUPERVISING ADMINISTRATOR QUESTIONNAIRE

Academic Intervention Program Supervising Administrator Interview Questions

You have volunteered to participate in this interview and understand that all of your responses are going to be kept confidential. You will be asked to review a consent form and agree to be interviewed.

1. Did you supervise the academic intervention program during the 2013-2014 school year?
2. What program model did you use to provide this program to students at your school?
3. How did you use the AIP allocation provided by the school district for the 2013-2014 school year?
4. Who was responsible for tracking student performance in the AIP program for the 2013-2014 school year?
5. If you used a face-to-face teacher model, was the teacher rated as Highly Effective for the 2013-2014 school year?
6. Do you have any additional comments pertaining to the implementation and procedural steps concerning the delivery method of the academic intervention program at your school?

Any additional thoughts?

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT LETTER



EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: The Relationship of Participation in an Academic Intervention Program for At Risk Eighth Grade Middle School Students and Their Performance in Coursework

Principal Investigator: Victoria L. Hyatt, Doctoral Candidate
Faculty Supervisor: Barbara A. Murray, Ph.D.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up to you.

You are invited to participate in a research study designed to collect data and information on the school district's middle grades academic intervention program. As the supervising administrator of the AIP program at your middle school, your input concerning the program model is important to this study. This interview should take approximately 20 minutes to conduct and will consist of 6 questions.

The purpose of this study will be to analyze the academic intervention program administered in all middle grade schools in your school district, to determine to what extent, if any, participation in the academic intervention program by at-risk eighth-grade students affects core coursework success and academically earned promotion to high school. The research provided in this study regarding the effectiveness of the academic intervention program will provide useful information in order for school district officials and school board members to determine future allocations of resources for the Academic Intervention program in the middle school grades to assist at-risk students with content area coursework and subsequent academic preparedness for high school level coursework.

You are being asked to participate in an interview about the academic intervention program at your middle school. The interview will be conducted at an agreed upon location between you and the researcher. The preferred interview location will be at your school site.

You will be audio taped during this interview. The Principal Investigator will be the only person who has access to the recording. The recording will be kept in a locked filing cabinet until it has been transcribed. The recording will be destroyed after transcription.

You must be 18 years of age or older to take part in this research study.

Study contact for questions about the study or to report a problem: If you have questions, concerns, or complaints please contact Victoria L. Hyatt, Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership program, College of Education and Human Performance by email at: victoria_hyatt@knights.ucf.edu or Dr. Barbara A. Murray, Faculty Supervisor, College of Education and Human Performance (407) 823-1473 or by email at: barbara.murray@ucf.edu.

IRB contact about your rights in the study or to report a complaint: Research at the University of Central Florida involving human participants is carried out under the oversight of the Institutional Review Board (UCF IRB). This research has been reviewed and approved by the IRB. For information about the rights of people who take part in research, please contact: Institutional Review Board, University of Central Florida, Office of Research & Commercialization, 12201 Research Parkway, Suite 501, Orlando, FL 32826-3246 or by telephone at (407) 823-2901.

APPENDIX E
TRANSCRIPTS OF ACADEMIC INTERVENTION PROGRAM SUPERVISING
ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEWS

Interviewee 1

Transcription of interview with APmiddleschool1 on October 21, 2014

Reviewed the consent agreement and interviewee 1 consented to the interview.

Researcher: School number one; interview with supervising Assistant Principal. You have volunteered to participate in this interview and understand that all of your responses are going to be kept confidential.

Administrator: (Coughs)

Researcher: Are you ready to answer some questions?

Administrator: I am.

Researcher: Okay question number one; did you supervise the Academic Intervention Program during the 2013- 2014 school year.

Administrator: I did.

Researcher: Question number two; what program model did you use to provide this program to students at your school?

Administrator: Here at our school we used, the program model of Face to Face instruction, which was where students actually, took the course as an elective class and met with the supervising with the teacher, the AIP teacher every day as part of the delivery method for the program.

Researcher: Okay, question number three; how did you use the AIP allocation provided by the school district for the 2013- 2014 school year?

Administrator: The AIP allocation provided by the school district was used to pay for the AIP teacher of the AIP program.

Researcher: Okay question number four; who was responsible for tracking student performance in the AIP program for the 2013- 2014 school year?

Administrator: Overall I am responsible for tracking student performance in the AIP program in combination with the AIP supervising program teacher. The teacher's actually the one that tracks the student progress, works with the

students, teaches them how to track their own progress. From that information we also work with the guidance counselors here at our school, and with the administration as far as making sure that students are appropriately placed and are becoming successful with this program.

Researcher: Okay question number five; if you used the Face to Face teacher model was the teacher rated as highly effective for the 2013, 2014 school year.

Administrator: Yes we used a Face to Face model and the teacher was rated highly effective for the 2013-2014 school year.

Researcher: All right and question number six; do you have any additional comments pertaining to the implementation and procedural steps concerning the delivery method of the academic intervention program at your school?

Administrator: Just that the district itself does not give a specified delivery model for each, for all schools, so each individual school, selects its own delivery model for what they think will be best for the program. And here at our school we have chosen to use the Face to Face instruction and to use the class as an elective in the schedule to allow students to have that full class period with the teacher in the Academic Intervention Program every day.

Researcher: Okay any additional thoughts?

Administrator: No not today.

Researcher: Okay thank you very much.

Administrator: You're welcome, thank you.

Interviewee 2

Transcription of interview with APmiddleschool1 on November 5, 2014

Reviewed the consent agreement and interviewee 2 consented to the interview.

Researcher: Academic Intervention Program, supervising administrator interview, school number two.

You have volunteered to participate in this interview and understand that all of your responses are going to be kept confidential.

Administrator: Okay.

Researcher: Question one. Did you supervise the Academic Intervention Program during the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: No, I did not.

Researcher:: Question two. What program model did you use to provide this program to students at your school?

Administrator: We did a face-to-face model with the students for a semester.

Researcher: Okay.

Administrator: And the teacher monitored the students at that time.

Researcher: Okay. Question 3. How did you use the AIP allocation provided by the school district for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: The allocation was used on a teacher unit, as well as on other interventions that we did throughout the year.

Researcher: Who was responsible for tracking performance in the AIP program for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: The teacher that was allocated did the tracking for the student.

Researcher: Question five. If you used a face-to-face teacher model, was the teacher rated as highly effective for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: The teacher was rated as effective.

Researcher: And question six. Do you have any additional comments pertaining to the implementation and procedural steps concerning the delivery method of the Academic Intervention Program at our school?

Administrator: The additional comment that I would say is that we've tried, we tried the face-to-face last year and found it not to be very effective to pull the kids out for an elective.

Researcher: Umm hmm.

Administrator: And so this year, because I'm overseeing it, we're doing a different model, utilizing still a, a teacher unit.

Researcher: Umm hmm.

Administrator: But she's part of the, um, she's actually going to do more pull-outs instead of a face-to-face in a class situation.

Researcher: Umm hmm.

Administrator: And we're gonna try to look at both models and see which one is gonna be the most effective moving forward.

Researcher: Umm hmm.

Administrator: So once we gather data from both, both years, we'll make a better decision for the next year. So I'm looking forward to that.

Researcher: Okay, thank you.

Administrator: No problem.

Interviewee 3

Transcription of interview with APmiddleschool3 on November 3, 2014

Reviewed the consent agreement and interviewee 3 consented to the interview.

Researcher: Academic Intervention program supervising administrator interview with school number 3. You have volunteered to participate in this interview and understand that all of your responses are going to be kept confidential.

Good morning.

Administrator: Good morning.

Researcher: Question 1, did you supervise the academic intervention program during the 2013 2014 school year?

Administrator: No, I did not.

Researcher: Question 2, what program model did you use to provide this program to students at your school last year?

Administrator: They used a pull out program, where students would be pulled out a few weeks at a time to work with an intervention teacher as needed, until the grades were back up to where they want, and then they'd go back to their electives.

Researcher: OK, so it wasn't just once or twice a week, it was for a block of time?

Administrator: They did both.

Researcher: OK.

Administrator: There was a teacher who they did a power lunch thing where they'd be pulled out during lunch, or during the lunch time frame,

Researcher: Mmm-hmm.

Administrator: whether it's 3rd or 4th period, and then they also have class periods where let's say, 2nd period isn't during lunches, but there is a teacher available so they pull from 2nd hour PE.

Researcher: OK.

Administrator: For a couple weeks at a time.

Researcher:: OK and number 3, how did you use the AIP allocation provided by the school district for the 2013 2014 school year?

Administrator: A couple of different ways, we had a part time retired teacher who came back for 3 hours a day, twice a week, to do the power lunch and then the rest of it was used for planning period supplements for teachers who gave up their planning period to do intervention.

Researcher: OK. number 4, who was responsible for tracking the student performance in the AIP program for the 2013 2014 school year?

Administrator: Whichever teacher had those kids, we just kind of keep track of how their grades were, they had access to them in Skyward, they were kind of assigned as an extra homeroom teacher so they could look up their grades and see what they were missing.

Researcher: OK.

Administrator: But I don't know because I wasn't here, I don't know if that went all year, or just for the amount of time that they have them.

Researcher: Mmm-hmm.

OK, if you used a face to face model, which was the teacher rated as highly effective for the 13 14 school year?

Administrator: Um, I was not here, so I'm not sure.

Researcher: OK, and number 6, do you have any additional comments pertaining to the implementation and procedural steps concerning the delivery method of the academic intervention program at your school?

Administrator: This year with the addition of the SBA assessments and all the electives, we decided that the pull out intervention was not going to be functional, so we have switched to using course codes for those classes and we've gone ahead and done schedule changes, um, for those students who need it. We looked at ah, numbers of Ds and Fs, we looked at just students who weren't performing, we talked to the kids, we made parent phone calls for each of them and then started with actual schedule changes into a course code model.

Researcher: So they're taking that instead of an elective?

Administrator: Correct.

Researcher: OK. Any additional thoughts?

Administrator: Not that I can think of.

Researcher: Thank you for your time.

Interviewee 4

Transcription of interview with APmiddleschool4 on October 24, 2014

Reviewed the consent agreement and interviewee 4 consented to the interview.

Researcher: Academic intervention program, supervising administrator interview, with school number 4. You have volunteered to participate in this interview, and understand that all your responses are going to be kept confidential. Question one. Did you supervise the academic intervention program during the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: No, I did not. Our principal who has retired, supervised the program last year.

Researcher: Question two. What program model did you use to provide this program to students at your school, last year?

Administrator: We use a pull out model. And the academic intervention teacher keeps track of those students, and their data.

Researcher: Question three. How did you use the AIP allocation provided by the school district for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: We used it to fund one academic intervention program teacher.

Researcher: Question four. Who was responsible for tracking student performance in in the AIP program, for the 2013-2014 school year.

Administrator: The responsibility fell on the teacher's end. The AIP teacher, and also the supervising administrator, the principal retired.

Researcher: If you used a face to face teacher model, was the teacher rated as highly effective for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: We did not use a face to face model. Yes, the teacher was highly effective last year.

Researcher: Number six. Do you have any additional comments pertaining to the implementation and procedural steps, concerning the delivery method of the academic intervention program at your school?

Administrator: I do. Considering the fact that our outgoing teacher, and outgoing principal have both retire, we have a new principal, and a new teacher, because we don't have these kids tracked in skyward in any way, we have no clue who the kids are who were in the AIP program from previous years, so a better tracking system is definitely a need, moving forward.

Researcher: Do you have any additional thoughts?

Administrator: I don't.

Researcher: Thank you for your time.

Administrator: Thank you.

Interviewee 5

Transcription of interview with APmiddleschool5 on November 6, 2014

Reviewed the consent agreement and interviewee 5 consented to the interview.

Researcher: Academic intervention program supervising administrator, interview with school number five. You have volunteered to participate in this interview and understand that all of your responses are going to be kept confidential. Number one: did you supervise the academic intervention program during the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: No I did not.

Researcher: Question two: what program model did you use to provide this program to students at your school?

Administrator: Uh, it was a pull-out method last year.

Researcher: Question three: how did you use the AIP allocation provided by the school district for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: It was under a teacher-based position.

Researcher: Question four: who was responsible for tracking student performance in the AIP program for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: The teacher over the AIP program.

Researcher: Question five: if you used a face to face model or didn't, was the teacher rated as highly effective for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: The teacher was related highly effective.

Researcher: And question six: do you have any additional comments pertaining to the implementation and procedural steps concerning the delivery method of the academic intervention program at your school?

Administrator: The delivery method is still developing throughout this academic year. Obviously students will receive a SBA test, an assignment of the course

code, it will be calculated into the student's grade point average in order for them to obviously advance to their appropriate grade level.

Researcher: So you're now using, this year, you're using a course code and having them assigned it to a class period.

Administrator: Correct.

Researcher: Okay. Any additional thoughts?

Administrator: No.

Researcher: Thank you.

Administrator: Thank you.

Interviewee 6

Transcription of interview with APmiddleschool6 on October 23, 2014

Reviewed the consent agreement and interviewee 6 consented to the interview.

Researcher: Academic intervention program supervising administrator interview with school number 6. Good morning.

Administrator: Good Morning.

Researcher: You have volunteered to participate in this interview and understand that all of your responses are going to be kept confidential. Question 1. Did you supervise the academic intervention program during the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: No, I did not.

Researcher: What program model was, did you use to provide this program to students at your school for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: Although I did not supervise it, we used a model in which students were assigned to an academic intervention program based on their previous year promotion status. Students who were retained were conditionally placed into our academic intervention program. And once they were placed in the program they were, um, ... If they were successful at the end of the first quarter they were promoted to the next grade level.

Researcher: Number 3. How did you use the AIP allocation provided by the school district for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: The allocation was used specifically for, the academic intervention program teacher. In addition to the students who we identified as not being, or not meeting promotional requirements being assigned to the academic intervention teacher, we also allowed teachers to recommend students attend the academic intervention classroom from assignment recovery.

Researcher: OK, thank you. Question 4. Who was responsible for tracking student performance in the AIP program for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: Our academic intervention teacher was responsible for tracking the student performance.

Researcher: Question 5. If you used a face-to-face teacher model was the teacher rated as highly effective for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: The teacher was rated highly effective for the 2013-2014 school year.

Researcher: Question 6. Do you have any additional comments pertaining to the implementation and procedural steps concerning the delivery method of the academic intervention program at your school?

Administrator: Yes. My concerns relate to the pull out model portion of our program, in which students who are in a content area class may not be progressing in terms of the academic standards; may have D or an F in the class. And those students are then allowed to go down to our academic intervention program teacher to obtain what is called class assignment recovery. My concern with that is that we are sending students to a non-certified teacher in some content areas. She is certified in language arts, however she is not certified in math, social studies, or science. We are sending students to her to have assignment recovery, when, I believe, they are better served in the content area teacher's classroom to receive either spiraled or, remediated instruction with that teacher.

Researcher: OK. Any additional thoughts?

Administrator: Not at this time.

Researcher: Thank you.

Administrator: My pleasure.

Interviewee 7

Transcription of interview with APmiddleschool7 on November 6, 2014

Reviewed the consent agreement and interviewee 7 consented to the interview.

Researcher: Academic intervention program supervising administrator interview with school number 7. You have volunteered to participate in this interview and understand that all of your responses are going to be kept confidential. Good morning.

Administrator: Good morning.

Researcher: Question 1, did you supervise the academic intervention program during the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: I did not.

Researcher: Okay, question 2, what program model did you use to provide this program to the students at your school?

Administrator: So the program model for the academic intervention program was basically designed to support students who were on academic contract. So students who failed to meet the requirements to progress to the next school year and so they were placed on academic contract and that coach monitors their weekly progress during the first 9 weeks of school, um, through weekly progress reports, mentoring, meeting, facilitation in their classes um, to make sure that they are in communication with parents to make sure they meet those requirements to the first 9 weeks to then be promoted to the next grade level. So they start the year in those classes that are coded as 6th graders instead of 7th graders, but they are taking 7th grade course work. So and at the end then they meet their contract obligation. And she continues to follow and monitor them throughout the school year.

In addition to that they, we find, we have a lot of overage students in our title 1 population. So students that have been retained, more than once, so two years. So they're two years behind their peers. And so those students are marked for grade advancement, um, to catch up to their peers so they have an opportunity to go to high school, before they're at drop out age. So and she monitors them in a similar fashion through weekly progress

reports and mentoring and facilitation in their classes so that they can help re-mediate some of their skills through intervention to go on to high school.

Researcher: All right, thank you. Question 3, how did you use the AIP allocation provided by the school district for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: I have to guess that's kind of the same answer. So that's how we use her.

Researcher:: For the teacher.

Administrator: For the teacher.

Researcher: So you used it for a full-time teacher.

Administrator: We used, yeah full-time teacher.

Researcher: Okay. Question 4, who is responsible for tracking student performance in the AIP program for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: Our academic intervention specialist.

Researcher: Thank you. Question 5, if you used a face-to-face teacher model, which you did not, but your teacher was still rated so was your teacher rated as highly effective for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: She was.

Researcher: Number 6, do you have any additional comments pertaining to the implementation and procedural steps concerning the delivery method of academic intervention program at your school?

Administrator: In addition to working with students through-and she's part of our MTSS program and all of those interventions, oversees, we have a math lab, so she also oversees the paraprofessional that runs our success-maker math lab which is now our think through math lab, so because we had title one funds it supports that. She oversees the intervention program through that program as well.

Researcher: Okay. Any additional thoughts?

Administrator: No, I think it's been a successful program for us. It's been another asset and another, uh, pathway for students to interact with an adult that is, you know, fully involved with the parents and community outreach and all of

those things for them. So it's, you know it's been successful in getting students moved, you know, on to high school and on to the next grade level where they were failing previously.

Researcher: Thank you.

Administrator: You're welcome.

Interviewee 8

Transcription of interview with APmiddleschool8 on October 22, 2014

Reviewed the consent agreement and interviewee 8 consented to the interview.

Researcher: Academic intervention program supervising administrator interview.
School number 8. Good afternoon.

Administrator: Good afternoon.

Researcher: You have volunteered to participate in this interview and understand that all of your responses are going to be kept confidential.

Administrator: Thank you.

Researcher: Question 1. Did you supervise the academic intervention program during the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: Yes I did.

Researcher: Question 2. What program model did you use to provide this program to students at your school?

Administrator: Program model was a full time AIP teacher that pulled out students from class to check on their progress based on teacher feedback, weekly feedback, to her and the teacher facilitates between the parent, the teacher, and encourages the students, motivates the student, inspires the student to complete assignments, projects, and do well on tests. Uh, so really the program model is really for documentation of, of student work, student progress, and it is done on a weekly basis, with students.

Researcher: Okay. How did you use the AIP allocation provided by the school district for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: It was a full time teacher. Like I said, it's a pull out model. She does not have a class of students that she teaches. She pulls them out of class and she does monitoring status with some of our students that are, based on their academic need. Um, so, and that is done on a weekly basis.

Also communicated with administration and we have also put into place, um, mentoring with, uh, other, other teachers in the building to sort of teach down the gap if you will with our students that are in those classes. Well, we're using a 6th grade model this year.

Last year we really didn't have a teaching down the gap student, but this year we're really motivating our teachers to be playing more of an active role rather than just the AIP teacher to be the mentor.

Researcher: Okay. Question 4. Who was responsible for tracking student performance in the AIP program for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: It's two fold. It's, it's the AIP teacher of course, but it's also the teachers, and administration. Um, making sure that teachers are tracking the progress. So the AIP teachers really responsible for the reports that are given to administration as far as what's their GPA, where they fall at the, quarterly and during the year and also looking at, you know, do we need to bump up interventions, do we need to release students from the program based on their progress and a lot of that data is collected by the AIP teacher.

But a big part of that, the reason why we're able to make those decisions is because of the AIP teacher getting the weekly feedback from teachers as to how they're progressing in their classes. And they have to fill out a report that goes to the AIP teacher so that she is able to collect all that information and that brings it to the table weekly to administration as to how they're doing.

Researcher: Okay.

Administrator: So we make decisions based on, the teacher feedback more than anything.

Researcher: Question 5. If you used a face to face teacher model, was the teacher rated as highly effective for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: We didn't have that model, so.

Researcher: Okay. Onto question 6. Do you have any additional comments pertaining to the implementation and procedural steps concerning the delivery method of the academic intervention program at your school?

Administrator: Yeah, I mean, it's really come into play now with MTSS. Um, you know, tiering students level 1, level 2, level 3 and making sure we had the documentation needed so that when they go to tier 3 and they're at that

level, that we had provided all the support, all the interventions possible and it's documented at the FBAs, BIPs, so that when it does go into the ESC realm that they can make an informed decision based on the accumulated data over a period of time and can show a tracking of where they are and if they need to be bumped up to ESC status.

Researcher: Any additional thoughts?

Administrator: Yes. I think it's important that the teachers really need to be more involved with the AIP process than they already are. Simply because of like, like I said, the teacher who got the gap students, um, were trying to motivate and inspire and, uh, get buy in from students so that they are more, uh, participatory in their classrooms. So the teacher really should, uh, I think, play more of a role in targeting those students being more of a mentor with those students and also connecting with the home more with those students. It shouldn't be just the AIP teacher.

It's got to be, it's got to be a team approach and administration, of course, uh, helps to facilitate that model by trying to reinforce in, through PD and all that good stuff, um, you know, trying to get the staff to understand to importance of paying particular attention to those students. And yeah, I mean, we are a high performing district and we make the A grade and all that, but we're really falling short with students that are falling down into that gap where we need to reach them. And so we have to really step it up in that respect.

Researcher: Thank you.

Administrator: You're welcome.

Interviewee 9

Transcription of interview with APmiddleschool9 on November 5, 2014

Reviewed the consent agreement and interviewee 9 consented to the interview.

Researcher: Academic Intervention Program Supervising Administrator Interview with school number nine.

You have volunteered to participate in this interview and understand that all of your responses are going to be kept confidential.

Question one: Did you supervisor the Academic Intervention Program during the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: Yes.

Researcher: Question two: What program model did you use to provide this program to students at your school?

Administrator: Pull out program from the elective classes to a grade recovery room.

Researcher: Question three: How did you use the AIP allocation provided by the school district for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: I used a full-time, certified teacher to pull the children out.

Researcher: Question four: Who was responsible for tracking student performance in the AIP program for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: The AIP allocation teacher.

Researcher: Question five: If you used a face-to-face teacher model, was the teacher rated as highly effective for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: I don't know.

Researcher: Question six: Do you have any additional comments pertaining to the implementation and procedural steps concerning the delivery method of the Academic Intervention Program at your school?

Administrator: Yes. So much so that we are going to adjust the program for the second semester. Our concern is the SBAs in the elective programs. If the children are pulled out for grade recovery and not assigned to that class but rather assigned to the elective, they're missing content area and that will in turn affect the SBAs for the elective teachers. Second semester, we are developing the course code and these students: repeat offenders, administratively assigned, previously retained, and MTSS Tier 3 students will be assigned this program in lieu of an elective.

Researcher: Any additional thoughts?

Administrator: No. Not that I can think of.

Researcher: Thank you.

Interviewee 10

Transcription of interview with APmiddleschool10 on October 31, 2014

Reviewed the consent agreement and interviewee 10 consented to the interview.

Researcher: Academic Intervention Program Supervising Administrator interview with school number ten. Good morning.

Administrator: Good morning.

Researcher: You have volunteered to participate in this interview and understand that all of your responses are going to be kept confidential.

Question 1: Did you supervise the Academic Intervention Program during the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: No.

Researcher:: Question 2: What program model did you use to provide this program to students at your school?

Administrator: It was a face-to-face program and they took this class instead of an elective.

Researcher:: Number 3: How did you use the AIP allocation provided by the school district for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: It was used for the teacher, so it paid for the teacher's position.

Researcher: Okay. Who was responsible for tracking student performance in the AIP Program for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: The teacher was.

Researcher: Question 5: If you used a face-to-face teacher model, which you did, was the teacher rated as highly effective for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: Yes, the teacher was rated Highly Effective.

Researcher: Thank you. Um, do you have any additional comments pertaining to the implementation and procedural steps concerning the delivery method of that Academic Intervention Program at your school?

Administrator: I do not.

Researcher: Thank you for your time.

Administrator: Thank you.

Interviewee 11

Transcription of interview with Pmiddleschool11 on November 4, 2014

Reviewed the consent agreement and interviewee 11 consented to the interview.

- Researcher: Academic Intervention Program Supervising Administrator
Interview: questions with school number 11. You have volunteered to participate in this interview, and understand that all of your responses are going to be kept confidential. Good afternoon.
- Administrator: Good afternoon.
- Researcher: Question 1: Did you supervise the Academic Intervention Program during the 2013 - 2014 school year?
- Administrator: Yes, I did. I supervised for half a year, or the second semester.
- Researcher: Question2: What program model did you use to provide this program to students at your school?
- Administrator: Our Middle School used the, the push-in, pull-out model.
- Researcher: So your teacher floated into classrooms?
- Administrator: Yes, she floated in classrooms and acted more so as a support facilitator with our delayed assignment students.
- Researcher: Okay. Question 3: How did you use the AIP Allocation provided by the school district for the 2013 - 2014 school year?
- Administrator: We used the AIP Allocation, um, for a full time teacher.
- Researcher: Thank you. Question 5: If you used a face-to-face teacher model, was the teacher rated as highly effective for the 2013 - 2014 school year?
- Administrator: No, however, um, she did meet with the students on a weekly basis. She was rated as Needs Improvement.

Researcher: Okay. Question 4: Who was responsible for tracking student performance in the AIP Program for the 2013 - 2014 school year?

Administrator: The AIP Teacher.

Researcher: Okay, and Question 6: Do you have any additional comments pertaining to the implementation and procedural steps concerning the delivery method of the Academic Intervention Program at your school?

Administrator: Yes I do. Um, by analyzing, and reflecting on the push-out, and pull-out model basically the teacher acting as support facilitator, I felt it didn't serve as an effective monitoring or support model. Therefore I changed the model where the AIP teacher actually has three sections of students, our delayed assignment students who were basically, um, below proficient in math and reading, um, where the teacher could actually monitor the classroom behaviors to aid the teacher in delivering effective instruction. And also keep intact with the students' parents in communication, um, along with aft-, acting as a catalyst for our administration team, and how to better serve our AIP students.

Researcher: Okay, good, thank you. Any additional thoughts?

Administrator: No.

Researcher: Thank you, you have a good afternoon.

Interviewee 12

Transcription of interview with APmiddleschool12 on October 21, 2014

Reviewed the consent agreement and interviewee 12 consented to the interview.

Researcher: Interview with supervising assistant principal of school 12.

Administrator: Morning.

Researcher: Good morning. You have volunteered to participate in this interview and understand that all of your responses are going to be kept confidential. You will be asked. We'll stop there. Number one. Did you supervise the academic intervention program during the 2013, 2014 school year?

Administrator: Yes I did.

Researcher: Number Two. What program model did you use to provide this program to students at your school?

Administrator: We modeled the program after AVID. We saw that our students needed the same strategies that AVID students need. That was our goal, is to really develop study skills, test taking skills. I guess make it very easy for students to understand how their grades matter. Not only for today but as they move onto high school and then when they're looking are college and careers.

Researcher: So your students take this as a class, as an elective class?

Administrator: That's correct.

Researcher: A period a day.

Administrator: Yes.

Researcher: Thank you. Question three. How did you use the academic intervention program allocation provided by the school district for the 2013- 2014 school year?

Administrator: We used the allocation for a teacher teach students that are ... That need academic support. Usually a 2.3 and below is what we've targeted.

Researcher: Number four. Who was responsible for tracking students' performance in the AIP Program for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: I'm, I'm ultimately responsible. I work very closely with our AIP instructor to also track the students.

Researcher: Number five. If you use a face to face teacher model, which you say you do, um, was the teacher rate as highly effective for the 2013-2014 school year?

Administrator: He was rated high effective.

Researcher: And lastly number six. Do you have any additional comments pertaining to the implementation and procedural steps concerning the delivery method of the academic intervention program at your school?

Administrator: I don't really have any questions but I have wondered how other schools um run their program. I would certainly like to improve what we're doing. I think we do an okay job with it, but I'm very interested in learning, um, how other schools do it and their success rate with it.

Researcher: Any additional thoughts?

Administrator: Not really at this time, um, just you know the fact that I'd like to know a little bit more about how other schools are using it.

Researcher: Thank you for your time.

Administrator: You're welcome.

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