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# The Impact of an Alternative Education Intervention (Student Transition and Recovery) on Middle Schools' Attendance, Academic Performance, and Discipline

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THE IMPACT OF AN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION INTERVENTION  
(STUDENT TRANSITION AND RECOVERY) ON MIDDLE SCHOOLS'  
ATTENDANCE, ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND DISCIPLINE

by

CATHY MCDANIEL CAMPBELL

(Under the Direction of Barbara J. Mallory)

ABSTRACT

When middle school students need to learn accountability and discipline to be successful in school, many parents, teachers and school administrators seek short-term solutions to stop inappropriate behavior. This mixed methods study was designed to determine the impact of one intervention used by many middle schools in Georgia, the Student Transition and Recovery (S.T.A.R.) program . The researcher found that the intervention, a military-style of discipline, did have a positive impact on student attendance, grades and discipline. The findings describe five major features of the intervention that contribute to its success. The study provides support for this type of intervention. The ultimate goal is to provide middle schools with an alternative intervention that keeps students in school while improving academics and discipline.

INDEX WORDS: Student transition and recovery (S.T.A.R.) program, Middle school, Alternative intervention, Out of school suspension, Attendance, Academic performance, Discipline

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Truancy rates and discipline have long been problems for many school systems throughout the nation. Absenteeism is reaching as high as 30% in some educational settings (Goldstein, Little & Atkin-Little, 2003), and educators face an increasing challenge of meeting the needs of these students. Addressing discipline problems of students is particularly important for educators due to the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2001 (NCLB, 2001). Schools that are determined to be “persistently dangerous” under NCLB are at risk of losing staff, students and funding. More than ever, administrators are under pressure to find effective methods to address truancy and discipline problems. These educational issues have educators, parents and communities searching for resolutions.

While national data is limited due to a lack of a uniformed definition of truancy, larger cities have reported substantial rates of absenteeism (Baker, Sigmon & Nugent, 2001). An average of 62,000 students are absent daily from the Los Angeles Unified School District, while approximately 4,000 unexcused absences occur in the Milwaukee, WI school district on a daily basis (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). High truancy rates have long been a problem for Georgia’s schools (Bennett, 2003) and have prevented some districts from making Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP). Under NCLB, at least 95% of students must participate on state assessments for all subgroups enrolled in a school or school system in order for the school or system to meet AYP. Out of 846 schools across the state of Georgia that did not make AYP, 536 did not reach standards solely for failing to reach the 95% participation threshold (Georgia Department of

Education, 2008). The Department of Education notes that the number is not a surprise because of the high truancy rate in the state.

Research indicates that truant students do not perform well in school and are often discipline problems in the classroom (Suh, Suh & Houston, 2007). When students become convinced they are not good learners and will not be successful in school, they misbehave in and out of the classroom to receive attention and feel power (Lapointe & Legault, 2004). Classroom discipline and management often determines what students can learn (Geiger, 2000). Disruptive behaviors in the classroom hinder students from attaining a proper education. By competing with instruction and making it much less likely students will achieve academic objectives (Luiselli, Putnam & Sunderland, 2002). In most instances, students with the greatest number of discipline problems have grades below average, high absenteeism and may be involved in gangs (Lehr et al., 2004).

One nationally approved program to reduce student absenteeism, discipline and suspension is the Student Transition and Recovery Program, referred to as S.T.A.R. However, there is very little empirical evidence to demonstrate the program reduces absenteeism. Data available on the use of the S.T.A.R. program to reduce absenteeism and improve discipline are concentrated on reports from only eight Georgia counties and do not focus results on a specific age group of students. Data provided note that during the first year of program implementation, a decrease in absenteeism of 11% was reported (National Center for School Engagement, 2007), and middle schools active in the S.T.A.R. program over a three-year program period recorded a 87% reduction in police-assisted calls, 73% reduction in drug/alcohol/tobacco related incidences, 34% reduction in fights/assaults and 67% reduction in out-of-school suspension (Reimer & Smink,

2005). While these results hold promise for the use of S.T.A.R. as a means to reduce truancy and discipline problems, they are limited; therefore, additional research is needed to evaluate the program's impact on truancy and discipline in schools. This study focuses specifically on the impact of the Student Transition and Recovery Program on middle school student attendance, academic performance and discipline. Because there is limited data available, this study will add to the existing limited body of knowledge.

### Background of the Study

With increasing numbers of students being suspended and/or expelled from school due to discipline, it is important that districts serve truant students and disruptive students through alternative programs whenever possible so they can continue their education. In the past, alternative education programs focused on the adolescent, but now the focus is extended to younger students for two reasons. First, it has become more common for younger students to act out in ways that are dangerous. Second, rates of arrest for younger offenders have increased (Tobin & Sprague, 2000).

Failure to meet the 95% participation rate issue has motivated schools and school systems to develop programs that prevent and reduce truancy, student absenteeism and suspension. Gilmer County in Georgia implemented intervention programs, which have resulted in a 16% improvement in attendance (Georgia Department of Education, 2008). Additionally, Georgia's Fulton County Truancy Intervention Program has become a model throughout the state (Mall, 2005). If implemented correctly, truancy intervention programs can and should lead to the creation of American schools in which students and teachers alike are able to have positive educational experiences.

To counteract the negative effects that poor student attendance and suspension has on schools and communities, many districts are now using a variety of truancy intervention programs. Many school systems have sought alternative education programs (Farris-Berg, Schroeder, Kolderie & Graba, 2003). Alternative education programs, however, are often designed in a way that require students to attend school at an alternative campus or that removes them from their regular classroom. One concern is that alternative education prevents students from obtaining a quality education (National Youth Employment Coalition, 2005). Another report reveals that these programs – after several years of operation – have failed to prove that they have a positive educational benefit for pupils who are referred (Ruzzie & Kraemer, 2006).

However, one promising program approved by the state of Georgia is the Student Transition and Recovery (S.T.A.R.) program (Alexander, 2003). Many schools have incorporated the S.T.A.R. program into their discipline plan because it is designed to be an alternative education intervention that keeps truant students in their regular classrooms, through a targeted focus to hold them accountable for attendance, academics and discipline. The goal of the S.T.A.R. program is to reduce suspension, expulsion and juvenile anti-social behavior by combining military-style drilling and exercise with academic tutoring (Heilbrunn & McGillivray, 2006).

School absenteeism is a growing problem in the United States that extends beyond the school. It affects the student, the family and the community. Truancy has been labeled one of the top ten major problems in this country's schools, negatively affecting the future of our youth (DeKalb, 2004). In fact, absentee rates have reached as high as 30 percent in some cities (Kid Source, 2000). In New York City, about 150,000



out of 1,000,000 students are absent daily (DeKalb, 2004). The Los Angeles Unified School District reports ten percent of its students are absent each day and a mere half of these students return with written excuses (DeKalb, 2004).

In addition, absenteeism has a direct impact on education funding for school districts, with better attendance rates equaling more money from the state. The federal *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) also has given anti-truancy efforts a heightened urgency, as some elementary and middle schools have to meet attendance standards to meet annual progress benchmarks. Beginning in 2007, NCLB required schools to start reporting their absentee rates to their state education departments (Vu, 2007).

Another factor affecting student absenteeism is suspensions from schools due to discipline. In almost any discussion about middle schools, student discipline will dominate the conversation (Luiselli, Putnam & Sunderland, 2002). Schools consistently have to deal with serious discipline issues. Many students do not respond to detention or in school suspension (ISS) because they prefer being sent out of the classroom as a way to avoid work or to gain attention (Walker, Ramsey & Gresham, 2004).

All too often schools are forced to use out of school suspension (OSS) to deal with disruptive students. Disruptive behavior by students in the classroom not only impedes the learning of that child; it impedes the learning of others (Rathvon, 2008). The lack of parental involvement and support has lead many schools to search for alternative education programs (Bosher, 2001).

Although there is limited data on truancy, there is data on the number of truancy-related court filings. According to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the number of petitioned truancy cases increased 92% from just

over 20,000 in 1987 to almost 40,000 in 1996 (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). The same data shows the rate of truancy petitions per 1,000 young people aged ten or older increased 97% among black students, 70% among white students and 11% for students of other races (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). It is not clear to what extent these trends reflect an increase in the incidence of truancy versus an increase in the propensity of schools to send truants to court. However, a national review of discipline issues in schools conducted in 1996-97 found that public school principals identified student absenteeism, class cutting and tardiness as the top discipline problems in their schools (Heaviside et al., 1998).

One example of the prevalence of truancy in major cities may be derived from a study of Denver Public Schools (DPS) from 2002-03 to 2004-05. Average unexcused absences per year per student ranged from just under six for elementary school, to over eight for middle school students, and to around seventeen for high school students. Almost 20 percent of all DPS students missed at least ten days without a valid excuse, causing them to meet the legal definition of “truant” in Colorado. Truancy peaked during ninth grade, then tapered off, presumably as the most truant students reached the mandatory attendance age of 16 and dropped out of school (MacGillivray & Mann-Erickson, 2006). In *Monitoring the Future* (2003), a national survey of adolescents in the United States, 11% of 8<sup>th</sup> grade students, 16 percent of 10<sup>th</sup> grade students and 25% of 12<sup>th</sup> grade students reported illegally skipping one or more days of school during the previous 30 days.

Truancy is costly, and the most frequent response to student discipline is suspension (Morrison & Skiba, 2001). It costs students an education, resulting in reduced

earning capacity. It costs school districts hundreds of thousands of dollars each year in lost federal and state funds that are based on daily attendance figures (Garry, 2001). It costs businesses, which must pay to train uneducated workers. It costs taxpayers, who must pay higher taxes for law enforcement and welfare costs for dropouts who end up on welfare rolls or underemployed. Frustrated by this social and economic burden, communities across the United States are fighting back. Some counties are contemplating fining students if they are not in class during school hours. Others are fining or jailing parents who permit their children to miss school continually (Garry, 2001).

Contrary to this evidence, out of school suspension continues to be one of the most common consequences for disciplinary infractions, and is often used in response to infractions such as disrespect and insubordination, truancy and classroom disturbance (Morrison & Skiba, 2001). However, whether in school or out of school, suspension has been found to be largely ineffective. Actually, it may have a detrimental impact on students because it removes them from a constructive learning environment. Forbidding students to come to school tends to exacerbate rather than remediate the problem (Bernard, 2007).

Schools and school districts across the country are concerned with improving or maintaining student attendance. According to an analysis of the 2004 Schools and Staffing Survey by the Center for Public Education, 45% of teachers report that student absenteeism is a serious problem. Additionally, 55% of Georgia teachers report that student attendance is a serious problem (Center for Public Education, 2004). These

statistics provide convincing evidence that educators and researchers need to take seriously the issue of student absenteeism and to find ways to improve attendance.

As an educator, one must recognize the relationship between daily school attendance, school performance, graduation and habits in the workplace. Research indicates that the amount of time actually spent in class is a good measure of student access to an education (Johnston, 2005). Each tardy or absence means a student has lost an opportunity to learn (Georgia Department of Education, 2004). In order to address truancy and attendance, Georgia state law (HB 1190) now requires that communities and schools work together to address truancy.

Some students willingly attend school, but others do not, often because of negative factors or influences in their lives. These students require intervention. The benefits of regular school attendance may be the difference between a lifetime of burdens and a lifetime of accomplishments (DeKalb, 2004). By addressing related risk factors with an attendance policy that works, teachers and administrators can give students a better chance of succeeding. The problem of student absenteeism is a complex challenge, and many interventions have been designed to address the problem.

In light of these facts, reducing truancy is capturing renewed interests in communities across the country. Attendance improvement programs are being organized using a number of models. Some models are school-based, others are court-based and some models operate through community service agencies. The literature regarding truancy intervention programs also provides numerous models and programs to address student truancy and reduce absenteeism. Some programs focus on a zero-tolerance message. Other programs are more nurturing and involve intensive case management for

the student and the student's family. Some programs focus on the individual student while other programs also focus on the family unit. All of these programs share common objectives: to improve school attendance in the short term, with the longer term goals of raising grades and encouraging high school graduation for students who are at risk of dropping out.

While compulsory education laws vary from state to state, truancy is a national problem and requires national attention and national truancy intervention initiatives. Responses must include the entire community, parents, educators, law enforcement personnel, juvenile and family court judges and representatives from social service community organizations (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). School administrators must take proactive measures to deter truancy.

Several truancy intervention programs are used to reduce student absentee rates throughout the United States. Some programs designed to increase attendance rates are school or community-based, while other programs utilize either the legal system or impose economic sanctions. While there are a variety of intervention programs aimed at reducing truancy rates, the majority target high school students only. Although it may be difficult to determine which programs are the most successful at decreasing truancy, educators must address the issue of school absenteeism because research demonstrates that the uneducated child of today is the criminal of tomorrow, the welfare recipient of tomorrow and the adult of tomorrow who never reaches his or her true potential (Spaethe, 2000).

Like other states, Georgia has implemented numerous truancy intervention programs for excessively truant students. State and privately operated boot camps, youth

detention centers and alternative schools are some of the most common (Andrews, Taylor, Martin, & Slate, 1998). When juvenile complaints are filed, some students are sentenced to boot camps or youth detention facilities. Although these two programs are similar, juveniles usually spend more time in detention centers. While a juvenile's stay at a boot camp is often for a short duration, the discipline is much more intense than that of a youth detention center (Andrews et al., 1998).

Students with chronic discipline problems may require either highly individualized and targeted support or more selected support. The amount and intensity of the support depends largely on the complexity of the behavior problem (Bernard, 2007). Some researchers suggest that certain efforts such as extra adult attention and extra academic support can be used to improve the overall likelihood of improving student attendance, reducing problem behavior and ensuring school success (Reeves, 2008).

Due largely to the overcrowding of state facilities, privately owned detention centers and boot camps have been developed. These facilities are for-profit and operate under their own guidelines (Lewis, 2000). Alternative schools came into being in the 1980s (Reyes, 2001). They are utilized by a large number of school systems to remove students from the regular school setting (Andrews et al., 1998). Alternative schools provide a place for students who have been expelled from the regular school setting (Gregory, 2001).

The S.T.A.R. program, which originated in Texas in 1993, teaches teamwork, discipline, life skills, academic achievement and drug education and intervention. It is designed for students ages nine to fifteen (Heilbrunn & McGillivray, 2006). The boot

camp-type atmosphere that S.T.A.R. provides adds to the school's ability to improve the attendance of students who are placed on probation by the courts or are about to be suspended for truancy or disciplinary issues (Loewenstein, 2008).

Although the S.T.A.R. program was originally created to deal with students who were placed on probation by the courts, many schools today place students in the program in lieu of suspension (L. Reed personal communication, July 28, 2008). Rather than having their child suspended, parents have the option of signing students up for the S.T.A.R. program and keeping them in school. The S.T.A.R. program has expanded and is currently utilized in over 130 school systems (Alexander, 2005). The goals of the program are to improve attendance, discipline and grades of each of its participants (Gumaer, 2000).

In 2000, then Georgia Governor Roy Barnes hired Laurie B. Dopkins to research the S.T.A.R. program. Governor Barnes did not support the program and wanted research to substantiate his beliefs (L. Reed personal communication, July 28, 2008). Dopkins' (2000) report summarized the effects of ten S.T.A.R. programs across Georgia. The findings revealed that the S.T.A.R. programs were achieving their goals of improving school attendance, raising grades and reducing disciplinary actions, court referrals and commitments. At a time when policies increasingly favor getting tough with troubled youth, schools need to have alternative education programs in place. The S.T.A.R. program may be what stands between a delinquent youth either being incarcerated and staying at home, or a student being suspended from school and remaining in the regular classroom. Therefore, Dopkins (2000) recommends that the S.T.A.R. program continue to be evaluated and its impact assessed.

### Statement of the Problem

Hundreds of thousands of students are absent from school each day in America, many are absent without an excuse (Baker, Sigmon & Nugent, 2001). Teachers in Georgia report that student absenteeism is a chronic problem in all parts of the state. To add to this concern, NCLB (2001) places tremendous pressure on schools and school systems to meet attendance requirements each year, as well as accountability for student performance. The consequences of these pressures impact not only the schools but communities as well. These pressures have left parents, educators and communities looking for answers. According to Trulson and Triplett (1999), educators, juvenile authorities and community leaders have searched for new creative programs to confront the problem of truancy.

Students are missing important educational opportunities by missing school. Even if students were to acquire all of the content knowledge they would have gained in class on their own, they are missing the very important social development they could have benefited from in a cooperative classroom setting. There is the concern among educators that students who are not learning the importance of attendance will struggle in the workplace where absenteeism can cost workers their livelihood. It is also important that schools maintain their funding, which is generally based on average daily attendance and progress in improving it.

The motivation behind the desire to solve the problem of truancy is that truancy is often a warning sign of failure, and failure often leads to students dropping out, which can greatly hurt their chances of success (Railsback, 2004). When a student fails, the



responsibility is not his or hers alone and it is incumbent upon educators to do as much as possible to prevent students from failing.

Discipline problems also impact students' education on several levels. Behavior problems interfere with learning and make it less likely that all students will achieve academically (Luiselli, Putnam & Sunderland, 2002). Studies indicate that students who present the most discipline problems also have academic deficits (Atkins et al., 2002; Sautner, 2001). These same studies found that among students who were disciplined, those with learning problems and family conflict were more likely to be expelled (Atkins, et al., 2002). Suspended students often have academic achievement below grade level, have a history of poor behavior and have typically repeated a grade (Sautner, 2001).

These are complex issues, and not ones administrators can solve alone. In order to solve these problems, parents need to work to support their children and get them to school. Communities need to come up with policies for solving problems of absenteeism and discipline. School administrators need to come up with attendance and discipline policies that work for their schools. Students themselves need to take responsibility for their own futures. All of these things need to occur in conjunction in order to solve these problems, but not all of these are controlled by administrators. However, school administrators do have several options available for implementation in their schools to target these problems. This study examines the impact of the S.T.A.R. program on middle school students' attendance, academic performance and discipline in order to provide administrators with information they need to make informed decisions regarding solutions to school truancy and discipline.

## Research Questions

The overarching research question in this study is, “What is the impact of the S.T.A.R. program on middle school attendance, academic performance and discipline?”

The following sub questions guided the research:

1. To what extent does S.T.A.R. intervention impact the attendance of middle school students?
2. To what extent does S.T.A.R. intervention impact the academic performance of middle school students?
3. To what extent does S.T.A.R. intervention impact the discipline of middle school students?
4. How do S.T.A.R. officers account for the impact of S.T.A.R. on middle school students?

## Significance of the Study

Reducing student absenteeism and improving student discipline are among the top ten goals of many schools across the nation. From state to state, districts struggle to combat truancy and discipline problems and their affects on schools, school districts, communities and society. The significance of this study was to assess whether the S.T.A.R. program continues to have an impact on the attendance, academic achievement and discipline of students after they have exited the program. Data were gathered that has the potential to assist other school systems in evaluating the S.T.A.R. program. This study also provides additional insight into the utilization of boot camp programs and school-based alternative discipline programs designed exclusively for middle school students. Extensive research concerning attendance, grades and discipline for students

involved in the S.T.A.R. program is provided. The information gathered from this study also contributes to the limited research on the S.T.A.R. program.

### Overview of Methodology

A mixed-method research design was used because quantitative and qualitative research provides a more comprehensive view of the phenomena being studied (McMillan, 2003). Quantitative research provides numerical data to interpret the results from the qualitative aspects of research (McMillan, 2003); the quantitative interviews provide information that is generalized. Qualitative research allowed characteristics and inferences to be drawn from participants (Creswell, 2003) that have first-hand knowledge regarding the 30-day S.T.A.R. program within three rural middle schools in Southeast Georgia.

Qualitative research is often used when minimal information is known about a topic (Patten, 2000). Little research is available examining the impact of alternative education programs; therefore, qualitative research produced first-hand knowledge and a greater understanding of the impact of the 30-day S.T.A.R. program. Interviewing, a form of qualitative research, gave insight from S.T.A.R. officers' perspectives of the 30-day program. Qualitative research afforded an opportunity to gain an understanding of the alternative education program being studied without preconceived assumptions of the program being reviewed (Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Zechmeister, 2006).

S.T.A.R. officers provided a list of students successfully completing the 30-day program in three middle schools in Southeast Georgia during the 2008-2009 school year. From the list of students, a spreadsheet was created and data were gathered on each individual student. Data were obtained through the Infinite Campus student information

system on each students' attendance, grade point averages and discipline referrals one year prior to entering the 30-day S.T.A.R. program and one year post enrollment to determine the program's impact on the three target areas.

The obtained data for the quantitative research were computed using the GraphPad Software (2005) on a personal computer. This software increased and simplified the process of data calculation. Descriptive statistics describe data in a simpler or abbreviated summarized format such as frequency tables, mean and standard deviation (Sprinthall, 2003). To ensure confidentiality of the students, their schools, and school districts, numeric and letter codes were assigned throughout the study.

The qualitative, narrative inquiry study was an attempt to give voice to the 30-day S.T.A.R. program through officers that have experienced the impact of the program, both past and present. This study involved three S.T.A.R. officers who worked in three targeted rural middle schools in Southeast Georgia once consent was obtained from each school district. To ensure confidentiality of the officers, their schools, and school districts, codes were assigned throughout the study. The participants in the sample were interviewed using a private narrative inquiry interview. Each interview was conducted in a conversational style interview with a list of pre-selected questions (see Appendix C). The interviews were recorded and then transcribed. Interviews were written in narrative format to allow the researcher to analyze the S.T.A.R. officers' responses to determine common themes and categories. Each transcribed interview was dissected to identify and review reoccurring or common themes, keywords and phrases and responses, as well as individual thoughts, feelings and opinions in order to find relationships, key themes and emerging categories so that connections could be made across and between categories.

Themes of positive and negative effects and experience of working with the 30-day S.T.A.R. program were looked at and focused on. Once categories were connected, the researcher summarized and determined what was in the data (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh & Sorensen, 2006). At the conclusion of the study, results were analyzed to identify categories and common themes that emerged by determining connections and common links among categories. To ensure confidentiality of the students, officers, their schools, and school districts, numeric and letter codes were assigned throughout the study. The findings are summarized and discussed in Chapter Five.

#### Limitations of Study

- The population is limited to three middle schools in rural Southeast Georgia with similar socio-economic status.
- The population is limited to students in grades six through eight who attended the same school during the study, from the 2008-2009 school year through the 2009-2010 school year.
- Teachers within each of the three target schools are all highly qualified, follow the same curriculum, and use the same grading scale.
- Schools A, B and C have different incentive programs in place for students in grades six through eight.
- There may be many mistakes in attendance recording and tracking that cannot be explained.
- The different personalities, styles, gender and techniques of the S.T.A.R. officers may have an impact on their effectiveness.

- Some students who meet the criteria for economically disadvantaged may not be identified because they have not applied for services due to parents' unwillingness to apply or difficulty completing the application.

#### Definitions of Terms

For the purpose of this study, key terms are defined as follows:

##### *Student Transition and Recovery Program (S.T.A.R.)*

A program designed to serve middle school students at risk of suspension, expulsion or being detained in a juvenile facility (Wilson, 2005).

##### *S.T.A.R. II (One-Day Prevention)*

A one-day stay in the S.T.A.R. program for students who have broken minor rules in school resulting in cumulative offenses. It is designed to deter future unwanted behaviors and to serve as a warning of what will occur if the student does not change his or her behavior (Wilson, 2005).

##### *S.T.A.R. III*

A 30-day component of the S.T.A.R. program in which students are referred to the program by parents and school officials for serious, continuous rule violations (Wilson, 2005).

##### *At-Risk Student*

At-risk students are students who are not experiencing success in school and are potential dropouts. They are usually low academic achievers from low socioeconomic status families with low self-esteem. At-risk students tend not to participate in school activities and have a minimal identification with the school. They have disciplinary and truancy problems that lead to academic problems.

They exhibit impulsive behaviors and their peer relationships are problematic. As they experience failure and fall behind their peers, school becomes a negative environment that reinforces their low self-esteem (Rozycki, 2004).

#### *Alternative Education*

Removes students who demonstrate chronic discipline behavior or criminal behavior from the classroom and places them in a supervised environment to continue their education (Reyes, 2001).

#### *Discipline Referral*

A student is referred to an administrator by school faculty or staff for improper conduct to be disciplined according to school policy (Geiger, 2001).

#### *Expulsion*

A student is not allowed to attend school for a period exceeding ten school days (Tobin & Sprague, 2000).

#### *In-School Suspension (ISS)*

The removal of students from the regular classroom setting. Students are isolated on school grounds. They are counted present and can continue to work on their classroom assignments (Morris & Skiba, 2001).

#### *Out-of-School Suspension (OSS)*

A student is not allowed to attend school for one to ten days. Their absence is unexcused. They are excluded from any after school activity during this time (Sautner, 2001).

### *Georgia Department of Education*

The Georgia Department of Education is the department of education for the state of Georgia. This entity developed the standardized state assessments for the school districts in Georgia. It defines the standards school districts must attain in order to stay accredited every year (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

### *Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) represents the annual academic performance targets in reading, language arts and mathematics that the State, school districts and schools must reach to be considered on track to meet the NCLB requirement of 100% proficiency by the school year 2013-2014. A school must meet criteria in three areas: test participation, academic performance and second indicator.

For a school that does not make AYP on these direct steps, a “second look” option is available. If the school does not make AYP using the “second look” option, then the “safe harbor” option (progress made from the previous year) is applied. If a school does not make any of these additional options, then it has failed AYP (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

### *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*

The *No Child Left Behind Act* was passed by the United States federal legislature in 2001. It has several stipulations, most importantly that every student must test proficient and advanced in communication art and mathematics on their state achievement test. State departments of education have been given until 2014 to meet this goal. Additionally, the law stipulates sanctions will be made against school districts not making progress towards the goals. Sanctions could be



providing teacher assistance, allowing students the right to transfer to succeeding school, or school closure (United States Department of Education, 2009).

### *Second Indicator*

If a school has failed AYP, the school must then make progress on a second indicator, in which attendance for grades three through eight may be used. The group of ALL students must always meet the criteria for the second indicator (Georgia Department of Education, 2008).

### *Middle School*

For this study, middle schools are defined to be schools with grades six, seven and eight in one building.

### *Independent T-Test*

An independent t-test is a “test using the t-statistic that establishes whether two means collected from independent samples differ significantly” (Field, 2005, p.734).

## Summary

The background for this study, the research problem and the purpose for the study were addressed and discussed in chapter one. Additionally, limitations and assumptions for the study were delineated and key terms were defined. The *No Child Left Behind Act* has raised accountability standards in schools, with the object of closing achievement gaps and increasing student performance overall (U.S. Department of Education, 2009), and makes federal funding contingent on schools ensuring that at-risk students are able to succeed academically (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Students whose performances are significantly below average and who are truant are often labeled “at

risk.” The National Center of Educational Statistics (2002) found that the dropout rate of at-risk students is twice as high as that of their achieving peers. As a result, school districts in Georgia are seeking programs to help at-risk middle school students improve attendance, academic performance and discipline.

The S.T.A.R. program is being utilized as a result of school leaders identifying the need of a program in middle school as an alternative to detention, suspension, expulsion and other less effective disciplinary tools for students with attendance, behavioral and academic problems. This program’s goal is to improve student attendance, behavior and achievement, in order to meet AYP criteria and lower the number of student dropouts. This study examined the impact of this program by measuring the success and using interviews (Kreuger & Casey, 2000) to determine the experiences and perceptions of S.T.A.R. instructors “first-hand” knowledge of the 30-day program.

A literature review of related research and findings about at-risk students and characteristics of effective at-risk programs are presented in Chapter Two. Chapter Three details the design of the mixed study. Research questions and the research design are delineated in Chapter Three. The results of the quantitative and qualitative data are presented in Chapter Four. Chapter Five includes a summary of the study and presents the findings of the study. Implications for practice in education and recommendations for further students are also addressed in Chapter Five. Appendices of the consent form used in school districts A, B and C (Appendix A), the S.T.A.R. instructor’s participant consent, (Appendix B) and the interview protocol (Appendix C) are available for review following the reference list.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Introduction

Truancy is a term used to describe any intentional unauthorized absence from compulsory schooling. Currently, children in the United States today lose over five million days of their education each year through truancy (Scheff, 2009). Students missing school is a serious concern that affects most school districts in the United States, and school personnel have long recognized that truancy is a major problem.

Many educators view truancy as something more far reaching than the immediate consequence missed schooling has on a student's education (Scheff, 2009). Truancy may indicate more deeply embedded problems with the student, the education they are receiving or both. Truancy is commonly associated with juvenile delinquency. In some schools, truancy may result in an ineligibility to graduate or to receive credit for class attended, until the time lost to truancy is made up through a combination of detention, fines, or summer school (Scheff, 2009).

A review of the literature suggests that middle school students are often absent from school for such a period of time that it is difficult if not impossible for them to catch up. This leads to further disengagement from school, from teachers, and ultimately can lead to serious anti-social behavior like juvenile delinquency (Gonzales & Richards, 2002). The traditional method for disciplining delinquent students is to exclude them. This "push out" method sends a message to struggling students that they are not wanted, ultimately making a student's situation worse (Muney, 2001). Sending a middle school student home for not coming to school provides little or no intervention to the

underlying causes of the absences and is counterproductive to the educational process (OJJDP, 2005).

School districts are tackling the truancy problem through alternative education programs. The focal point of this research project is an alternative program designed for middle school students aimed at helping at-risk students remain in school, improve behavior and increase academic performance. The S.T.A.R. program is used by middle schools as an alternative to detention, suspension, expulsion and other less effective disciplinary tools for students who are truant and/or misbehave.

The investigator of this study organized the literature review by identifying major topics and synthesizing the literature in these topics. First, the investigator reviewed truancy in American schools in order to describe the extent of the problem. Second, the negative effects of absenteeism are reviewed. Third, alternative education interventions are presented and reviewed. Fourth, reviews of successful alternative education programs are detailed. Fifth, the S.T.A.R. program and its role as an alternative education program are discussed.

### Truancy in American Schools

Truancy is not a new problem, but a historically present problem that has over the last decade received new found attention as the lack of school attendance and its link with student delinquency has become more clearly defined. In 1993, “more than two-thirds of all schools absences nationwide were non-illness related” with absence rates reaching thirty percent each day in some communities (Rohman, 1993). In 2008, more than 55,364 students were absent more than 15 days from schools in Georgia alone (Georgia Department of Education, 2009). These statistics have monumental social

ramifications because truancy is often one of the first and best predictors of academic failure, suspension, expulsion, delinquency and later adult crime (Heilbrunn & Seeley, 2003).

School attendance laws were first adopted by Massachusetts in 1852 as a way to curb child labor (Moskowitz, 2004). By 1900 thirty-two of the states had compulsory attendance laws, and by 1918 every state had some form of school attendance law (Muney, 2001). However, these laws were ineffective in that they were seldom enforced and relied on suspension as a consequence, rather than addressing the underlying issues of truancy and developing ways to keep students in school.

In 2002, Congress passed the *No Child Left Behind Act*. This accountability measure requires schools to meet predetermined levels of achievement in math as well as in reading/language arts. Schools are also required to meet predetermined levels for test participation and attendance. For the purpose of making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), a school may only have 15% or less of its students missing more than 15 days. Having more than this percentage can cause a school to be designated as “Did Not Make AYP.”

Not only does attendance affect a school’s AYP status, absenteeism also disrupts the school environment and test scores suffer due to students missing instruction. A high rate of absenteeism often leads to higher dropout rates and lower graduation rates (Woelfel, 2003).

Research indicates that truant youths are more likely to demonstrate poor academic achievement (Henry & Huizinga, 2007). Truant students are also more likely to become discipline problems, to drop out of school, to demonstrate poor employment

habits in adulthood and are prone to delinquency, unstable relationships and poverty (Henry & Huizinga, 2007).

In the state of Georgia, any child between the ages of six and sixteen who during the school calendar year has more than five days of unexcused absences from school, is considered truant. The legal penalties and consequences for truancy include referral of parents, guardians or custodians to State Court and referral of juveniles to Juvenile Court for prosecution. If convicted, punishment consists of a fine of no less than \$25.00 and not greater than \$100.00, imprisonment not to exceed 30 days, community service or any combination of such penalties per absence. Each day's absence from school is a violation of this provision and constitutes a separate offense. If convicted, a juvenile may face several penalties under the Juvenile Code of the State of Georgia (Georgia Department of Education, 2010).

Alternative programs designed to help at-risk students remain in school and graduate from high school are being implemented in school districts across the United States (Woelfel, 2003). The number of alternative schools has increased significantly over the past ten years (Menendez, 2007). Programs addressing the needs of at-risk students have multiplied, and many schools are including the achievement of at-risk youth in their school goals and mission (Owing & Kaplan, 2001). Just as individual students can be at risk for school failure, so can schools be at risk when they do not provide an environment for learning (Vaughn, Bos & Schumm, 2007); this means schools must provide an environment for learning for all students.

### Negative Effects of Absenteeism and Truancy

Whether referred to as absenteeism, truancy or non-attendance, all of the aforementioned are concerned with whether or not students are appropriately in school. Poor student attendance and not being present in class have been linked to lack of school success, including low academic achievement and dropping out of school (Suh et al., 2007). A lack of education results in limited career options, increased rates of unemployment and reduced income for the individual student (U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). Past studies found that truancy might be correlated with increased problems in adult life including the need for psychiatric help, elevated crime rates and a higher rate of early mortality (Baker, Sigmon & Nugent, 2007).

When students are absent from school there are a broad range of short term educational consequences they face. First and foremost, students miss assignments. By missing assignments, they are more likely to underachieve or perform poorly in school. Students sometime fail to do their homework even when they do attend school because their absences prohibit them from learning the lessons (Reid, 2006). Students face serious academic difficulty and fall behind in their schoolwork (DeSocio et al., 2007). DeSocio et al. found that within a group of students with 15 or more days of unexcused absences, “65% of students were failing six or more of their eight class periods,” and their grade point averages ranged from 0.0 to 2.29, creating a mean of a .30 grade point average. Absenteeism is shown to be the highest predictor of course failure (American Bar Association, 2006).

Truancy also has a number of unfortunate consequences and it is not surprising truancy affects academic achievement. A National Center for School Engagement literature review (Heilbrunn, 2007) found truants have lower grades, need to repeat grades, drop out of school, are expelled from school, or fail to graduate from high school at higher rates than do students with fewer absences. The review reports there is evidence that at least some schools and districts expel or otherwise “push out” students who are both truant and low achieving. The review also points out some researchers claim that not enforcing truancy laws can be a negative form of classroom management, because students who are consistently truant sometimes have behavioral issues that disrupt classrooms, making it difficult for teachers to teach and other students to learn as well as causing administrators to spend time on disciplinary issues.

A study by the Philadelphia Education Fund (2006) found sixth graders who failed math or English/reading, or attended school less than 80% of the time, or received an unsatisfactory behavior grade in a course had only a 10% to 20% chance of graduating on time. Eleven and twelve-year-olds who miss one, two, or more months of school or who receive poor behavior ratings from their teachers clearly signal lack of engagement and participation in school. Absent successful intervention, these behaviors do not typically self-correct over time and lead to course failure, non-promotion and ultimately, dropping out (Balfanz, 2009).

Students, whether in middle school or high school, are at a greater risk of dropping out of high school if attendance problems occur. The truant student’s achievement suffers because of lack of regular school attendance. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2009), “Students with the highest truancy rates have the lowest



academic achievement rates.” Students who have problems in middle school with attendance will likely have problems in high school. Seventy-five percent of these same students will fail to graduate from high school (Edward & Malcolm, 2002).

What is classified as truancy depends essentially on the school’s attitude toward truant students or their problems. Relationships with teachers, seen as lacking respect, play a large part in truancy rates among students. Often the inability to get along with teachers and/or other students results in disciplinary problems, which may lead to suspension or expulsion (Scheff, 2009). This time away from school either voluntarily or at the school’s demand may have adverse affects on the student’s academic performance, resulting in students not being able to keep up with schoolwork, getting poor grades, or even failing.

Researchers have found absenteeism, poor academic performance and behavioral problems in middle school as potential risk factors for truancy. According to Lehr, Johnson, Bremer, Cosio and Thompson (2004), students at risk for truancy can be identified at an early age. Lehr et al. found that it is more effective to work with middle school students than high school students because problems tend to be more complex and intense as children get older. The same researchers also suggests the younger a child is when he or she develops problems and the longer the problems last, the harder it will be to intervene. Early truancy interventions that focus on the individual, school factors, family factors and community factors are found to be the most effective (Teasley, 2004). Howerton (2007) concluded researchers may want to focus on early intervention programs that are effective in reducing truancy so more punitive initiatives are not needed in high schools.

## Academic Achievement

Academic achievement has always been a top priority among school districts; however, due to federally mandated guidelines such as the *No Child Left Behind Act*, academic achievement has become the most important concern in districts today. As school districts are seeking ways to improve student achievement, educators are concerned with factors that have a negative impact on student achievement. Roby (2004) found student absenteeism has a negative impact on student achievement.

Truancy has many negative consequences for students. Being absent from school negatively affects a student's level of academic achievement. Obviously, if a student does not attend school, the student will not learn the academic material. Research supports this concept. Researchers found several cases in which high rates of absenteeism negatively affected a student's performance regarding the student's classroom grades, grade point average and standardized achievement test scores. One report found that a student's absence is negatively correlated to a student standardized test score, and warns policy makers that habitually absent students need special attention (Dunn, Kadane & Garrow, 2003).

Mascia (2009) found that when a school district has a high number of chronic absentees, they will usually have a lower district-wide GPA than a school with fewer absences. This study found that missing ten percent of school days yearly equals nearly a month's worth of education and thus absent students will miss many skills. Additionally, when a student is absent, a teacher must take valuable time away from helping other students to catch that student up, which negatively impacts the learning of the entire class (Mascia, 2009).

Chang and Romero (2008) conducted a study and determined that students have to be present and engaged in order to learn. The researchers found that thousands of younger students are academically at-risk because of extended absences when they first embark upon their school careers. They also determined that monitoring chronic early absences and using it as a trigger for intervention, could assist schools with ensuring children are in school and have an equal opportunity to reach their potential.

Other researchers have studied truancy and achievement. Epstein and Sheldon (2002) indicated that absent students have fewer opportunities to learn the materials that will help them succeed in school. Another study found students with the highest rates of truancy have the lowest academic achievement rates (Baker et al., 2001). The National Center for School Engagement (2006) indicated that truancy is correlated with poor performance on standardized tests. The American Federation of Teachers (2007) also found that students who do not attend school are more likely to score poorly on achievement tests. These studies support the idea that students will exhibit higher achievement if they attend school regularly.

In other research, more specific results were found. An analysis of student math and reading scores on the Minnesota Basic Standards Test by Myers (2000) indicated a one percent increase in attendance affected up to a seven percent increase in math scores among high achieving Latino students. Myers also reported that students in the upper quintile were affected more by an increase in attendance. Murray (2002) concluded from a study in the Minneapolis Public School system that students who were in class 95% of the time were twice as likely to pass state performance assessments as students with attendance rates at 85% or below.

The relationship between educational attainment and nearly every facet of adult productivity is strong and well documented (Brown, Moore & Bzostek, 2003). Literature suggests students must be held accountable and attend regularly in order to attain high academic achievement. Research indicates that truancy negatively impacts achievement whether measured by classroom grades, grade point averages or standardized achievement test scores.

#### Truancy and Impact on Discipline

Many students feel negatively about school and have discipline problems. Truancy is a risk factor for other problems and discipline is not an exception. Truancy has been clearly defined as one of the early warning signs of students aimed for potential delinquent activity, or educational failure via suspension, expulsion or dropping out of school (Huizinga, Loeber, Thornberry & Cothorn, 2000). A truant student's lack of commitment to school has been established by one study as a risk factor for substance abuse, delinquency, teen pregnancy and school dropout (Huizinga et al., 2000).

In order to combat these risk factors, the police opened a truancy center in North Miami Beach and began picking up school-aged youth on the street during school hours. As a result crime diminished substantially in targeted neighborhoods; for example, vehicle burglaries decreased by 22%, and residential burglaries and criminal mischief both decreased by 19% (Berger & Wind, 2000). A combined analysis of survey data from 28 communities collected between 1980 and 2000 revealed that truancy is a particularly good indicator of middle school drug abuse. Truant eighth graders were 4.5 times more likely than regular school attendees were to smoke marijuana (Halfers et al., 2002).

Truancy is a specific type of school problem that clearly relates to delinquency. Researchers conducting an Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) study entitled “Causes and Correlates of Juvenile Delinquency” identified three pathways to boys’ problem behavior and delinquency. Truancy is an early indicator in what they called the “authority avoidance pathway” (OJJDP, 2004). Students who reported skipping occasional classes are four times as likely to report having committed a serious assault, almost five times as likely to report having committed a serious property crime and twice as likely to be arrested. Chronic truants are 12 times as likely to report having committed a serious assault, 21 times as likely to report having committed serious property crimes and almost seven times as likely to have been arrested as students that do not skip school (OJJDP, 2004).

Truant youth significantly contribute to the number of daytime crimes committed. Data from the National Incidence Reporting System clearly indicated that crimes committed by school age children in Denver, Colorado, during school hours exceeded those committed after school (MacGillivray & Mann-Erickson, 2006). Once truancy has been addressed, delinquency and crime rates decline. A drop in crime rates also occurred when Miami, Florida, police conducted sweeps for truants (Berger & Wind, 2000).

Students missing school also participate in numerous risky behaviors. Data from an Adolescent Health Survey indicates school problems, including truancy, are related to weapon possession and suicidal thoughts and attempts (Blum, Beuhring & Rinehart, 2000). Twenty-five Colorado truant students participated in an anonymous

survey, and 12 reported having carried a gun or other weapon to school at least once (Heilbrunn, 2004). Although data is limited on the relationship between adult crime and truancy, chronic truancy clearly is an indication of school dropout and dropouts are largely over-represented in prisons (Harlow, 2003).

Exclusionary discipline practices, such as suspension, perpetuate a failure cycle, severely limiting a student's ability to achieve academically (Sherbo-Huggins, 2007). Negative outcomes such as incarceration, unemployment, dependence on public assistance, drug and alcohol abuse and lower rates of civic participation are all associated with low levels of educational attainment. Repeated suspensions make it difficult for a student to keep up with the curriculum, complete assignments and advance from one grade to the next (Sherbo-Huggins, 2007).

When children are not in school, it quickly becomes a police problem (Berger & Wind, 2000). Edith (2005) and Christle, Jolivette and Nelson (2005) as well as other researchers, found that there is a correlation between school failure and increased delinquency and between school attendance and decreased recidivism. Given this, attempts to intervene at the school level hold potential for having an effect on the juvenile crime problem (Clement, 2008).

There is little research indicating that typical discipline measures are effective. Additional alternative programs are needed in order to meet the needs of truant students (Geiger, 2000). There are many alternatives to programs that are currently in place, however, problems with discipline must be addressed with discipline strategies that meet the learning and behavioral needs of all students (Sautner, 2001).

### Alternative Education Interventions

Programs aimed at intervening and assisting students with attendance, discipline and academic issues and increasing opportunities for at-risk students are problems faced by many schools, districts and states. While stakeholders must determine interventions that are most effective for their schools, a number of strategies have been researched that have proven to have an impact on improving student attendance thus curtailing discipline issues and increasing academic performance.

The School Tardiness and Attendance Review Team (START) program is an example of a successful truancy reduction program, which began in Cambridge, Massachusetts in the 2002-2003 school year. The program was developed to examine and address the issues of truancy. Ten middle schools launched the program in the Boston, Massachusetts area. Once a student is identified, the assigned school administrator contacts the parent or guardian with a phone call or e-mail message. Through the first screening, the team members made up of administrators, staff members, parents and students determine the level of involvement needed from the START team. The team reviews the case for 30 days. If attendance has not improved, the team makes a referral to the Department of Social Services or files a petition in court (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2009).

In the 2003-2003 school year, data showed that students who were exposed to the START intervention had about a 50% decrease in the number of days absent per month and about a 40% decrease in the number of times they were tardy each month. Research also indicates that the START program had an impact on attendance in

the participating schools, with a decrease of approximately 40% in the number of children who were chronically absent (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2009).

Supporting at-risk and low-income youth, the Alum Rock Counseling Center's Truancy Reduction Services (2009) focuses on removing or mitigating barriers to attending school. The goal of this culturally sensitive program is to change poor school attendance by creating a positive learning environment. Students who are deemed truant are referred for a minimum of 90 days case management. Case managers not only track school attendance and achievement, they also advocate for the student. Seventy-five percent of all students participating in this truancy reduction program reported an increased commitment to staying in school (Alum Rock Counseling Center, 2009).

The Ninth-Grade Asset Builders Program in St. Louis Park, Minnesota, is designed to decrease alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, reduce academic failure, improve attendance rates and decrease discipline problems among ninth-grade students (Sharma & Griffin, 2003). The program utilizes a series of interventions including student leadership training, reducing class size, improving the consistency in enforcement of school rules and improving staff coordination. A four-year evaluation study indicated a trend toward improved overall school attendance. Overall, the students in the Ninth-Grade Intervention program demonstrated fewer high-risk behaviors and improved academic performance. However, the improvement of school attendance fluctuated over the four years examined, ranging from 26% absenteeism in the baseline year to 21% absenteeism in year two of the program (Sharma & Griffin, 2003).



Munoz (2001) and Wilhelms and Munoz (2001) studied the Truancy Court Diversion Project in Jefferson County, Kentucky, which provided parenting classes, Saturday school, behavior contracts, drug screening, tutoring, psychological management, anger management, violence abatement classes and referrals to community programs to address underlying issues contributing to truancy. Students were selected to participate after 15 to 25 absences. The majority were elementary students. The findings revealed that, at least short term; the intervention has moderate impact on reducing truancy. Attendance improved with a 24% decrease in days absent after one month, compared to the same month the previous year.

Broward County, Florida, has established a program called the Broward County Intervention Program, that consists of parents, social workers and school representatives. The program's goals are to reduce juvenile crime and get students to attend school on a regular basis. Parents are informed of the consequences of truancy and are often referred to school or community services. If the attendance problems continue, charges may be brought against the parents. Of the schools participating in the program, 78% of the students showed improvement in student daily attendance while only 66% of all other schools that did not participate in the program showed attendance improvements. However, there have only been 160 court filings despite the thousands of cases seen by the truancy board of the past three years (Mogulescu & Segal, 2003).

The Hennepin County Targeted Early Intervention (TEI) program for delinquents under age 10 (Gerrard & Owen, 2003) uses a team of county staff along with a staff member from a community organization to target the needs of high-risk students and their families. The program aims to reduce delinquent behavior and increase school

success. The team works with each participating child to build the child's strengths through involvement with positive activities and experiences. This program establishes a method of service delivery combined with a partnership between government and community-based agencies (Gerrard & Owen, 2003). On average, the youth attended school 89% of enrolled days compared to 78% of enrolled days for comparison youth. Although school attendance is improved, approximately 69% of the youth continue to be involved with the courts related to their delinquent behavior.

In Oklahoma, district attorneys can file charges against parents or guardians of truant students (Scott & Fridli, 2002). The county established a uniform reporting system for all Tulsa districts so the district attorney could enforce attendance laws. In addition, the county offers supportive training in parental skills and operates a news media campaign that promotes the benefits of school attendance and informs parents about the laws and possible penalties. The county also has added school staff to telephone parents and employed police officers to visit homes of students with attendance problems. The county reports that 800 or more student attendance days are on the school rolls each year, generating \$3,000 each in reimbursement, which is based on average daily attendance. Scott and Friedli (2002) reported a reduction in truancy, but did not provide specific data.

Alternative middle school programs are being developed and implemented as research indicates that the earlier factors of at-risk students are addressed, the more likely they are to be successful (Vaughn et al., 2007). The escalating number of at-risk students is placing pressure on the education system, and if not appropriately addressed, many long-term consequences may occur. Left unaddressed, truancy during the preteen

and teenage years can have negative effects on the student, school and society (Baker et al., 2001). Therefore, it is important to identify promising alternative programs to intervene with chronic truants, address the root of truancy and stop youth's progression from truancy into more serious behaviors and academic failure (Baker et al., 2001).

Truancy and discipline alternative programs are based on theoretical or ideological assumptions about "what works," in the absence of research. Programs have been found to be ineffective, and critics of delinquency prevention popularized the cynical view that "nothing works." Such a pessimistic view among educational leaders is no longer tenable. Juvenile truancy and violence can be prevented and juvenile offenders can be rehabilitated (Cornell, 2006). Therefore, one goal of this research is to bring attention to the existence of the S.T.A.R. program, which can be used as a sound and cost-effective prevention program that improves attendance and academic performance and reduces the number of discipline referrals.

#### Out of School Suspension (OSS) as an Alternative for Truancy and Discipline

Out of school suspension (OSS) is one of the most frequently used alternatives for rule violations in schools today (Sautner, 2001). The beginnings of OSS seem to be clouded in mystery, as there is not a definitive establishment of this consequence cited in literature (Blankenship & Bender, 2007). OSS is defined in the literature as a consequence for misbehaving in which the student is excluded from school for a period of time. The student is denied access to their typical educational environment for a set period of time ranging from as little as a day to as long as a permanent expulsion (Blankenship & Bender, 2007).

Little research has been done regarding the actual effectiveness of OSS (Skiba, 2002). In fact, while OSS is used quite frequently as a disciplinary alternative, not a great deal is known about its effects on student behavior, attitude and eventual outcome (Blankenship & Bender, 2007). The research that has been done seems to point to less than desirable outcomes such as further suspension and an increased dropout rate (Skiba, 2002). Furthermore, some research suggests that suspension may be assigned arbitrarily and at a disproportionate rate for many African American students (Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Townsend, 2002). The research on efficacy of OSS suggests that it may not be effective (Atkins, McKay, Frazier & Jakobsons, 2002; Bounds, 2000; Ruck & Wortley, 2002). Clearly, serious questions need to be addressed regarding this frequently used intervention (Blankenship & Bender, 2007).

Presumably, interventions for inappropriate behavior should lead to a reduction in behaviors that lead to the intervention, and researchers have investigated the effects of OSS in this regard (Atkins et al., 2002). For example, one study of suspension at a large urban high school analyzed data from a random sample of 94 students who had been suspended (Blankenship & Bender, 2007). The researchers looked at discipline records of these students by utilizing the school wide data recording program. They found that the most common behaviors resulting in school suspension were cutting class and tardiness. Of course, these particular behaviors are typically considered school avoidance behaviors and this raises certain questions about the applicability of OSS (Blankenship & Bender, 2007). Specifically, it would seem that OSS, which results in avoidance of school, would be the wrong type of consequence for school avoidance behaviors.

Sanders (2001) promoted an alternative education model that provides Services that meet the needs of all students, including those with attendance, academic and behavioral problems. The Student Advisory Center is one such program. This program provides alternatives to OSS and may be isolated from the school base. The Student Advisory Center concentrates on supporting students and illustrating how to make positive behavioral changes. The objective is for students to experience social and academic success in the classroom. According to Sanders (2001), this success promotes high self-esteem and the students are less susceptible to inappropriate behaviors. On the other hand, students with low self-esteem have a propensity to engage in inappropriate behaviors and will be suspended more often.

#### Military-Style Discipline

One alternative program that has gained popularity in recent years is a method that utilizes military-style discipline for deterrence and consequences. The first program of this orientation started in Georgia in 1983 and was for adults only. Created as an alternative for low-level criminals, it used a military regiment to promote self-discipline and confidence. Two years later, its first counterpart for juveniles was founded in Louisiana (Hamilton, 2010).

There are a vast range of methods used in military discipline programs to deter negative behaviors, which include traditional military schools, boot camps for delinquents, military institutes for troubled school students and specialized school programs. The focus of these programs is to show adolescents that conforming to authority and direction will enable them to be successful (Military School Alternatives, 2009).

The concept of military-style discipline has its obstacles. Critics have cited humiliation of children, child abuse and even deaths as reasons to abolish the programs. On the other hand, many citizens believe the influence of helping students mature in boot camps is an excellent resource for dissuading student misconduct in schools and communities (Coppolo & Nelson, 2005). Addressing and identifying workable alternatives to discipline is an urgent challenge facing leadership at every level and for a variety of reasons (Shaw, 2008).

#### Boot Camps as an Alternative to Truancy and Discipline

In 1983, Georgia implemented the use of boot camps for first-time juvenile offenders. The majority of research conducted on juvenile boot campus was done prior to the early nineties (Braune, 2001). The basic component of juvenile boot camp programs is to replicate the tone and appearance of military basic training (Lewis, 2000).

Boot camp programs have proven to be very effective (National Center for Mental Health & Juvenile Justice, n.d.). Boot camps have grown in popularity mostly due to the belief they may reduce recidivism and reclaim juvenile delinquents from a life of criminality (Parent, 2003). Research indicates that the recidivism rate for juvenile offenders who have attended a “teen boot camp” is over 90% (National Center for Mental Health & Juvenile Justice, n.d.). Teen boot camp is not an environment intended to modify behavior through self-understanding. It is an environment that seeks to scare teens straight, a method that has proven to have only short-term results (National Center for Mental Health & Juvenile Justice, n.d.).

The juvenile justice system is faced with overcrowding. The number of juvenile delinquents in custody in the United States is about 42,000 with 742 in Georgia (Juvenile Offenders & Troubled Teens, 2010), and modern day boot camps have been created to address overcrowded detention centers and the growing number of crimes committed by youth (Anderson, 2000). There is great appeal behind the juvenile boot camp approach to discipline due to the number of adults in the United States who have experienced success through military basic training (Tyler, Darville & Stalnaker, 2001).

However, Tyler et al. (2001) determined that juvenile boot camps are likely to be ineffective in terms of both costs and recidivism unless they incorporate a program to give a delinquent the skills, the motivation and the resources to avoid the environment and lifestyle that contributed to the delinquency in the first place. Therefore, no matter what an adolescent learns in juvenile boot camp programs, he/she must have support for a new lifestyle after leaving the boot camp in order to avoid recidivism (Tyler et al., 2001).

#### History of Student Transition and Recovery (S.T.A.R.) Program

In September 1993, the S.T.A.R. program originated in Montgomery County, Texas. The S.T.A.R. program was designed to serve students ages nine to fifteen who have committed offenses that would result in incarceration (Stancil, 2003). The program's goal was to address the needs of students while also providing them with an education. S.T.A.R. strives to teach teamwork, discipline, life skills, academic achievement, drug education and intervention. The program endeavors to achieve this while at the same time attempting to inspire a sense of pride and self-discipline in students (Stancil, 2003).

The S.T.A.R. program was launched as a result of administrators seeking alternative methods of disciplining students. The superintendent of Conroe Independent School District agreed to assist with finding a resolution to decreasing the amount of discipline offenses taking place on Conroe School District's campuses (Stancil, 2003). The Honorable Olen Underwood of the 284<sup>th</sup> State District Court worked with the superintendent and organized a council of professionals. The council included Dr. Mel Brown, Executive Director, Montgomery County Supervision and Corrections; Ron Leach, Director, Montgomery County Juvenile Services; Chris Katner, Principal, Travis Junior High School; and Charlie Stancil, Senior Chief United States Navy (Stancil, 2003). These professionals are the founders of the S.T.A.R. program (Dopkins, 2000).

Military-style programs comparable to S.T.A.R. have been in existence in the United States since 1983. Louisiana was the first state to introduce military-style programs for delinquent youth. Since the military-style program's inception, there has been a great deal of evidence that suggest the public supports this type program (Siegel & Welsh, 2008). This evidence suggests that the public's opinion is that the use of aggressive discipline programs is the best option to gain control of discipline in schools and communities. For this reason, politicians have been led to lend support for military-style discipline programs such as S.T.A.R. (Siegel & Welsh, 2008).

Two main concerns of stakeholders are truancy and school safety. Time and again, research indicates that educational professions and private citizens complain that many schools are disorderly and undisciplined places (Martin & MacNeil, 2007). Cited discipline problems range from truancy to crime in schools (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2002). Furthermore, the belief that schools must be safe and secure places



with a focus on learning is an essential priority for all educational leaders (Edwards, 2004). The S.T.A.R. programs work to alleviate truancy and discipline problems and increase academic performance; thus, allowing all students to feel safe in their regular school environment (Stancil, 2003).

#### Student Transition and Recovery (S.T.A.R.) Program

The S.T.A.R. program has continued to grow and expand since its inception in 1993. The program has expanded and now includes over 12 programs in over 20 counties in Texas as well as counties in North Carolina, New York, Alabama and Georgia (Stancil, 2003). The program's growth is attributed to three concerns that stakeholders have: attendance, student achievement and discipline (Stancil, 2003).

The S.T.A.R. program operates primarily in middle schools (Morales, 2002). The program is designed to address the needs of students ages nine to fifteen years of age, and the middle school is where students of this age are generally housed. S.T.A.R. does not work well with primary and elementary school students due to the intense style of training. At the ages of nine through fifteen, it is easier to control and direct disruptive children.

The program consists of three phases based on a student's past history or the severity of the discipline offense. The first phase of the program that may be implemented in a school district is S.T.A.R. I. This is a six-month program for juveniles remanded by the courts or have repeated discipline offenses (Stancil, 2003). Today, however, these students actually make up a small percentage of students enrolled in the S.T.A.R. program (Stancil, 2003).

The second phase of the program is S.T.A.R. II. It is a one-day program for students referred by parents or administrators. S.T.A.R. II was created to show students where they are headed if their behavior does not improve (Dopkins, 2000). This phase of the program was added after having several requests from administrators, teachers and parents seeking S.T.A.R.'s assistance with children who were obviously headed for more serious discipline consequences. This part of the program continues to grow as school districts and parents continue to work with S.T.A.R. to improve student attendance and behavior (Dopkins, 2000).

The third phase of the program is S.T.A.R. III. This is a 30-day program to which administrators may refer truants or students with repeated discipline offenses. Students in S.T.A.R. III are often referred for cumulative truancy or disciplinary issues. This phase of the program is designed to discourage students from taking the wrong path (Stancil, 2003).

Frequently, students with truancy and/or discipline problems are removed from the classroom. Whether they are placed in ISS or Alternative School or removed from school through OSS, they are not able to receive a quality education. According to Stancil (2003), the goal of all three phases of the S.T.A.R. program is to keep students in the classroom while encouraging correct behavior.

Each site requires a minimum of two S.T.A.R. drill officers and a maximum of eight drill officers. All drill officers are required to have prior military training (Stancil, 2003). Students are placed in the program by the school, parent, or juvenile justice system. However, the fundamentals of the program are the same for all

students regardless how they are placed and to which phase they are assigned (Dopkins, 2000).

At its peak, S.T.A.R. grew to serve 32 for-profit programs in four states, serving 7,225 youths (Alexander, 2003). The program claims that hundreds of its youngsters have improved their grades, discipline and attendance, and have been diverted from the juvenile justice system (Alexander, 2003). Stancil (2003) proclaims that the program is a shock regimen for disruptive and truant youth that begins with military-style drills at dawn.

#### Enrollment in the S.T.A.R. Program

All students enrolled in the S.T.A.R. program must be between the ages of nine and fifteen (Stancil, 2003). Various students are court-ordered; however, students that are not court-ordered must be enrolled by a parent or legal guardian. S.T.A.R. is often proposed in lieu of suspension or expulsion. The students' parents or administrators have determined that these youth will benefit from a regimented discipline program with an educational approach (Trulson & Triplett, 1999).

According to Stancil (2003), S.T.A.R. works on discipline, teamwork, academic achievement, drug education, life skills and intervention. The S.T.A.R. officers work to instill a sense of pride and self-discipline in the students enrolled in the program.

Students enrolled in the thirty-day S.T.A.R. III program are required to have a physical examination before beginning the regiment (Stancil, 2003). Students that have a history of mental illness, any severe physical ailments, or complications, which may prevent them from completing the physical and emotional regimen of the S.T.A.R. program, are denied entry into the S.T.A.R. program (Alexander, 2003).

Thirty-day S.T.A.R. program participants are required to wear military-style attire and follow a strict behavior code (Stancil, 2003). Military attire includes a black shirt, sweatshirt and sweatpants that boast the S.T.A.R. logo. Military haircuts are a requirement for males and females are not allowed to wear makeup. Female students' hair must be kept up off their shoulders and out of their faces (Trulson & Triplett, 1999).

Students enrolled in the thirty-day program may be required to complete additional days. Students that cause any disruption at school, get in trouble at home, or commit any criminal offense are given extended time in the program (Stancil, 2003). Some students may be required to start from the beginning if they commit an offense between their initial start date and exit date (Alexander, 2003).

#### Daily Routine for S.T.A.R. III (30-Day Program)

All students in the S.T.A.R. program follow a strict schedule and regimen. Parents transport their child to the S.T.A.R. office at 5:30 a.m. Students arrive dressed in their black S.T.A.R. uniforms and are greeted by the S.T.A.R. officers. The students begin the day by participating in military drill and exercise. S.T.A.R. students who have no problems throughout their morning routines are allowed to shower, eat breakfast and report to their regular classroom (Wilson, 2005).

From 8:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m., S.T.A.R. students attend their regular classes. If there is an infraction of any classroom or school rule, the S.T.A.R. officer is called and an on-the-spot correction is made. Depending on the infraction, it could be anything from a "chewing out" to a three-mile run, 200 jumping jacks or an educational or motivational training log. Once the infraction has been corrected, the student returns to their class. At

lunchtime, there is a S.T.A.R. officer to eat with the students. They must earn the privilege of talking to their friends.

Students in this phase of the program return to the S.T.A.R. classroom for assistance with assignments at the end of the school day. A certified teacher assists the S.T.A.R. officer as a tutor. Students must complete all work and present it to the S.T.A.R. officer before reporting to class the next school day (Stancil, 2003). A counselor is provided by the school, and students are afforded the opportunity to meet on an as needed basis. According to Stancil (2003), parents are required to collect their child at 5:30 p.m. All S.T.A.R. students have a 7:00 p.m. curfew and are required to be in bed no later than 10:00 p.m. The same routine continues for 30 days. If S.T.A.R. students grades are passing, and there are no attendance or discipline infractions, students phase out of the program. They do not report at 5:30 a.m., and students are allowed to wear their personal clothing and make-up.

One of the S.T.A.R. officers is on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and may be called by the parent of a disobedient child. S.T.A.R. officers make home visits. At the request of an administrator, teacher, parent, juvenile court worker or community member an instructor will respond (Stancil, 2003).

Another important element of the S.T.A.R. program is community service. Students enrolled in S.T.A.R. I and S.T.A.R. III participate in community service activities on weekends and holidays. The students are supervised by a S.T.A.R. officer and typically work to clean up the school campus, campus stadium, or other school area (Wilson, 2005).

The S.T.A.R. officers dress in uniform and are present on school campuses throughout the school day. The officers are available to assist administrators and teachers with students enrolled in the program. Officers provide support with disciplinary management in hallways, classrooms and lunchrooms (Stancil, 2003).

All students enrolled in the S.T.A.R. program are required to maintain a daily progress report. Teachers and parents are asked to complete the form on a daily basis and have the option of making notations regarding behavior and assignments. S.T.A.R. officers may be called at any time throughout the school day by an administrator or classroom teacher to provide assistance with a S.T.A.R. student. The officer has the option of taking the student for a courtesy intervention at any given time. The main objective is to reduce any type behavior that results in disruption in the school and classroom (Stancil, 2003).

Students participating in the 30-day program may be required to complete more than 30 days. Participants who commit a criminal offense, cause a disruption at school or home, or fail to attend school without a doctor's excuse may be required to complete more time in the program (Stancil, 2003). Students may be required to start their 30 days over if they commit an offense between their intake day and phase out day. Stancil (2003) indicated once a student is enrolled in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program, he or she is always considered a S.T.A.R. student. Failure is not an option once you are a S.T.A.R. student.

### S.T.A.R. Program Personnel

Stancil (2003) recommends that S.T.A.R. officers be retired military personnel. The officer should be a military retiree who ranked E-7, 8, or 9 in a twenty year military career. Stancil (2003) suggests that in the military, only the top three percent of the force ever achieve these ranks, and S.T.A.R. strives to surround itself with the best. The program will not be as successful if the personnel do not meet these guidelines (Alexander, 2003).

It is recommended that S.T.A.R. officers not be any of the following: probation officer, educator, jailer or law enforcement personnel (Stancil, 2003). According to Stancil (2003), it is difficult for these workers to separate their present employment from that of a drill instructor. Alexander (2003) suggests that school districts that hire personnel who do not meet the criteria may not obtain the results of districts who hire qualified staff. Stancil (2003) indicates that it is imperative that S.T.A.R. personnel not have Special Forces training. Special Forces go through extensive training and often they feel that S.T.A.R. recruits are able to complete the same type training (Stancil, 2003).

S.T.A.R. officers must be very knowledgeable in the areas of regimented drill and exercise that are appropriate for juvenile participants. All officers must be certified in CPR and First Aid. A four-year degree is preferred but not a requirement. Officers must keep thorough and accurate logs and reports and submit them to the S.T.A.R. coordinator (Stancil, 2003). Officers must have the capacity to work independently when the need arises. However, officers must function as a team of two or

three officers (Alexander, 2003). S.T.A.R. coordinators must be capable of working well with students, parents, educators and juvenile justice personnel (Stancil, 2003).

#### Negative Impact of the S.T.A.R. Program

The S.T.A.R. program has received criticism. Skeptics believe that juvenile boot camp programs that incorporate the efforts of the school and the juvenile justice system should not be school based (Richissin, 2000). Richissin asserts that programs such as S.T.A.R. do not reduce recidivism rates. Trulson, Triplett and Snell (2001) compared the recidivism rate of S.T.A.R. students to other students in Texas. They found that students enrolled in the S.T.A.R. program did no better after phasing out of the program than students who participated in other alternative programs.

Richissin (2000) considers boot camp programs like S.T.A.R. as not effective. However, politicians suggest that programs such as S.T.A.R. are solutions to juvenile delinquency; there is no real evidence that these programs have an impact. The general impression of a military school based boot camp program emphasizes strict and tough discipline. According to Mundell (2004) the rigidity of a participant's time in military style programs is more apt to excite the middle-class television audience than to intimidate actual underclass juveniles. Many states have banned military style programs. From Maryland to Georgia, reports of repeated abuses by personnel have lead many states to shut down or revamp their programs (Garcia, 2006).

#### Role of School District in S.T.A.R. Program

The school district must play a major role in the S.T.A.R. program for it to be successful (Stancil, 2003). It is the school districts responsibility to provide financing and other areas of support for the program (Dopkins, 2000). A classroom must be



available, equipped and ready for S.T.A.R. instructors before, during and after school. A facility for students to shower after physical training in the mornings must be provided. In addition, a certified teacher or paid employee must be provided for after school tutoring in study hall. Every school district must be prepared to make these provisions in order for the program to be successful (Stancil, 2003).

The school administrator is responsible for obtaining parental releases for the one day and thirty-day programs. The principal or their designee conducts parent meetings to initiate enrollment in the program (Stancil, 2003). Administrators and teachers are responsible for keeping the S.T.A.R. officers abreast of the students' daily progress in the classroom and other areas. Teachers complete daily reports that discuss students' attendance, academics and behaviors in classrooms and other areas of the school (Stancil, 2003).

#### Role of Legal and Civic Organizations in S.T.A.R. Program

The juvenile justice system plays a crucial role in the S.T.A.R. program. Districts with more than one juvenile judge should assign a specific judge as the S.T.A.R. judge for the sake of consistency (Stancil, 2003). According to Stancil (2003), it is the judge's responsibility to assign orders for both parents and students. The juvenile judge must be willing to follow through with necessary action when a student or parent fails to comply with the court order for enrollment in S.T.A.R. When the school and the S.T.A.R. officers have done all they can do to have a student or parent to comply, it is up to the judge to enforce the S.T.A.R. contract (Dopkins, 2000).

Juvenile probation officials play an essential role in whether S.T.A.R. is a success or a failure (Stancil, 2003). The juvenile justice system provides a probation officer as well as court documents, supervision for community service and other normal probation or court requirements (Stancil, 2003). The juvenile justice department also has money set aside for counselors and family therapists for students that have been assigned to the S.T.A.R. program by the courts, and according to Stancil (2003), this service is crucial.

According to Stancil (2003), the more community involvement any school district can attain, the more likely the program will have for success. Dopkins (2000) reported that civic organizations can be a wealth of information and service for the S.T.A.R. program. Community organizations can also provide community service projects for student enrolled in the program. The school district may seek financial support from an outside community organization also. The original S.T.A.R. program was funded by a grant awarded to the Children and Youth Coordinating Council. Numerous school districts in Georgia have been able to gain the same type assistance to help fund their programs (Stancil, 2003).

#### Role of Parents and Guardians in S.T.A.R. Program

According to Brown and Newnam (2005), many problems that youth experience are due to the lack of supervision and guidance of parents. All too often parents fail to take responsibility for their children. Many parents are not involved in the lives of their children. A lack of parental involvement has become a major crisis (Brown & Newnam, 2005). Families and communities have the primary responsibility for meeting the basic socializing needs of youth in American. It has been recognized that

failure to meet these basic needs is a primary contributor to juvenile crime (Brown & Newnam, 2005).

Stancil (2003) indicates that the law holds parents and guardians responsible for their child's actions until the child turns eighteen years old, and we as a country must start holding the parent responsible. A considerable part of the S.T.A.R. program is parental involvement. The program encourages parent responsibility. S.T.A.R. forces parents and guardians to be responsible for the actions of their children (Stancil, 2003).

Alexander (2003) reports that the juvenile justice system places parents under a court order to drop their children off at the school at 5:30 a.m. and pick them up at 5:30 p.m. In addition, the court requires parents to attend a minimum of 20 hours of parenting classes. Failure to comply with the orders of the judicial system may result in parents being found in contempt of court. Parents may be required to pay a fine or spend time in jail, or both. Therefore, the program requires a high level of parent and guardian accountability (Alexander, 2003).

The juvenile courts often order parents and guardians to stay in close proximity of their children when their child is not at school or with the S.T.A.R. officers. According to Stancil (2003), youth do not normally get into serious trouble when they are in the presence of their parents. School districts and the juvenile justice system should not have to do the job required of parents (Hyman & Snook, 2000). Contrary to this belief, Hispanic parents view the school district as the responsible party for providing education to students and the home being the nurturer of the well being of the child (Quezada, Diaz & Sanchez, 2003).

## Improving Student Attendance

Reducing the rates of student truancy and chronic absenteeism continues to be a goal for most school districts in the United States (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Although there has been a long history of concern over truancy, a majority of the attention focuses on dropouts. However, research indicates that student absenteeism may be as important as any other issue facing education today (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

Poor attendance is not the only indicator of dropping out of school. According to Lehr (2004), absenteeism indicates that students with better attendance score higher on achievement tests than students who are frequently absent. Attendance affects all stakeholders, not just the students who are absent. Funding is often dependent on the number of students who regularly attend school. In addition, for AYP purposes, some schools use student attendance as an indicator for how well a school is performing (Lehr, 2004). Student attendance is monitored through the S.T.A.R. program (Stancil, 2003).

### Monitoring S.T.A.R. Students after Exiting the Program

A number of military approaches have been evaluated. Often researchers have determined that these programs are not a good long term option for teens that need help. Recidivism rates suggest they are not a good solution for long-term changes (Boot Camps for Troubled Teens, 2007). Critics of military style programs suggest that long-term maintenance regarding school attendance, discipline and grade point averages will not persist over time (Lohmann, 2010). A positive transition phase must be executed if the gains achieved are to continue after students exit the S.T.A.R. program (Stancil, 2003).

Behavioral intervention programs have the burden of ensuring students are tracked once existing the program. However, other criticisms of research on alternative programs point out that many studies report on short-term outcomes for the programs, neglecting more long-term results, and that program evaluators may often be too closely linked to the school to give objective interpretations (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Barr and Parrett (2001) reflect on the trend toward research based on the “bottom line” for programs. The educational community has become less interested, they say, in simply knowing that reforms are being implemented. Rather, audiences want to know what effect these programs have on student attendance, achievement, discipline and retention.

Stancil (2003) indicates that there are many signs to indicate that a student is regressing. Students may exhibit a lack of empathy, lack of discipline and participate in criminal activities. For a student to be successful once he/she has exited the S.T.A.R. program, problems must be identified quickly so setbacks can be prevented (Stancil, 2003). Most alternative programs experience the same problems when students exit the programs and return to their regular classes. These students are simply not prepared for less structure, poor student-student relationships and poor teacher-student relationships (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Therefore, every alternative education program needs to provide an effective transition and track student progress in order to ensure long-term success (Lehr, 2004).

### Summary

In chapter two, the literature reviewed discussed alternative programs designed to improve student attendance, academic performance and discipline. The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act of 2004 was created to ensure improvement in these areas

in schools across the nation, and states are being held accountable to ensure that all students reach a proficient level within twelve years. Compulsory school attendance is another example of the importance our nation places on education as well as a recognition that regular attendance is necessary if education is to prepare a child for adulthood. Attendance rates play a role in measuring whether a school has fulfilled NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress requirements. School districts which do not show adequate progress in these areas may be subjected to sanctions and restructuring measures.

Although stakeholders strive to meet the needs of all students, many students continue to be absent from school. Alternative education programs that promote regular attendance can also improve academic achievement while reducing discipline problems. Alternative education programs are geared toward students who are at risk for truancy, academic failure and behavior programs. This may include children who are suspended or expelled or have a history of truancy (Parker, Zechmann, Wilson, Oen & Klopovic, 2002). In many of these programs, the need for behavior modification is considered equal to or more important than academic achievement. The sooner educators identify and help at-risk youth; the more likely these students are to succeed (Ezarik, 2003).

The S.T.A.R. program is one such alternative education program that is designed to serve middle school students. The program focuses on attendance, academic performance and discipline. The S.T.A.R. program allows students at risk of suspension from school to stay in school, remain in class and receive additional academic support. The program combines the structure of a military-style drill and exercise program with a

focus on academic performance. This program is an alternative to OSS for administrators who are seeking ways to discipline students rather than simply removing them from school, which results in lost learning opportunities for at-risk students. Chapter Three details the design of the mixed study of the impact of the S.T.A.R. alternative education program in three rural South Georgia middle schools. Research questions and research design are delineated in this chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

School districts are under pressure to improve student attendance and performance due to federal, state and local legislatures increasing accountability requirements. Principals experience the pressure and respond to this pressure by initiating school improvement strategies. Many at-risk programs have been developed as a response to accountability requirements (Woelfel, 2003), as school leaders seek solutions and systems to improve student attendance, student performance and student behavior. As noted previously, one such program, the Student Transition and Recovery (S.T.A.R.) program, is designed to serve middle school students at risk of suspension from school or detention in a juvenile facility (Dopkins, 2000). The S.T.A.R. program targets early adolescents with attendance and behavior problems in order to reduce school suspensions and expulsions, improve school attendance and improve grades. The goal of the program is to improve the attendance, academic achievement and discipline of each of its participants (Stancil, 2003).

Although the S.T.A.R. program was evaluated in ten Georgia school districts in 2000, school leaders have not had access to a systemic review statewide (Dopkins, 2000). The findings of the study in 2000 revealed that the S.T.A.R. program was working to decrease truancy and behavior problems and to increase student performance. Many school districts in Georgia are investing significant amounts of monies into the military-style discipline program, but in 2009-2010, some school districts began to drop the program (L. Goettie, personal communication, September 3, 2010) due to the costs of the



program. According to one target district's superintendent (personal communication, October 2, 2010), the annual cost for operating the program is approximately \$120,000.00. Due to economic conditions, school leaders are being forced to reduce budgets, and the S.T.A.R. program is one of the programs being cut. This study is a possible means for schools districts to determine the impact of the S.T.A.R. program on attendance, academic performance and discipline; and the information gathered contributes to the limited research and understanding of the S.T.A.R. program. The results of this study demonstrate the positive benefits of the STAR Program, and provide school leaders data to support its continuing implementation.

Providing evidence of program impact is a factor in implementing and shaping at-risk programs, and with the current increased demand for accountability, data are even more important (Brown & Trusty, 2005). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to assess the short-term impact of the middle school S.T.A.R. program on attendance, academic achievement and discipline of students. Two sets of data, spanning two years of the S.T.A.R. students' participation in school, were compared. One set was collected and included data on student attendance, grade point averages and discipline referrals for four consecutive nine-weeks grading periods prior to the 30-day program intervention. The second set of data reports student attendance, grade point averages and discipline referrals for four consecutive nine-weeks grading periods after the 30-day program intervention. The data were used to analyze the impact of the S.T.A.R. program on approximately 150 middle school students in three different middle schools by studying daily attendance rates, an average of five academic subjects that represent GPA and the number of discipline referrals both pre- and post- enrollment. In addition, three S.T.A.R.

program officers were interviewed in order to gain insight into what they perceive the effect of the S.T.A.R. program is on middle school students. These interviews yield insight into how the program is effective beyond the data collected on attendance, GPA and discipline referrals.

Data were collected related to the criteria utilized to evaluate the impact of the S.T.A.R. program at three middle schools in Southeast Georgia. An analysis of the data allowed the overarching research question, “What are the effects of the S.T.A.R. program on middle school students?” This chapter reviews the supporting research questions, outlines the methods and procedures used in the study and presents the means of data collection and analysis.

### Research Questions

The overarching research question in this study was, “What is the impact of the S.T.A.R. program on middle school attendance, academic performance and discipline?”

The following sub questions guided the research:

1. To what extent does S.T.A.R. intervention impact the attendance of middle school students?
2. To what extent does S.T.A.R. intervention impact the academic performance of middle school students?
3. To what extent does S.T.A.R. intervention impact the discipline of middle school students?
4. How do S.T.A.R. officers account for the impact of S.T.A.R. on middle school students?

## Research Design

As the goal of a research design is to provide trustworthy and reasonable results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001), a mixed methods using both quantitative and qualitative approaches was used in this study. The primary approach was quantitative, with a non-experimental, descriptive design. Three forms of non-experimental research are often used and include, descriptive research, predictive research and exploratory research (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). This study followed a descriptive form. Descriptive research provides an accurate description or picture of the characteristics or status of a situation (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). It focuses on describing the variables that exist in a given situation. Descriptive research reports things as they are or were (McMillan & Shumacher, 2001). In non-experimental design, there is no control of conditions and of extraneous influences (Johnson & Christensen, 2004). The variables are used as they appear in practice.

This descriptive, non-experimental mixed methods study allowed the researcher to explore the effectiveness of the S.T.A.R. program by using existing data in the Infinite Campus database. Each of the three schools in the study provided access to data. The information provided the opportunity for data analysis to describe the outcomes of the program intervention on students who were enrolled for 30 days. In order to gain insight into the program and its effectiveness, the researcher also interviewed three S.T.A.R. officers. Since little research exists that examines the effectiveness of the S.T.A.R. program, the qualitative piece produced first-hand knowledge and enhanced the understanding of the S.T.A.R. program from those with unique insights into the program. Therefore, in the qualitative piece of the mixed methods study, the researcher employed a

qualitative component to understand “the lived experiences of the participants” to be studied (Heppner & Heppner, 2004, p. 137). Interviewing, a form of qualitative research, provided an opportunity for the researcher to be immersed in the environment and gain an accurate understanding of effectiveness of the program being studied without preconceived assumptions (Shaughnessy et al., 2006).

The quantitative and qualitative components were employed independently. The quantitative part of the study allowed the researcher to describe what gains or losses occurred in student attendance, academic achievement and discipline referrals as measured by number of absences, grades in five academic subjects and number of discipline referrals prior to participation in the S.T.A.R. program and after exiting the S.T.A.R. program. The qualitative part of the study describes how officers of the S.T.A.R. program view the program’s effectiveness on middle school students and their experiences associated with the program (Merriam, 2002). The quantitative piece “proves or disproves” (Shuttleworth, 2008) the effectiveness of the program, and the qualitative piece describes “first-hand knowledge” of the impact of the program while students are actively participating in the program (Paterniti, 2007).

#### Population and Sample

Of the approximately 474 middle schools in Georgia, the S.T.A.R. program is found in approximately 130 schools (Alexander, 2005). Enrollment of students in the 30-day program varies from school-to-school. The goals of the program are to improve attendance, grades and discipline of each of its participants (Gumaer, 2000).

For purposes of this study, the researcher collected data from three middle schools that had a database which records attendance, grades and discipline referrals. A

convenience sample was used for the qualitative piece of this study (Merriam, 2002). A typical sample was used to obtain an idea of how three S.T.A.R. officers feel the 30-day S.T.A.R. program effects middle school students.

The study was conducted in three rural middle schools in South Georgia. The study sample included 153 sixth through eighth grade students from three selected middle school districts who participated in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program during the 2008-2009 school year. Participants exiting the program prior to the prescribed 30-day program completion were excluded from the study; therefore, 150 students comprised the population sample (N=150). The target population for this study included middle school students from three Title I rural school districts in South Georgia who completed and exited the 30-day S.T.A.R. program in the 2008-2009 school year. One hundred fifty-three students completed and exited the 30-day S.T.A.R. program during the 2008-2009 school year.

The participants for the interviews were S.T.A.R. officers currently working in the three rural South Georgia middle schools. The interviews were conducted at a convenient time and location for the S.T.A.R. officers. In each case, the interviews were conducted in a private location. Once the interviews were completed, they were transcribed.

During the 2008-2009 school year, there were 762 students attending School A, 946 attending School B and 628 attending School C. Based on gender, School A had a population of 47 percent females and 53 percent males for the 2008-2009 school year. School B had a population of 49% females and 51% males, while School C had a

population of 53% females and 47% males (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2009).

School A met Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) for NCLB on the Georgia State Report Card (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2009). School B did not meet AYP based on the second indicator of attendance (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2009). School C did not meet AYP based on academic performance (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2009). All targeted schools are Title I schools based on the percentage of students who qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. School A has a 60% economic disability population, School B has a 75% economic disability population and School C has a 50% economic disability population (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2009). Each of the three middle schools received Safe School status on the Georgia State Report Card (Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2009).

#### Instrumentation

The Infinite Campus database was used in this study. Infinite Campus provides districts with the integrated tools needed to streamline student administration, enable stakeholder collaboration and individualize instruction. The entire system is web-based so educators have access to information from anywhere at any time. The system also serves as a district-wide data warehouse allowing student data to be entered once and used across the entire district supporting data-driven decision-making. First, the researcher compiled a spreadsheet using existing data housed in the Infinite Campus database. The names of the students enrolled in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program during the 2008-2009 school year in the three selected middle schools were gathered from S.T.A.R.

personnel in the three schools. Then, the researcher collected data through the database using an instrument protocol, which required the researcher to enter the individual student name, and then follow tabbed links to the attendance data, grades and discipline records. The researcher also recorded the gender and race of each student as the demographic information was used in data analysis. Once student data were extracted through the Infinite Campus Data System, the researcher assigned each student a number in lieu of identifying data.

The quantitative component collected two sets of data for the spreadsheet instrument, spanning two years of the S.T.A.R. students' participation in school. The spreadsheet included the number of absences (gender and ethnicity) in four nine-week periods, as this variable provided daily attendance information. The researcher also computed the average of five academic subjects (gender and ethnicity) to represent the GPA variable. Thirdly, the researcher reported the number of discipline referrals (gender and ethnicity) for each nine-week--both pre- and post-30-day enrollment of 155 middle school students in three different middle schools.

A second means of data collection was the interview protocol for the S.T.A.R. officers. The semi-structured interview was designed to ascertain data from key informants, who were asked a series of questions by the interviewer. Questions such as, "What difference does S.T.A.R. make in the lives of the S.T.A.R. students?" and "What ways could S.T.A.R. be improved?" detailed first-hand knowledge of S.T.A.R. officers' perceptions of the impact of the program on middle school students. All of the questions are found in Appendix C.

## Data Collection

Approval from the schools' districts was obtained through the central office of the three school districts (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). Then, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was ascertained for the study (Fink, 2006). During January of 2011, the researcher asked S.T.A.R. personnel from each participating site to compile a list of all students enrolled in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program at their school site. These lists were used to develop spreadsheets of data to include attendance records, grade point averages and discipline reports of students participating in the 30-Day S.T.A.R. program, as well as selected demographics, such as gender and race. Descriptive statistics such as frequency tables, mean and standard deviation were used in order to analyze and describe data in a simpler or abbreviated summarized format (Sprinthall, 2003).

The qualitative part of the study consisted of one interview with each S.T.A.R. officer employed by S.T.A.R., Inc., to work in Schools A, B and C. The interviews were conducted at a convenient time for the S.T.A.R. officers. The goal of the interviews was to understand the S.T.A.R. officers' perceptions of the effectiveness of S.T.A.R. on middle school students. The interviews were taped and transcribed. After the interviews were conducted and transcribed, the researcher used pre-determined codes (attendance, academic performance and student behaviors) to categorize the transcript data. Additional codes emerged, necessitating a second, third and fourth review of transcripts to ensure accurate coding. From the themes that emerged, the researcher constructed a narrative description of the impact of S.T.A.R. on students.



## Data Analysis

Pre- and post-program participation were analyzed for each selected student. Data were collected regarding student attendance, grade point averages and discipline referrals, as well as gender and race of each student. Data collected during interviews were used to answer the overarching research question to determine the S.T.A.R. officers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the S.T.A.R. program on middle school students. The data were analyzed by looking for themes and patterns. It involved reading, rereading and exploring the data (Creswell, 2009).

To answer research questions one, two and three, the researcher analyzed data from the spreadsheet instrument using Microsoft Excel (2007). Pre-intervention attendance data were calculated by averaging the total absences for four consecutive nine-week grading periods. Pre-intervention group analysis was determined using a one-way ANOVA to validate equivalent intervention groups. Post-S.T.A.R. program participation attendance data for four nine-week grading periods were obtained for each student using the Infinite Campus computer system. An average of total absences for four consecutive nine-week grading periods pre- and post-program intervention was calculated. The answer to research question one was derived from the comparison between the numbers of absences a student had pre-program intervention and the number of absences post-program intervention. Data were collected and analyzed by gender and race/ethnicity for the number of absences pre- and post- program intervention. A mean score for each student and school district was calculated pre- and post-program participation, and a paired t-test was conducted to uncover the interaction effects of the variable and form a determination as to whether the 30-day S.T.A.R. program

intervention had an impact on attendance of students enrolled in three rural South Georgia school districts.

To determine the extent of which the 30-day S.T.A.R. program impacted the grade point averages (GPA) of students, a comparison of each student's GPA prior to program intervention four nine-week grading periods post-program intervention was calculated. School A, School B and School C all follow the same format for grading and include the following scale: 100-90 (A), 89-80 (B), 79-70 (C) and 69-0 (F). Each of the three schools maintains a five courses academic schedule and documents grade point averages (GPA) using the Infinite Campus computer program. A student's GPA for each semester was computed by finding the mean of the five academic courses, and GPAs for four consecutive grading periods prior to 30-day S.T.A.R. program intervention and four consecutive nine-week grading periods post-program intervention analyzed. A comparison of gender and race/ethnicity was collected and analyzed for GPAs. A paired t-test was used to determine interaction effects of the variable and determine whether the 30-day S.T.A.R. program intervention had an impact on GPA of students enrolled in three rural South Georgia school districts. This information provided an answer to research question two.

Analysis of participants' discipline referrals collected for four consecutive nine-week grading periods pre-program intervention and four consecutive nine-week grading periods post-program intervention was used to answer research question three. All participating schools require every discipline referral to be documented; therefore, even minor infractions such as excused and unexcused tardiness were documented using the Infinite Campus computer program. The number of disciplinary referrals for each

participant was determined by calculating the mean of discipline referrals for four consecutive nine-week grading periods prior to program intervention and the mean of discipline referrals for four consecutive nine-week grading periods post-program intervention. Major and minor discipline referrals were defined as instances of problem behavior reported by school staff. Major discipline referrals were defined as instances of problem behavior that are typically handled by administration and have offense codes one through twenty. Examples include fighting, continued disruption of school and classroom and non-compliance. Minor referrals were defined as instances of problem behaviors that do not need to be handled by the office staff and have offense codes above 20. For example, bothering others, off limits and possession of cell phone are minor infractions (Kauffman, 2008). Each discipline referral resulted in a formal discipline report and was entered into the Infinite Campus database. Data were collected and analyzed for discipline referrals by gender and race/ethnicity. The statistical method used to compare discipline referrals is a paired t-test, and the results were used to determine if the 30-day S.T.A.R. program intervention had an impact on disciplinary referrals for students enrolled in three rural South Georgia school districts.

To determine if relationship exists between the S.T.A.R. program and student attendance, academic achievement and discipline, an alpha level of .05 was used for analysis. If the alpha level is less than .05, the differences in patterns of scores are considered to be statistically significant (Field, 2005). Hence, the program and the impact of the program on attendance, grade point average and discipline are considered related and dependent on each other if pre- and post-mean scores are greater than .05.

## Summary

The research questions and research design were addressed in Chapter Three. The study was a mixed design study consisting of a quantitative and qualitative piece. The quantitative aspect of the study addresses the impact of the alternative education S.T.A.R. program on students' attendance, academic achievement and discipline referrals. It allowed for comparison of students in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program pre- and post-intervention. Students' attendance, grade point averages and discipline referrals were used as the measure of study. The population of participants consisted of sixth through eighth grade middle school students enrolled in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program. The qualitative aspect of the study addressed the perceptions and experiences of three S.T.A.R. instructors working in the three target middle schools. Interviews and related documents were used for data collection.

The results of the quantitative piece and qualitative components of the study are presented in detail in Chapter Four. Chapter Five includes a summary of the study and present the findings of the study. Additionally, Chapter Five addresses implications for practice in education and recommendations for future studies.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the Student Transition and Recovery (S.T.A.R.) 30-day program as an intervention for middle school students who experienced problems with attendance, discipline and/or academic performance. Approved by the state of Georgia as an alternative education intervention that keeps truant middle school students in their regular classroom through a targeted focus to hold them accountable for attendance, academics and discipline, S.T.A.R. was designed to reduce suspension, expulsion and juvenile anti-social behavior by combining military-style drilling and exercise with academic tutoring (Heilbrunn & McGillivray, 2006).

This study was intended to expand what is known about alternative education program interventions at the middle school level, and specifically the impact of the 30-day S.T.A.R. program on tardiness, absences, academic growth and discipline. Through an analysis of descriptive statistics and qualitative data from in-depth interviews with S.T.A.R. officers, the researcher sought to examine the impact of the S.T.A.R. program to provide evidence for data-driven decision making concerning future support for and funding of the S.T.A.R. program. Focusing on attendance, academic achievement data and discipline, the researcher sought to determine S.T.A.R. program impact on middle school students and how to account for the impact of the intervention.

Student data from three South Georgia middle schools were used to conduct the research. Alphabetical codes were used to refer to each middle school and numerical codes were used to refer to each S.T.A.R. student, providing complete anonymity for all

participants. School A reported 53 S.T.A.R. students, School B reported 55 S.T.A.R. students and School C reported 49 S.T.A.R. students enrolled in the 30-day program during the 2008-2009 school year. Of these, four students were excluded - two from School A, one from school B and one from School C - because they did not complete the 30-day program. To conduct an in-depth analysis of the impact of the intervention, data were collected to included gender and ethnicity, as well as attendance, GPA and discipline on 51 students in School A, 54 students in School B and 48 in School C. The total number successfully completing the 30-day S.T.A.R. program from the three middle schools during the 2008-2009 school year was 153 students. Ages of the students ranged from nine to fifteen, with a mean age of 13.28.

#### Research Questions

Findings of the study were presented by research question, preceded by descriptive statistics to portray the middle school populations served by S.T.A.R. programs. The overarching research question in this study was, “What is the impact of the S.T.A.R. program on middle school attendance, academic performance and discipline?” The following sub questions guided the study:

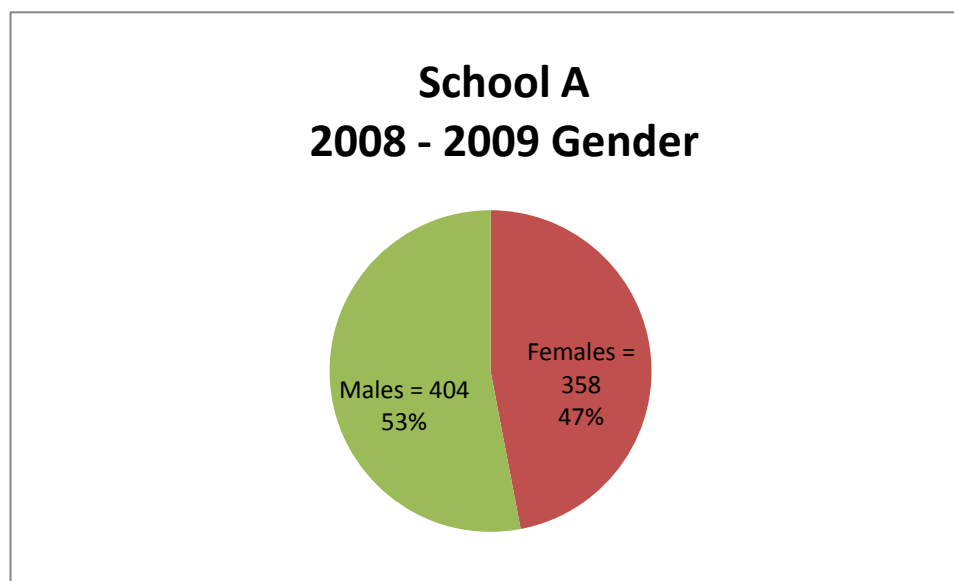
1. To what extent does S.T.A.R. intervention impact the attendance of middle school students?
2. To what extent does S.T.A.R. intervention impact the academic performance of middle school students?
3. To what extent does S.T.A.R. intervention impact the discipline of middle school students?

4. How do S.T.A.R. officers account for the impact of S.T.A.R. on middle school students?

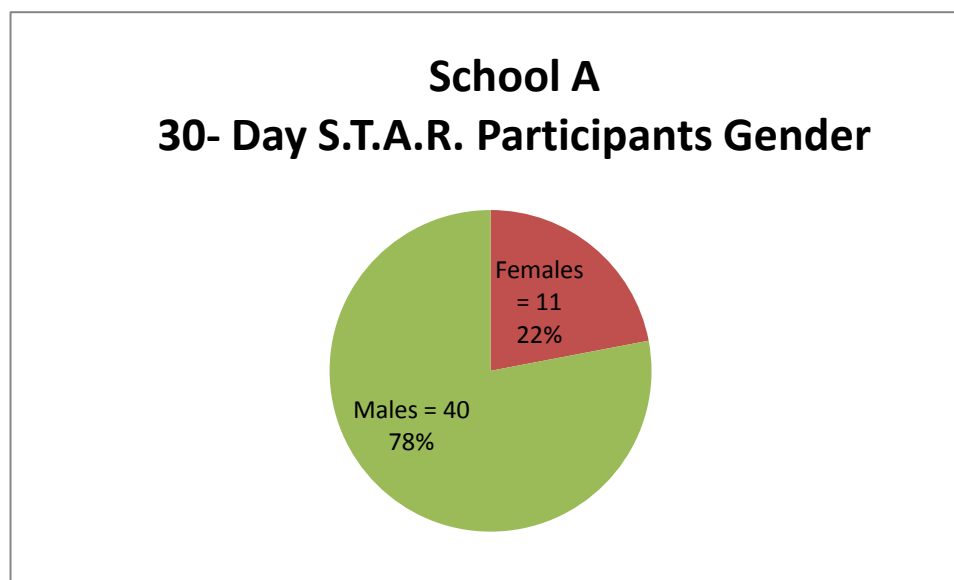
Chapter Four ends with a summary of major findings.

#### Descriptive Statistics Portraying Middle School Participants

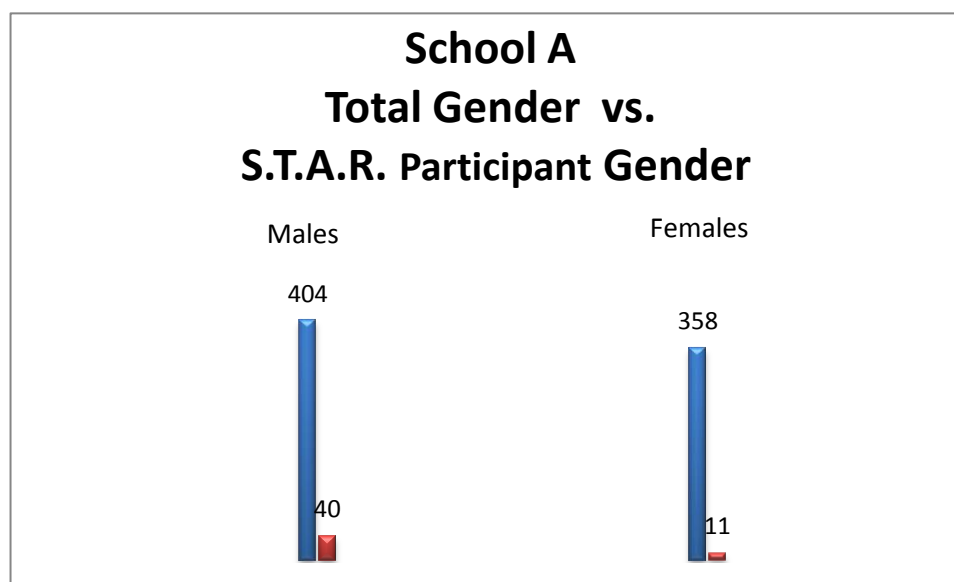
In order to describe the participants of the study, the researcher provided an overview of the middle school students from each school. During the 2008-2009 school year, there were 762 students attending School A, with 47% (358) females and 53% (404) males. Figure 4.1 depicts School A student population by gender. Of these 762 students, 51 students participated in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program with 22% (11) being females and 78% (40) being males. Figure 4.2 depicts School A S.T.A.R. student enrollment by gender. In School A, males were disproportionately served by the S.T.A.R. program as depicted in Figure 4.3.



*Figure 4.1.* School A 2008-2009 Gender



*Figure 4.2.* School A 30-Day S.T.A.R. Participants Gender



*Figure 4.3.* School A Total Gender vs. S.T.A.R. Participant Gender

Figures 4.4 and 4.5 depict percentage data for ethnicity for School A. During the 2008-2009 school year, there were 762 students attending School A, with 71% (541) White, 20% (152) Black, 8% (61) Hispanic and 1% (8) Multi-Racial. Of these 762 students, 51 students participated in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program with 51% (26) being



White, 41% (21) being Black and 8% (4) being Hispanic. In this middle school, the Black student population was disproportionately served by the S.T.A.R. program.

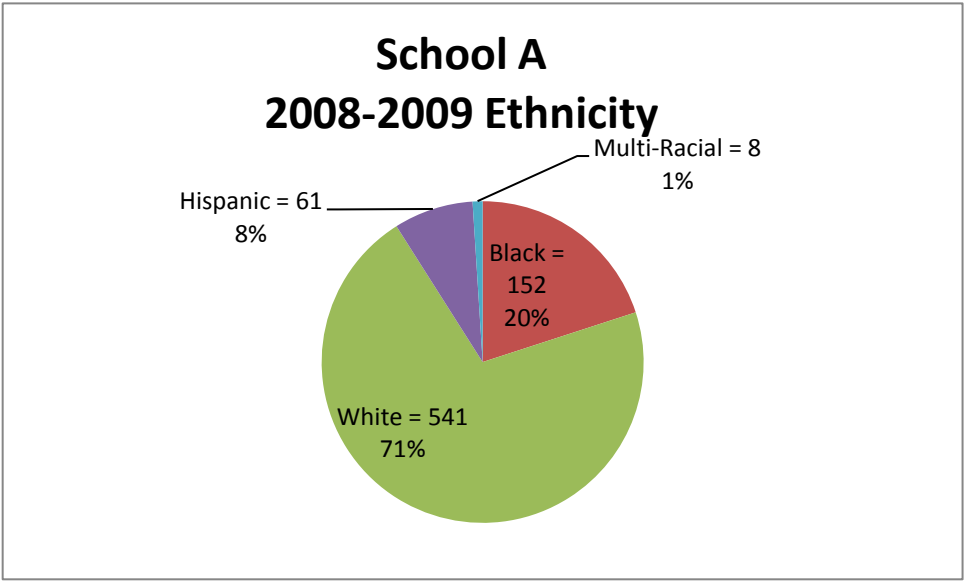


Figure 4.4. School A 2008-2009 Ethnicity

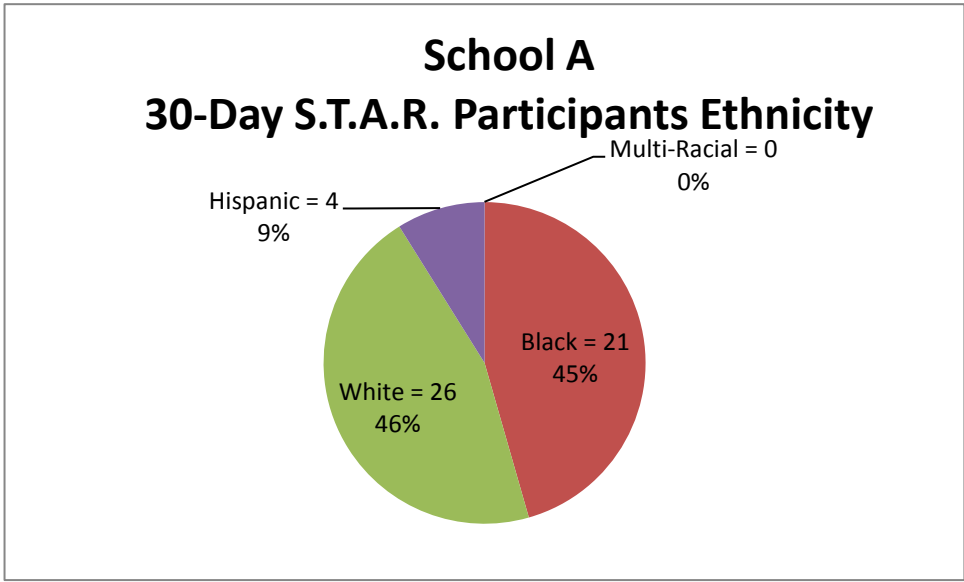


Figure 4.5. School A 30-Day S.T.A.R. Participants Ethnicity

Figures 4.6 and 4.7 depict percentage data for gender for School B. During the 2008-2009 school year, there were 946 students attending School B, with 49% (464) females and 51% (482) males. Of these 946 students, 54 students participated in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program with 15% (8) being females and 85% (46) being males. In this middle school, males were disproportionately served by the S.T.A.R. program as depicted in Figure 4.8.

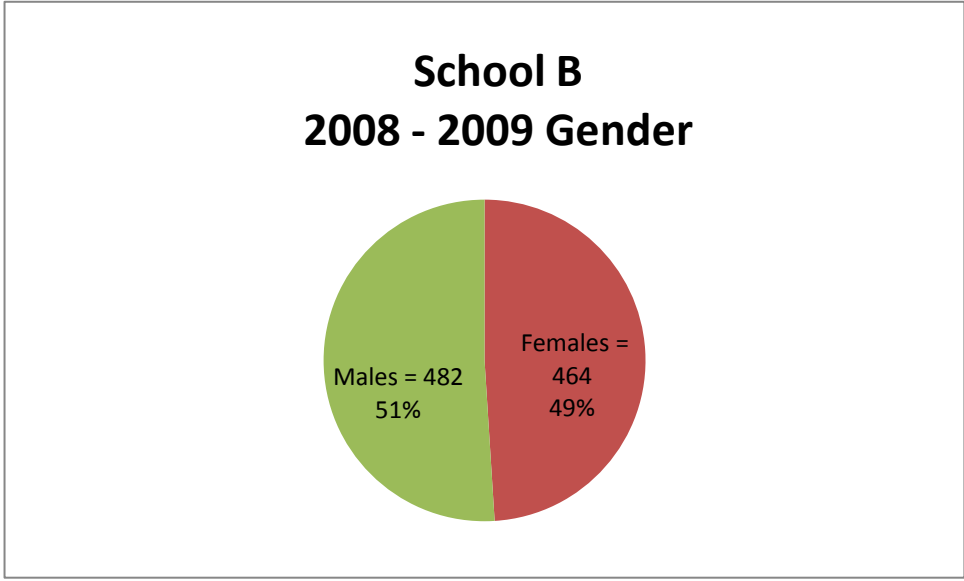
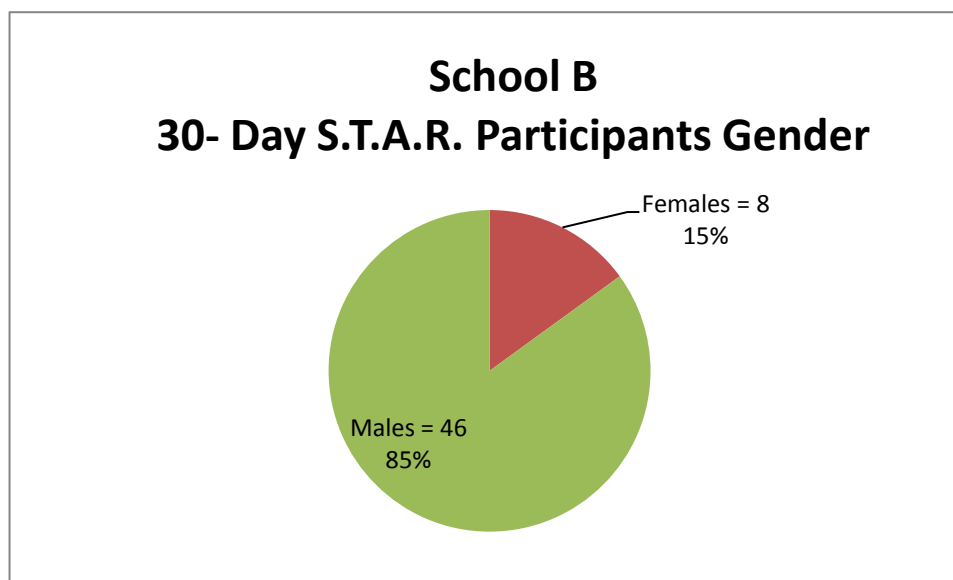
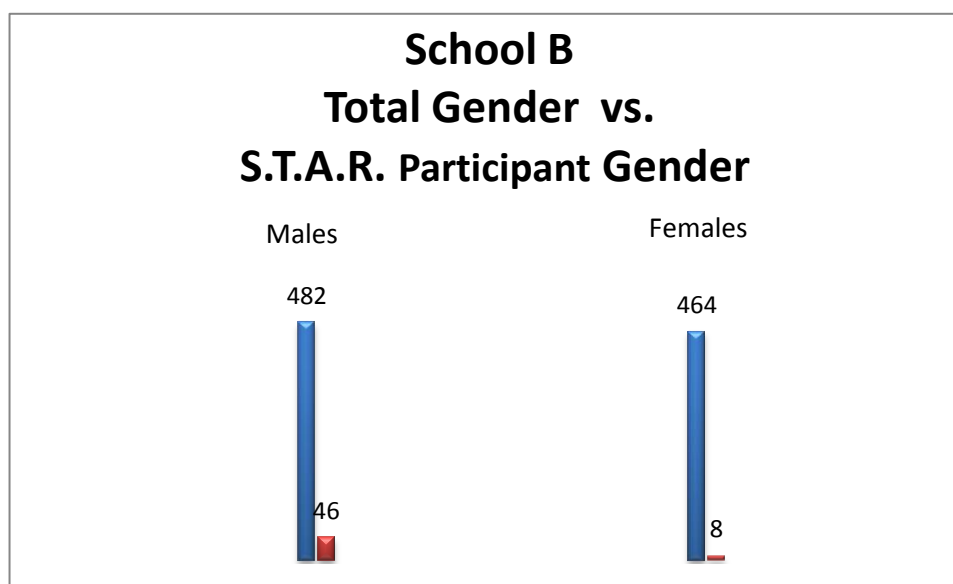


Figure 4.6. School B 2008-2009 Gender



*Figure 4.7.* School B 30-Day S.T.A.R. Participants Gender



*Figure 4.8.* School B Gender vs. S.T.A.R. Participant Gender

Figures 4.9 and 4.10 depict percentage data for ethnicity for School B. During the 2008-2009 school year, there were 946 students attending School B, with 40% (379) White, 56% (530) Black, 2% (19) Hispanic and 1% (9) Multi-Racial. Of these 946 students, 54 students participated in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program with 38% (20) being

White, 52% (28) being Black, 9% (5) being Hispanic and 1% (1) being Asian. In Middle School B, S.T.A.R. students reflected the student population proportionately by ethnicity.

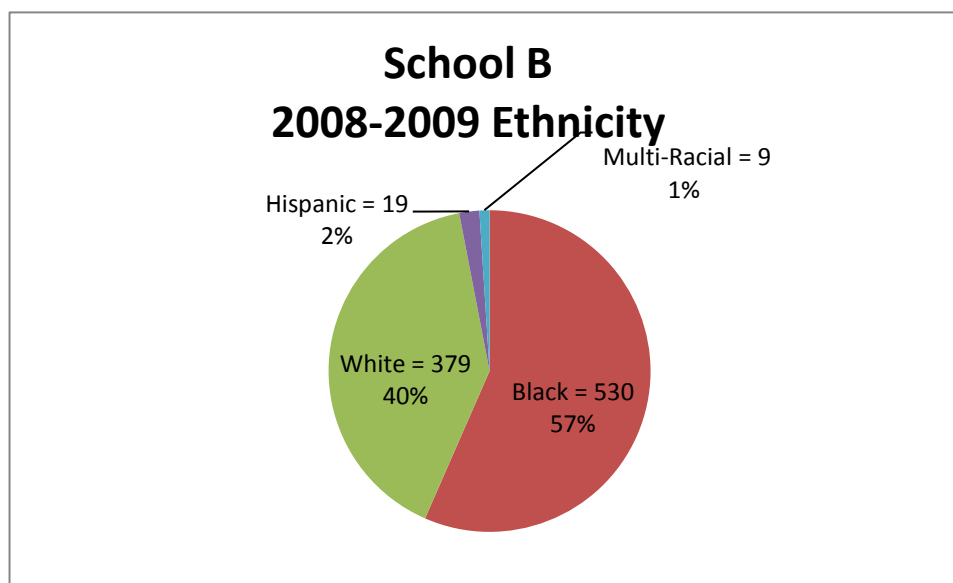


Figure 4.9. School B 2008-2009 Ethnicity

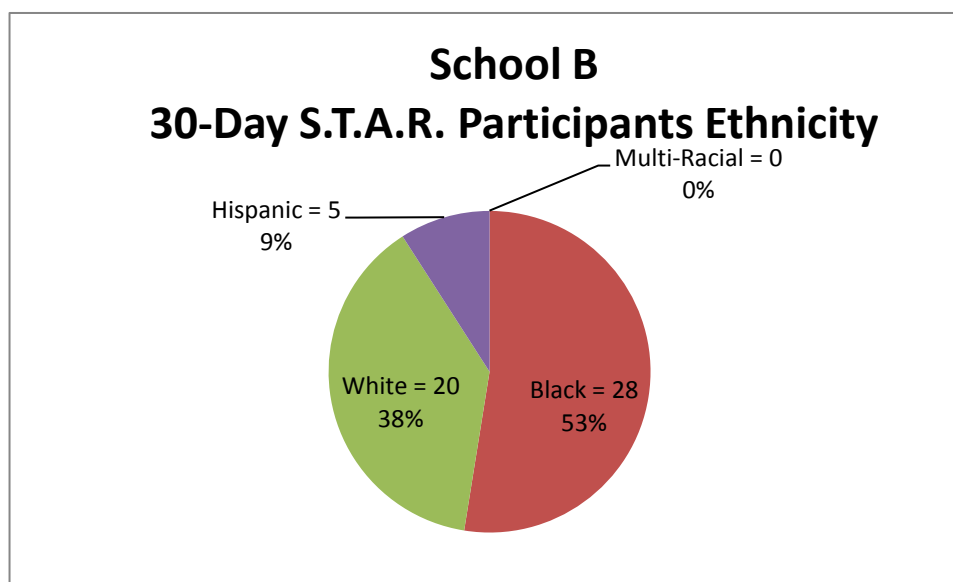


Figure 4.10. School B 30-Day S.T.A.R. Participants Ethnicity

Figures 4.11 and 4.12 depict percentage data for gender for School C. During the 2008-2009 school year, there were 628 students attending School C, with 47% (295) females and 53% (333) males. Of these 628 students, 48 students participated in the 30-

day S.T.A.R. program with 15% (7) being females and 85% (41) being males. In Middle School C, males were disproportionately served by the S.T.A.R. program as depicted in Figure 4.13.

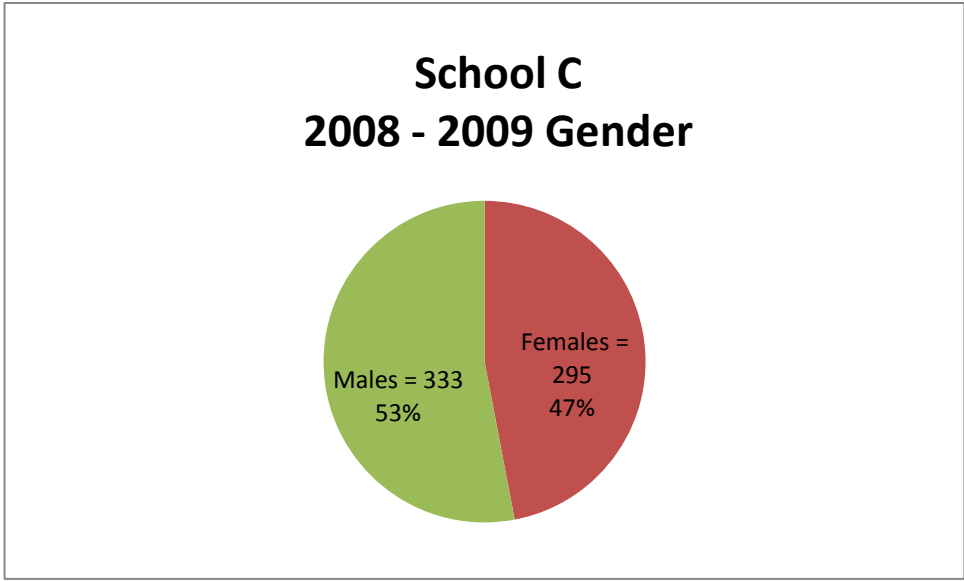


Figure 4.11. School C 2008-2009 Gender

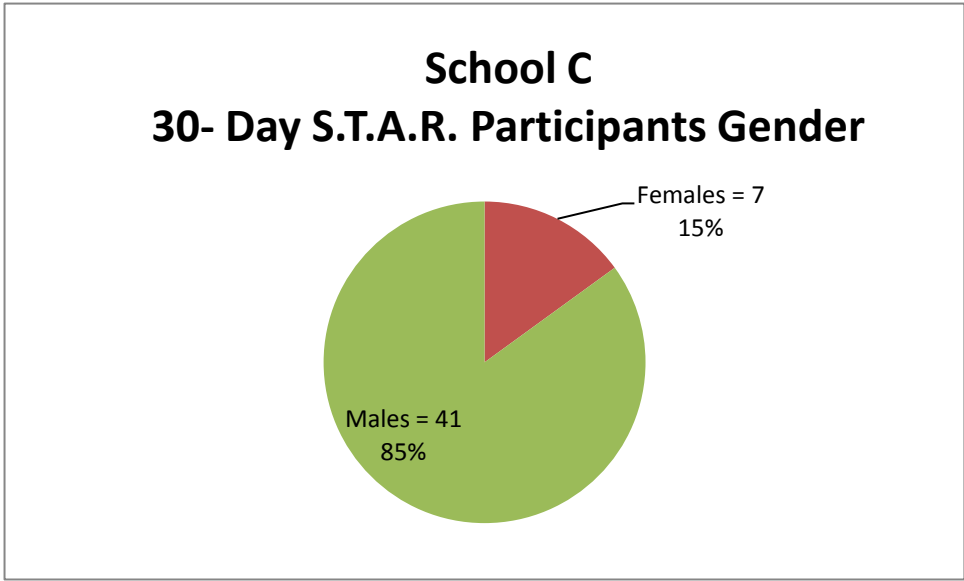
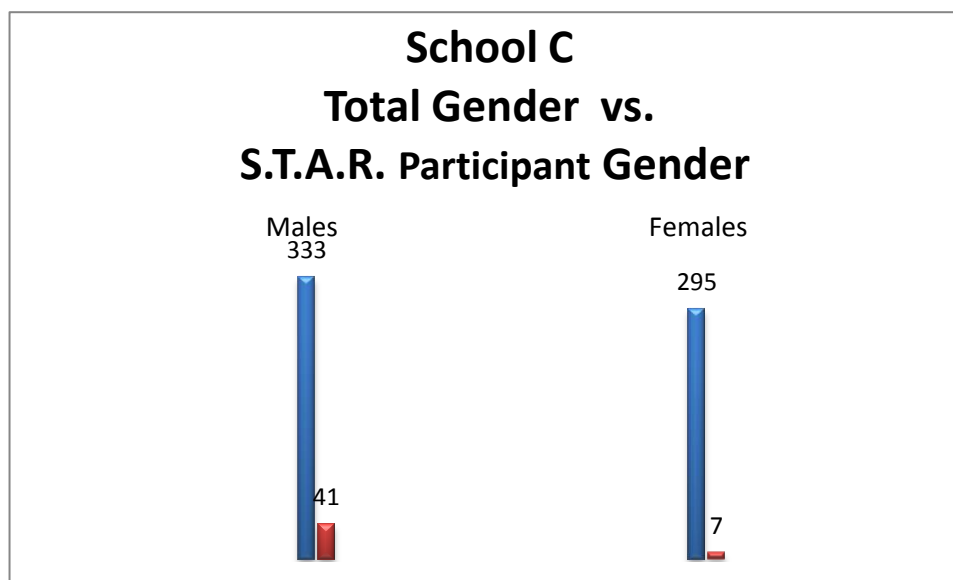


Figure 4.12. School C 30-Day S.T.A.R. Participants Gender



*Figure 4.13.* School C Total Gender vs. S.T.A.R. Participant Gender

Figures 4.14 and 4.15 depict percentage data for ethnicity for School C. During the 2008-2009 school year, there were 628 students attending School C, with 67% (421) White, 27% (169) Black, 2% (13) Hispanic, 3% (19) Multi-Racial and 1% (6) Asian. Of these 628 students, 48 students participated in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program with 35% (17) being White, 48% (23) being Black, 15% (7) being Hispanic and 2% (1) being Asian. In Middle School C, the Black and Hispanic student populations were disproportionately served by the S.T.A.R. program.

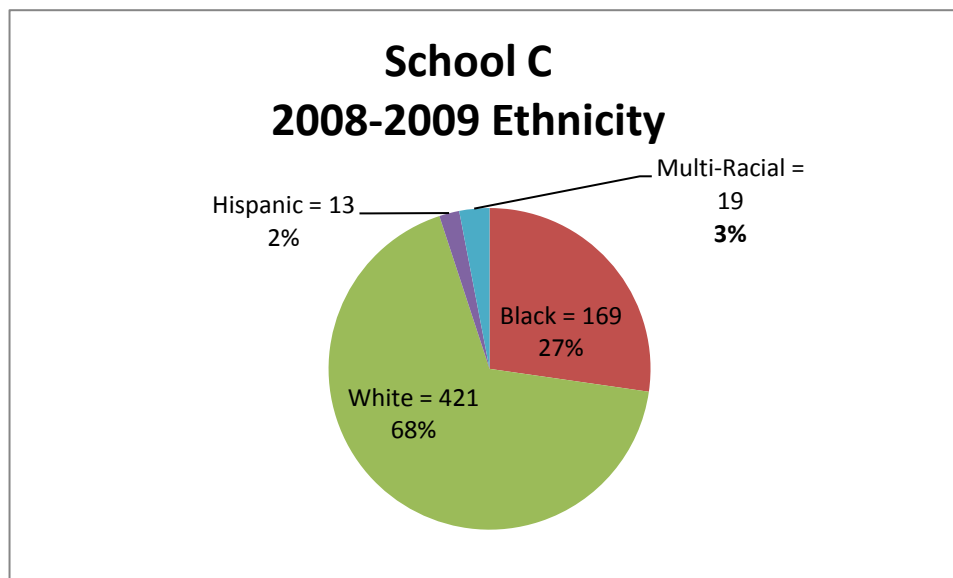


Figure 4.14. School C 2008-2009 Ethnicity

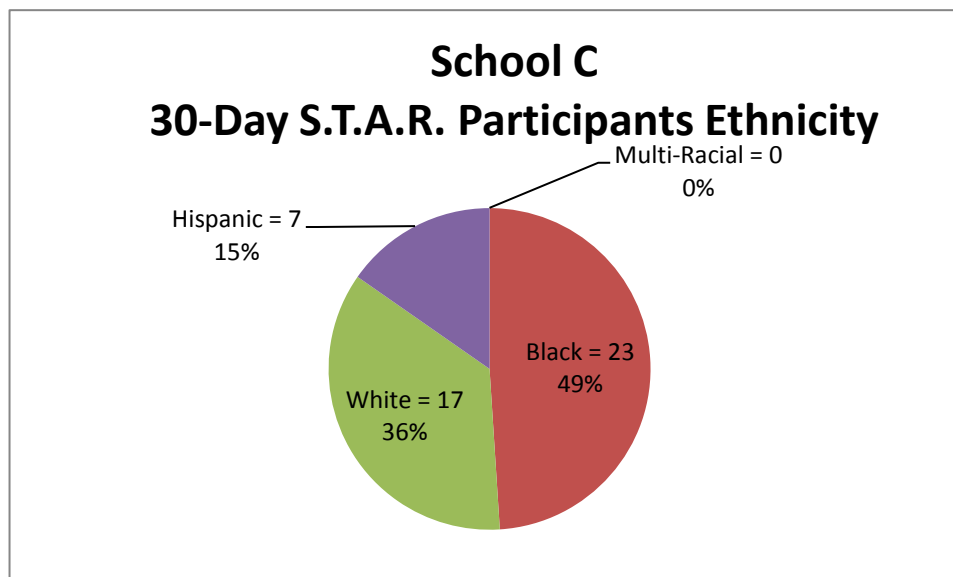


Figure 4.15. School C 30-Day S.T.A.R. Participants Ethnicity

### Summary of Demographics of Study Participants

Most of the 153 middle school students served by the S.T.A.R. intervention, were males, with Black males compared to White males being disproportionately served. In one school, both Black and Hispanic populations were disproportionately served, and from evidence of demographic data, the researcher found that middle school males were the majority group impacted by the intervention of S.T.A.R. Some research suggests that suspension may be assigned arbitrarily and at a disproportionate rate for many African American students (Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Townsend, 2002). Yet, in this study, a disproportionate rate of Black males in the three middle schools were served by the 30-day S.T.A.R. program rather than assigned suspension. Currently utilized in over 130 school systems (Alexander, 2005), the S.T.A.R. program was originally created to meet the needs of students who were placed on probation by the courts. Many schools today place students in the program in lieu of suspension (L. Reed personal communication, July 28, 2008); however, in this study, middle school females were not being served by the intervention in the same numbers as middle school males.

### Findings to Research Question One

In reporting findings to research question one, concerning S.T.A.R. impact on attendance, the researcher described impact by school.

#### S.T.A.R. Impact on Attendance

Data for Schools A, School B and School C were attained from Infinite Campus database. Attained data were used to determine the impact of S.T.A.R. on middle school student attendance for the 153 students served by the program for four consecutive nine week periods prior to enrollment in the 30-day program and the number of student



absences for four consecutive nine week periods after exiting the program. School A served 51 students, School B served 54 students and School C served 48 students in their 30-day S.T.A.R. programs. Before enrollment in S.T.A.R., the 51 students from School A had accumulated 409 absences in the four consecutive nine week periods prior to enrollment. After being enrolled in the 30-day intervention (S.T.A.R.), the 51 students had accumulated 284 absences in four consecutive nine week periods after exiting from the 30-day program. Prior to enrollment in the 30-day program, the 54 students in School B had accumulated 489 absences in the four consecutive nine week periods pre-enrollment. Post intervention, the 54 students had accumulated 324 absences in the four consecutive nine week periods. Records revealed that the 48 middle school students served by the 30-day S.T.A.R. program in School C had accumulated 366 absences in the four consecutive nine week periods prior to enrollment; however, post-intervention data revealed only 253 absences in four consecutive nine week periods.

To delve deeper into absence data, the researcher studied the absences by gender and ethnicity of the 153 S.T.A.R. participants. First, the researcher determined mean scores for student absences pre- and post-intervention. In comparing mean scores pre- and post-intervention (see Tables 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3), the researcher determined that both male and female middle school student participants in Schools A, B and C improved their attendance after enrollment in the S.T.A.R. program. However, the S.T.A.R. intervention did not improve attendance of School A's Hispanic S.T.A.R. participants of the study, their absences actually increased after exiting from the program. In School A, both White and Black student participants had fewer absences after exiting from the S.T.A.R. program, as evidenced by a comparison of pre- and post- mean scores. On the other

hand, in Schools B and C, all subpopulations had fewer absences post-30-day intervention, as evidenced by a comparison of pre- and post- mean scores.

A paired t-test was calculated using GraphPad Software (2005). The t-test was used to determine if the difference in absences for four consecutive nine week periods pre-intervention and their absences for four consecutive nine week periods post-intervention were significant at the .05 level with 42 degrees of freedom. T-values of 2.1695 for School A, 3.345 for School B and 2.956 for School C were calculated and tested at the .05 level of significance. The t-values were greater than the critical value of 2.021. Thus, the differences in days absent for four consecutive nine week periods pre-intervention, and days absent four consecutive nine week periods post-intervention in Schools A, B and C were significant. With the p-value being calculated at 0.034 for School A, .0001 for School B and .004 for School C, this demonstrates with a 95 percent confidence that there was a significant difference in student absences for four nine week periods post-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention as compared to four consecutive nine week periods pre-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention.

Table 4.1

*School A Attendance Rates by Demographics*

Students	Days Absent Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	Days Absent Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	Difference	Mean Pre- Intervention	Mean Post- Intervention
<u>Gender</u>					
Male (n=40)	362	243	119	9.05	6.08
Female (n=11)	47	41	006	4.27	3.73
<u>Ethnicity</u>					
White (n=26)	288	203	85	11.07	7.81
Black (n=21)	93	51	42	4.43	2.43
Hispanic (n=4)	28	30	-02	7.00	7.50

Note.  $t = 2.1695$ \* $p = 0.034$

Table 4.2

*School B Attendance Rates by Demographics*

Students	Days Absent Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	Days Absent Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	Difference	Mean Pre- Intervention	Mean Post- Intervention
<u>Gender</u>					
Male (n=46)	442	282	160	9.61	6.13
Female (n=08)	47	42	005	5.88	5.25
<u>Ethnicity</u>					
White (n=20)	257	211	46	12.85	10.56
Black (n=28)	177	63	114	6.32	2.25
Hispanic (n=5)	53	49	4	10.60	9.80
Asian (n=1)	2	1	1	2.00	1.00

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Note.  $t = 3.345$

\* $p = 0.001$

Table 4.3

*School C Attendance Rates by Demographics*

Students	Days Absent Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	Days Absent Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	Difference	Mean Pre- Intervention	Mean Post- Intervention
<u>Gender</u>					
Male (n=41)	310	233	77	7.56	5.68
Female (n=07)	56	20	36	8.00	2.86
<u>Ethnicity</u>					
White (n=17)	193	111	82	11.35	6.53
Black (n=23)	107	86	21	4.65	3.74
Hispanic (n=7)	51	47	4	7.29	6.71
Asian (n=1)	1	15	9	15.00	9.00

Note.  $t = 2.956$

\* $p = 0.004$

The average absentee rate pre-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention in School A was 8.02 days with a standard deviation of 6.45. School B had an average absentee rate of 9.06 with a standard deviation of 5.57, while School C had an average absentee rate of 7.63 and a standard deviation of 4.32. The average absentee rate post-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention in School A was 5.57 with a standard deviation of 4.99, School B's post-data revealed an absentee rate of 6.00 with a standard deviation of 3.85 and School C's average rate was 5.27 with a standard deviation of 3.53. These rates also revealed there

was a 2.37 decrease in days students were absent for students in School A, a 3.06 decrease in absences in School B and a 2.63 decrease in School C for four consecutive nine weeks post-dismissal from the 30-day S.T.A.R. program. Additional data, including absence rates and percentage of absences were explored. In examining the percentages of students who were impacted by the intervention, the researcher found the majority of the 153 S.T.A.R. student participants experienced fewer absences after exiting the 30-day program.

In a closer examination of each student participant, the researcher determined the number of absences pre- and post-intervention by student. The researcher found in School A that 12 percent of the students were not impacted positively, as they (6) collectively had accumulated 19 more absences post-intervention. In School B, nine percent were not impacted positively, as they (5) collectively had accumulated 21 more absences post-intervention. Similarly, School C was found to have ten percent of the students were not impacted positively, as they (5) collectively accumulated 12 more absences post-30-day intervention. The researcher found in School A 67% of the students were impacted positively, as they (35) collectively had accumulated 144 less absences post-intervention. In School B 83% of the 30-day participants were impacted positively, and they (45) collectively had accumulated 186 less absences post-intervention. School C's S.T.A.R. participants were impacted positively by 80 percent, as they (38) collectively had accumulated 101 less absences post-intervention. Additionally, the researcher found that 11% of the students in School A were not impacted positively or negatively, as they (10) collectively reported 37 absences pre- and post-intervention. Middle school participants in School B were found to have seven

percent of the student not positively or negatively impacted, as they (4) collectively had 27 absences pre- and post- 30-day intervention. Equally, data revealed that ten percent of School C's students were not positively or negatively impacted by the 30-day intervention, as they (5) collectively reported 23 absences pre- and post-intervention.

Table 4.4

*School A Descriptive Statistics Attendance*

Component	Variance	Standard Deviation	Median	Mean
Days Absent Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	41.54	6.45	7.00	8.02
Days Absent Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	24.85	4.99	4.00	5.57

Note. n=51

Table 4.5

*School B Descriptive Statistics Attendance*

Component	Variance	Standard Deviation	Median	Mean
Days Absent Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	31.07	5.57	8.00	9.06
Days Absent Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	14.83	3.85	6.00	6.00

Note. n=54

Table 4.6

*School C Descriptive Statistics Attendance*

Component	Variance	Standard Deviation	Median	Mean
Days Absent Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	18.62	4.32	7.00	7.63
Days Absent Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	12.46	3.53	4.00	5.27

Note. n=48

#### Summary of Findings Concerning Impact on Attendance

In summary, it was determined the overall attendance of the 153 30-day S.T.A.R. participants was impacted positively when compared to four consecutive nine week periods pre- and post- intervention. This was evidenced by comparing the mean averages from Schools A, B and C pre- and post-intervention. The mean average of days absent for S.T.A.R. participants from the three middle schools pre-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention was 8.24, while the mean average days absent post-intervention was 5.61. This indicated an increase of 2.63 in the average days attendance of the 30-day S.T.A.R. participants for four consecutive nine week periods post-intervention enrolled in the three middle schools participating in this study.

In one school, Hispanic middle school students were not impacted positively by the intervention, as their absences actually increased after the 30-day intervention designed to improve their attendance. In all middle schools, in percentages ranging from 17% to 23%, approximately one-fifth of the middle school students did not improve attendance after the 30-day S.T.A.R. intervention.



## Findings to Research Question Two

In reporting findings to research question two, concerning S.T.A.R. impact on students' grade point average (GPA), the researcher described impact by school.

### S.T.A.R. Impact on GPA

School A, School B and School C data were attained from Infinite Campus database to determine the impact of S.T.A.R. on middle school student GPAs for the 153 students served by the program for four consecutive nine week periods prior to enrollment in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program and the students' GPAs for four consecutive nine week periods after exiting the program. Academic GPAs were gathered for each student pre- and post-intervention. The researcher obtained each S.T.A.R. participant's GPA by calculating the mean of each student's five academic classes for four consecutive nine week periods pre- and post-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention. A grade point average scale of 0-4 was utilized in this study, with 0=Failure, 1=D, 2=C, 3=B and 4=A. Before enrollment in S.T.A.R., the 51 students in School A had accumulated a GPA average of 2.5, the 54 participants in School B had accumulated a 2.30 GPA, and the 48 students in School C had an accumulation of a 2.52 average GPA in the four consecutive nine week periods prior to enrollment. After being enrolled in the 30-day intervention (S.T.A.R.), the 51 students in School A had accumulated a GPA average of 2.74, the 54 students in School B had accumulated a 2.65 GPA and School C's 48 participants had accumulated a 2.85 GPA in four consecutive nine week periods after their exit from the 30-day program.

To make sense of this absence data, the researcher studied GPAs by gender and ethnicity of the 153 S.T.A.R. participants. First, the researcher determined mean averages for student GPAs pre- and post-intervention. In comparing mean scores pre-

and post-intervention (see Tables 4.7, 4.8 and 4.9), the researcher determined that both male and female middle school student participants improved their GPAs after enrollment in the S.T.A.R. program. In School A, female students mean average GPAs improved by more than the male student participants. However, male S.T.A.R. participants' GPAs were indicative of the highest increase in averages in School B. In School C, both male and female S.T.A.R. participants increased GPAs by an average of 0.3. In addition, all ethnicities' GPAs increased after exiting from the S.T.A.R. program, as evidenced by a comparison of pre- and post- mean scores, with the African American (21) population showing most improvement in their mean average GPAs in School A. In School B, the Hispanic (5) population showed the most improvement in their mean average GPAs and in School C the Asian (1) population was calculated to have the most improvement in mean average GPAs.

A paired t-test was calculated using GraphPad Software (2005). The t-test was used to determine if the difference in GPAs for four consecutive nine week periods pre-intervention and their GPAs for four consecutive nine week periods post-intervention were significant at the .05 level with 50 degrees of freedom. A t-value for School A, School B and School C of 4.2865, 6.6883, and 7.492 respectively was calculated and tested at the .05 level of significance. The t-value was greater than the critical value of 2.021. Thus, the difference in student GPAs for four consecutive nine weeks pre-intervention and four consecutive nine week periods post-intervention was significant. With the p-value being calculated at 0.0001, this demonstrates with a 95% confidence that there was a significant difference in student GPAs four nine week periods post-30-

day S.T.A.R. intervention as compared to four consecutive nine week periods pre-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention.

Table 4.7

*School A GPAs by Demographics*

Students	GPA Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	GPA Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	Difference	Mean Pre- Intervention	Mean Post- Intervention
<u>Gender</u>					
Male (n=40)	99.1	108.4	9.3	2.48	2.71
Female (n=11)	28.4	31.3	2.9	2.58	2.85
<u>Ethnicity</u>					
White (n=26)	71.6	76.0	4.4	2.75	2.92
Black (n=21)	47.9	54.5	6.6	2.28	2.60
Hispanic (n=4)	8.0	9.2	1.2	2.00	2.30

Note.  $t = 4.2865$

\* $p = 0.0001$

Table 4.8

*School B GPAs by Demographics*

Students	GPAs Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	GPAs Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	Difference	Mean Pre- Intervention	Mean Post- Intervention
<u>Gender</u>					
Male (n=46)	102.7	120.5	17.8	2.2	2.6
Female (n=08)	21.4	22.4	1.0	2.7	2.8
<u>Ethnicity</u>					
White (n=20)	48.1	51.7	3.6	2.4	2.6
Black (n=28)	62.3	74.7	12.4	2.2	2.7
Hispanic (n=5)	10.6	13.0	2.4	2.1	2.6
Asian (n=1)	3.1	3.5	0.4	3.1	3.5

Note.  $t = 6.883$

\* $p = 0.0001$

Table 4.9

*School C GPAs by Demographics*

Students	GPAs Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	GPAs Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	Difference	Mean Pre- Intervention	Mean Post- Intervention
<u>Gender</u>					
Male (n=41)	102.2	115.3	13.1	2.5	2.8
Female (n=07)	18.9	21.3	3.0	2.7	3.0
<u>Ethnicity</u>					
White (n=17)	44.4	48.9	4.5	2.6	2.9
Black (n=23)	60.6	69.6	9.0	2.6	3.0
Hispanic (n=7)	13.4	14.9	1.5	1.9	2.1
Asian (n=1)	2.7	3.2	0.5	2.7	3.2

Note.  $t = 7.492$

\* $p = 0.0001$

The average GPA pre-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention for the 51 students in School A was 2.5 with a standard deviation of 0.60. The average GPA post-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention was 2.74 with a standard deviation of 0.54. These rates also revealed a 0.24 increase in School A student GPAs for four consecutive nine week periods post-dismissal from the 30-day S.T.A.R. program. The average GPA pre-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention for the 54 participants in School B was 2.30 with a standard deviation of 0.64. The average GPA post-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention was 2.65 with a standard deviation of

0.50. These rates also revealed a 0.35 increase in School B student GPAs for four consecutive nine week periods post-dismissal from the 30-day S.T.A.R. program. For the 48 S.T.A.R. participants in School C, the average GPA pre-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention was 2.52 with a standard deviation of 0.49. The average GPA post-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention was 2.85 with a standard deviation of 0.47. These rates also revealed a 0.33 increase in School C student GPAs for four consecutive nine week periods post-dismissal from the 30-day S.T.A.R. program. Additional data, including GPAs and percentage of GPAs were explored. In examining the percentages of students who were impacted by the intervention, the researcher found the majority of the 153 middle school S.T.A.R. student participants experienced higher GPAs after exiting the 30-day program.

In a closer examination of each student participant, the researcher determined GPAs pre- and post-intervention by student. The researcher found that 20% of the 51 students in School A were not impacted positively, as they (10) collectively had lower GPAs post-intervention. In School B, nine percent of the 54 middle school students were not impacted positively, as they (5) collectively had lower GPAs post-intervention. Similarly, in School C, of the 48 30-day participants, ten percent were not impacted positively, as they (5) collectively had lower GPAs post-intervention. The researcher found that 76% of the 51 students in School A were impacted positively, as they (39) collectively had accumulated higher GPAs post-intervention. In School B, 85% of the 54 middle school students were impacted positively, as they (46) collectively had accumulated higher GPAs post-intervention. The 48 students in School C were impacted positively, as they (42) collectively had accumulated higher GPAs post-intervention.

Additionally, the researcher found that four percent of the 51 students in School A were not impacted positively or negatively, as they (2) collectively had the same GPAs pre- and post-intervention. Six percent of the 54 students in School B were not impacted positively or negatively, as they (3) collectively had the same GPAs pre- and post-intervention. In School C, two percent of the 48 middle school participants were not impacted positively or negatively, as they (1) collectively had the same GPA pre- and post-intervention.

Table 4.10

*School A Descriptive Statistics GPA*

Component	Variance	Standard Deviation	Median	Mean
GPA's Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	0.36	0.60	2.6	2.50
GPA's Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	0.29	0.54	2.8	2.74

Note. n=51

Table 4.11

*School B Descriptive Statistics GPA*

Component	Variance	Standard Deviation	Median	Mean
GPA's Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	0.40	0.64	2.2	2.30
GPA's Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	0.25	0.50	2.8	2.65

Note. n=54

Table 4.12

*School C Descriptive Statistics GPA*

Component	Variance	Standard Deviation	Median	Mean
GPA's Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	0.23	0.49	2.7	2.52
GPA's Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	0.23	0.47	3.0	2.85

Note. n=48

#### Summary of Findings Concerning Impact on GPA

In summary, it was determined that most GPAs of the 153 30-day S.T.A.R. participants were impacted positively when compared to four consecutive nine week periods pre- and post-intervention. Ranging from 76% to 88%, most of the students who were enrolled in the intervention program improved their grade point average, which is significant, as S.T.A.R. is designed to be an alternative to suspension as a means of addressing attendance, academic problem students and discipline.

As evidenced by the mean GPA averages from Schools A, B and C, the mean average GPAs for S.T.A.R. participants from the three middle schools pre-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention was 2.43, while the mean average GPA post-intervention was 2.75. This indicates an increase of 0.32 in average GPAs of 30-day S.T.A.R. participants, who were in school rather than in an out-of-school suspension.

However, some students' academic performance did not improve, ranging from 24% in School A, to 15% in School B and 12% in School C. The intervention did not impact some students' academic growth as evidenced by grades, but this was only true for very small numbers of students across all three schools.



### Findings to Research Question Three

In reporting findings to research question three, concerning S.T.A.R. impact on discipline, the researcher described impact by school.

#### S.T.A.R. Impact on Discipline

School A, School B and School C data were gathered from Infinite Campus database on student discipline. The number of student discipline referrals pre-30-day S.T.A.R. enrollment and post-30-day S.T.A.R. was determined finding the total number of discipline referrals for four nine-week periods grading periods pre- and post-30-day S.T.A.R. enrollment to determine the impact of S.T.A.R. on middle school student for the 153 students served by the program. Before enrollment in S.T.A.R., the 51 S.T.A.R. participants in School A had accumulated 512 discipline referrals in the four consecutive nine week periods prior to enrollment. After being enrolled in the 30-day intervention (S.T.A.R.), the 51 students accumulated 377 discipline referrals in four consecutive nine week periods after their exit from the 30-day program. A difference of 135 discipline referrals pre- and post-intervention. Before enrollment in S.T.A.R., the 54 students in School B had accumulated 612 discipline referrals in the four consecutive nine week periods prior to enrollment. After being enrolled in the 30-day intervention (S.T.A.R.), the 54 students in School B had accumulated 481 discipline referrals in four consecutive nine week periods after their exit from the 30-day program. A difference of 131 discipline referral pre- and post-intervention. Before enrollment in S.T.A.R., the 48 students in School C had accumulated 508 discipline referrals in the four consecutive nine week periods prior to enrollment. After being enrolled in the 30-day intervention (S.T.A.R.), the 48 students in School C had accumulated 376 discipline referrals in four

consecutive nine week periods after their exit from the 30-day program. A difference of 132 discipline referral pre- and post-intervention.

To make sense of this discipline data, the researcher studied the number of discipline referrals by gender and ethnicity of the 153 S.T.A.R. participants. First, the researcher determined the number of discipline referrals for each student participant pre- and post-intervention. In comparing numbers pre- and post-intervention (see Tables 4.13, 4.14 and 4.15), the researcher determined that of the 153 S.T.A.R. students, both male and female middle school student participants decreased the number of discipline infractions post enrollment in the S.T.A.R. program. In School A, School B and School C, the male (127) population's mean average discipline infractions decreased more than the female (26) population. In addition, all ethnicities decreased their numbers of discipline referrals after exiting from the S.T.A.R. program, as evidenced by a comparison of pre- and post- mean scores. In School A, the mean average of discipline referrals for the Hispanic (4) population showed the greatest decrease. However, in School B, the African American (28) population mean average of discipline infractions showed the greatest decline. While in School C, students of White (17) ethnicity mean average discipline referrals was impacted more positively by the 30-day S.T.A.R. intervention. Of the 153 S.T.A.R. participants, students of White ethnicity in School C showed the greatest improvement in the area of discipline as their average number of discipline referrals was 12.65 pre-intervention and 9.18 post intervention, with an average difference of 3.47 less discipline referrals for four nine weeks periods post-S.T.A.R. enrollment.

A paired t-test was calculated using GraphPad Software (2005). The t-test was used to determine if the difference in discipline referrals for four consecutive nine week periods pre-intervention and their discipline referrals for four consecutive nine week periods post-intervention were significant at the .05 level with 50 degrees of freedom. A t-value of 7.318 for School A, 3.1398 for School B and 3.9485 for School C was calculated and tested at the .05 level of significance. The t-value was greater than the critical value of 2.021. Thus, the difference in the number of discipline referrals students received for four consecutive nine week periods pre-intervention and four consecutive nine weeks post-intervention was significant. With a p-value being calculated at 0.0001 for School A, 0.0022 for School B and 0.0002 for School C , this demonstrates with a 95% confidence that there was a significant difference in student GPAs four nine week periods post-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention as compared to four consecutive nine week periods pre-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention.

Table 4.13

*School A Discipline Infractions by Demographics*

Students	Infractions Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	Infractions Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	Difference	Mean Pre- Intervention	Mean Post- Intervention
<u>Gender</u>					
Male (n=40)	425	313	112	10.63	7.83
Female (n=11)	87	64	23	7.90	5.82
<u>Ethnicity</u>					
White (n=26)	267	187	80	10.27	7.19
Black (n=21)	202	161	41	9.62	7.67
Hispanic (n=4)	43	29	14	10.75	7.25

Note.  $t = 7.318$ \* $p = 0.0001$

Table 4.14

*School B Discipline Infractions by Demographics*

Students	Infractions Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	Infractions Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	Difference	Mean Pre- Intervention	Mean Post- Intervention
<u>Gender</u>					
Male (n=46)	548	426	122	11.91	9.26
Female (n=8)	64	55	09	8.00	6.88
<u>Ethnicity</u>					
White (n=20)	220	173	47	11.00	8.65
Black (n=28)	316	245	71	11.29	8.75
Hispanic (n=5)	70	58	12	14.00	11.60
Asian (n=1)	06	05	01	6.00	5.00

Note.  $t = 3.1398$

\* $p = 0.0022$

Table 4.15

*School C Discipline Infractions by Demographics*

Students	Infractions Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	Infractions Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	Difference	Mean Pre- Intervention	Mean Post- Intervention
<u>Gender</u>					
Male (n=41)	449	331	118	10.95	8.07
Female (n=7)	59	45	14	8.43	6.43
<u>Ethnicity</u>					
White (n=17)	215	156	59	12.65	9.18
Black (n=23)	222	159	63	9.65	6.91
Hispanic (n=7)	62	55	07	8.86	7.86
Asian (n=1)	09	06	03	9.00	6.00

Note.  $t = 3.9485$

\* $p = 0.0002$

The average number of discipline referrals pre-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention for the 51 students in School A was 10.04 with a standard deviation of 4.60. The average number of discipline referrals post-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention for the 51 S.T.A.R. participants was 7.39 with a standard deviation of 3.54. These rates also revealed a 2.65 average decrease in number of student discipline referrals in School A for four consecutive nine weeks post-dismissal from the 30-day S.T.A.R. program. The average number of discipline referrals pre-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention for the 54 students in School B was 11.33 with a standard deviation of 4.41. The average number of discipline

referrals post-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention was 8.91 with a standard deviation of 3.57. These rates for the 54 30-day S.T.A.R. participants in School B also revealed a 2.42 average decrease in number of student discipline referrals for four consecutive nine week periods post-dismissal from the 30-day S.T.A.R. program. The average number of discipline referrals pre-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention for the 48 participants in School C was 10.58 with a standard deviation of 3.74. The average number of discipline referrals post-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention was 7.83 with a standard deviation of 3.06. These rates also revealed a 2.75 average decrease in number of student discipline referrals for the 48 middle school students in School C for four consecutive nine week periods post-dismissal from the 30-day S.T.A.R. program. Additional data, including the number of discipline referrals and percentage of discipline referrals were explored. In examining the percentages of students who were impacted by the intervention, the researcher found the majority of the 153 S.T.A.R. student participants experienced a lower number of discipline referrals after exiting the 30-day program.

In a closer examination of each student participant, the researcher determined the number of discipline referrals pre- and post-intervention by student. The researcher found that ten percent of the 51 S.T.A.R. students in School A were not impacted positively, as they (5) collectively had more discipline referrals post-intervention. The researcher found that 82% of the students were impacted positively, as they (42) collectively had a lower number of discipline referrals post intervention. Additionally, the researcher found that eight percent of the students were not impacted positively or negatively, as they (4) collectively had the same number of discipline referrals pre- and post-intervention. In School B, the data revealed that 11% of the 54 S.T.A.R. participants

were not impacted positively, as they (6) collectively had more discipline referrals post-30-day intervention. The researcher found that 78% of the students in School B were positively impacted, as they (42) collectively had a lower number of discipline referrals post intervention. In addition, the researcher found that 11% of the students were not impacted positively or negatively, as they (6) collectively had the same number of discipline referrals pre- and post-intervention. In School C, the researcher found that of the 48 participants, eight percent of the students were not impacted positively, as they (4) collectively had more discipline referrals post-intervention. The researcher found that 81% of the students were impacted positively, as they (39) collectively had a lower number of discipline referrals post intervention. Additionally, the researcher found that ten percent of the 48 students in School C were not impacted positively or negatively, as they (5) collectively had the same number of discipline referrals pre- and post-intervention.

Table 4.16

*School A Descriptive Statistics Discipline Infractions*

Component	Variance	Standard Deviation	Median	Mean
Discipline Infractions Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	21.12	4.60	9.00	10.04
Discipline Infractions Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	12.56	3.54	8.00	7.39

Note. n=51



Table 4.17

*School B Descriptive Statistics Discipline Infractions*

Component	Variance	Standard Deviation	Median	Mean
Discipline Infractions Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	19.47	4.41	10.5	11.33
Discipline Infractions Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	12.76	3.57	8.00	8.91

Note. n=54

Table 4.18

*School C Descriptive Statistics Discipline Infractions*

Component	Variance	Standard Deviation	Median	Mean
Discipline Infractions Pre-S.T.A.R. Intervention	13.95	3.74	9.50	10.58
Discipline Infractions Post-S.T.A.R. Intervention	9.33	3.06	7.50	7.83

Note. n=48

### Summary of Findings Concerning Impact on Discipline

In summary, it was determined the overall average number of discipline referrals for 30-day S.T.A.R. participants was impacted when compared to four consecutive nine week periods pre- and post- intervention. This was evidenced by the mean averages from Schools A, B and C. The mean average number of discipline referrals for S.T.A.R. participants from the three middle schools pre-30-day S.T.A.R. intervention was 10.65, while the mean average discipline referrals post-intervention was 8.04. This indicates an average decrease of 2.61 discipline referrals for the 153 30-day S.T.A.R. participants in

for four consecutive nine week periods post-intervention enrolled in the three middle schools participating in this study.

#### Summary of Findings Concerning Overall Impact

The quantitative findings of this study revealed there was significant improvement in the 153 students enrolled in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program during the 2008-2009 school year for attendance, GPAs and discipline. The mean average in the number of days the 30-day S.T.A.R. students were absent from school for the three schools involved in the study was a 5.61 days decrease per student, while the mean GPAs increased by an average of 0.32 points per student and the mean number of discipline infractions decreased by 2.61 discipline referrals per student. The S.T.A.R. program, designed to keep truant, problem middle school students in their regular classrooms, contributed to a reduction in absences, an improvement in GPAs and reduced discipline referrals. As an intervention that combined military-style drilling and exercise with academic tutoring, the S.T.A.R. program had positive impact on most middle school students enrolled in the 30-day intervention.

#### Findings to Research Question Four

Armed with knowledge of the impact of the S.T.A.R. program, the researcher sought to explore how S.T.A.R. officers accounted for the success of the program on targeted middle school students. Structured interviews with three S.T.A.R. officers from each of the three middle schools were taped recorded, stored in a locked cabinet and transcribed by the researcher. An interview protocol was used during each interview session. The researcher explained the overarching question of the study prior to the interviews. The researcher also revealed some of the findings of the study to indicate that

the program had a positive impact on middle school students. The purpose of the qualitative portion of the study was to explain, from the perspective of the S.T.A.R. officers of the three programs, the culture of the programs, and to begin to identify possible components of this culture that are integral to how the S.T.A.R. program operates, and why it might be effective.

After transcribing the interviews, the researcher coded the phrases or statements made by the S.T.A.R. officers by identifying components of the S.T.A.R. program, including structure, people, resources, methods of administration and effectiveness. By studying the S.T.A.R. officers' statements and phrases coded in these categories, the researcher identified several subthemes that were then merged into five major themes to explain the success of the intervention. The findings to research question four were reported by the major themes that account for the success of the S.T.A.R. program in middle schools.

#### Accumulation of Short-term Successes

Interviews with the three S.T.A.R. officers provided rich data on their perspectives and experiences regarding the S.T.A.R. program. A particularly prominent theme that emerged was short-term successes that led to changes in attitude and improved student performance. The officers observed changes in student attitudes towards school, including their morale and subsequent performance, which attributed to student beliefs in themselves once they experienced small successes. They wanted to live up to expectations once they experienced some successes in attendance, academic performance and discipline.

*Changes in Attitudes and Morale.* The three S.T.A.R. officers shared that they observed positive changes in attitudes toward school and morale. One S.T.A.R. officer stated, “Students learn from their experiences in the program that hard work equals success.” Another officer stated, “We teach them (the students) about having a time and place for everything, so they better understand about rules in school. We want them to understand about rules in the school and about how they must behave in every location of their lives.” The third officer stated, “Each day there is something successful. A student does not want to miss school. They will wake their parents up to bring them at 5:30 a.m. They absolutely do not want to miss a day.” One officer said, “We work really hard in teaching the students the differences between personal and business...social behaviors. The differences in communication between an adult and their friends.” Finally, one officer said, “They (the students) don’t like the corrective training so they start rethinking decisions they are making while they are in school. Once they get a taste of success in the field and classroom, you see a change in their attitudes.”

*Changes in Performance.* The S.T.A.R. officers offered positive opinions about improvements in student attendance, achievement and discipline. One officer stated,

We have a tutor that is a teacher. She works with the students after school. In the beginning, most of our kids don’t care about grades. But they quickly learn that they have to have the grades to phase out of the program. They start asking for help and the tutor stays busy.

Another officer stated,

Everything changes when students begin to see their successes in P.T. (physical training). When they (the students) start seeing what they can do physically.

They start seeing that they can do and just start doing what they need to do. I mean grades, everything...it all just begins to fall in there together.

One officer shared,

Students must have ones, twos, or threes on their DPRs (daily progress reports) from their teachers to be considered having a successful day. Any fours or fives and another day is added. Absolutely no discipline referrals. You get a discipline referral after you are in the program...you are in trouble.

All officers agreed that if a student did receive a school discipline referral from a teacher the student had to start over at day one of their 30 days.

The S.T.A.R. officers credited improve in school attendance to students feeling successful. One officer said,

As they realize their own successes, they thought less of the missing school. It became the least of their problems. They were used to having to be there so much...it wasn't even a second thought for them. Now students are concentrating on how to get out of the program, not why I have to be in school today.

Once students experienced successes, they wanted to maintain the momentum and they did not want to fall back into negative experiences with attendance, GPA and discipline.

When there were setbacks, because they had experienced success, they worked to overcome the obstacles due to the close supervision and their beliefs in themselves.

#### Administrative and Teacher Support

The significance of administrative and teacher support of the program was another prominent theme. Administrative and teacher support emerged in various ways, including the importance of supporting the program and communicating with the

S.T.A.R. officers. Each officer articulated the importance of these factors and their part in making the program a success. This intervention focuses on hardcore physical training in order to adjust attitudes of middle school students, which must be viewed as a technique that is helpful, not harmful, to a child's self-esteem. The reward system builds on a series of positive consequences as students complete each phase of the program. Because of the military-style structure of the intervention and a very structured reward system, it is crucial to have community support, which begins with the support of administrators and faculty of the school.

*Supporting the Program.* Administrative and teacher support emerged as a crucial element for the success of the S.T.A.R. program. As one S.T.A.R. officer pointed out, "You've got to have the support of the principal and assistant principal for the program to be successful. That's our biggest challenge. We've got to have support throughout the school." Another S.T.A.R. officer expressed, "The administration initiates referrals to our program. Hopefully, they don't use us as a last ditch effort to correct a student. If we can get on board and make interventions early, we will have more success."

Another officer pointed out,

If the people (administrators, teachers and staff) in the school don't buy into the program, then the parents and community will know. They won't buy into the program. For the program to be successful, you need the whole school's support.

A genuine support of the program was thought to be the basis for it to be successful.

One of the officers pointed out,

Some teachers don't buy into the 'military-style' drills that we (officers) do with the students. They (teachers) feel we (officers) are being too tough on them (students). When they (teachers) see them (students) carrying logs or doing crab crawls on the ground, they (teachers) feel sorry for them (students). But they've (teachers) got to look beyond that and see the end result we (officers) are looking for. They've (teachers) got to believe in the program and know the point of the military-style training.

*Communication.* S.T.A.R. officers must win support from faculty in order to keep lines of communication open about student performance in school. An officer articulated,

If teachers don't consistently fill out DPRs (daily progress reports) or communicate problems to us, we may not know what is going on. We can't be there with every student, every minute of the day. So we have to depend on the principals and teachers to let us know. I'm not talking about just discipline. They have to let us know about grades and assignments too. We know when they're absent, it's the other stuff (academics and discipline) that I want to hear about."

A point that one officer made was,

Communication is critical to the success of the S.T.A.R. program. We (S.T.A.R. program, administration and teachers) really do have to communicate with each other. We need to talk and discuss what is going on if one of our students is not doing what they are expected to do while they are in the program."

The knowledge becomes empowering for the officers of the program, which ultimately impacts students who realize that officers know how they are performing.

Two-way communication is critical to maintaining support for the program. Officers must explain how the program works and why it is designed the way it is to earn the support of faculty and administration. One S.T.A.R. officer felt that it was essential that all faculty and staff be familiar with each phase of the program. The officer stated,

In the program, a student will start out with no privileges – this is phase one. They have no, no privileges. As time progresses, and they are doing better, they earn specific privileges, weaning their way out of the program. This provides stability for the student to be completely on their own...carrying on their success that they have earned or worked for. We need to let the principals and teachers know what phase our students are in, so we've got to communicate with them (principals and teachers) too.

#### Parent Support

S.T.A.R. officers from the three schools stressed the value of a sound, partnership between parents and the program. When asked about connection with parents, one officer stated, "A positive parent involvement is a vital part." Another said, "It is critical to the program's success, absolutely 100 percent. The parent, school and program must work together or the program won't work."

One officer said,

It helps the kids build a better relationship with their parents. The students get to show their parents they can be successful at school. This carries over to home,



and parents will begin to see their kids taking more responsibility at home too.

The kids begin to get along better with their parents at home.

Another officer pointed out,

We want parents to understand that we want to help them fix their child. But we are only part of the fix. We need to know from the parents what is going on at home, so we can understand what is important to their child. This helps us as we work with the kids to change their behaviors.

An officer stated,

A big reason students end up in our program is because they don't have parents that hold them accountable. Parents are gone a lot...at work...or just not home. They are not involved and don't know what's going on. They are busy and don't have time to check behind their kids.

An officer conveyed,

The biggest challenge of the S.T.A.R. program is the non-cooperation from apathetic parents. That is my biggest challenge. When parents don't help. They don't get it...that makes our job that much more difficult. We have to make the kids understand that it's not okay to be apathetic even though their parents are apathetic. We have to convince the kids above their parents.

All three officers revealed that parental support is essential and critical to the effectiveness of the program.

#### Student Expectations

Each of the S.T.A.R. officers interviewed felt that students must be held accountable for their attendance, academics and behaviors. As one officer described,

“Students must have an average of 75 or above in each class in order to go to the next phase of S.T.A.R. The student must have an 80 and above to successfully complete the 30-day program.” Another officer stated, “We have a tutor in study hall every afternoon. They are held accountable for their work and assignments.” The officers not only provide high expectations for student success, they also build in structures that help students have high expectations for themselves.

An officer said, “We try to teach the children that the meaning of self-discipline is to make yourself do things when it’s time to do them whether you like it or not. So in this we constantly...daily...every morning and afternoon, we teach them to complete hard work to the best of their ability.” Another officer explained, “Our motto is ‘Failure is Not an Option,’ and we try to instill this in the kids.” An officer expressed,

It’s apathy. You know all these issues reflect each other. It’s the overall attitude that affects all of these issues. Some of these students have attendance issues, but their grades are still good. Maybe 30 percent already had good grades. They just didn’t give a crap. They just don’t care. That’s what we’re here for...to change those attitudes. We’re here for attitude adjustments...military style. In the military, you are expected to give your best. We expect the kids in our program to do their best.”

By providing high expectations for performance, the officers see attitudes of students change to expect more of themselves.

#### Students as Decision Makers

Ultimately, by the time a student is in middle school, he or she is expected to make thousands of decisions a day. A student makes many choices about his or her

schooling, from the friends he or she chooses to the behavior he or she chooses to exhibit. Responses to questions regarding choices and decisions students make while in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program were explored. One officer conveyed, “S.T.A.R. gives students an opportunity to stay in the regular setting at school as opposed to being expelled or even locked up. It makes a difference in so many areas of their lives.” Another officer said, “We took a poll and asked students questions. They told us that they got along better with family at home and their peers at school. They have more friends. They learned to socialize better. It made them feel better about themselves because their grades were up.”

An officer being interviewed related, “A lot of the students, where they didn’t think about it before, are now thinking about going to college. A lot of them feel like they can finish school. When they first go to the program, they didn’t think about finishing school. Now they think they can do it.” Another officer felt,

They are making better choices at home. They are more understanding of their parents. Also, it makes a difference with them not having any discipline issues at school. This helps them get along better with their teachers too. The teachers are not fussing at them, and they want to participate in class more. They are learning more because they are choosing to be more involved in their classes.

The interviewed officers felt it is important for students to learn to make good choices. One officer offered,

If a student makes a bad choice, he learns quickly that it messes things up for him. If it is a discipline issue, the student will be removed from the classroom and taken to the field immediately for PT (physical training). Once he gets on that field, it doesn’t take long to wish he was back in the classroom. You can often

see it in their eyes. They understand. They finally get it. Students learn to think twice before they make a bad choice.

Another officer stated,

One bad choice and a student starts from day one. You can see in their faces. They know. When others in the program see one kid starting over, they begin to make positive choices too. This is effective teaching taking place. These kids begin to understand that they have a choice and they're making choices to behave in this way.

During the interviews with the three S.T.A.R. officers, each interviewee was asked to identify anything that would make the program more effective.

One officer stated,

I'd like for more people in the community to understand what we do in the program. It has changed so many lives, but people in the community continue to talk negatively about the program. It has an effect on how people perceive the program. You can do wonderful things, but people in the community can erase everything we have worked for because of their misunderstanding of the way the program works. The S.T.A.R. program could be the only good thing a kid has done and felt successful about in his live. Then adults can erase how they feel because of some comments they make about the program. The community just needs to be more aware and understand the program so that they don't have a negative impact on the program.

### Summary of Findings Concerning Intervention Success

Research question five was analyzed using qualitative analysis. Interviews were conducted with S.T.A.R. officers from the three middle schools participating in the study. Five themes emerged from the data as it was coded, accumulation of short-term success, administrative and teacher support, parent support, student expectations and students as decision-makers. These major themes contribute to the success of the military-style intervention that helped middle school students improve attendance, GPA and behavior.

The five factors that contribute to the program's impact on students emerged as themes. First, once enrolled in the program, students must begin to experience success, which then motivates the students to want more positive outcomes. Success tends to breed success. The interviewees disclosed that the student participants will begin to have a positive connection with school once they experience some success, and this impacts their attendance, GPAs and discipline. Second, factors that accounts for the impact of the S.T.A.R. program is administrative and faculty support. The S.T.A.R. officers revealed that it is essential to have strong connections with the administration and teachers at each middle school where the programs are based for the program to be successful. Principals and teachers must see the program as a positive intervention and not be critics of the military-style structure of the program.

Third, parental support is crucial to the success, as the intervention is dependent upon reinforcement of the practices and changes being made in the students. The officers indicated that parents and other community people could destroy what both they and the S.T.A.R. participants strive to achieve, by not having a clear understanding of the program and how it operates. Parental support and reinforcement, the forms of

noncooperation and apathy, proved to be the greatest challenge to those who administer the program each day. Additionally, the administrators of the program and the students themselves must hold high student expectations. Lastly, once students understand that the school expects them to be successful and provides structures for them to be successful, they begin to hold themselves accountable for high expectations.

#### Summary of Major Findings of the Study

- In chapter four, the analysis of data were presented to report findings of the mixed methods study designed to explore impact of an intervention designed to improve student attendance, grades and behavior. Research questions one, two and three were analyzed using quantitative analysis. The researcher found: Middle school males were the majority group served by the intervention of S.T.A.R
- Overall attendance of the 153 30-day S.T.A.R. participants was impacted positively when compared to four consecutive nine weeks pre- and post-intervention.
- One group, Hispanic middle school students, was not impacted positively by the S.T.A.R. intervention, as their absences actually increased after the 30-day intervention.
- In all middle schools, in percentages ranging from 17% to 23% approximately one-fifth of the middle school students did not improve attendance after the 30-day intervention.
- Most GPAs of the 153 30-day S.T.A.R. participants were impacted positively when compared to four consecutive nine weeks pre- and post-intervention.

- Some students' academic performance did not improve, ranging from 24% in School A, to 15% in School B and 12 percent in School C. The intervention did not impact their academic growth as evidenced by grades, but this was only true for very small numbers of students across all three grades.
- Overall average number of discipline referrals for 30-day S.T.A.R. participants was impacted positively when compared to four consecutive nine weeks pre- and post-intervention.
- There was a significant improvement in attendance, GPAs and discipline of the 153 middle school students enrolled in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program.
- As an intervention that combined military-style drilling and exercise with academic tutoring, the S.T.A.R. program worked to have a major, positive impact on most middle school students enrolled in the 30-day intervention.
- Officers of the program describe five major factors to account for intervention success: accumulation of short-term success, administrative and teacher support, parental support, high student expectations and students as conscientious decision makers.
- These factors account for the success of the military-style intervention that helped middle school students improve attendance, GPA and discipline.

In summary, the researcher found that:

- The 30-day S.T.A.R. program positively impacted the attendance of middle school student participants
- The 30-day S.T.A.R. program positively impacted grades of middle school student participants.

- The 30-day S.T.A.R. program positively impacted discipline of middle school student participants.
- The five major factors that contributed to the positive impacts were:  
accumulation of short-term success, administrative and teacher support, parental support, high student expectations and students as conscientious decision makers.



## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher presented an overview of the study, along with a summary of findings, discussion of major findings and conclusions, as well as the implications and recommendations based upon the data gathered. By focusing the study on interventions designed to assist middle school students with the strategies to overcome obstacles of truancy, poor academic performance and discipline-related problems, the researcher determined the impact of one intervention that worked, the Student Transition and Recovery (S.T.A.R.) program.

#### Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of an alternative education program (S.T.A.R.) on middle school students. The overarching research question in this study was, “What is the impact of the S.T.A.R. program on middle school attendance, academic performance and discipline?” The following sub questions guided the research, (1) To what extent does S.T.A.R. intervention impact the attendance of middle school students? 2) To what extent does S.T.A.R. intervention impact the academic performance of middle school students? (3) To what extent does S.T.A.R. intervention impact the discipline of middle school students? and (4) How do S.T.A.R. officers account for the impact of S.T.A.R. on middle school students?

The literature suggests that the importance of school attendance to achievement, engagement and educational success has been somewhat neglected in educational reform and prevention initiatives (Baker, Sigmon & Nugent, 2001). School truancy, zero

tolerance and school safety concerns have combined to produce strategies that are counterproductive by pushing students out of school (Muney, 2001). Attendance is the basis of school achievement, and interventions that target problem students can be effective in making sure students are in school and working on academic performance, while reducing truancy and disciplinary infractions. Assuring that no child is left behind in our schools is a premise for administrators to seek alternative education programs that are designed to keep students in school, reduce truancy, improve academic achievement and reduce discipline problems. Shaw (2008) contends that addressing and identifying workable alternatives to discipline is an urgent challenge facing leadership at every level and for a variety of reasons.

In Georgia, the S.T.A.R. program offers an alternative to out-of-school suspension (OSS) for school administrators. Research on efficacy of OSS suggests that it may not be effective (Atkins, McKay, Frazier & Jakobsons, 2002; Bonds, 2000; Ruck & Wortley, 2002). The S.T.A.R. program enables administrators to keep at-risk students in school by not sacrificing discipline for attendance, and allows students every opportunity to learn. This study was intended to expand what is known about alternative education program interventions at the middle school level, and specifically the impact of the 30-day S.T.A.R. program on participants' attendance, academic achievement and discipline.

#### Design of the Study

Student data from three South Georgia middle schools were used to conduct the research. In this study, 153 students and three 30-day S.T.A.R. programs were utilized to obtain the attendance, grades and discipline from Infinite Campus database. In order to conduct an in-depth analysis of the impact of the intervention, data were collected to

included gender and ethnicity, as well as attendance, GPAs and discipline on 51 students in School A, 54 students in School B and 48 in School C. The total number successfully completing the 30-day S.T.A.R. program from the three middle schools during the 2008-2009 school year was 153 students. Ages of the students ranged from nine to fifteen, with a mean age of 13.28.

The study was further substantiated with interviews from the S.T.A.R. officers of the three Georgia Title I middle schools. The intent of this study was to determine if the 30-Day S.T.A.R. interventions had an impact on the attendance, GPAs and discipline of middle school students after successfully completing the program for four consecutive nine-week grading periods. Data were collected for each participant from three middle schools for four nine weeks grading periods prior to enrollment in the 30-day program and for four nine weeks grading periods post-enrollment.

Interviews were scheduled with S.T.A.R. officers at their respective schools and consisted of 16 questions. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. To ensure confidentiality of the students, officers, their schools and school districts were assigned codes throughout the study.

### Summary of Findings

Quantitative evidence from the study supports the use of the S.T.A.R. program to improve attendance, academic performance and discipline of middle school students. The researcher found that the S.T.A.R. program had a positive impact on student attendance, especially male students. It was noted that absences decreased after participants successfully completed the S.T.A.R. program.

Attendance is essential for students participating in the S.T.A.R. program. Students must be in school in order to successfully phase out of the program. In order to learn, a student must be present in school, and if a student is going to be educated, a sufficient amount of time must be spent in the classroom. However, student absences may have decreased due to new laws regarding attendance in the state of Georgia. A school may be placed on the “Needs Improvement List” due to poor student attendance. Therefore, school districts in Georgia have placed a greater emphasis on student attendance and have implemented several policies regarding attendance. In addition, the state of Georgia restricts a student from receiving a driver’s license or learner’s permit if he/she has 15 or more unexcused days absent from school for one year.

One group, Hispanic middle school students, were not impacted positively by the S.T.A.R. intervention, as their absences increased after the 30-day intervention. Children of Hispanic background often face challenges that differ from other subpopulations. Language barriers, economic disadvantages and issues related to parental citizenship status often faced by these students can result in various negative outcomes. Language barriers may impede Hispanic parents from understanding the critical need for attendance and continued overall success in school. Additionally, the Hispanic culture believes that it is the schools responsibility to educate the child, and it is the parents responsibility that the well being of the child is developed (Quezada, Diaz & Sanchez, 2003). Inclusion of a Spanish-speaking facilitator should be a critical component for positive outcomes.

In all middle schools in percentages ranging from 17% to 23%, approximately one-fifth of the middle school students did not improve attendance after the 30-day intervention. There are many attributes that students already possess that interventions cannot change. Many students that have antisocial behaviors may not be affected by this 30-day intervention due to a lack of disengagement from school (Gonzales & Richards, 2002). In addition, another factor to consider is the lack of teacher and parental support. Once the student has phased out of the program, parents and teachers no longer communicate with the DPRs (daily progress reports) and some students revert to bad choices. Parental support may diminish after they are no longer responsible for transporting their child to school at 5:30 a.m. and picking them up at 5:30 p.m. for 30 consecutive school days. Some parents likely view this as a hardship and are reluctant to reenroll non-compliant students that have successfully phased out of the program. Therefore, these students realize the threat of reentry into the 30-day program is no a longer viable option for them. This greatly diminishes the long-term impact of the program for these students.

Students GPAs were analyzed to determine if there was a significant difference in academic achievement of students prior to and after successfully completing the 30-day S.T.A.R. program. Overall, most of the students were positively impacted by the program. Students participating in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program attend study hall each day of the week and receive tutoring each afternoon. While in the program, students are taught study and organizational skills. In addition, the DPR (daily progress report) students are responsible for while in the program may encourage them to maintain accountability to their teachers after they exit the program. Students' absences from

school lead to poor grades, they fall further behind, make-up work amasses, which may lead to more tardiness or absences. S.T.A.R. students are held accountable for their work on a daily basis. This keeps students from falling behind and feeling overwhelmed. Therefore, when S.T.A.R. students' attendance improves and they are in the classroom to learn, each participant has a better opportunity to increase their GPAs.

Many factors including teacher support and academic extensions are essential components of the 30-day S.T.A.R. program. Teacher support is a critical part of the program. Therefore, once students exit the program, they may perceive they no longer have teacher support. However, teachers may have higher expectations of S.T.A.R. students due to their proven successes during the 30-day intervention. Students may no longer have the same teachers and academic expectations may be more difficult and rigorous. These factors may account for students that did not show academic improvement after exiting the 30-day intervention. The academic component of S.T.A.R. addressed by after-school tutoring may have been more of a study-hall type environment. An academic summer program combined with on-going tutoring provided by S.T.A.R. might help overcome academic deficits.

Overall, average number of discipline referrals for 30-day S.T.A.R. participants was impacted positively when compared to four consecutive nine weeks pre- and post-intervention. Parental support was found to be a key element for the S.T.A.R. program to be a success. When parents are involved and the school has their support, discipline typically improves. When a parent enrolls their child in the S.T.A.R. program, they are considered S.T.A.R. students. The majority of the students realize that their parents authorized their participation in the program, and their parents will authorize it again. As

a rule, students that have successfully phased out of the program will think before they commit an offense that will place them back in the program. Parents also have the option to sign a release allowing students to receive courtesy interventions (CIs). At any point after a student has phased out of the program, the S.T.A.R. officer may be called if the student has a discipline infraction. The officer takes the student to the field for immediate CI intervention. The student is returned to class once he/she realizes the classroom is the better of his/her options. Additionally, some 30-day S.T.A.R. students are placed in the program by the juvenile judge. If these students have any serious discipline infractions once they phase out of the program, the judge may order them to a youth detention center. As a result, the majority of court-ordered students have no desire to return to court and avoid major discipline issues. In addition, it is important to note, middle school students are in a transitional phase of their lives and a great deal of maturation takes place in students at this age. As a result, some students mature and begin to take pride in their attendance, GPAs and behavior.

There was significant improvement in attendance, GPAs and discipline of the 153 30-day S.T.A.R. students enrolled in the three middle schools participating in this study. It is evident from the research that attendance and achievement are positively correlated. This is important because many schools in the United States seem to have a problem with attendance. This often means that students are not achieving to the best of their abilities because they are missing learning opportunities. It is important for students to be successful in middle school because it often sets them on the right path to be successful in life. It is imperative to get the students to go to class on a regular basis so that they can be as successful as possible. Using the 30-day S.T.A.R. program as a means of holding students accountable for attendance and discipline also appears to improve academic performance.

Officers of the program attributed five major factors that account for intervention success: accumulation of short-term success, administration and teacher support, parental support, high student expectations and students as conscientious decision makers. Most of these contributing factors reflect the qualities of effective regular education. However, based on the three interviews, these major factors must be greater in intensity and play a more significant role for the students who are targeted for the program. These five factors are imbedded in the philosophies of the 30-day program and are integral to their successes and approaches to effectively serving middle school students.

The S.T.A.R. program allows students to be successful. One of the most important things students learn in the program is that “failure is not an option.” In order to be successful in life, students realize they must put forth their best effort and not give up. By participating in the program, students recognize that they can be just as successful in the classrooms as they are with their military-style drills and exercises.

Additionally, the significance of administrative, teacher and parental support relative to S.T.A.R. program success includes the importance of communication. The nature of the S.T.A.R. program provides support at home and in school. Therefore, students benefit from caring adults who follow-up at school, in the classroom and at home. Together, administrators, teachers and parents can work as an effective team to provide the best possible education for at-risk students enrolled in the 30-day program.

In the S.T.A.R. program, students are held to high expectations. The program allows students to be successful in school and increase their chances of reaching their maximal potential. Students in the S.T.A.R. program can achieve success without being expelled or suspended and lose valuable learning time. Ultimately, each student must decide. Students with improved attendance will increase chances of success and opportunities to learn.



## Discussion of Findings

Cornell, 2006 asserts that nothing works to improve truancy. This statement suggests that interventions are futile, and yet the findings of this study indicate a positive impact of the S.T.A.R. program on attendance. Although short-term, the immediate impact of the intervention does make a difference in middle school attendance. Because attendance is considered a significant factor in academic performance, it is important to note that students in this study also improved their overall grade point averages. Mascia (2009) found that when a school district has a high number of chronic absentees, they typically have a lower district-wide GPA than a school with fewer absences. The researcher of this study found that middle school interventions designed to improve attendance and academic performance can work. Students enrolled in the S.T.A.R. program were required to be in attendance, and although cause-effect relationship was not studied, it is significant to note that improved attendance and higher academic achievement were reported for students targeted for the intervention.

Students who participated in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program receive daily tutoring from a certified teacher each day of the week from 3:30 p.m. until 5:30 p.m. Study skills and organizational skills are greatly emphasized while students are in the 30-day program. Students that successfully complete the program are taught these habits. As a result, these middle school students may continue to practice what they have learned after completing the 30-day intervention. This may account for the improvement shown in the majority of students' grade point averages (GPAs) for four nine-weeks post-S.T.A.R. intervention.

The S.T.A.R. program also promotes parental contacts. Consequently, parents may become more aware of their responsibility to assist their children and follow-up to ensure their children are keeping up with class work and homework. Furthermore, it makes sense that when attendance improves, students spend more time in the classroom where they have a better opportunity to improve their academic performances. An underlying factor may be that parents are responsible for bringing their child to school at 5:30 a.m. Parents having this responsibility for 30 days will likely follow-up to make certain their child is attending school, performing academically and behaving. Since findings indicate that Hispanic parents view the school district as the responsible party for providing education to students and the home being the nurturer of the well being of the child, parental contacts may not be promoted (Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003). This could be a factor in why the attendance of Hispanic students was not impacted by participation in the S.T.A.R. program.

There were several factors that negatively affect students when they are chronically absent from school. Baker et al. (2001) found several short- and long-term consequences. Students with high rates of absenteeism become at-risk for substance abuse, low self-esteem, social isolation and teen pregnancy. In addition, these students often are unemployed, earn lower wages as adults and receive welfare assistance. As adults, truant students are more likely to be violent (Baker, et al., 2001). Bernard (2007) found that, whether in school or out of school, suspension has been ineffective. Therefore, the S.T.A.R. program offers an alternative to suspension and allows students to remain in their regular classrooms during the school day and receive additional tutoring after school. The findings of this study indicated the 30-day S.T.A.R. program

was an effective alternative to suspension in that it produced a decline in student truancy and discipline for four nine-weeks post-intervention. When a student is placed in the S.T.A.R. program, the student is immediately brought to a new level of accountability. The military-style discipline is precisely what the student may have needed at this time in his/her life to bring an awareness of the consequences of poor self-control. The student remained in school, going to classes and learning, rather than being expelled and at home or “on the streets.”

The literature also suggests that truancy is a risk factor for other problems, including substance abuse, delinquency, gang activity, serious criminal behavior and dropping out of school (Baker, Sigmon & Nugent, 2001). Additional research found that truancy itself can lead to risk behaviors, given that children who are not in school are typically unsupervised and removed from the influence of positive peers and adults (Heilbrunn, 2007). There are a number of studies showing that effective truancy reduction programs can produce a marked decline in delinquency and crimes committed by school age youth (Heilbrunn, 2007). Additionally, boot camps have proven to be very effective, and have grown in popularity due to their ability to reduce juvenile delinquency (Parent, 2003). Many citizens believe the influence of helping students mature in military-style boot camps is an excellent resource for dissuading student misconduct in schools and communities (Coppolo & Nelson, 2005). The findings of this study support this research. The 30-day S.T.A.R. program was found to be an effective truancy reduction program.

A comparison was made between student discipline referrals four nine-weeks prior to students entering the 30-day S.T.A.R. program and four nine-weeks after they

exited the program. The findings indicated a decrease in discipline for the students successfully completing the 30-day intervention. As previously mentioned, the S.T.A.R. program encourages parental contact. According to Brown and Newman (2005), many problems that youth experience are due to the lack of supervision and guidance of parents. All too often parents fail to take responsibility for their children. A lack of parental involvement has become a major crisis (Brown & Newnam, 2005). Therefore, once the school has parental support, discipline typically improves. Alexander (2003) asserts the S.T.A.R. program requires a high level of parent and guardian accountability. Parents that place their child in the S.T.A.R. program will more than likely enroll them again. This prospective may play a role in students thinking about the consequences of another discipline infraction. Also, some 30-day S.T.A.R. students are court-ordered. A court-ordered student receiving a serious discipline infraction after phasing out of the program, could possibly be sent to a youth detention center. This is a strong deterrent for students that are court-ordered. Although S.T.A.R. places a great deal of emphases on discipline, some improvements may be attributed to maturation of these middle school students.

Parenti (2000) found that military discipline models were excellent strategies to deter student misbehavior in schools and communities. The notion of military-style discipline, according to Parenti, has been an excellent tactic for helping students realize they must become responsible for their behaviors. Parenti also noted that these type programs add to the maturity of noncompliant youth. Tyler, Darville and Stalnaker (2001) contend that there is great appeal behind the juvenile boot camp approach to discipline due to the number of adults in the United States who have experienced success

through military basic training. The S.T.A.R. program is rigid, and students learn to understand their boundaries and expectations. The military-style nature of the program may account for the larger number of male students the program serves. The findings of this study indicated the program served a greater percentage of males. By and large, the military service is predominantly male. This may account for some parents being hesitant to enroll their daughters in the program.

Some students rebel against the “in-your-face” discipline, and this may account for the Hispanic population not showing an improvement in attendance after the 30-day intervention. Quezada, Diaz and Sanchez (2003) indicate that Hispanic parents feel the school district is responsible for providing education to students, and the home is responsible for providing for the well being students. A language barrier may exist and this ethnic group and their parents may not understand this form of discipline. However, one must consider that this population may have missed more days of school after the intervention due to seasonal migrant work. Hispanic students may miss school due to working in the fields during various seasons of the year.

The findings of this study show that there were statistically significant differences in attendance, GPAs and discipline for students four nine-weeks prior to entering the 30-day S.T.A.R. program as compared to four nine-weeks post intervention. In all three areas, student performance increased after he/she successfully completed the 30-day program.

### Conclusions

One nationally recognized program to reduce truancy, improve academic achievement and behavioral performances is the S.T.A.R. program. In this study the

S.T.A.R. program was found to have a positive statistical impact on middle school students in the areas of attendance, academic performance and discipline. Based upon the research findings of this study, the following conclusions may be drawn:

- Interventions that feature strong adult support have the best potential to impact improved attendance and grades of middle school students.
- When served in small groups and held to high expectations, middle school students can make positive decisions, which lead to reduced discipline referrals and improved grades.
- Military-style programs have the potential to improve student attendance, grades and discipline in middle school.
- Alternatives to out-of-school suspension (OSS), such as the S.T.A.R. program, may lead to at-risk students remaining in their regular classes and potentially increasing their chances of success.
- Parental involvement and support serve as a motivator for students to be successful in middle school.
- An ongoing intervention program throughout middle school may provide maximum support for students' transitional years.
- Alternative interventions which include an academic support component that meets the needs of truant students holds promise for at-risk students.
- Support of stakeholders (administrators, teachers and parents) may increase the effectiveness of alternative interventions in middle school.
- Alternative intervention programs might need to be planned ethnic differences in mind.

- Home and school connection in solving problems through alternative interventions in order to improve students' attendance, grades and behavior holds promise for at-risk middle school students.
- Early intervention at the middle school level may be critical in terms of reaching children still in their impressionable years.
- In order for alternative interventions to be successful, a component to address language and cultural barriers should be a part of the program.

### Implications

The results from this study hold implications for middle school students, teachers and administrators. The positive influence of the S.T.A.R. program on attendance, academic performance and discipline of middle school students provides an effective intervention in the educational setting.

For students, the S.T.A.R. program serves as a tool to improve overall success in and outside the classroom. The program instills in the students positive work ethics and pride. Students acquire the ability to set and reach short and long term goals; the use of the S.T.A.R. program can have a positive impact on the students educational success and self esteem. Students begin to notice small accomplishments through goal setting and acquire an intrinsic desire to attend school, learn and behave. The 30-day intervention allows the students to feel successful at home and in school.

The S.T.A.R. program provides an alternative for administrators to keep students in school in order to reduce truancy, raise academic achievement and decrease discipline problems school-wide. In addition, as administrators continue to seek ways to meet adequately yearly progress (AYP), this study will provide evidence for continued support

of the military-style program. Most importantly, administrators have an alternative to out of school suspension, providing students with greater opportunities to learn.

For classroom teachers, the use of the S.T.A.R. program provides an avenue for keeping students in the regular classroom setting. S.T.A.R. assists teachers with discipline and allows them to focus on teaching. Additionally, the 30-day intervention provides academic tutoring for students enrolled in the program. This provides additional academic support for classroom teachers. The after-school program ensures that students have their class work and homework completed in a timely manner.

It is important for students, administrators and teachers to understand the S.T.A.R. program is effective and has a positive impact on students who successfully phase out of the program.

#### Future Research

Results from the analysis of the data raised further questions, which should be studied in order to fully understand the impact of the 30-day S.T.A.R. program for at-risk students in middle schools. Future studies, which should be conducted, include the following:

1. The population and sample for this study was small, considering the number of programs in Georgia. The sample consisted of only three middle schools located in South Georgia. Therefore, future studies should use a larger population and sample over a wider geographic area.
2. The use of longitudinal data to determine long-term outcomes for students and the graduation rate of students placed in the S.T.A.R. program need to be examined.



3. A study should be conducted to determine parent perceptions, especially parents of girls and Hispanic students, of the S.T.A.R. programs at each of the three middle schools used in this study.
4. Additional studies involving qualitative research should be conducted to collect more feedback regarding the S.T.A.R. program. Teacher, student, parent and community interviews could provide invaluable information.
5. Additional research regarding the needs of the S.T.A.R. program should be conducted. Educators must continue to address the needs of at-risk middle school students. The number of at-risk youth in this country is increasing, and this is affecting the operation of schools. Alternative interventions have been proven to help. Therefore, for the intervention to be a success, requirements for the program must be addressed.

#### Summary

The United States is restructuring its education system with the help of *No Child Left Behind* by adopting high academic standards and accountability systems and focusing more attention and resources on low-performing schools. Efforts within school districts need to be supplemented with high quality alternative educational interventions that address truancy, academic performance and discipline and give administrators options to out-of-school suspensions. The Student Transition and Recovery Program (S.T.A.R.) is one such alternative educational intervention.

The S.T.A.R. program is designed for middle school students that are aged nine through fifteen and have committed offenses that warrant suspension from school or detention in a juvenile facility. The abiding principle of S.T.A.R. is that working with

teens while they are impressionable ensures a greater possibility of success. To be a part of S.T.A.R., principal recommendation and parental permission is required. As a result of the S.T.A.R. program students are allowed to remain in their schools and classes. This intervention is used as an alternative to “alternative” schools and juvenile detention centers.

As student truancy and discipline continues to be a problem and major concern of the United States educational system (Bennett, 2010), the S.T.A.R. program offers a viable solution for administrators as they seek ways to meet AYP. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine if the 30-day S.T.A.R. program impacts middle school students’ attendance, academic performance and discipline. The researcher examined data related to attendance, grades and discipline for students participating in the 30-day S.T.A.R. program during the 2008-2009 school year. Data were gathered for students four nine-week periods pre-30-day intervention and four nine-week periods post-30-day intervention.

A review of the literature revealed that there are few programs comparable to the S.T.A.R. program in the United States that are designed exclusively to serve middle school students. A study of this nature was needed in order to evaluate the impact of the 30-day program and provide evidence for continued support and funding of S.T.A.R. This study will give credence to the program and support its use by administrators as an alternative to OSS.

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## APPENDIX A

## SCHOOL DISTRICT CONSENT LETTER

January 12, 2011

Superintendent  
\_\_\_\_\_ County School District  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, Georgia \_\_\_\_\_

Dear Superintendent:

I am currently enrolled at Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, GA as a doctoral candidate. As a component of the degree requirements, I am proposing a research study on the Student Transition and Recovery Program (S.T.A.R.). The proposed study will determine the impact of the 30-day S.T.A.R. Program on enrolled students' attendance, grades and discipline. This research has been approved by the GSU IRB under protocol number H11171.

I am writing to request information regarding proposed research that I wish to conduct, and your school district will be included in the study. This research will include archival attendance, academic and discipline records to be retrieved from the Infinite Campus database. In addition, a S.T.A.R. officer will be selected to participate in an individual interview.

The data and information participants provide will be kept strictly confidential. The informed consent forms and other materials will be kept separate in locked file cabinet. Once data are collected for S.T.A.R. participants, student names will be deleted and numerical codes will be assigned to protect their anonymity. All identifying information will be shredded. Tape recordings of interviews with S.T.A.R. officers will be listened to only by the researcher and the dissertation chair, Dr. Barbara Mallory.

The results of this research will be included in my dissertation. Although studies have some degree of risk, there are not feasible risks in this study beyond those experienced in everyday living. All information is confidential. There will be no indication of names or schools to protect the identity of participants. Participation is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for the participants not choosing to participate in this study. If participants participate in the interview and then choose to withdraw, every effort will be made to delete their initial data and the comments made by them during the interview. There is no monetary payment to any participants for participating in this research.

In order to complete the proposed study, I am requesting permission to gather data on the 30-day S.T.A.R. students that were enrolled in the program during the 2008-2009 school year. The identity of the school district, all students and the S.T.A.R. officers who participate will remain anonymous and will not be published.

Please grant permission to conduct research in your school district by signing the form below. Your consideration and confirmation will be greatly appreciated. If you have questions, please contact me at (912) 367-8630.

Sincerely,

Cathy M. Campbell, Doctorial Student  
Georgia Southern University

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\_\_\_\_\_ I have read and understand the contents of this request to conduct research in this school system. I hereby grant permission for Cathy M. Campbell to conduct research in this school system.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Superintendent or Designee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## APPENDIX B

## S.T.A.R. INSTRUCTOR PARTICIPANTS' INTERVIEW CONSENT

As part of the requirements of the doctoral program in Educational Leadership at Georgia Southern University, I am conducting a mixed methods research study. The qualitative part of the study is for the purpose of determining the effect of the S.T.A.R. program on middle school students. The study will describe how officers of the S.T.A.R. program view the program's effectiveness on middle school students and their experiences associated with the program. It will give "first-hand knowledge" of the impact of the program while students are actively participating in the 30-day program.

Participation of this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study at any time without penalties or consequences.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in an interview session to answer questions related to the 30-day S.T.A.R. program and middle school students that complete the 30-day program. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. Your comments will be recorded on audiotape to accurately document your responses for this research. After the interview has been completed, the tapes will be transcribed. All audiotapes, transcriptions and notes will be confidential and stored in a locked cabinet. They will be destroyed one year after completion of the study.

Although studies have some degree of risk, there are no feasible risks in this study beyond those experienced in everyday living. All information is confidential. There will be no indication of names or schools to protect identities of the participants. You may ask questions about this study. The researcher or the dissertation chairperson will answer any questions related to this study. Contact Cathy M. Campbell at (912) 367-8630 with additional questions. If you have questions concerning your rights as a research participant or the process of IRB approval, contact the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at (912) 478-5465.

The results of this study may indicate positive benefits of the S.T.A.R. program, then school leaders will have data to support its continuing implementation of the program.

A copy of the results of this research may be obtained by contacting the researcher.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number H11171.

**Title of Project: The Impact of an Alternative Education Intervention (Student Transition and Recovery Program) on Middle School Students' Attendance, Academic Performance and Discipline**

**Principal Investigator: Cathy M. Campbell, PO Box 524, Baxley, GA 31513, (912) 367-8630, [cathy.campbell@appling.k12.ga.us](mailto:cathy.campbell@appling.k12.ga.us)**  
**Faculty Advisory: Dr. Barbara Mallory, College of Education, LTHD Department, Box 8131, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, GA 30460-8131, (912) 478-1428, [bmallory@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:bmallory@georgiasouthern.edu)**

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**Participant Signature**

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**Date**

## APPENDIX C

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR S.T.A. R. INSTRUCTORS

1. What are the policies or procedures regarding attendance of students in S.T.A.R.?
2. What are the policies or procedures regarding academics of students in S.T.A.R.?
3. What are the policies or procedures regarding discipline referrals of students in S.T.A.R.?
4. What is the attitude of students about attendance in school when they enter S.T.A.R.?
5. How does that change while they are in the Program?
6. What is the attitude of students about academics when they enter S.T.A.R.?
7. How does that change while they are in the Program?
8. What are the discipline expectations for S.T.A.R. students?
9. How do S.T.A.R. students deal with discipline expectations in the S.T.A.R. Program? Consequences of non-compliance?
10. What is the attitude of students about discipline in school when they enter S.T.A.R.?
11. How does that change while they are in the Program?
12. How does the S.T.A.R. Program help students develop the capacity to go back to their regular classes and do well?
13. What difference does S.T.A.R. make in the school district?
14. What difference does S.T.A.R. make in the lives of the S.T.A.R. students?

15. What ways could S.T.A.R. be improved?

16. What are the biggest challenges of the S.T.A.R. program?