Running Head: THE IMPACT OF A SCHOOL-WIDE TOKEN ECONOMY

The Impact of a School-Wide Token Economy on
Behavior, Attendance, and Academics
At Morgan High School.

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of Master of Education in the
Graduate School of Marietta College.

By
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*****
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March 26, 2007

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Abstract

Token economy systems are used in many different situations throughout the world. Primarily these systems seem to be used the most in educational settings. The use of “tokens” also varies with the situation of the social setting. There has been extensive research about token economies in elementary and special needs classrooms. However, not much research has been conducted to determine if token economy systems are effective in a high school setting. This researcher used quantitative data in an attempt to support the idea that token economy systems are indeed effective on a school-wide level in a high school setting.
Dedicated to my parents
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Cathy Brown for all her help and understanding during my time at Marietta College. She was always polite and prompt in her responses to my graduate questions. Her friendliness convinced me to complete my Masters Degree at Marietta College.

I thank Dr. William Bauer, for his encouragement, emotional support, and assistance that made this research paper possible. It is a great feeling to have a person, such as Dr. Bauer, care that you succeed in your career and in your life.

Most of all I would like to thank my parents for their continuous support during my life and this Master’s Degree program. If it had not been for their encouragement, I am not sure I would have done as well as I have during my college career.
VITA

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• Developed daily lesson plans
• Increased science awareness of students through hands-on
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• Created and executed personalized teaching strategies for
  individual students
• Evaluated student comprehension using traditional and
  non-traditional methods
• Implemented classroom management plan
• Participant in High Schools That Work Program
• Taught Summer Science Intervention classes: Grades 4-6 &
  9-12
• Organized and coordinated Morgan High School Science Fairs
• Created and executed personalized teaching strategies for individual students
• Followed teachers’ lesson plans and guidelines
• Taught various lessons and developed creative, hands-on activities for students to expand learning experiences
• Developed a mastery of good teaching techniques
• Established a good rapport with administrators, staff, and students
• 21st Century Planning Committee
• Drama Club Advisor
• Freshman Class Advisor
• Technology & Learning Committee
• Renaissance Rewards Program Chair

1998-2000 SEARS
Assistant Hardware Manager
• Sears University Graduate, Associate of the Month, Customer Courtesy Award recipient
• Responsible for associate work schedules
• Trained associates in Sears’s policy and procedures, maintenance agreements, team work, and self confidence
• Developed associates for better productivity and for career development
• Required to solve issues that benefited customers and Sears
• Delegated tasks to associates to meet store deadlines

Community Service and Activities

• Able to work with personal computers and software such as: Microsoft Word, Excel, etc.
• Developed partnership with Big Brothers and Sisters program and Sears
• Participated in American Cancer Society Walk – a – thons
• Volunteer for Morgan High School athletic events
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Skills

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• Can operate office equipment: copiers, fax machines, cash registers, signing computers
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

All schools want to increase student attendance, decrease student behavior problems, and positively influence student grade point averages (G.P.A.). An emergent approach that demonstrates promise in accomplishing these goals is a school-wide behavior management system known as the Renaissance Program. This system is an extrinsic reward-based program designed to empower students and educators to re-energize the educational atmosphere in a school and to create new opportunities for success (Jostens Renaissance, 2006).

Behavior management studies have been analyzed throughout our history. Two of the most prominent people who have studied behavior management are Ivan Pavlov and B. F. Skinner. Pavlov was primarily interested in studying classical conditioning where subjects could be trained to produce desired responses to stimuli. Pavlov's most famous study of classical conditioning involved using the ringing of a bell to get dogs to salivate. In this study, Pavlov paired the presentation of food with the ringing of a bell. Over time, Pavlov found that merely ringing the bell, even in the absence of food, caused the dog to salivate. The ringing of the bell had become a learned or conditioned stimulus producing a learned or conditioned response. Pavlov went on to discover that the bell could lose its ability to elicit the production of saliva if it were repeatedly rung without the presentation of food. The dog learned that the bell was no longer associated with food and thus no longer acted as a conditioned stimulus for salivation (Zirpoli, 2005).

B. F. Skinner on the other hand worked with operant conditioning. Operant conditioning involves developing relationships between various consequences and
behaviors in order to achieve the desired outcome. Skinner used positive reinforcers to strengthen behaviors that he wanted to see occur and used negative reinforcers to discourage behaviors that were not desired (Zirpoli, 2005).

Over the past 50 years, behavior management systems have continued to grow based on Skinner’s research using operant conditioning as a method of improving social conditions. Interestingly, Skinner’s term operant conditioning has been linked to token economies when used in educational settings, research, and practice. One of the first uses of the token economy was to remediate problems of seriously mentally ill patients who were residing in mental hospitals. The design of a ward-wide system of organizing the consistent application of antecedents and consequences of behavior was termed the “token economy” because tokens could be conveniently dispensed to patients contingent on their exhibiting improvements in their behavior. The tokens were then subsequently exchanged for a panoply of rewards that were often individually determined by each patient such as cigarettes, candy, beverages, personal radios or televisions, single rooms, special privileges, and home visits (Lieberman, 2000). He found that research revealed the efficacy of the token economy in a wide variety of settings and for many patient populations, including children in special education classrooms, children with mental retardation, adolescents with conduct disorders and residential care homes, and psychiatric patients in day hospitals.

The use of token economy systems have not been without controversy as they continue to grow in usage. One of the main criticisms is that these economies tend to decrease the individuals intrinsic interest in the activity (Vasta, 1981). By using rewards to get the desired outcome for the activity, many researchers believe that we are only
stimulating the extrinsic motivations in the students and not the intrinsic (Weeks, 2006). On the other hand, many studies have shown that when classroom management is a struggle, using some form of token economy can bring the toughest class back into line (Bafile, 2005).

From their small beginning, token economies have taken many different avenues to get where they are today. Token economy systems were first introduced into special education classes and they produced favorable results. Changes in the quality and levels of student behavior were observed with various types of classroom performance variables. Two of the performance variables were academic achievement and the shaping of classroom appropriate responses (Knapczyk & Livingston, 1973). One study was designed to integrate a token reinforcement program into a special class setting without alteration of the ongoing classroom structure. In this study, the investigation sought to examine whether earning the use of educational activities can be an effective payoff within a token economy system (Knapczyk & Livingston, 1973). Another example of this approach is to teach appropriate behavior and social skills that can be used in one's natural environment to children who are in special education programs, who have developmental or learning disabilities, hyperactivity, attention deficit, or behavioral disorders. In the study, individuals receive tokens immediately after displaying desirable behavior and then these tokens are collected and later exchanged for a meaningful object or privilege (Thomson, 2006).

After the huge success of these programs with the special education students, regular education teachers began to see the value of using tokens. Regular education classrooms began to adopt various strategies using tokens to help control behavior and
increase achievement. One example of a token economy in a regular education classroom setting involves the use of “poker style” chips. The students earn chips for returning assignments on time, performing deeds of kindness, and various other tasks that exhibited appropriate behavior. However, if the students demonstrated an inappropriate behavior, the chips were deposited back into the teacher’s account. The goal of this program was to encourage the students to earn money “tokens” for good behavior and as their reward; they could purchase items at an end of the year auction. To increase achievement and better behavior the teacher would put various cool auction items on display in order to fire up her students (Bafile, 2005). Another example was used in a high school classroom where the teacher gave tickets for good behavior and would take tickets away for an inappropriate behavior. At the end of the week, students could turn in their tickets for various prizes (Wikipedia, 2006). Token economy systems can also be used in college classes. The University of Central Arkansas implemented a token economy into an undergraduate psychology course where students received tokens for their participation in class. The students could then exchange their tokens for extra credit in the course (Boniecki & Moore, 2003). However, these examples are from individual classrooms and are not at a school-wide level.

Today’s schools, administrators, teachers, and students are looking for various ways to breathe life back into our school systems. Many school systems across the country are now beginning to implement Renaissance Programs. Principal Santina Haldeman of Glassboro High School in New Jersey states, “I feel that the Renaissance Program is another way to provide a nurturing, caring school environment. For some students as a motivator to do well for others it is just a perk to do what is expected of
him. Students, parents, and staff like Renaissance” (Haldeman, 2004). The South Brunswick High School believes that the Renaissance Program means rebirth, renewal, or revival and invites students to renew their efforts to achieve academically, to attend school regularly, and to practice positive behavior and attitudes. Their program appreciates, celebrates, and rewards students for achievement and good moral character through the partnerships built among administrators, faculty, parents, community, and local businesses (The SBHS Renaissance Program, 2005). Renaissance Programs are a new approach to an old system of school-wide behavior management.

The purpose of this paper is to determine if a Renaissance Program can have an effect on a school's academics, attendance, and behavior therefore increasing the school's overall achievement level.

Research Problem

Token economy systems on a school-wide level are new and there is not enough research evaluating the impact of these systems. Therefore, school systems could be missing an effective tool in increasing school achievement.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to determine if a school-wide, token economy system has an impact on Morgan High School (Ohio) students’ academics, attendance, and behavior.
Hypotheses

Null Hypotheses:

- A school wide token economy system does not influence academics.
- A school wide token economy system does not influence attendance.
- A school wide token economy system does not influence student behavior.

Alternative Hypotheses:

- A school wide token economy system has an impact on academics.
- A school wide token economy system has an impact on attendance.
- A school wide token economy system has an impact on student behavior.
Definition of Terms

Attendance: The number of students attending school on a daily basis.

Behavior: The attitude and actions of the students while in the school setting.

Academic Achievement: The combination of grades achieved on multiple assignments that are calculated together to get an overall G.P.A.

Effective Behavioral Support (EBS): A system of school-wide processes and individualized instruction designed to prevent and decrease problem behavior and to maintain appropriate behavior (Fitzsimmons, 1998).

Token Economy: A token economy is a form of behavior modification designed to increase desirable behavior and decrease undesirable behavior with the use of tokens. Individuals receive tokens immediately after displaying desirable behavior. The tokens are collected and later exchanged for a meaningful object or privilege. (Encyclopedia of Mental Disorders, 2007).

Renaissance Program: The name given to the token economy system, which is designed to give a rebirth to school academics, behavior, and attendance (Jostens Renaissance, 2006).
Limitations of the Study

A variety of limitations influences this study. The study was conducted at Morgan High School in Morgan Local School District near McConnelsville, Ohio. The school consists of around 750 students primarily of low to middle-income status and is located in a rural community. The subjects from this setting may not reflect or represent other high schools around the country. Another possible limitation to the study is whether the tokens are causing the changes in the study or if the students are naturally determined to come to school, get good grades, and not cause behavior problems. A final possible limitation could be that teachers are becoming more proactive in managing students to increase in their overall school experience.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

What is a Token Economy?

According to Webster's dictionary, a token economy is a form of operant conditioning that is used in the behavior modification that involves rewarding desirable behaviors with tokens, which can be exchanged for items or privileges. Undesirable behaviors can be punished by taking away the tokens (Wikipedia, 2006). Stover (1994) defines a token economy as a behavior modification program that employs a variety of reinforcers, which encourages students to change their own behaviors. Zlomke & Zlomke (2003) describes a token economy as an intervention that includes contingencies in which tokens, points, or objects are given following the emission of targeted behaviors. Tokens can be redeemed for reinforcing objects or activities at a later point in time.

Token economy systems are one of the most often used behavior management techniques, especially in settings for students who have learning or behavior difficulties (McIntyre, 2004). Educational and behavioral institutions use token economies to meet several goals. Some of the goals these institutions try to reach are:

- increasing the ability to students and patients by delaying gratification
- increasing the sense of time that the individuals stay on task
- by increasing the number of responses necessary to obtain a primary reinforcer, the child becomes less satiated with that particular form of reinforcement
- increasing the teaching rate by giving quick reinforcements
- giving more natural reinforcement such as food
- increasing the selection of reinforcers (Wallin, 2004).
History of Token Economies

Behavior management has thoroughly been studied throughout our history. Two of the most prominent people who have investigated behavior management are Ivan Pavlov and B. F. Skinner. Pavlov was primarily interested in studying classical conditioning where subjects could be trained to produce desired responses to stimuli. Pavlov’s most famous study of classical conditioning involved using the ringing of a bell to get dogs to salivate (Zirpoli, 2005). Pavlov paired the presentation of food with the ringing of a bell. Over time, Pavlov found that merely ringing the bell, even in the absence of food, caused the dog to salivate. The ringing of the bell had become a learned or conditioned stimulus producing a learned or conditioned response. Pavlov went on to discover that the bell could lose its ability to elicit the production of saliva if it were repeatedly rung without the presentation of food. The dog learned that the bell was no longer associated with food and thus no longer acted as a conditioned stimulus for salivation.

B. F. Skinner, on the other hand, worked with operant conditioning. Operant conditioning involves developing relationships between various consequences and behaviors in order to achieve the desired outcome (Zirpoli, 2005). Skinner used positive reinforcers to strengthen behaviors that he wanted to see occur and used negative reinforcers to discourage behaviors that were not desired.

Over the past 50 years, behavior management systems have continued to grow based on Skinner’s research using operant conditioning as a method of improving social conditions. Interestingly, Skinner’s term operant conditioning has been linked to token
School-Wide Token Economies

When used in educational settings, research, and practice. One of the first uses of the token economy was to remediate problems of patients who were seriously mentally ill that were residing in mental hospitals. The design of a ward-wide system of organizing the consistent application of antecedents and consequences of behavior was termed the “token economy” because tokens could be conveniently dispensed to patients contingent on their exhibiting improvements in their behavior. The tokens were then subsequently exchanged for a panoply of rewards that were often individually determined by each patient such as cigarettes, candy, beverages, personal radios or televisions, single rooms, special privileges, and home visits (Lieberman, 2000). He found that research revealed the efficacy of the token economy in a wide variety of settings and for many patient populations, including children in special education classrooms and children who are mentally retarded, adolescents with conduct disorders and residential care homes, and psychiatric patients in day hospitals.

The use of token economy systems have not been without controversy as they continue to grow in usage. One of the main criticisms is that these economies tend to decrease the individuals intrinsic interest in the activity (Vasta, 1981). By using rewards to get the desired outcome for the activity, many researchers think that we are only stimulating the extrinsic motivations in the students and not the intrinsic (Weeks, 2006). On the other hand, many studies have shown that when classroom management is a struggle, using some form of token economy can bring the toughest class back into line (Bafile, 2005).
**How are Token Economies Established?**

Token economies are established whenever there is a need to change an undesirable behavior or enhance a desirable behavior in an individual. All token economy situations should take time and give thought to response cost issues. Response cost is a form of punishment, which involves token economies. An individual is fined a specific number of tokens when he behaves inappropriately. The goal of the strategy is to have the hope of reducing the inappropriate behaviors displayed. If an individual continues to display the inappropriate behavior, the higher the token costs might go.

Response costs must be given considerable thought before implementing. It might take a considerable amount of work to teach the child the token system and even more to get him to trust the system. Sometimes response costs can also cause the children to lose trust in the system (Wallin, 2004). Reinforcement is more likely to be effective if the students know exactly what consequences will follow various behaviors. So it is especially important to make response costs explicit (Ormrod, 2000).

**Key Elements of Token Economies**

There are several key elements to every token economy. These elements may vary in appearance from each location, but are usually found in each setting. Thomson (2006) suggests there are six main elements that every token economy has to have to be successful. The first element consists of items called tokens. Tokens are anything that is visible and countable that really have no value of their own. They are usually collected and later exchanged for meaningful objects, privileges, or activities. Example tokens are poker chips, stickers, point tallies, or play money.
The second element is to have a clearly defined target behavior. All individuals participating in the token economy need to know exactly what they must do in order to receive tokens. Desirable and undesirable behaviors should be explained ahead of time in simple specific terms. In addition, the number of tokens awarded or lost because of the behavior demonstrated should be specified.

The third element that is necessary for a token economy is to have backup reinforcers. Backup reinforcers are meaningful objects, privileges, or activities that individuals receive in exchange for tokens. Some examples of backup reinforcers are food items, toys, extra free time, or outings. The success of token economies depends upon the appeal of backup reinforcers. Individuals will only be motivated to earn tokens if they anticipate the future reward represented by the tokens. A well-designed token economy will use backup reinforcers chosen by individuals in the program rather than by staff.

The fourth element is to have a system for exchanging tokens. A time and place for purchasing backup reinforcers is necessary. The token value of each backup reinforcer is predetermined based on the monetary value, demand, or therapeutic value. It is important to make the reinforcers meaningful to each individual and backup reinforcer worth appropriate levels of value. If the value is set too high, individuals may become easily discouraged. If it is set too low, it may be less motivation to earn.

The fifth element is to have a system for recording data. Before any token economy begins, a baseline data collection should be performed. The baseline is a measure of where the individuals’ performance levels are in the investigation. That baseline is then compared to how well individuals progress over time. Information
regarding the exchange of tokens is also important to see which tokens are more effective.

Finally, the last element in a good token economy system is to have consistent implementation of the token economy by staff. For any token economy to succeed all involved staff members must reward the same behaviors, use appropriate amount of tokens, avoid dispensing back up reinforcers for free, and prevent tokens from being counterfeited, stolen, or otherwise unjustly obtained. All token economy systems should be periodically evaluated for proper management (Thomson, 2006).

*Token Economies in Special Education Classrooms*

Token reinforced systems have been introduced into special education classes with generally favorable results. Changes in the quality and levels of student behavior have been observed with various types of classroom performance variables, including both those concerned with academic achievement and with shaping appropriate classroom response repertoires (Knapczyk & Livingston, 1973). One example of a token economy system in a special needs classroom is where the students receive stamps to put in a payment book. The students receive a stamp each day that they meet or exceed their goals or desired behaviors. When they received a specific number of stamps, they cash in their payment books for a reward (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, & Leal, 1999). Zecker (2005) believes that special needs children (for example: ones with ADHD) require a token economy system that is more powerful, more frequent, and more linked in time to the desired behavior than do their non-ADHD peers. Some example behaviors that could be rewarded are getting homework done in a timely manner and getting ready for school on their own.
Token Economies in Elementary Classrooms

Bafile (2005) explains how Donna Kelley designed a good example of a token economy system for her fourth grade elementary school classroom. In her system, each student received 10 poker style chips with each representing one dollar in what she called *Kelley Kash*. To simplify accountability, loss, and theft, each chip was assigned the students’ number and it was the students’ responsibility to keep track of their chips. Students obtained additional *Kelley Kash* for returning assignments on time, performing deeds of kindness, and more. Every Friday, students recorded their earnings and updated their notebooks with the total value of the chips they had accumulated. Donna also kept a running record of the totals and used it to verify the students’ data. During the last week of school, Kelley had an auction. The students were allowed to purchase items that they saw at the auction and pay for them using their poker style chips. The students were notified that all sales are final and they can only have one trade per-person after the auction was over (Bafile, 2005).

Token Economies in High School Classrooms

TOBINWORLD's Reward Store creates a fun atmosphere through the school's token economy system. Students can purchase food items or play games as a reward for appropriate behavior. High school students may choose to spend their reward time listening to an old fashioned juke-box - loaded with a variety of popular music - play Sega or pinball, watch videos, eat "fun" food or simply sit and relax (TobinWorld, 2007).

ACES Whitney High School uses token economy systems with their seriously emotionally disturbed high school students. Students participate in academic and vocational programs, which include motivational behavior management. The goal is to
prepare the students to participate in a democratic society, compete successfully in the job market, be informed decision-makers, and become lifelong learners (ACES Whitney High School North, 2006).

**Token Economies in College Classrooms**

Token economy systems are not just for K-12 classrooms. Colleges also use various forms of token economy systems. College rewards tend to relate significantly to students’ motivational orientation and performance levels (Davis et al, 2006). One study of the use of token economies came from the University of Central Arkansas. The 63 undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory psychology course were introduced to a token economy system to help “break the silence” of the classroom. During the class, the instructor was uncomfortable because no one would respond to the instructor’s questions. The instructor tried a variety of different techniques to combat the “silence”, such as waiting out the silence, calling on students by name, or initiating small-group discussions. However, during the study, the best medicine to get the students to stop their silence was to allow extra credit for participation in class. Immediately following participation, the instructor presented tokens to each participating student. The students then exchange the tokens for extra credit towards their course grades. Another variation that can be done with small college classrooms is to write students initials on the board and place a checkmark beside each name for every time they participate in the class (Boniecki & Moore, 2003).

**Token Economies Outside of Schools**

Many people think token economies are just established for students in school. However, token economies are alive and well outside of schools. For example if we
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compare it to national economic system, we find token economies. In this token economy, we work for money, which has no value in and of itself, and later exchange the money for items or activities that are valuable to us. Credit card companies established various reward programs for using their credit cards, such as, if you purchase so much on your credit card, you will earn free miles to take at your leisure. Department stores offer discounts for coming in their store and buying various items (McIntyre, 2004). Token economies have also been effective in facilitating change and psychiatric settings. In these locations, patients earn reinforcers in the form of tokens for engaging in targeted behaviors. The tokens are then exchanged for desired items and privileges. The token economy helps clients perform and learn desired behaviors. Because of the flexibility and efficiency of token economies, they have been used in a variety of inpatient settings with numerous populations ranging from chronic psychiatric patients, adults with mental retardation, alcoholics, patients with brain injuries, and children (LePage, 1999).

What are Renaissance Programs?

Renaissance Programs are educational enrichment programs developed by schools that are designed to empower your students and educators to re-energize your educational atmosphere. These programs encourage students and teachers to participate in the program by aiming to increase student performance and teacher enthusiasm. Renaissance Programs also encourage all the parents and local businesses to participate in the program through community participation. The main theme of the Renaissance Programs is to get students to see that it is “cool” to do well in school (Jostens Renaissance, 2006). Because schools are able to individually design their own Renaissance Program, each school can have different criteria and activities associated with their program. For example, the
South Brunswick High School (SBHS) Renaissance Program means rebirth, renewal, or revival. They encourage their students to renew their efforts to achieve academically, to attend school regularly, and to practice paused behavior and attitudes. Through their Renaissance Program, SBHS celebrates and rewards students’ achievement through partnerships among administrators, faculty, parents, the community, and local businesses. It also recognizes teachers and staff for their efforts in obtaining community support (SBHS Renaissance Program, 2005). Another example is from Glassboro, New Jersey High School. In this Renaissance Program, students have the opportunity to earn three levels of cards. In order to earn a card, students must earn good grades, have no failures, not be absent or late more than three times during a grading period, be involved in school and community activities, and not commit any disciplinary infractions.

Santina Hadleman quotes:

I feel that Renaissance is another way to provide a nurturing, caring school environment. For some students it is a motivator to do well. For others it is just a perk to do what is expected of them. Students, parents, and staff like Renaissance. Renaissance is also used for teacher incentives—they also benefit from the program since teachers also get perks during American Education Week, Staff Appreciation Week, and many times throughout the year (Haldeman, 2004).

*How to Establish a Renaissance Program at Your School.*

Organizing and establishing a Renaissance Program in your school can be an incredibly big undertaking. It is important to start on a small scale and begin slowly, to shoot for winnable victories, engage support in early stages, and to have fun. If done correctly, the program should take on a life of its own and grow. An example of how to
organize an effective program could be by following the Jostens Renaissance Program example (Jostens Renaissance, 2006).

Jostens believes that by completing the following steps your school can create an effective program.

1. **Gain administrative support:**
   - Speak to your principals; apply him or her with general information about the basic principles, goals, and objectives of Renaissance.

2. **Give information to your faculty members to elicit support:**
   - Select a few key faculty, students, and parents to help you plan your program.
   - Request one hour of effective meeting time or in-service to ensure your vision of what you believe your school can become.

3. **Form a school Renaissance Program:**
   - Determine a key performance area on which your committee will concentrate.
   - Establish baseline information for areas of concentration so you can chart schools progress and celebrate victories.
   - Brainstorm ideas in terms of eligibility requirements incentives and recognition plans.
   - Sift through your ideas and focus upon goals that are attainable.
   - Sort into the categories: immediate, short-term, long-term, and place these ideas and categories of expense: no cost, low cost, or high cost. Of all the achievable ideas, select one that you can do and do it.
   - Review your efforts and results.

4. **Formulate a plan of action:**
   - Plan a three to six month program. In addition, select a date to officially start your Renaissance Program.
   - Discuss fundraiser plans and illicit community support for discounts and rewards.
   - Kick off Renaissance with a party or dance rally to build interest and curiosity about the program.

5. **Finally, fully implement Renaissance in your school by advertising, having ongoing recognition efforts weekly, monthly, or whenever the opportunity presents, itself.**
   - Do not forget to include student recognition and faculty staff recognition.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Study Design

All schools want to increase student attendance, decrease student behavioral problems, and positively influence student grade point averages (G.P.A.). An emergent approach that demonstrates promise in accomplishing these goals is a school-wide behavior management system known as the Renaissance Program.

The research problem in this study is that token economy systems on a school-wide level are new and there is not enough research evaluating the impact of these systems. Therefore, school systems could be missing an effective tool in increasing school achievement.

The purpose of this research was to determine if a school-wide, token economy system has an impact on Morgan High School (Ohio) students’ academics, attendance, and behavior.

Participants

This study was conducted at Morgan High School in Morgan Local School District near McConnelsville, Ohio. The school consists of around 750 students primarily of low to middle-income socioeconomic status and is located in a rural community. A majority of the students are of a white Appalachian heritage. There are also some smaller diverse groups such as African Americans, Hispanics, and a couple of students who are foreign-exchange students.
Procedure

The research began by collecting data on the grades obtained by the students, the number of days students missed school, and the amount of behavior problems that occurred. To be able to qualify for the Renaissance Program, the students could have no lower than a C- for a grade, no more than two days absence from school, and could only have a minor discipline infraction.

Instruments

The study was conducted by collecting data each nine weeks on grades obtained by the students, any discipline problems that occurred, and the daily attendance numbers of each student. The grading scale at Morgan High School is based on a 10-percentage point grading scale with grades ranging from A to F. Attendance is primarily based on excused or unexcused absences; however, there are many different codes that can be placed in the computer such as for a field trip, out of school suspension, and alternative educational placement. The Renaissance Program does not distinguish between excused or unexcused absence, only whether the student is at school or not at school. Behavioral problems also have many different codes that can be placed into the computer such as detention, OSS, ISS, or AEP. The Renaissance Program only accepts a minor discipline infraction, which is a one-hour detention for a minor offense such as being tardy to class, not being prepared for class, or some other minor offense.

Data Analyses Procedures

The data that was collected and analyzed were the grades of the students, the amount of days missed, and the amount of behavior problems reported. This data was
analyzed on an individualized student basis and was then compared to the qualifications set by the Renaissance Program at Morgan High School.

The SPSS statistical software package was used to analyze the basic data that was collected.

Preliminary Results

The researcher expected to prove that each of the alternate hypotheses is correct. The alternate hypotheses are:

- A school wide token economy system has an impact on academics.
- A school wide token economy system has an impact on attendance.
- A school wide token economy system has an impact on student behavior.

Potential Ethical Issues

Research began after obtaining permission from the Marietta College Human Subjects Review Board, the superintendent of Morgan Local School District, and the high school principal. All data collected in this research was filed away in a secure file on the researcher's computer. No student names or personal information was used in this research report. The only data that is reported is a numerical amount or percentage of how many students by grade level obtained the qualifications to meet the Renaissance Program.

Timeline

September 2006 – Obtained permission from the superintendent and high school principal to begin research and data collection.

February 2007 – Submitted paperwork to obtain permission from Marietta College Human Subjects Review Board so that data collection may begin.

March 2007 – Began data collection.

Budget

There were no personal expenses incurred because of this research. However, the Renaissance Program had to purchase multiple items for the students during the course of this research project. These tokens were used as rewards for the students that qualified for the Renaissance Program. The money to purchase these items came from sponsor donations and many different types of fundraisers.
CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this research was to determine if a school-wide, token economy system has an impact on Morgan High School students’ academics, attendance, and behavior. The sample was comprised of 447 high school students from Morgan High School in the Morgan Local School District that had met one or more of the criteria for the Renaissance Program. Permission to complete this research was obtained from the superintendent of the school district, the principal of the high school, and the Marietta College Human Subjects Review Board. The data collected and analyzed consisted of the grades of the students, the amount of days missed, and the amount of behavior problems reported. This data was analyzed on an individualized student basis and then compared to the qualifications set by the Renaissance Program at Morgan High School. The data was analyzed using SPSS 11.5 statistical software.

The research began by collecting data on the grades obtained by the students, the number of days students missed school, and the amount of behavior problems that occurred. To be able to qualify for the Renaissance Program, the students could not have lower than a C- for a grade, no more than two days absence from school, and could only have a minor discipline infraction. This study was composed of 447 students at Morgan High School. Table 2 displays the percentage of the 447 students by class rank: 113 or 25.3% were freshmen, 129 students or 28.9% were sophomores, 94 or 21% students were juniors, and 111 or 24.8% were seniors. However, not all the students met the criteria for the Renaissance Program in each category of grades, attendance, and behavior. Table 1 illustrates that 225 students met the qualifications for grades and attendance for the first
nine-week period, while all 447 students met the discipline criteria. Table 1 also reveals that during the second nine weeks, there was a 91 student increase of students that met the grade requirement, a 132 student increase of students that met the attendance requirement, and all students again met the discipline requirement. Tables 4 through 9 allow us to compare the individual statistics of the students making the grade, attendance, and the discipline requirements for the Renaissance Program.

By comparing tables 4 and 5, we can see that the number of A’s declined by roughly 7%. The number of B’s increased by about 5%, and the number of C’s roughly increased by 2.3%. However, even though the number of A’s decreased it is important to understand that the number of students qualifying for the Renaissance Program by their grades increased by 20%. Based on this data we can conclude that the Renaissance Program was having an effect on students’ academic achievement that had previously been below a grade of C. By comparing the means from table 1, we can determine that the grading increase was slightly positive.

By comparing tables 6 and 7, the data confirms that there is an increase of 132 students making the attendance requirement for Renaissance. Even though the percentage of days missed varied between zero and two, the data clearly displays that the majority of students missed zero to one day.

Finally by comparing data tables 8 and 9, the data table reveals that discipline infractions increased by roughly 1.5% or seven students. Overall, this is still a good sign with the majority of the 447 students having no discipline infractions at all.
The data for this 18-week period clearly proves that grades and attendance did increase slightly, while the Renaissance Program was in effect. However, it did show the discipline did slightly increase also during this time.
# DATA

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grades 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; 9 Week Period</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.2311</td>
<td>.78485</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; 9 Week Period</td>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>.8889</td>
<td>.76538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; 9 Week Period</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.0089</td>
<td>.09428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grades 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; 9 Week Period</td>
<td>316</td>
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<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.3228</td>
<td>.71951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; 9 Week Period</td>
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<td>2.00</td>
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<td>.76953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>.00</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.0246</td>
<td>.15510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valid N (list wise)</td>
<td>123</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table illustrates the minimum and maximum values, means, and standard deviation for each variable.
Table 2

Student Grade Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables - Grade</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table illustrates the percentage of freshman, sophomores, juniors, and seniors that qualified for the Renaissance Program.

Table 3

Qualifying Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Grades 1st 9 Week Period</th>
<th>Attendance 1st 9 Week Period</th>
<th>Discipline 1st 9 Week Period</th>
<th>Grades 2nd 9 Week Period</th>
<th>Attendance 2nd 9 Week Period</th>
<th>Discipline 2nd 9 Week Period</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>357</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table illustrates the number of students that made the individual criteria for the Renaissance Program.
Table 4

Grades 1st 9 Week Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>44.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>System</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>447</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table illustrates the percentage of students that received an A, B, or C during this period.

Table 5

Grades 2nd 9 Week Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>System</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>447</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table illustrates the percentage of students that received an A, B, or C during this period.
Table 6

Attendance 1st 9 Week Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days Absent</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid .00</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.50</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>44.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>68.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>11.2</td>
<td>22.2</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>225</td>
<td>50.3</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>System</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table illustrates the percentage of students that missed a specific amount of days during this period.

Table 7

Attendance 2nd 9 Week Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days Absent</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid .00</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>29.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.50</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>40.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>60.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>77.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>23.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>79.9</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>System</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table illustrates the percentage of students that missed a specific amount of days during this period.
Table 8

Discipline Infractions 1\textsuperscript{st} 9 Week Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Valid .00</td>
<td>443</td>
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<td>99.1</td>
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<td>1.00</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table illustrates the percentage of students that had a discipline infraction during this period.

Table 9

Discipline Infractions 2\textsuperscript{nd} 9 Week Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Valid .00</td>
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<td>97.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table illustrates the percentage of students that had a discipline infraction during this period.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Token economy systems are an everyday occurrence in today's society. Even though the systems are not exactly like Pavlov’s ringing bell and B. F. Skinner's operant conditioning, they are still just as effective. Renaissance Programs are educational enrichment programs developed by schools that are designed to empower your students and educators to re-energize your educational atmosphere. These programs encourage students and teachers to participate in the program by aiming to increase student performance and teacher enthusiasm. Renaissance Programs also encourage all the parents and local businesses to participate in the program through community participation. The main theme of the Renaissance Programs is to get students to see that it is “cool” to do well in school (Jostens Renaissance, 2006). Generally, everyone in the world wants to get a reward for doing a task. This philosophy allows token economy systems to flourish in our society. People like getting rewards or tokens for doing tasks, whether it is getting bonus points for buying certain objects or just the fact of getting something for doing a good job.

Based on the findings of this research project, it is apparent that the previous statements are true. Even though the research illustrates, there was only a slight improvement in academic achievement and in attendance, there was a significant increase in the number of students achieving the goals for the Renaissance Program. The data supports the alternate hypothesis for academic achievement and attendance. This means that the Renaissance Program did actually make an impact on students’ achievement and attendance. It also proves that there was a slight increase in discipline infractions for the
second nine-week period. This information supports the null hypothesis. However, the majority of the students still have no discipline infractions during this time.

By analyzing the data, there seems to be a correlation that the students want to do well enough to achieve the minimum requirements of the Renaissance Program and to obtain the tokens and rewards that the program offers. According to the data, it did not matter what the grade level of the students was as a deciding factor to participate in the program or not. When making comparisons from the charts, the number of students at each grade level was fairly even.

Limitations

Every research project has various limitations to the study. A variety of limitations influenced this study. The study was conducted at Morgan High School in Morgan Local School District near McConnelsville, Ohio. The school consists of around 750 students primarily of low to middle-income status and is located in a rural community. The subjects from this setting may not reflect or represent other high schools around the country. Another possible limitation to the study is whether the tokens are causing the changes in the study or if the students are naturally determined to come to school, get good grades, and not cause behavior problems. A third limitation to the study is the amount of time that was used to collect the data. Eighteen weeks might not been enough time to get a true representation of the effect of the Renaissance Program. A final possible limitation could be that teachers are becoming more proactive in managing students to increase in their overall school experience.
The conclusions based on the 18-week data are merely a possible outcome of a long-term study. Based on the literature review and the data collected in this research project, it is imperative that we continue to study this topic.

*Application*

There are many different applications that can be applied based on the results of this research project. Based on this information, school systems and high school principals might want to implement their own school-wide token economy system. Today's schools are looking for higher standards from their students. The need for higher standards will continue to increase as time progresses. This makes school more challenging for students and sometimes can be overtaxing for them. The institution of a token economy system might provide an atmosphere of satisfaction for doing a good job in school for students. The research clearly indicates through the literature review that many individual classrooms, institutions, and communities are already using some form of a token economy system. If students are already utilizing a token economy system, why not use one in our school systems.

*Future Implications*

There are many future implications for the study. The study only encompassed a small fraction of the total possibilities that this topic has on our school systems today. This report only examined one rural high school in Ohio for an 18-week period. What would the results of the experiment have been in multiple schools across the United States over a longer time? The information collected in this research project confirms the need for a longer-term study and a broader subject group.
If this research project were to be completed again, the researcher would first start gathering information for a longer time, perhaps one year to two years for comparison of data. It would also be plausible to set up the same system in multiple schools. Another investigation or observation would be interesting to discover whether the system works for other high schools around the country. Literature does suggest that many high schools around the country are beginning to embrace this philosophy of rewarding their students.

This research project was fascinating to complete. However, the project itself raised more questions that need to be addressed in the future. A few of the questions that this researcher looks forward to finding answers for are:

- What would the results be of this research over a year to two-year period?
- Why do not all the students make this program?
- How would the elementary students compare to the high school students?
- How would the junior high students compare to the high school students?

The use of token economy systems are still a controversial topic, whether it is the criticism that these economies tend to decrease the individuals intrinsic interest in the activity (Vasta, 1981) or using some form of token economy to bring the toughest class back into line (Bafile, 2005). After analyzing the data from this study, we are left with one remaining question:

Are token economies systems the future of our schools?
REFERENCES


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http://www.tobinworld.org/rewardsy.htm


http://www.polyxo.com/visualsupport/tokeneconomies.html


http://homepages.wmich.edu/~d2weeks/Token%20Economy.htm


http://www.ldaor.org/Newsletter-Fall2005.html


http://www.sbschools.org/schools/sbhs/school_information/renaissance.php


Appendix

Graphs of Analyzed Data

Graph 1

Number of student in each grade level.

Graphs 2 & 3

1st 9 Week Period Grades A=1, B=2, C=3

2nd 9 Week Period Grades A=1, B=2, C=3
Graphs
3 & 4

Number of days absent 1st 9 Week Period

Number of Days Absent 2nd 9 Week Period

Graphs
5 & 6

Number of Discipline Infractions 1st 9 Week Period

Number of Discipline Infractions 2nd 9 Week Period
Dear Supt. Lowe:

The intent of this letter is to ask for permission to gather research data from Morgan High School. The information gathered will be used in my Master's Thesis Project at Marietta College and for possible publication in an educational journal. The research is looking to analyze how effective a school wide token economy system is on high school academics, attendance, and behavior. The data to be gathered from these categories will be kept strictly confidential and no individual student or students will be singled out or contacted. The research will not interfere with any classroom instruction or be a distraction to the school. I am required to follow all of the ethical guidelines of research as proposed by the Human Subjects Committee at Marietta College. If you would like to review these guidelines or have any questions, please let me know and I can provide these for you.

Parents may also contact me if they would have any questions about this research project.

By signing this letter, you are granting me permission to collect the necessary data from Morgan High School and use the data for my project, which may be published.

Thank you for your time and if you would like a copy of my thesis when I am finished, do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

Scott M. Porter

Superintendent Signature___________________________________

March 26, 2007
Dear Miss Eldridge:

The intent of this letter is to ask for permission to gather research data from Morgan High School. The information gathered will be used in my Master's Thesis Project at Marietta College and for possible publication in an educational journal. The research is looking to analyze how effective a school wide token economy system is on high school academics, attendance, and behavior. The data to be gathered from these categories will be kept strictly confidential and no individual student or students will be singled out or contacted. The research will not interfere with any classroom instruction or be a distraction to the school. I am required to follow all of the ethical guidelines of research as proposed by the Human Subjects Committee at Marietta College. If you like to review these guidelines or have any questions please, let me know and I can provide these for you.

Parents may also contact me if they would have any questions about this research project.

By signing this letter, you are granting me permission to collect the necessary data from Morgan High School and use the data for my project, which may be published.

Thank you for your time and if you would like a copy of my thesis when I am finished, do not hesitate to ask.

Sincerely,

Scott M. Porter

Principal Signature___________________________________