

“Why do some ninth grade students fail core content classes
and what can be done to assist them in achieving passing grades?”

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Abstract

The researcher set out to determine why some ninth grade students fail core courses after transitioning from the middle school to the high school. The researcher collected quantitative data through a survey of ninth grade students, their parents and ninth grade core content teachers. Results of the survey indicated that students failed classes when they struggled to understand concepts. Results of the study showed that students, parents and teachers believe extra assistance in the form of tutoring would help struggling students. The researcher suggests a series of recommendations that would benefit the students who struggle academically in the transition from middle school to high school.



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Action Research Proposal

Chapter One- The Introduction

The small town where this action research project will be conducted is located on the Oregon coast. Its history is rich in logging and fishing lore, both serving as the economic backbone of the town's existence for the past 100 plus years. The town is bracketed by vast forests and the many waterways both surround and intersect its boundaries. Economic development is not evident when one travels the main highway through the town. Many buildings of the early parts of the 20th century still stand and serve as residence for antique stores, restaurants, or small businesses. Most economic activity can be observed during the summer month when RV's and trucks pulling ATV's are major additions to the regular morning, noon, and night commutes. Tourism is what currently keeps this small rural community afloat by providing many outdoor activities year round such as fishing, hunting, riding ATV's, and gambling at a local casino. There are small pockets of new housing developments and future housing developments in selected areas. Residents divide themselves when faced with future economic development opportunities. Some residents see the need to re-tool an outdated infrastructure in preparation for new industries, while others see the cost of the additions and the potential effect on the environment as a threat.

The population of the town has grown by approximately 700 people since the 2000 census, (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000) which can most likely be attributed to the migration of retired people moving north from California. The town's high school has a student population of approximately 1,150 students and has been consistently around that mark for the past 10 years.

The schools are in a state of disrepair, a reflection of the town's decision not to invest in its infrastructure. Currently a bond measure is being proposed to build two new primary schools instead of trying to continue remodeling the old and tired existing structures. But with a poor economy and prices of everyday necessities such as gas rising, many residents are feeling that the timing for paying more taxes is ill-timed.

The town's school district that is made up of seven schools serving approximately 3,500 students. The school configurations include three K-4 elementary schools, one 5-6 intermediate school, one 7-8 middle school, one 9-12 high school, and one 9-12 alternative high school. In addition, the district sponsors one charter school serving 50 students. Over 54% of the students in the district are bused to school. The district adheres to an open enrollment policy allowing students and families to choose the elementary school that best fits their learning needs on a space available basis. The school board and administration has continued to make class size a priority, and even in times of budget cuts they have keep class sizes low using a combination of grant and general funds. Average class sizes across the district are in the range of 20-29 students per teacher. An emphasis is placed on lower class sizes at the primary level.

More than half the students in the school district qualify for free or reduced meals based on their family income level. Over 19% of the students in the district are identified with a disability and receive services through special education. Last year 276 students were referred for services to the district's homeless liaison. The ethnicity of the high school student population of 1052 outside of the dominance of Caucasian is as follows; 156 American Indian, 92 Hispanic, 28 Asian/pacific Islander, 10 black and nine are English Language Learners. Of the 1052

students, 87 have been identified as talented and gifted, while 115 have are receiving special education services. The district alternative education program consists of 67 students. Numerous volunteers donate their time to our schools with a large amount of this time being directed to support of students in the classroom.

The central goal of this action research project is to address academic needs of ninth grade students at the research site. It appears that many freshman students are not being successful in core classes. There were a total of 23 9th grade students who failed English 9, 30 who failed physical science, and 38 who failed algebra I in the first trimester of the 2007-08 school year. This is out of a total of 272 students in the freshman class. In addition to this data, 20 of the 23 English 9 students who failed also failed either math or physical science. Of the 30 9th grade students who failed physical science, 22 failed English 9 and/or algebra. And for the 38 students who failed math, 19 failed either English 9, physical science or both.

There are a few remedial programs in place or being put into place for the upcoming school year to assist these ninth grade students. For English remediation, the READ 180 program assists those 9th and 10th grade students who have a low reading level. These students are identified by the state reading comprehension test. A class was designed just this past year for incoming freshmen that focused on study and organizational skills that 9th grade teachers identified as a skill that many freshmen lack. This coming fall, all freshmen entering math at the algebra I level will have access to a period a day of math lab that will reinforce algebra concepts currently being studied in the students classes. To that end, the researcher asks: Why do some

ninth grade students fail to pass core content classes and what can be done to assist them in achieving passing grades?



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Action Research Proposal

Chapter Two- The Problem or Issue

The researcher begins this study with a sense of humility and feeling of responsibility to an issue that has more or less been given fleeting attention over the years at the research high school in the study. Statistics show that not all 9th grade students are passing their core classes in the areas of physical science, English 9, and algebra. Research has shown that ninth grade failure rate of core classes is a national problem. More students nationally are failing the ninth grade than any other year in school (Kerr in Blueprints, 2006). McIver points out the importance in meeting the needs in young adolescents in the transition from middle school to high school by stating “more students fail the 9th grade than any other grade level” (McIver in Dedmond, 2006, p.1). In addition, In 2005, *High Schools That Work* reports that “15 states had a ninth-grade failure rate exceeding 10 %, nine states had a failure rate exceeding 15 % and two states had a failure rate exceeding 20 %” (Bottoms and Timberlake, 2007, p.1). For these reasons, the researcher has chosen to investigate why do some ninth grade students fail to pass core content classes and what can be done to assist them in achieving passing grades.

The following data of freshman failures in the core class areas of English, science, and math for the school years of 2006-2007 and 2007-2008 point to the importance of the researcher’s study. As one begins to analyze these data a trend appears. First, the number of failures in core class increase each trimester, in some cases even doubles. Secondly, each trimester the number of students failing in all three core classes increases. First trimester of 2006-2007 has 87 core classes failed, second trimester has 155 core classes failed, and third

trimester has 210 core classes failed (Esis, 2008). Both trends are true for the 2007-2008 core classes in trimester I and trimester II also. Careful analysis points to a problem that exists with the 9th grade failure of core classes at the researcher's school. The data above supports what Roderick and Camburn found, "Students failing courses during the first semester of high school were more likely to experience further deterioration in their school performance and not likely to recover" (Roderick & Camburn in Kerr, 2002, p.3).

9TH GRADE FAILURE BY CORE CLASS 06-07

TOTAL STUDENTS 299

Trimester I

Trimester II

Trimester III

MATH	16	46	66
PERCENT %	5.35%	15.3%	22%
SCIENCE	39	43	67
PERCENT %	13%	14.3%	22.4%
ENGLISH	32	66	77
PERCENT %	10.7%	22%	25.7%

9TH GRADE FAILURE BY CORE CLASS 07-08

TOTAL STUDENTS 285

Trimester I

Trimester II

Trimester III

MATH	35	67	IN PROGRESS
PERCENT %	12.2%	23.5 %	NA
SCIENCE	33	58	IN PROGRESS
PERCENT %	11.5 %	20.3%	NA
ENGLISH	33	49	IN PROGRESS
PERCENT %	11.5 %	17.1%	NA

One possible outcome from this kind of failure is a continuation of poor performance and eventually the probability of dropping out of school. There is a link between academic failure and the possibility of dropping out of school. As Roderick reports, “over 60 percent of students who eventually dropped out of high school failed at least 25 percent of their credits in the ninth grade” (Roderick in Kerr, 2002, p.3). The State of Oregon average graduation rate for freshman for 2002-03 was 73.7 % and 74.2% for 2003-04 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006).

The teachers of freshmen in the researcher’s school have voiced concern over the failure rate of current ninth grade students. A ninth grade science teacher commented when approached

about the failure rate of the current freshmen, “I cannot figure these ninth grade students out. They are not concerned about not passing and have no sense of urgency when given time to complete assignments prior to the end of the grading period.” A similar conversation has taken place at the researcher’s school with one of the tenth grade regular English teachers in which the concern over apathy and lack of motivation prevailed.

The researcher will use survey, interview, and observation data-gathering technologies to investigate why 9th grade students fail core content classes and what can be done to assist them in achieving passing grades.

Literature Search

The search of literature revealed five major categories that define the issue of why some ninth grade students fail to pass core content classes and what can be done to assist those students in achieving passing grades.

These categories are the following:

- Transition Issues
- Academic concerns
- High school support structures
- Adolescent/social development

The researcher will now discuss the history of the middle school movement as it pertains to the creating the grades 9-12 high school. The first middle school was created in 1950 with the

intent to better meet the developmental needs of young adolescents (Manning, 2000a). One of the results of this structural change was moving the 9th grade out of the junior high and creating the 9-12 grade high school. The shift of 9th grade to the high school created the ability for districts to shift students from lower grades into the middle schools. In the process of moving lower grades up into the new middle schools, the decision to move the ninth-graders to the high school is being questioned as to whether or not the shift was a benefit. According to Epstein and MacIver (1990), "...While ninth-graders have been firmly situated at the high school level for over three decades, educators continue to question the best placement for ninth-graders in the organizational framework of schooling." (Epstein and MacIver in Kerr, 2002. p.2).

The Transition from the middle school has been one that has been happening for the past 30 plus years. Moving from a smaller social environment to a larger social environment is one of the concerns for students making the transition from middle school to the high school as incoming ninth-graders. Because students are moving from a middle school structure that contains two or three grade levels of students to a high school that contains four grade levels, students are faced with a number of challenges. Many observers see right away that the social hierarchy has flipped. As Roderick points out, there is a change in the social status on the high school campus from what he refers to as "top dog" to "bottom dog" (Roderick in Kerr, 2002).

This can be seen in the transitional change in the researcher's district as well. The middle school has the 8th grade class of 271 students broken into two teams of approximately 135 students. Those students in each team have their own core English, social studies, science, and math teachers. The only times student teams interact with each other during school hours is in

elective classes and lunch. Once the eight-grade students move to the high school, they combined with grades 10-12 in a collective body of approximately 1,150 students. Research by Wheelock and Miao (2005), pointed out that eighth-grade students who were interviewed or shadowed found a greater connection to the school and their learning when teachers took the time and showed an interest to get to know the student personally. When a teacher at school takes time to notice a student as an individual it creates a positive feeling with the student and reduces the feeling of anonymity that students may feel otherwise. According to Blythe, Simmons, and Carlton Ford (1983), students coming into the high school setting encounter a much larger student population than their middle school setting resulting in less one on one contact with their teachers and students having greater feelings of anonymity. This is a result of the transition from leaving the smaller student body middle school setting coupled with a smaller campus and a smaller teaching staff in which teacher to student contact is higher. According to Aldine Independent School District's superintendent Nadine Kujawa in Houston that operates four grade nine centers, "Our research found that we have more 9th graders drop out of school because they get lost in a large high school setting and have less attention paid to them as individuals." (Reents, 2002).

Students have many concerns when they enter a new learning environment. One of their main concerns is academic. Many students have anxiety when leaving a school setting in which they have enjoyed academic success and moving into a high school setting that is different than middle school. In an article written by Nancy Mizelle and Judith Irvin, "Transition from Middle School into High School", they point out the main concerns that incoming 9th graders have academically about high school. They are concerned that high school teachers will be stricter and

that teachers will give them much more and much harder work than they had in middle school” (Mizelle and Irvin, 2005).

Mizelle and Irvin also discuss the issue of time management of their academic class work in regard to the variety of courses in which they have to select from as well as the extracurricular opportunities that exist once in the high school setting. “While they liked being able to choose their classes and extracurricular activities, they were concerned about how difficult the classes were and how to manage their time when they got involved in extracurricular activities” (Mizelle and Irvin, 2005, p.2).

Academic success in middle school does not automatically translate into academic success at the high school level. In a 1993 study of ninth graders conducted by Melissa Roderick, “Of the ninth-graders studied, course failure immediately following the transition to high school was not limited to students with lower prior academic skills, making the threat of course failure an issue for entering ninth-graders of all achievement levels” (Roderick in Kerr, 2002, p.3).

The structure of the 9th grade curriculum and the lack of transition programs for incoming 8th graders is another variable of concern in the quest for 9th grade success. In Susan Ohanian’s web article, *The Pivotal Year*, researchers John Lounsbury and Howard Johnston did an extensive study of ninth graders in 48 states attempting to answer the question posed by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, “How fares ninth grade?” (Ohanian, 2008). Over the course of their study, they shadowed students and observed the instructional practices of teachers in a typical 40 to 50 minute class period. What Lounsbury and Johnston

discovered was, “most high schools offered little or no guidance to help ninth-graders adjust academically and socially” (Ohanian, p.1). The findings of Lounsbury and Johnston were conducted approximately 20 years ago and since then numerous districts have attempted to address designing a structure for ninth-grade success in their own high schools.

Another area of concern regarding 9th grade failure is how the high school structures the learning environment for freshman students. Keeping the student to teacher ratio is a priority that many school districts aim to keep low. Many times budget shortfall impacts this ratio's and often times these ratios are large in all core classes across the curriculum regardless of grade level. What impacts this student to teacher ratio in the 9th grade is the number of students who have to repeat the same core required class they failed in their freshman year. At the researchers school sophomores who failed freshman core classes are put into classes with freshman the following year. According to Williams and Richman (2007), “...more students fail the ninth grade than any other grade”(Williams & Richman in Kennelly & Monrad, 2008), This leads to students repeating those classes and creating larger class size at the ninth grade. Many refer to this term as a “Bulge” or as “overage”. In an article by Jennifer Mrozowski in which she looked at struggling students who fail the ninth grade in the state of Michigan, she reported that the high schools in the State Michigan “in 2005-2006 saw 21,000 more students in the ninth grade than in the eighth”(Mrozowski, 2008). The following chart was from a study conducted for the year of 2004-2005 in which the researchers looked at national and middle school enrollment numbers (Gray, Sable, & Sietsema in Williams & Richman, 2007). This chart displays the fact that enrollment numbers at the 9th grade year are the largest. Much of this is due to the number of students that are repeating 9th grade courses in what should be their tenth grade year.

Student Enrollment by Grade and Percentage of Total Enrollment, 2004-2005

8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	Total
3,824,670	4,281,345	3,750,491	3,369,339	3,094,349	18,320,194
20.9%	23.4%	20.5%	18.4%	16.9%	100.0%

(Gray, Sable, & Sietsema, 2006)

When high schools do not provide another method for recovering a credit from a failed 9th grade core class when the student is in the 10th grade, student enrollment numbers in 9th grade classes will continue to be the largest of all high school grade levels. This can also be supported by 10th grade enrollment numbers too. In a national study conducted by John Hopkins University researchers Robert Balfanz and Nettie Legters, “Nationally, as of 2001, 10th grade enrollment was between 11 and 12 percent smaller than 9th-grade enrollment the previous year” (Wheelock and Miao, 2005).

One of the toughest transitions for incoming 9th grade students is the social adjustment to a new larger school environment. As young adolescents, there are new freedoms that were not available to them in the 8th grade. There is a larger campus with many more classes to choose from as well as activities both curricular and extra-curricular to choose from. The social interaction with new and older peers is part of social experience and atmosphere of high school. “They also develop a more negative view of themselves and feel an increased need for peer friendships” (Hertzog in Mizelle & Irvin, 2005). The researcher has observed in the 15 years of teaching 9th grade students that the social adjustments and challenges to “fit in” socially and establish a peer group are prevalent behaviors. As Barone points out in Mizelle, “At a time when

friendships and social interaction are particularly important for young adolescents, the normative transition into high school often serves to disrupt friendship networks and, thereby, interferes with students' success in high school" (2005). In a high school environment, ninth-grade students are developing an identity that most likely will be influenced by their choices and the choices of their peer group. These choices they are making influence academic achievement and their attitudes towards peers and adults that can be looked at as negative, positive, or both.

"Experiencing a school transition, while also coping with the stress of adolescent development, may be too much for some adolescents to deal with, overwhelming their abilities to adapt well to the new school environment" (Crockett in Kerr, 2002). Many of these new challenges can be and do become obstacles for many new 9th graders resulting in discipline and learning problems in the classroom.

The transition of students from the middle school to the high school is one of great interest to many school districts around the country. The academic failure of 9th grade students has many aspects that play a role in its existence. The importance of identifying variables to failure when students enter the 9th grade is a critical one. It is only when these variables are identified can the method of how to address them can be implemented. Research has supported the variables that have been identified for this study and have been backed up by evidence that this is not just a state concern, but a national concern to educators across the country. Moving from a more personal middle school setting to a larger high school setting is a reality of students face and make in every state. The adjustment to a new physical environment as well as a larger student body creates concern for many if not all students. Exiting the middle school curriculum to a more demanding curriculum of the high school places a new unfamiliar set of expectations

upon entering 9th grade students. Will there be more homework? Will it be more rigorous? These are the academic questions that students ponder prior to leaving the middle school. Equally important is how the incoming freshman will respond to a new environment that has expanded in student body many times over with the addition of grades 10-12. Most teachers will not be teaching just freshman but most likely teaching to most if not all 9-12 grades. The research and literature that has been reviewed offer substantial information and provides examples of the importance of why 9th grade failure is a concern to educators and school districts nationwide: however there remains the need to find out what can be done to help 9th grade students be successful and receive passing grades.



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Action Research Proposal

Chapter Three – The Goal of the Action Research Project

This research project seeks to find out why some 9th grade students fail core content classes and what can be done to assist them in achieving passing grades.

It is clear from research that the 9th grade transition year from middle school to high school is one that concerns educators across the country in both rural and urban settings. Many issues surrounding the failure of classes in the 9th grade have been identified and support by the research. It is the intent of the researcher to find a combination of educational practices designed for 9th grade students to be academically supported in their transition to high school for the intended purpose of achieving passing grades in their core content classes.

The measurable goal for the researcher after implementing strategies for helping struggling 9th grade students in core classes will be the reduction of the failure rate in each core content class of English, physical science, and algebra by 10% within a three year window of time. The process for achieving this goal will be the implementation of programs at the high school designed to meet academic needs of those 9th grade students who need additional support in content area classes. To carry this out, the researcher will be working with district office personnel in order to get a list of current tenth grade students who has ninth graders failed two or more core classes in their first trimester. The researcher will identify core ninth grade teachers in the area of physical science, math and English in order to survey them. Lastly, the researcher will be surveying the parents of students who have been selected in order to create triangulation. All three groups, students, parents and staff will be surveyed fifteen interview questions that attempt to ask the same information as it attempts to address the researchers' question of "why do some

ninth grade students fail core content classes and what can be done to assist them in achieving passing grades?”

Instruments for Gathering Data

In this study, the researcher will use a combination of interview and survey in order to monitor the impact of the goal of reducing the failure rate of 9th grade students in core content classes.

An interview of current tenth grade students who failed two or more core content classes will be conducted in the fall by the researcher. The sample will be taken from current tenth grade students who failed two or more core content classes in their first trimester of their ninth grade year. The questions will attempt to measure why the students failed core content classes and what can be done in order to assist ninth grade students in achieving passing grades.

Once the students for the research have been selected and interviewed, the researcher will interview a parent of each of the selected students. After both students and parents have been interviewed, the researcher will identify two ninth grade core content teachers in English, math and physical science.

At the end of the 12 weeks of research, the data collected will be presented to the teachers, administration and superintendent of the school district. The hope of the researcher's findings is to continue to support those 9th grade students coming from the middle school with high school academic programs that will give them the support they need to achieve passing grades in core content classes.

Action Research Proposal

Chapter Four – Action Plan

In this project the researcher asks why some 9th graders fail to pass core content classes and what can be done to assist them in achieving passing grades.

Possible Solutions

In researching methods that might meet the needs of 9th grade students who struggle to pass core content classes, the researcher was intrigued by the following programs that showed promise. In looking at the following programs, the researcher had to keep in mind that their must be a possibility of reproducing a similar program in his district without creating a financial expense outside of the district's current budget level. Thus the researcher looked at programs and strategies that would be of little to no cost to implement and would currently be able to be coordinated within our current master schedule at the high school.

Ninth-Grade Academies

In October of 2006, Mike Hall the Georgia Department of Education Deputy Superintendent for Information Technology discussed his implementation of a 9th grade academy while principal at Houston County High School (Hall, 2006). The purpose of the academy was to help students make the transition from middle school to high school. The main components of the cut down on referrals, maintain strong grades, and decrease the number of students that dropout. The strengths of the academy were:

- Reduction of tardiness due to isolation of 9th graders in one building.
- Selection of teachers who were flexible with strategies for helping students.
- Creation of new course that addressed academic needs of students.

Though many elements of this program address many of the goals that the researcher would like to achieve, especially the creation of a separate freshman only schedule, the researcher rejected the academy model for several reasons. The ability to isolate the 9th grade class on the researcher's campus is not possible given the space being occupied currently. Another barrier is that there are very few teachers that teach to only one grade level throughout the day. Many of the 9th grade classes are also being taken by 10th grade students who failed the course as a freshman and have no other way to make up the credit otherwise. The master schedule has already been created at the researcher's school, so there can be no new courses designed to meet academic needs of freshman that are not already in the new schedule.

Though the researcher rejects the academy model, he is interested in how that model could possibly be considered by his district in the future. The researcher believes this might be an effective way to focus on many different needs of transitioning 9th graders entering the high school.

Freshmen only Study Halls

Creating study halls designed just for freshmen is another method designed to target the academic needs of incoming ninth grade students. Two Wisconsin high schools in 2002-03 instituted freshmen study halls as a way to better help 8th grade students make the transition to

high school (Warner, 2008). There are advantages to the implementation of a study hall for all incoming 9th graders:

- Extra time in the school day to complete the high school homework load.
- Opportunity for peer tutoring to occur by upper classmen in core content curriculum.
- A course in which there is no academic work assigned thus no homework.

The advantages of students having time during the school day to get homework done are important. Many students carry tough academic course loads and others participate in extra-curricular sports that require students to miss part of the school day one to two days a week in order to travel to the contest. The study hall time provides a consistent structure of time for students to get work done that might not exist outside the school day.

Though the researcher recognizes the benefits of having a freshman only study hall, the researcher rejects the model a number of reasons. First, the master schedule for the next school year has been created and no study halls exist in the schedule. With the financial stresses on districts and the burden of high class numbers, the researcher's school has eliminated the option of study halls from the course offerings. Secondly, given the small number of staff members on the researcher's high school staff, there is not the capability of releasing a staff member or staff members to teach a study hall. Lastly, the researcher's school has worked the past few years to eliminate the teaching of study halls due to the staff's disliking of having to monitor a study hall. The staff would rather be teaching than monitoring students. This move was supported by the researcher's district curriculum director.

Summer Transition Program

Providing a transition program in the summer between the 8th and ninth grades in order to introduce 8th grade students to the high school experience with a number of transition activities. In Pittsburg, one school district dedicates a weeklong orientation to incoming 9th grade students (Gewertz, 2007). The goal of the program is to develop confidence in students and provide them with a feeling of support. As Mark Roosevelt the Pittsburgh's superintendent stated, "Eighth to 9th grade is a pivotal point. That's where we have our highest dropout, repeat, and opt-out rates" (Gerwertz, p.1). The camp is held for a week over the summer prior to the start of school. The advantages of the camp are:

- Introduces incoming 9th grade students to upperclassmen.
- Introduces incoming 9th grade students to their core freshmen teachers.
- Provides an atmosphere in which students feel a connection between their classmates and their school.
- Introduces incoming students to the policies and procedures of the high school.

There are many benefits for students as well as the staff that will be working with these students as incoming freshmen. The activities and opportunities in which students and staff can bond are unlimited. Students have the ability to get to know the teachers and have an adult or two that they can trust to go to when they need help. For students to have a positive and meaningful experience with the high school before the year begins eliminates many fears and concerns.

Though the researcher sees value in a summer transition program, he must reject it for on the following reasons. First, the planning of a week experience with students takes planning and

coordination, more than what can be done in a few short months. Secondly, finding enough teachers on staff willing to commit a week of their summer time to essentially “work,” would be difficult. Lastly, the upfront costs of providing meals, rental fees, and other operational expenses would be a financial expense the researcher’s district cannot make in this budget cycle.

Summary

The researcher reviewed several well-designed, researched-based frameworks and programs that met the needs of cost and availability. Many of the programs showed promise and addressed the issue of the researcher’s question in some aspect. None were a best fit when matched with this researcher’s students and school setting. The researcher would like to be able to implement aspects of each of the three programs in his school because given the uniqueness of all three; they would complement each other in what they provide for students.

The Action Plan

In this action research project the researcher will look to find ways to help 9th grade students who fail core course content be able to achieve passing grades. The following steps will be necessary to follow in order to conduct the research.

Parent Notification

Notification of all parents with students that have failed two or more core content classes in their first trimester of their ninth grade year will be completed by the researcher as a first step in the action research. Parents will be informed that their son or daughter may part of the research data but will not be identified by name or gender.

Identification of student variables

Accessing the 07-08 first trimester grades of ninth graders to determine those students that have failed core content classes will be necessary. Once the data has been accessed, it will be necessary for the researcher to identify those students that have failed core content classes the first trimester. Of the students that have failed core content classes, those students who have failed two or more will be identified as candidates for the research.

Notification of Support Programs

Once 10th grade students have been identified that meet the criteria, the students will be notified in person about the research project. If the student is interested in participating in the research, a consent letter will be sent home for parents for parent consent. The student will then return the letter of consent to the researcher if participating.

Interview

Once students have been identified as research candidates and have returned consent forms, the researcher will set up an interview schedule for the fall. After the students have been interviewed, the researcher will contact parents by phones who have agreed to participate. After the researcher has interviewed the parents, six core content teachers from math, physical science and English will be interviewed.

Action Plan Timeline

September

- Develop interview questions for students, parents & staff
- Develop consent forms for students
- Identify students eligible for research

October

- Set up student interviews
- Conduct student interviews

November

- Contact parents for interview times
- Interview parents by phone

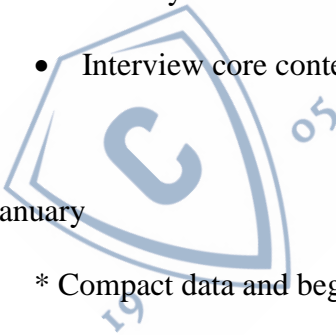
December

- Identify core content teachers to interview
- Interview core content teachers

January

- * Compact data and begin to analyze and summarize data

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Conclusion

The intent of the researcher is to discover through research why some ninth grade students fail core content class and what can be done in helping them achieve passing grades.



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Action Research Project

Chapter Five- The Results

The goal of the action research project is to investigate ninth-grade student academic success at the research site, by asking the question, “Why do some ninth grade students fail core content classes and what can be done to assist them in achieving passing grades?”

The researcher used the data-collection methods of survey and interview to investigate ninth grade students’ academic success in core content classes at the research site. The researcher surveyed and interviewed 10 students, six parents, and six teachers at the research site. The 10 students were selected from 16 current tenth graders who last school year failed at least two of the three following core classes, algebra I, English 9, and physical science. Over a time frame of two months, the researcher called each of the 16 students in one at a time and discussed the purpose of the research with the student and provided them with a letter of consent to be signed by parent/guardian in order to participate in the research. Also in the letter of consent was a place for the parent/guardian to identify as to whether or not they would be willing to be interviewed as part of the research. Of the 16 students, the researcher received only ten letters of consent to participate. Only six of those ten parents/guardians’ gave identified themselves as wanting to be part of the research. The researcher chose six ninth-grade core content teachers, two from each of the three core academic areas in which to interview.

The researcher proceeded to interview the 10 students one at a time at the research site over an eight week period. The students were asked 15 interview questions (Appendix A)

relating to their middle school and ninth-grade academic experiences. Following the student interviews, the research contacted six of the 10 students' parent/guardian by phone in which the parent/guardian was asked 15 interview questions (Appendix B) similar in context to the student's questions. Lastly, the researcher interviewed (Appendix C) six ninth-grade core teachers at the researcher's site.

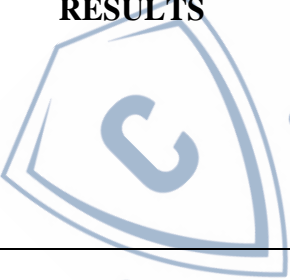
The researcher completed the action research plan with fidelity, using both survey and interview research methods. The researcher will first discuss the results of the survey followed by a detailed discussion of the interview results.

The student survey given to students included 15 questions the researcher believed would reveal the academic success of ninth-grade students in academic core classes.

- The first and second questions asked students to explain what their middle school experience was like as well as what was their favorite classes in middle school and why?
- Questions three through six asked about their favorite classes in high school, if they are successful in those classes and why, and during their first trimester of their ninth-grade year which classes were they successful in and why?
- Questions seven and eight ask why they think they failed a core ninth-grade class and if they failed more than one of the core classes for the same reason and if so what was the reason.
- Questions nine and ten asks students what would have helped them be more successful in those classes they failed and if they could go back in time to take the classes failed again, what would they do differently in order to pass?

- The 11th question asks the student if they feel they will be successful when they repeat the course they failed and why or why not.
- The 12th question asks the student what advice they would give to incoming ninth-grade students regarding classes and class work.
- Question 13 asks what kinds of things they think need to be in place to help struggling students be more successful.
- The 14th question asks what they do after school.
- The 15th question asks the student how much homework the student does.

The researcher collapsed the student, parent and teacher data to make it easier to understand. The results of the survey are as follows:

#1. Describe your middle school experience; what was being a 7 th and 8 th grader like for you? #2. What were your favorite classes in middle school? Why?	Student	Parent	Teacher
<p>RESULTS</p> 	<p>5 out of 10 difficult. 8 out of 10 liked required courses. 8 out of 10 liked the teacher.</p>	<p>3 out of 6 normal experience. 3 out of 6 elective classes. 3 out of 6 hands-on.</p>	<p>5 out of 6 liked teacher. 5 out of 6 hands-on classes.</p>

Both students and ninth-grade core teachers felt that the teachers at the middle school played a major role in the positive feelings of the students’ middle school experience. One student commented, “He (8th grade history teacher) explained information more thoroughly and used humor so students would grasp onto the information.” One teacher commented, “I think

they are very influenced by their teachers and so their favorite classes would be classes they liked because the teacher was fun.”

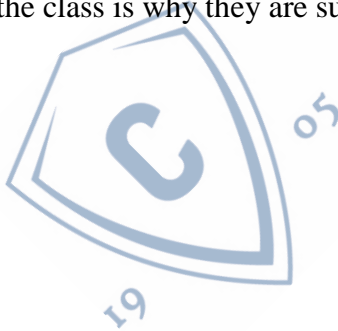
Both the parents and the teachers felt that hands-on type classes were the students’ favorite type of classes while students identified liking their core classes and the teachers who teach them.

<p>#3. What are your favorite classes in high school and why? #4. Are you successful in those classes? #5. Why do you think you are successful in those classes?</p>	<p>Student</p>	<p>Parent</p>	<p>Teacher</p>
<p>RESULTS</p>	<p>7 out of 10 science, 6 out of 10 interesting. 10 out of 10 yes. 5 out of 10 interested.</p>	<p>5 out of 6 electives, 5 out of 6 meets interest. 6 out of 6 yes. 6 out of 6 based upon interest or student’s strength.</p>	<p>3 out of 6 interests, 2 out of 6 students’ strength. 5 out of 6 yes. 3 out of 6 based. Upon students Strength.</p>

All three groups felt that classes that were students’ favorites were those that interested the students. Both parents and teachers felt that the types of classes that students classify as their favorites and that they are successful in are the kind of classes that cater to their individual strengths. One parent commented, “Computers comes natural to him. It is in his blood and he instantly knows how to do it.” The results do show a difference between the parents and teachers in that classes that interest students are not necessarily elective classes. This is shown by the fact that 70% of the students identified a science class, which is a core class at both the ninth and tenth grade levels, as on of their favorite classes.

#6. What classes were you successful in during your freshman year, first trimester? Why were you successful?	Student	Parent	Teacher
RESULTS	6 out of 10 Wellness class, understood the content	3 out of 6 Wellness class, interest & little homework	3 out of 6 classes they choose, familiar with content

Both the student group and the parent group were able to recognize the 9th grade Wellness class that is a health/P.E. class required of all freshmen. One student had this comment about the Wellness class, “I knew a lot about it and I studied and focused more.” Although the teachers did not identify a required class as a class students and parents identified as being successful in, they did identify familiarity of content as a reason the students were successful and that was along the same line of response that came from both the students and parents. As a teacher commented in regards to why students might know they were successful, “Because they like the class is why they are successful.”



#7. Why do you think you failed science, English or math in the first trimester of your freshman year? #8. Did you fail more than two classes for the same reason? If so, what are the reasons?	Student	Parent	Teacher
RESULTS	7 out of 10 lack of effort. 7 out of 10 yes, 7 out of 10 lack of effort	4 out of 6 lack of interest. 6 out of 6 yes, 4 out of 6 didn't do work/lazy	5 out of 6 lack of effort. 6 out of 6 yes, 5 out of 6 not doing work

All three groups identified that failing core classes the first trimester of the students freshman year was due to a lack of effort. One student commented, "... I didn't take it seriously, I kind of horsed around you could say." The researcher notes that 5 out of 10 students commented that a lack of understanding contributed to the lack of effort. One student commented, "Not trying that hard, stuff was complicated, I didn't want to ask for help, I wish I would have."

#9. What would have helped you be successful in the classes you failed? #10. If you could go back in time and take the classes you failed in the first trimester of your freshman year, knowing what you know now about the classes and teachers,	Student	Parent	Teacher

what would you do differently in order to pass?			
RESULTS	8 out of 10 do assigned work. 7 out of 10 ask questions	3 out of 6 more one on one instruction. 3 out of 6 put forth more effort.	3 out of 6 greater parent involvement. 6 out of 6 turn-in assigned work.

Each of the three groups believed that there were separate solutions to what would have helped students be successful in classes they failed. The students themselves felt that they were responsible for their lack of success. One student commented when asked what would have helped him be more successful, "Paid more attention, did the work and asked questions when I needed to." And when asked if they could go back in time knowing what they know about the classes and teachers another student commented, "Ask a lot more questions. That was a big part of it, not asking questions." Unlike the students, the parents felt that their students needed more one-on-one instruction. One parent commented on what would have helped her son, "One –on-one tutoring." Yet 50% of the parents felt that if the students could go back in time and repeat the course they failed, they would put in more effort in order to pass. One parent commented regarding why her daughter would be more successful if she could go back in time by saying, "I think understanding that work needed to be done and that it is important." Teachers felt that more parent involvement would have helped students be more successful in classes they failed. One teacher commented, "Parents still need to be involved in knowing what's going on with their kids." Teachers did feel that they play a part in helping parents stay involved. This was evident by one teacher's comment, "Somehow getting information to parents to continue to stay involved and stay connected with teachers in some form."

All teachers felt that if students could go back in time and repeat the course knowing what they know about the classes and teachers that they would do the work assigned and turn it

in on-time. One teacher commented, “A stronger effort to complete homework and talk with teachers about their progress and standing in class.”

#11. Do you think you will be successful when you repeat the courses you failed the first time? Why or why not?	Student	Parent	Teacher
RESULTS	10 out of 10 Yes, 6 out of 10 Familiar with class.	3 out of 6 Yes, 3 out of 6 realize the importance.	5 out of 6 50/50, 4 out of 6 maturity

Students overwhelmingly felt that they would be successful when they repeat the same course they failed. A majority of the students cited as a main reason they would pass as the familiarity with the class. One student commented when asked if he would be more successful on his second attempt at the course, “Yes I do, because I will know where I messed up last time and I can correct the mistakes.” Parent were less optimistic with three of the parents not believing their student will be successful the second time they take the course and the other three parents believing their students will successful. For those parents that believed their students would be successful the second time, they cited a form of self-realization or maturity as the reason. One parent commented when asked will her student be successful when she repeats the class, “Yes, because she will realize the importance of getting out of school and moving on.” Parents that were not so optimistic and did not believe their student would pass the course the second time were quoted as giving reason such as, “No, because he’s been discouraged so much he is not trying anymore.” Another parent commented when asked if her daughter will be successful on her second attempt, “No, because she will be board with it.” Teachers responded indecisively

believing it really depends upon the maturity and drive of the student. One teacher commented, “I’ve seen both, people who blossom and really do well, and yet seen some kids sit there and do nothing.” Another teacher’s observations were as follows, “Students who do pass realize they need to get their act together and put forth an effort required to pass the class. Students who are not successful, they don’t care; they don’t want to put the effort in, no desire.”

#12. What would your advice regarding classes and class work be to incoming freshman students?	Student	Parent	Teacher
RESULTS	7 out of 10 Do your work, 6 out of 10 Attend	2 out of 6 Effort, 2 out of 6 Time management	4 out of 6 Communicate, 3 out of 6 Organized, 3 out of 6 Do work, 3 out of 6 Attend

Students felt that informing incoming freshman about doing the work assigned was most important. One student commented, “Don’t put off your work. Try to pay attention because when you fail you don’t care as a freshman, but when you are a sophomore you will not be happy taking the class again instead of taking a fun elective.” Another student was quoted as saying, “Don’t skip and do your work. Repeating the class isn’t worth it, it’s boring the second time.” Parents felt that time management and effort were key pieces of advice to give incoming freshmen. One parent had commented, “Make sure when you go in there (class) that it is not play time and make sure school work comes first and make those grades.” Teachers felt that being organized, attending class on a regular basis and doing the assigned work were all important

points that they would give incoming freshmen students. In the teacher survey the question also included advice for incoming freshmen parents too. The most prominent piece of advice they felt was the communication piece between student, teacher and parent. One teacher commented, “Keeping in contact with teachers (parents). Even as a student, if you feel you don’t understand or fall behind, you need to see teachers because they are there to help.”

#13. What kinds of things do you think need to be in place to help struggling students be more successful?	Student	Parent	Teacher
RESULTS	7 out of 10 Extra help	3 out of 6 Tutors	3 out of 6 Tutors

All three groups have identified the need for extra assistance in order for struggling students to become more successful. One student commented, “Tutoring for every subject by having more teachers available before and after school.” Another student commented, “A separate classroom where they specialize in a different subject and you go there for help on the day/subject you need.” Parent identified tutors as a possible solution. Another parent commented, “There needs to be face-to-face time with teachers on a one-to-one basis, availability of study time with a teacher nearby as a resource.” One teacher made the following suggestion as a way to help struggling students be more successful, “If we had a tutored study hall situation and you can pull kids in it if they failed from their elective class.”

#14. What do you do after school?	Student	Parent	Teacher
RESULTS	6 out of 10 Homework/study	3 out of 6 Homework	4 out of 6 School activity

A majority of the students said they do some sort of school work after school on a regular basis. All students mentioned that they engaged in other activities after school in addition to studying or doing some homework. One student commented, “I go to cheer team practice or study circle. After that I eat at home, do homework and then choirs.” Parents acknowledged that they know their student does homework or study but also are aware of the other activities that they engage in after school. One parent commented about her daughters’ after-school activity saying, “She rides the bus home for 45 minutes, talks on the phone, does homework and talks on the phone.” Another parent commented regarding her daughters’ time after school saying, “She goes to the Boy’s and Girls Club where she gets tutored help with math and other subjects.” A majority of the teachers believed that students are involved in after-school extra curricular activities in addition to other activities such as hanging out with their friends. One teacher commented when asked about student’s after-school activities, “A certain percent are involved in extra-curricular school activities, others are just kind of hanging out, skateboarding or playing Wii.” None of the students or parents mentioned that they were getting into trouble and only one of the six teachers surveyed mentioned drug use as a possible activity that a student may be involved in after school.

#15. How much homework do you do?	Student	Parent	Teacher
RESULTS	6 out of 10 Less than hour	5 out of 6 More than 30 minutes	5 out of 6 One hour a night

The results indicate that both the parents and the students were in synch with one another with the amount of time doing homework. The teachers surveyed believed that students spent at least an hour a day doing homework. One teacher commented, “One to two hours a day, I think that’s optimistic. I’m guessing it’s about an hour.”

In summary, based upon the researchers data collected from the survey, there appear to be some similarities of responses from all the groups as well as some differences.

When students were asked what their favorite classes in middle school were, both parents (53%) and teachers (83%) felt students would choose the classes that were hands-on. At the same time, both the students and the teachers mentioned that the teacher influenced the students’ favorite class regardless if the subject was a hands-on elective type course or a required class in which 80% of the students identified as their favorite class. Both students and teachers seem to agree that the teacher’s style of teaching impacts the liking of the class by the student.

When students were asked if they were successful in their favorite classes in high school, all students responded that they were. Like the students, 100% of the parents also responded that they felt their students were successful in their favorite high school classes. Over 83% of the teachers felt that students are successful in high school classes they like.

Classes that students identified as being successful in their freshman year first trimester were elective classes (80%). The teachers also felt that the courses, in which students have a choice to take and are familiar with, would be the classes that students found success in the first trimester of their freshman year. The parents identified the required health class as the class students would most be successful in which is not an elective course but required of all

freshmen. Parents did comment that classes that met their students' interest and had little homework would be the classes that students had the most success in.

Over half Parents (66%) felt that their students failed one or more of the three core ninth-grade classes due to a lack of interest in the class. Both the students (70%) and the teachers (83%) overwhelmingly identified as the main reason for failing two or more of the core ninth-grade classes as lack of effort.

When students were asked what would have helped you be more successful in classes you failed? Student response was do the work assigned (80%). When the teachers were asked if the students could go back to that first trimester of their freshman year and take the class again knowing what they know about the class and teacher, what would they do differently?, 100% of the teachers said that the students would do the assigned work.

Students differed from parents and teachers when asked if they would be successful the when they repeat the class for the second time. Student's response was overwhelmingly yes (100%). Only 50 % of the parents believed that their student would be successful the on the second attempt of the same class stating reasons such as boredom and discouraged for not being successful when they repeat the class. Eighty-three percent of the teachers also felt that it was a 50/50 proposition stating reasons such as maturity and self-realization of the importance of being successful in passing the class the second time as it relates to the bigger picture of progress towards graduation.

Both students and teachers identified the importance of attending and doing the work as key advice to give to incoming freshman students.

When all three groups were asked what kind of things need to be in place to help struggling students be more successful, the response from students was extra help (70%). Fifty

percent of both the parents and teachers identified the access to tutors for struggling students would help them be more successful.

When asked about what students do after school both students (60%) and parents (50%) identified that homework is a part of time spent after school. Teachers (66%) believed that students are engaged in some form of a school-related activity. Only thirty-three percent of teachers stated homework as part of what students do after school.

When asked how much homework do students do after school? Both the students and the parents identified between a half hour and hour. Five out of six teachers believed that students spend at least an hour a night on homework.

With the results from the survey of students, parents and teachers, it appears to the researcher that all three groups have similar feelings and thought in regards to “why some ninth-grade students fail core courses and what can be done to assist them in achieving passing grades.”

- All three groups have identified that a lack of effort is the key reason for failing core content classes. Students that have low performance often lack familiarity or understanding with the content. Success in core content classes is diminished if students lack understanding or concepts and in turn choose not to attend the class due to his/her lack of understanding.
- Both students and teachers agree that students experienced success in courses in which they familiar with or understand the content. It’s interesting to see that parents believed the courses that students had success were those that applied to their interests and had little to no homework.

- Students identified that doing the assigned work would have helped them to be more successful in core classes they did not pass. Realizing that, if they could go back in time they would ask more questions of the teacher which students previously pointed out, the result would possibly lead students into understanding the content and thus having a greater opportunity for success.
- When surveyed, students would advise incoming freshman students that doing their work and attending class are important in being successful in class. Teachers agreed that doing assigned work and attending class regularly is fundamental to student success. It is important to point out that once a student struggles with understanding the content of the course as both students and teachers have pointed out, attendance and the turning in of assigned work diminish. This point has been brought out by both students and teachers when asked what advice they would give to incoming freshmen. It appears that parents are not on the same page as the students and teachers do to the fact that parents felt that using time wisely and “trying your best” were the most important piece of advice to give incoming freshmen. Another interesting point is the fact that while all three groups alluded to putting forth effort through doing assigned work, time management and attendance as key advice to provide incoming freshmen, teachers most commented piece of advice was communication in all directions between all three groups.
- Given the correlations between understanding the content, turning assigned work in and attending class on a regular basis, students, parents and teachers agreed across the board that providing extra assistance to students that struggle need to be in place in order for greater student success. When students are struggling to understand

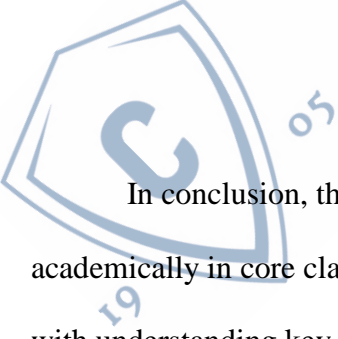
concepts being taught in class, a need then exists for more assistance with those concepts in the form of intervention such as small group or one on one tutoring as it has been suggested by all three groups surveyed.

- I find it interesting that students are 100% confident that they will be successful when they repeat the failed course in the future. It is surprising to note that both the parents and teachers thought differently in that half the parents were split upon student success. The teachers also believed that some will and some won't be successful based upon the student's individual maturity.

The researcher makes the following recommendations to address in assisting students achieving passing grades in core ninth-grade classes;

- Create a pamphlet for incoming freshman filled with tips from freshmen teachers and current high school students outlining how students can be successful academically in their freshman year.
- Spring orientation day in which 8th grade students spend the afternoon at the high school having lunch, meeting administrators, counselors and 9th grade teachers in the auditorium before going on a tour of the school while high school students are in class.
- Viewing a student created video presentation on high school in which events that occur in a typical month are videotaped for incoming freshmen students. The video shows pep assemblies, core and elective classes, and contains clips of students providing helpful tips about high school for freshmen.

- The first full day of high school is for freshmen only. Freshman get a tour attend a pep assembly, attend an auditorium assembly, eat lunch in the cafeteria and attend all their classes without any upperclassmen present.
- The creation of an after school tutor center at the high school on Tuesday's, Wednesday's and Thursday's from 3:45 to 4:45 in which teachers from each core area are available to tutor 9th grade students needing extra assistance.
- A freshman only counselor placed in the Pirate Hall building that contains the freshman lockers and the location of three of their four required classes. This would allow the counselor to keep closer watch on the academic progress of ninth-grade students as well as be able to meet with those core class teachers in the building in order to help identify struggling students and thus be able to provide necessary interventions.
- Create time on Professional Development Day's for 8th grade English, math and science teachers to collaborate with high school core teachers in order to discuss strategies for successful academic transitions between the two grades.



In conclusion, the researcher learned that ninth-grade students that struggle academically in core classes do so for primarily two reasons; one is that they struggle with understanding key concepts. Secondly, through their own admittance, most do not ask questions that might clarify their understanding and as a result they become apathetic in their effort. The other thing the researcher realized is that the students surveyed realized that they should have asked more questions and been more assertive in

communicating with the teachers when they encountered a lack of understanding. When all three groups surveyed reflected upon how to help future struggling students be more successful in core classes and achieve passing grades, it was unanimous in all three categories of students, parents and teachers that extra help was necessary in the form of the availability of tutors.

If the researcher were to change anything about the research project he would have asked regarding the students preferred learning style to see if there was a correlation among the learning style of struggling students. The researcher would also ask a question related to methods or strategies the student uses to get assistance when they find themselves struggling academically.



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Appendixes

Appendix A**Student Interview Questions**

1. Describe your middle school experience; what was being a 7th and 8th grader like for you?
2. What were your favorite classes in middle school? Why?
3. What are your favorite classes in high school? Why?
4. Are you successful in those classes?
5. Why do you think you are successful in those classes?
6. What classes were you successful in during your freshman year, first trimester? Why were you successful?
7. Why do you think you failed science, English or math in the first trimester of your freshman year?
8. Did you fail more than two classes for the same reason? If so, what are the reasons?
9. What would have helped you be successful in the classes you failed?
10. If you could go back in time and take the classes you failed in the first trimester of your freshman year, knowing what you now know about the classes and teachers, what would you do differently in order to pass?
11. Do you think you will be successful when you repeat the courses you failed the first time? Why or why not?
12. What would your advice regarding classes and class work be to incoming freshman students?
13. What kind of things do you think need to be in place to help struggling students be more successful?
14. What do you do after school?
15. How much homework do you do?

Appendix B**Parent Interview Questions**

1. Describe your son's/daughter's middle school experience.
2. What type of classes or activities did your son or daughter enjoy in middle school? Why?
3. What type of classes or activities does your son or daughter enjoy now in high school? Why?
4. Do you feel that they are successful in those classes? Why?
5. Why do you think your son or daughter is successful in those classes?
6. When your son or daughter was a freshman, what classes did you think they were successful in? Why?
7. Why do you think your son or daughter failed English, math or science class the first trimester of their freshman year?
8. If your son or daughter failed more than one of those core classes their freshman year, what do you think the reasons might have been?
9. What do you think might have helped your son or daughter be more successful in the class or classes they failed?
10. Do you feel that your son or daughter would do something differently if they could go back in time to their freshman year knowing what they know now about the classes and teachers? Why?
11. Do you feel your son or daughter will be successful when they repeat the class or classes they failed the first time? Why or why not?
12. What advice would you give today regarding classes or class work if you had a son or daughter that was an incoming freshman student?
13. What kind of things do you think need to be in place to help struggling students be more successful?
14. What does your son or daughter do after school?
15. How much homework does your son or daughter have?

Appendix C**Teacher Interview Questions**

1. What type of a middle school experience do you think would prepare a student for 9th grade?
2. What type of classes do you think are student's favorites in middle school? Why?
3. What type of classes do you think are their favorite in high school? Why?
4. Do you feel that students are successful in those high school classes?
5. Why do you think students are successful in those classes?
6. What classes do you think freshman are successful in during the first trimester? Why do you think they are successful?
7. Why do you think students failed science, English or math in the first trimester of their freshman year?
8. Do you think freshman fail more than two classes for the same reason? If so, what are the reasons?
9. How do you think the transition from middle school to high school could be made better or easier so students have a better chance to be successful academically in high school?
10. If students could go back and take the classes they failed in the first trimester of their freshman year, knowing what they know about the classes and teachers, what do you think they would do differently in order to pass?
11. Do you think the students will be successful when they repeat the courses they failed the first time? Why or why not?
12. What would your advice regarding classes and class work be to incoming freshmen students?
13. What kind of things do you think need to be in place to help struggling students be more successful?
14. What do you think 9th grade students do after school?
15. How much homework do you think freshmen students do after school?



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