FRESHMEN ACADEMY: IMPLEMENTATION AND AFFECTIVENESS

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Master of Arts in Education at
Marietta College

By
Laura Hall

Marietta College 2009

Master's Examination Committee
Dr. William Bauer

Approved by
Advisor
Department of Education
ABSTRACT

The transition from middle school to high school (8th grade to 9th grade) is a pivotal year. This transition year is important because it is the year that has the largest failure rate for students and hence the greatest influence on future high school graduation. One initiative that many schools are trying to implement in an effort to help students through this transition year is Freshmen Academy. In general, this researcher found several characteristics that most Freshmen Academies have in common. These characteristics include:

- Freshmen in groups traveling from one core class to another.
- Freshmen core classes in close proximity to one another.
- A team of dedicated core teachers who communicate and work together well.
- An emphasis on team building and positive reinforcement in the form of tangible rewards
- Efforts on the part of teachers to increase the involvement of parents

The purpose of this researcher’s study was to analyze Freshmen Academy at Frontier High School using an action research design for the qualitative component and a comparison of previous years first semester statistics to the current first semester statistics. 
of the 2008-2009 school year for the quantitative component. This was a mixed method study that most closely mimicked the embedded design approach. The researcher expected that the qualitative data would play a supportive role to the statistical data. It was anticipated that the researcher would find an increase in achievement among freshmen who were involved with Freshmen Academy. This increase would be reflected academically and in behavior and attendance.
Dedicated to my best friend and husband, Kent Hall
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my family, students, fellow faculty, and administrators for their help and patience with me throughout this project. Chad Rinard and Holly Cunningham both provided me with data that I would not have had access to otherwise. Thanks to Dr. Bauer, at Marietta College, who patiently read and offered advice on multiple occasions.
VITA

July 29, 1960..............................Born-Dayton, Ohio

1982.................................B.S. Forensic Chemistry, Ohio University.

1982........................................Chemist,
Mansfield Police Department
Mansfield, Ohio USA

1993.................................B.S. Education, West Virginia State College

1994-1996.............................Chemistry Teacher,
Miami Valley Career Technology Center

1996-1998.............................Integrated Science Teacher,
Marietta High School

1998-1999.............................Integrated Science & Chemistry Teacher
Belpre High School

1996-2003.............................Adjunct Chemistry Faculty,
Washington State Community College

2003-Present..........................Integrated Science, Chemistry, Physics,
and Forensic Science Teacher, Frontier High School

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Science Education
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Literature Review</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Methods</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Results</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Summary/Conclusion</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Implications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Improvement in freshmen scores and grades from 2006 – 2007 school year to 2007-2008 school year</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Approximate number of disciplinary actions for the 2007-2008 school year</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Demographic break down of Frontier High School Freshmen Class for the 2007-2008 school year</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Faculty at Frontier High School serving the 2008-2009 freshmen class</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Example questions for surveys</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Average daily absences</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Behavior Incidents for the 1st semesters</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“No Child Left Behind” is a phrase with which people are all now familiar. But do people often stop to think about its meaning? Most educators would agree that reaching each child is a worthwhile goal. While the merits of its execution can be debated, this researcher sees “No Child Left Behind” as the hallmark of Freshmen Academies. Freshmen Academies are being implemented in high schools across the nation.

The purpose of Freshmen Academies is to assist with the transition from middle school to high school. One school that has implemented Freshmen Academy successfully is Crescent High School of Iva, South Carolina. The purpose for establishing Freshmen Academy at Crescent High School was to assist students with the transition to high school by providing structure, discipline, and high expectations (Jordan, 2008).

To define Freshmen Academy is not an easy task. The design is flexible enough that each school must find their own fit. In general, this researcher found several characteristics that most Freshmen Academies have in common. These characteristics include:

- Freshmen in groups traveling from one core class to another.
- Freshmen core classes in close proximity to one another.
- A team of dedicated core teachers who communicate and work together well.
• An emphasis on team building and positive reinforcement in the form of tangible rewards

• Efforts on the part of teachers to increased the involvement of parents

There is a growing awareness that many students are not making a successful transition from middle school to high school. The Texas Center for Educational Research’s study (2002, as cited in Marshal, 2003) states that “More students repeat ninth grade than any other grade, and more decide to drop out of school during or at the end of their ninth-grade year than at any other time.”

Belfanz and Legters (2006) claim that 15% of the nation’s high schools produce half of the nation’s dropouts. This 15% is made up of roughly 2000 high schools where there are routinely 60% less seniors than there were freshmen four years earlier.

This study looked at the implementation of Freshmen Academy at Frontier High School in New Matamoras, Washington County, Ohio. By comparing previous freshmen classes with the current freshmen attending Freshmen Academy the researcher was able to ascertain if Freshmen Academy affected freshmen achievement. For the purpose of this research, the areas of achievement that were analyzed included:

• Student behavior

• Student attendance

• Student academics

• Parent involvement.

These comparisons were made through surveys of faculty and students, interviews with faculty and students, and statistics obtained from administrators. It was the premise
of this researcher that Freshmen Academy would positively affect most aspects of freshmen life for freshmen at Frontier High School.

Statement of the Problem

During the 2007-2008 school year at Frontier High School approximately twenty-five classes were failed by fourteen students in the 1st semester of their freshmen year. Frontier High School is not different than an average high school and is following the national trends in this area (Hall, 2008).

Recently, Frontier High School has made some attempts to reach at risk students. Namely, Frontier has introduced a program of classes called Core Area Study Skills; for those students who have failed an area of the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT). Frontier High School has full inclusion with special education instructors in class with the content teacher. Some team teaching is taking place but the special education teachers are essentially bystanders in the classroom and are not actively involved in classroom instruction. Special educators have their own classrooms where students may go for assistance at various times during the day. Frontier also has a two week OGT intervention class, conducted in the summer, for upperclassmen that have not passed the OGT. However, until this year with the implementation of Freshmen Academy, nothing has been done at Frontier High School to specifically address the challenges facing ninth grade students (Hall, 2008).

At Frontier High School it has been the practice to not retain 8th graders due to academic failing. It is not unusual for this researcher, who is a member of the Freshmen
Academy Teaching Team, to have ninth grade students who have a 0.0 grade point average (GPA) in junior high. Consequently, some freshmen students at Frontier High School find themselves in a dilemma now that they are in high school classes that really count. For the first time failure in coursework means not moving on. With the addition of the 8th Grade Ohio Achievement Tests, hopefully this practice will not continue (Hall, 2008).

Because Frontier freshmen students now have a serious consequence when they are not successful, Frontier High School has a serious problem. The ninth grade failure rate is too high and this leads ultimately to a low graduation rate. Graduation rate is a part of Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and Ohio Report card; documents that hold schools accountable to the public (Hall, 2008).

Why has nothing been done until now? Perhaps with the implementation of the stricter regulations (AYP and Report Cards) from the state of Ohio there is now administrative concern and an interest in seeing more students be successful in high school. Freshmen Academies are being incorporated in many High Schools That Work (HSTW) Sites. In 2007 Frontier High School became a High School That Works Site. “High Schools That Work is the largest and oldest of the Southern Regional Education Board’s school improvement initiatives for high school and middle grades leaders and teachers. More than 1,200 HSTW sites in 31 states are using the framework of HSTW Goals and Key Practices to raise student achievement.” (Southern Regional Education Board, 2008). Aside from more accountability, there is a spirit of cooperation among the Freshmen Academy Team which was motivated to see freshmen succeed regardless of their pasts.
As part of the implementation of Freshmen Academy, this researcher and other staff visited two HSTW sites with successful Freshmen Academy programs. The Freshmen Academy Team at Frontier High School has used these two sites as inspiration and models to adapt a Freshmen Academy to fit the needs of Frontier High School.

*Purpose and Research Questions*

In this study, the research examined the implementation of Freshmen Academy at Frontier High School and analyzed its successes and failures through the first semester of the 2008-2009 school year.

The purpose of this researcher’s study was to analyze Freshmen Academy at Frontier High School using an action research design for the qualitative component and a comparison of previous year’s first semester statistics to the current first semester statistics of the 2008-2009 school year for the quantitative component. This was a mixed method study which most closely mimicked the embedded design approach. The statistical data was thoroughly backed up by the qualitative data.

*Research Hypothesis*

The primary research hypothesis was tested by comparing behavior and academic statistics from previous year’s students who did not participate in Freshmen Academy to the current year’s students who are participating in Freshmen Academy. It is was anticipated that the results will show that freshmen, as a whole, participating in Freshmen
Academy have less discipline (behavior) problems, better attendance, more parental involvement, and greater academic success (passing rates).

*Central Phenomenon*

The study explored students’, parents’, and faculty perceptions about Freshmen Academy. The study attempted to use this qualitative portion of the study to answer the question, ‘What is the affect of Freshmen Academy?’

*Null Hypothesis*

There is no relationship between Freshmen Academy and student achievement.

*Alternative Hypothesis*

There is a relationship between Freshmen Academy and student achievement.
Definitions of Terms

FRESHMEN ACADEMY – a High Schools That Work initiative to help with the transition to high school and improve student success by providing structure, discipline, and high expectations.

HIGH SCHOOLS THAT WORK – largest and oldest of the Southern Regional Education Board’s school improvement initiatives for high school and middle grades leaders and teachers. More than 1,200 HSTW sites in 31 states are using the framework of HSTW Goals and Key Practices to raise student achievement.”

ACHIEVEMENT – something accomplished by special effort. In this study achievement is not just academic improvement or excellence. Achievement also includes areas such as behavior and attendance.
Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by time, demographics, and sample. The time limit that was imposed on the researcher is one semester of study. There may perhaps be some differences in a one semester study and a year long study. There is no doubt more data and therefore more reliable data could be collected were it possible to extend the study for an entire year.

The demographics of Frontier High School limit the study. The fact that the study was of one school only may limit the study’s application to other schools. Frontier is a rural high school with a large population living at poverty level and receiving school lunch assistance (Cunningham, 2008). It is hoped that this study will be a helpful addition to the body of research in the area of middle to high school transitions.

Each class is different; teachers will attest to that. So the possibility that the 2008-2009 freshmen group has differing abilities and aptitudes than previous classes must affect the data in some way. It was hoped that by looking at the last three years of freshmen statistics a more fair comparison could be made between past freshmen and current freshmen enrolled in Freshmen Academy.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There has been little specific research exploring Freshmen Academies being implemented around the nation. The greater body of research can be found in the exploration of reasons why students have trouble transitioning from middle to high school. In this section of the paper, Freshmen Academy’s definition, implementation, and affects are reviewed. The researcher then performed a thematic literature review (Creswell, 2008) to look at four specific areas of concern for this study: attendance, grades, parental involvement, and behavior.

Freshmen Academy

This researcher was first introduced to Freshmen Academy when Frontier High School became a High Schools That Work site. “High Schools That Work is the largest and oldest of the Southern Regional Education Board’s school improvement initiatives for high school and middle grades leaders and teachers. More than 1,200 HSTW sites in 31 states are using the framework of HSTW Goals and Key Practices to raise student achievement.” (Southern Regional Education Board, 2008). The Southern Regional Education Board was founded in 1948 and is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that works with leaders and policy-makers in sixteen member states to improve pre-K through postsecondary education. (Southern Regional Education Board, 2008).

The High Schools That Work initiative describes Freshmen Academy in the following ways:
• “Organize teachers into a ninth-grade academy with heterogeneous students. No ninth-grade academy should have only at-risk students. Every academy should have a full range of students.

• Appoint one instructional leader to assist the ninth-grade teams in practicing instructional planning, examining the level of teacher assignments and student work, and getting common agreements on end-of-grading-period exams and rubrics.

• Provide teachers with planning time at least weekly so they can work together to plan lessons and identify the unique needs of students.

• Ensure the student-to-teacher ratio in the ninth grade is no higher (and preferably lower) than any other grade level in high school.

• Encourage the best teachers to teach ninth-grade courses and become teacher leaders in planning a positive learning experience for students. (Bottoms, 2008)

To define Freshmen Academy is not an easy task. The design is flexible enough that each school must find their own fit. In general, this researcher found several other characteristics that most Freshmen Academies have in common. These characteristics include:

• Freshmen in groups traveling from one core class to another.

• Freshmen core classes in close proximity to one another.

• An emphasis on team building and positive reinforcement in the form of tangible rewards

• Efforts on the part of teachers to increased the involvement of parents
Many of the items listed in bullet points above are considered by High Schools That Work to be “Best Practices” for teaching (Southern Regional Education Board, 2008). Today many high schools have a school website. A quick Google search will reveal many high schools that have Freshmen Academies as part of their curriculum. Most of the high schools found in the search seem to be in the Southern Regional Education Board member states. However, the idea of Freshman Academies has spread as far as Oregon.

There has not been much published in terms of Freshmen Academy statistics. This is a good reason for documenting the implementation of Freshmen Academy at Frontier High School. This researcher had a difficult time in obtaining any documented statistics for Freshmen Academy. However, after several extensive searches, statistics were obtained for three schools. A five-year study done at Scott County High School in Georgetown, Kentucky reveals the potential of the Freshmen Academy concept. Among the Scott County findings:

- Drop-outs decreased from 12.4 percent to 4.7 percent.
- Failure rates dropped from 17 percent to six percent.
- Expulsions decreased from 14 in the 1995-96 school year to zero in the 1999-2000 school year.
- Discipline referrals went from 2,159 to 1,015 in this five-year period.
- Attendance increased from 89 percent to 93 percent.
- Freshmen Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills scores increased by five percent (Next, 2008).
The next study reviewed is a first semester examination of student results from James F. Byrnes High School located in Duncan, South Carolina. Table 1 shows an increase in the percentage in the end-of-course exam scores for three subjects and an increase in students passing core classes in three subjects. (The James F. Byrnes Freshman Academy Annual Report 2007-2008)

Table 1

*Improvement in freshmen scores and grades from 2006 – 2007 school year to 2007-2008 school year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>End-of-Course Exam Scores (% passing)</th>
<th>Algebra I</th>
<th>English I</th>
<th>Physical Science I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007 School Year (without Freshmen Academy)</td>
<td>64.8</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>49.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008 (with Freshmen Academy)</td>
<td>69.1</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>65.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of Students Passing a Core Course</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Social Studies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007 School Year (without Freshmen Academy)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008 (with Freshmen Academy)</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A case study done at Waynesville High School (WHS) in Waynesville, Ohio reveals that teachers’ attitudes have changed since the implementation of Freshmen Academy. “There appears to be a sense of hope, improved relationships and recognition of the true mission of teaching. The fact that teachers now feel a part of school improvement is supported by findings in the 2004 teacher survey.” (Southern Regional Education Board, 2008)

“The culture of high expectations and hard work is impacting students as well as teachers. At WHS between 2002 and 2004, there were significant decreases in disciplinary actions:

- Truancy decreased by 65 percent.
- Class disruptions decreased by 49 percent.
- Minor insubordination decreased by 76 percent.
- Major insubordination decreased by 86 percent.
- Detentions decreased by 45 percent.” (Case Study, 2005)

As stated earlier there are few published statistics available to show Freshmen Academies are accomplishing their desired goals. In an article about the Chicago Public Schools, Anderson (1997) relates that of the city's 74 high schools, 62 are developing full or partial freshman academy programs. From the large number of Freshmen Academies being incorporated by schools into their curriculum there must be some great ‘word of mouth’ that supports the implementation and success of these Academies.
Attendance

It almost seems unnecessary to say that attendance is mandatory to a student’s success in school. If one is not present to participate and learn then one will not be successful. The link between school success and attendance is one that has been well established in the literature.

Ninth-graders who miss up to five days of school stood a 29 percent chance of getting an F in a core subject. The rate more than doubles, to 61 percent, for students who miss 15 or more days (Anderson, 1997). Allensworth & Easton (2007) show, in their research, that almost all students who have good attendance will pass their freshmen year. While it seems obvious that a high number of absences are a recipe for high school failure what is not so obvious is that even a moderate level of absences can be problematic. “Just one to two weeks of absence per semester, which are typical for freshmen, are associated with a substantially reduced probability of graduating.” (Allensworth & Easton, 2007)

There are some schools fighting back against low attendance. Studies show that attendance is better than expected at schools where student have access to computer technology. Schools can offer programs in which students can recover days missed in excess of allowable absences. These programs could allow students to make up time after school, Saturday school, or summer make up days (Bottom & Anthony, 2005).

According to Allensworth (2007) “Course attendance is eight times more predictive of course failures in the freshman year than eight-grade test scores;” (p. 16).
Allensworth (2007) found that “Attendance is the strongest predictor of overall grades” (p. 18).

**Grades**

Course failures are directly tied to graduation because students need to earn a certain number of credits to graduate and they must pass classes to get those credits. One factor that is most directly related to graduation is student’s performance in their courses. Inadequate accumulation of credits in the freshman year is highly related to not graduating high school. (Allensworth & Easton, 2007)

According to Allensworth (2007) there are some factors that can affect grades:

- Students who have a high trust and a good relationship with teachers who provide support to them can improve performance.
- Students who participate in extracurricular activities have lower failure rates and higher grades
- Success in one class may lead a student to put forth more effort in other classes.

**Parental Involvement**

Monohan (1992) studied a Transition to High School Program in his research. The primary objectives of the program were to:

- reduce the number of disciplinary infractions
- reduce the number of school absences
• involve more students with school activities

• increase study-skill awareness, career education, and counseling assistance

The study went on to say that one of the biggest factors in the program’s success was parental involvement. Monohan (1992) states, “The inclusion of parents in an at-risk transitional program seemed to have been an essential factor in having the program achieve its desired goals” (p. 28).

Several of the above objectives match the objectives already mentioned for Freshmen Academies. To achieve these objectives parents must be brought on board. Parental involvement in primary grades is much more frequent. High school teachers very often see parents on one occasion a year; parent-teacher conferences (Hall, 2008). By encouraging parents to be involved Freshmen Academies will be more likely to be successful.

Mizelle & Irvin (2000) explained the following:

“Parent Involvement in young adolescent students’ transition from middle to high school is critical. When parents are involved in students’ transition to high school, they tend to stay involved in their child’s school experiences (Mac Iver, 1990); and when parents are involved in their child’s high school experiences, students achieve more (Linver & Silverberg, 1997; Paulson, 1994; Paulson, Marchant, & Rothlisber, 1998), are better adjusted (Hartos & Power, 1997(, and are less likely to drop out of school (Horn & West, 1992). The concern for educators is that, typically, parent involvement in young adolescents’ school related activities decreases during the transition from middle school to high school, unless schools and teachers work to encourage their involvement (Epstein,
1995; Epstein, 1996). At middle school level, teachers, and administrators need to inform parents about all transaction activities and encourage them to participate. Perhaps more importantly, they need to work to keep parents involved in their child’s education and school activities during the middle school years so that they are comfortable “coming to school” and confident that their involvement makes a difference in their child’s academic success.

Parent Involvement in the transition process to high school should be encouraged through a variety of activities (Epstein, 1995). Parents may be invited to participate in a conference (at a high school or, preferable, at a middle school) with their child and the high school counselor to discuss course work and schedules; they may be invited to visit the high school with their child in the spring and/or in the fall; they may be invited to spend the day at the high school to help them understand what their child’s life will be like; they may even be invited to help design and facilitate some of the articulation activities for students. In planning, activities for parents, high school educators should remember that parents of students who are already in high school are an excellent resource for other parents and may also help to encourage new parents to be more involved in school activities.” (p.3-4)

Keeping communication open between teachers, counselors, and parents is closely associated with student’s academic achievements. These communications will foster the student’s adequate preparation for the future (Tornatzky, cutler, & Lee, 2002 as cited in Principal’s Research Review July 2006)
Marshall (2003) says that parental involvement and verbal engagement is essential. He suggests the following for parents of freshmen;

- Ask the child how school is going on a regular basis
- Regularly schedule talking with teachers
- Be friendly and open with your teen during you conversations
- Make a beginning of the year school visit
- Demonstrate interest in your teen’s education
- Be persistent in your search for quality education. (p. 38)

Behavior

It has been this researcher’s experience that often freshmen classes are assigned to first year or most inexperienced teachers. This researcher has taught in four different public high schools and has observed that as older teachers retire, teachers that are lower on the totem pole take their place. The “move up” often involves teaching the older or more advanced students. This is the case at Frontier High School. This has never made sense. A successful freshmen year is so important to further upper-class success (Hall, 2008).

At Frontier High School the incidents of freshmen behavior problems greatly outnumber any other class (Rinard, 2008). The data in Table 2 may be deceiving. Many students who are sophomores are still in freshmen classes and by credits are still classified as freshmen. With that taken into account the freshmen incidents approximately double the incidents in other classes. Does it really make sense to give
these more challenging students’ to the least experienced teachers? The obvious answer is, no. But, many schools do it. Of course, there are some first year teachers who breeze through their first year but this researcher believes this to be the exception and not the rule.

Table 2

*Approximate number of disciplinary actions for the 2007-2008 school year*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Freshmen</th>
<th>Sophomore</th>
<th>Junior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary Actions</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a significant relationship between behavior and grade point average (Wentzel, 1993). Perhaps this is a major reason that freshmen retention is so high in our country.

One way to help teachers deal with the larger number of behavior incidents among freshmen is teacher teams. The teams keep data, set goals, and monitor trends in student behavior (para. 4, “Talent Development”, n.d.)

**Summary**

It is clear that each of the areas reviewed above plays a major role in freshmen year success. Addressing each of these areas was the goal of Freshmen Academy. Success in the freshmen year is essential to high school success and graduation. This is why educators do what they do. Doing it better is the goal.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Study Design

Evaluation of Freshmen Academy at Frontier High School was done using a Quantitative – Qualitative method. This was accomplished using an action research design for the qualitative component and a comparison of previous years first semester statistics to the current first semester statistics of the 2008-2009 school year for the quantitative component. This was a mixed method study that most closely mimicked the embedded design approach.

Mills described action research as a procedure done by teachers to gather information about, and then improve, the ways their particular educational setting operates, their teaching, and their students learning (as cited in Creswell, 2008, p. 597). This was exactly the researcher’s hope. Freshmen Academy was implemented at Frontier High School to help freshmen be successful. The embedded design approach allowed the researcher to collect quantitative data and qualitative data simultaneously. The strength of using the embedded design approach was that one form of research would support the other form (Creswell, 2008). In this research it was anticipated that the study would more heavily rely on the qualitative data while using the quantitative data comparison to support the themes developed.
Population

This study involved the current freshmen class at Frontier High School. The 76 members of the class population can be classified according to the groups in Table 3.

Table 3
Demographic break down of Frontier High School Freshmen Class for the 2007-2008 school year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Education Plans (IEP)</th>
<th>Students who are on an IEP</th>
<th>Students not on an IEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Caucasian</th>
<th>African American</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The faculty consists of teachers as described in Table 4.

### Table 4

*Faculty at Frontier High School serving the 2008-2009 freshmen class.*

**Core Teachers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 - Female</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 - Male</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other Faculty**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gym</th>
<th>Vo-Ag</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 – Male</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – Female</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedures**

Before the school year began all ninth-graders and their parents were invited to an orientation. The gathering began with introductory remarks made by administration and teachers. Students were then given their schedules and invited to visit the teachers and classrooms. This was the first introduction parents and students had to the idea of Freshmen Academy. At this meeting a ‘handbook’ was given out and discussed. The ‘handbook’ was a three page packet that described the reasoning for and a description of Freshmen Academy. Parents were asked to read and discuss this hand book with their child. The students were required to turn in the signature page to their homeroom teacher in order to participate in the first reward event.
Central Phenomenon:

The study explored students’, parents’, and faculty perceptions about Freshmen Academy. The study attempted to use this qualitative portion of the study to answer the question, ‘What is the affect of Freshmen Academy?’

Null Hypothesis

There is no relationship between Freshmen Academy and student achievement.

Alternative Hypothesis

There is a relationship between Freshmen Academy and student achievement.

One way of looking at the study was quantitative. The statistics from previous years that the researcher was able to obtain was compared to the current first semester statistics of the 2008-2009 school year. The comparison simply was a straight comparison to see if the numbers increased or decreased. The statistics that were obtained and then compared were:

- behavior incidents
- attendance (total days absent minus any student absent due to prolonged illness)
- grades
These areas were also studied qualitatively. The students, parents, and faculty were given surveys to capture how they perceive freshmen academy in a variety of areas. Due to easy access of the students and faculty, all of the participants received a survey and asked to respond. Access to parents was much more limited. Therefore the researcher randomly conducted telephone surveys. Twenty parents were selected using random sampling. The reason to use the random sampling was to allow the sample to be representative of the population. A telephone interview was conducted with these twenty parents. Two attempts, at different times of the day, were made to contact the selected parent. If the parent could not be reached after two attempts the next randomly selected parent was interviewed. Notes were taken during the phone interviews and with verbal permission of the parents. To insure internal validity, at the end of the interview comments that were likely to be used were be repeated back in summary form to the parent. The parent then affirmed the accuracy of the comments and if necessary further clarification was made.

Parental Involvement is another hallmark of Freshmen Academy. It is not possible, in this researcher’s opinion, to conduct any statistical analysis for parental involvement. Apart from a very small athletic boosters group, which does not even exist each year, there is no parental involvement group at Frontier High School. This was one of the most important parts of the study. The evaluation of this portion of Freshmen Academy implementation was done using only qualitative methods.

The surveys and interviews were similar in that their function was to gain insight as to how students, faculty, and parents perceived Freshmen Academy and whether it had
been a successful endeavor. Each survey was slightly different depending on the audience it was addressing as in Table 5.

Table 5

*Example questions for surveys.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Has Freshmen Academy successfully encouraged good behavior from students?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Has Freshmen Academy successfully reduced student absences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Has Freshmen Academy help students be successful academically?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Did you have any preconceived ideas of how successful Freshmen Academy would be?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you believe your Freshmen Academy teachers care about your success? Please give at least one example to support your answer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The best thing about Freshmen Academy is….</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The worst thing about Freshmen Academy is…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. One thing I would change about Freshmen Academy is…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What would you like to do for a fun reward activity?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Parents (phone interviews)

1. Overall has Freshmen Academy been a positive influence on your child this year?
2. Does your child have a more positive outlook about school than he/she did in previous years?
3. Have teachers at Frontier been helpful and communicative with you this year?
4. Did you have any preconceived ideas of how successful Freshmen Academy would be?
5. Has Freshmen Academy improved anything in your personal household?

Trustworthiness

A goal of the qualitative approach was to develop themes in this short amount of time, one semester. To insure internal reliability the researcher had the surveys approved by experts in the field to assure that the questions were clear, pertinent, and understandable.

To insure internal validity the researcher asked the faculty involved in Freshmen Academy to help design the student surveys and parent interview questions. The researcher anticipated that the alternative hypothesis was correct. The alternative hypothesis states: There is a relationship between Freshmen Academy and student achievement.

The quantitative data was predicted to show that Freshmen Academy affected freshmen success at Frontier High School. It was predicted that the statistics for behavior incidents and absences would decrease the year Freshmen Academy was implemented. It
was also predicted that grades for freshmen would be higher overall and the passage rate would be higher for the total number of classes passed than in previous years.

The researcher used observations, such as informal discussions with students, comments made by students during the day, etc., surveys, and interviews to analyze and develop themes regarding parental involvement and freshmen success due to Freshmen Academy. The researcher recorded details of these observations on a password protected electronic journal kept in a private office under lock and key. The qualitative data was reviewed and coded according to common themes.

Two other assurances of this study’s internal validity was triangulation and researcher participation. The researcher was actively involved in the research. According to Creswell (2008), “triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research” (p. 648). Triangulation was made between the qualitative data: observations and surveys, quantitative data: year to year comparisons, and the experts such as faculty and other educators.

Limitations

The limitations of this study were discussed in chapter 2. The limitations discussed were time, demographics, and sample. The time limit that was imposed on the researcher was one semester of study. The demographics of Frontier High School limit the study. The fact that the study was of one rural school only may limit the study’s application to other schools. It was probable that the 2008-2009 freshmen group has
differing abilities and aptitudes than previous classes and this must affect the data in some way. It was hoped that by looking at the last three years of freshmen statistics a more fair comparison could be made between past freshmen and current freshmen enrolled in Freshmen Academy.

**Ethical Concerns**

Permission, to conduct the study, was obtained from the Superintendent and Principal of Frontier Schools. The researcher also gained permission from the Marietta College Human Subjects Review Board. The anonymity of all students, faculty, and parents was maintained. The researcher destroyed all paper surveys. The researcher’s notes were kept in a password protected document, on a password protected computer in a locked office.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Before the school year began all ninth-graders and their parents were invited to an orientation. The gathering began with introductory remarks made by administration and teachers. Students were then given their schedules and invited to visit the teachers and classrooms. This was the first introduction parents and students had to the idea of Freshmen Academy. At this meeting a ‘handbook’ was given out and discussed. The ‘handbook’ was a three page packet that described the reasoning for and a description of Freshmen Academy. Parents were asked to read and discuss this handbook with their child. The students were required to turn in the signature page to their homeroom teacher in order to participate in the first reward event scheduled.

During the orientation parents were asked to sign up for Parent-Council. Eight parents signed up. Over ten percent of the freshmen had parents interested in participating in parent council.

The Freshmen Academy teacher team had met on two occasions to prepare for the school year. The handbook that was given to parents and students was constructed. A copy of the documentation was given to parents and students and is included in Appendix A. The first page is a letter from those involved with Frontier Freshmen Academy to the parents. It discusses the excitement and commitment of the new undertaking of Freshmen Academy. The letter invites parents to participate in their child’s education by encouraging daily reading, checking homework, and joining parent council. The letter encourages parents to email or schedule conferences with the teachers.
The second page of the handbook discusses Freshmen Academy’s purpose, concept, design, schedule, philosophy, and mission statement. It describes the rewards and events that teacher’s hope to utilize in motivating students. The make-up work and missing assignment policies are also discussed. Parents are once again encouraged to call or email the teachers, principal, or guidance counselor. The phone numbers and email addresses are provided.

The third of the handbook is a signature page that when signed verifies that parents and students received the handbook and agree to abide by the rules present therein. One hundred percent of students and parents returned the signature page of the handbook.

As part of the qualitative portion of this research, parents of Freshmen Academy students were interviewed by phone. Parents were randomly selected. A list of freshmen was compiled and every fifth child’s parent was called. This accounted for a total of nineteen parents being contacted by phone. The questions parents were asked can be found in the Methods section of this research.

The compiled data was sorted into the four categories studied for this research: attendance, behavior, grades, and parent involvement. The study of each category involved the triangulation of information from three sources. The three data sources triangulated were survey statements, statistics received from principle and guidance counselor, and expert findings from the literature review.
Attendance

Table 6 shows the average daily attendance rates for the 07-08 school year and the 08-09 first semester. A breakdown of the 07-08 school year into semesters was not available. The numbers for the semester of Frontier High School’s Freshmen Academy being studied is slightly smaller than the previous year’s average.

Table 6

Average Daily Absences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2007-2008</th>
<th>2008-2009 (1st Semester)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>5.61</td>
<td>5.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One reason for the decrease in the average daily absences is the positive learning environment that Freshmen Academy has fostered. Students have expressed that they look forward to coming to school because of Freshmen Academy. On February 6, 2009 several students asked if they could have a Sophomore Academy next year. The following is a sample of comments from parents collected on January 29, 2009 during phone interviews:

He (my child) looks forward to class more than he did in past years.

She (child) has looked forward to school this year unlike when she was in elementary school. Seems to like school much more than grade school.

He likes high school. He never really cared if he missed grade
school but he gets upset if he has to miss high school.

**Behavior**

According to the literature review conducted there is a significant relationship between behavior and grade point average which is one portion of a successful freshman year. A comparison of the current year’s and previous year’s student discipline incidents is a large indicator that Freshman Academy has improved student success at Frontier High School. In the tables below you will see a comparison of disciplinary actions during the first semester of the last two years. The researcher could not be provided with older data.

Table 7

**Behavior Incidents for the 1st Semester**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Offense</th>
<th>Consequence*</th>
<th>2007-2008</th>
<th>2008-2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bus Violation</td>
<td>Warning</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bus Violation</td>
<td>OSS</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutting Class</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutting Class</td>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disregard of Directions</td>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disregard of Directions</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disregard of Directions</td>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offense</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrespect</td>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disrespect</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class disruption</td>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruption</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disruption</td>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Use/Possession</td>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to Serve Detention</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting</td>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment</td>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horseplay</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horseplay</td>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordination</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordination</td>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordination</td>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profanity</td>
<td>SS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>OSS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profanity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profanity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety Violation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tardiness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol/Tobacco Use/Possession</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal Aggression</td>
<td></td>
<td>OSS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Incidents</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* ASD = after school detention, OSS = Out of School suspension, SS = Saturday School

The first semester behavior incidents decreased almost by half from the 2007-2008 to the 2008-2009 years. This researcher, who is the Freshmen Academy Science teacher has observed a huge decrease in behavior incidents. The improved behavior seems to be overflowing to homes. The following is a sample of comments from parents who were collected on January 29, 2009 during phone interviews:

She really enjoys the time she has in the academy. She enjoys the comfort of the authority.

Helped him a lot. Acts more adult.

I haven’t had to fight with him. A lot more respectful this year. May just be maturing but I think it may have something to do with FA.
When he needs help or frustrated he can go to get help. Excellent, principal, called and talked to me. I have no complaints. I’ve been contacted, probably five to six times which is much better than in elementary school where it was a called every week with something negative to tell me. I didn’t think he’d do well in high school. Very surprised that he has succeeded

Communication has improved. Homework done or does as soon as he gets home. Willingly does his work now.

He loves the extra things that you do and the classes.

_Parent Involvement_

As previously stated, apart from a very small athletic boosters group, which does not even exist each year, there is no parental involvement group at Frontier High School. The first meeting of the Freshmen Academy Parent Council was held on September 8, 2008. A copy of the flyer sent out is in Appendix B. There were nine parents, three students, and three Freshmen Academy teachers present. The meetings were held there after on the first Monday of each month. Attendance fluctuated between three and nine.

A sample of the comments from the participants comments follow:

Parent council helps me meet with other freshmen parents. We need to keep it going to next year. You get to see what the district really does for parents. Younger child complains that freshmen get to do stuff they don’t get to do anything. I was at Frontier in 1991 and we didn’t have a parent organization then but we need to keep this going into next year. It makes me feel wanted and gives me a say in some of the things that are going on with my child.

Whenever I’ve had a question I’ve been able to call the school and
get answers. I’ve also talked with teachers more this year. In the past I’ve pretty much only went to parent/teacher conferences but this year I’ve had much more contact and conversations. Parent council is very informative.

He communicates much more with us than in past years. Last year he’d just say, “I don’t know” Talks about school more academically and socially.

Spoke with teachers and if parents feel welcome the students feel welcome. Scott said this.

No, not communicated, More flyers home. Doesn’t feel like she knows what’s going on. Not attended parent council meeting. Report cards parents not informed about what was going on.

I believe there has been better communication. I know about missing assignments and don’t have to wait until interims.

**Grades**

Possibly the biggest success story of Frontier High School’s Freshmen Academy came from the first semester grades. No students failed a core class. Core classes are math, science, English, and social studies. There were four failures of non-core classes. One student failed art and three failed physical education.

This was a vast improvement over the previous year. In the first semester of the 2007-2008 school year grades were dramatically worse. There were twelve core class failures and seventeen non-core class failures.

The following is a sample of comments from parents who were collected on January 29, 2009 during phone interviews:

Teachers are more helpful and take time with him. In grade school he felt like he was stupid if he asked questions. At Freshmen Academy he feels like he can ask questions. I have talked with teachers six or seven times, much more than with grade school teachers. If he is behind on stuff they’ll call and get him back on track.
He adjusted well to the move from grade to high school. I don’t think he would have done so well in high school without Freshmen Academy.

Summary

The statistics as well as the comments of parents seem to show that Freshmen Academy has made a positive difference in the education of freshmen at Frontier High School. Students were asked to write about Freshmen Academy. Below is a sampling of student comments:

I really like the fun and neat things we get to do throughout the year. I like the rewards for being good, especially Fun Fridays.

I appreciate the help and encouragement it (Freshmen Academy) gives me.

I always get my work done. I always have help when needed during study halls. I like having study hall in the middle of the day.

The teachers all care about us.

I like the fact that classes are right there beside each other and we don’t have to walk around the whole school.

The teachers they are sometimes hard and mean, but I love them all and they are super good teachers!

I just like the fact that we have it. It gives us something to look forward to.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The compiled data was sorted into the four categories studied for this research: attendance, behavior, grades, and parent involvement. The study of each category involved the triangulation of information from three sources. The three data sources triangulated were survey statements, statistics received from principal and guidance counselor, and expert findings from the literature review.

Freshmen Academy has improved behavior.

One way to help teachers deal with the larger number of behavior incidents among freshmen is teacher teams. The teams keep data, set goals, and monitor trends in student behavior (para. 4, “Talent Development”, n.d.). This is what the Freshmen Academy core teachers have attempted to do. By having regular scheduled meetings and daily impromptu ‘meetings’, Freshmen Academy teachers have been able to keep track of student behavior from period to period and day to day. Incidents are discussed immediately and quickly dealt with.

Parent comments and the rather sizable decrease in behavior incidents has shown that Freshmen Academy has improved behavior which is directly related to student success as discussed in the literature review portion of this paper. Improved behavior has no doubt improved attendance as will be discussed next.

Freshmen Academy has improved attendance.

The link between school success and attendance is one that has been well established in the literature. Ninth-graders who miss up to five days of school stood a 29 percent chance of getting an F in a core subject. (Anderson, 1997). Perhaps this is the
reason that Ohio has implemented a policy of ‘no credit’ if a student misses over six
days. Allensworth & Easton (2007) show, in their research, that almost all students who
have good attendance will pass their freshmen year. If a student misses more than six
days Frontier High School uses a Saturday School system for making up the time.
Allensworth (2007) found that “Attendance is the strongest predictor of overall grades”
(p. 18).

When one looks at the statistical comparison the improvement in attendance is
only slight. It is interesting to note that in 2008-2009 first semester there were eleven
incidents of Out of School Suspensions. In first semester of 2007-2008 there were
fourteen incidents of Out of School suspensions. Out of school suspensions count as an
absence. The duration of the suspensions range from one to ten days. It is possible that
the improved behavior, as seen in the behavior data, influenced the attendance data. In
other words, Freshmen Academy influenced student behavior resulting in less out of
school suspensions and less missed school.

**Freshmen Academy has helped parents to become more involved.**

The key here is, ‘more involved’. Because there was no parent group, prior to the
formation of the Parent Council, it was almost impossible for parents to be involved at
Frontier. Parents were active in supporting Frontier’s sports team but that was the extent
of their involvement. Parents have made it clear that they intend to continue in Parent
Council. What this council will look like and grow into is yet unknown. What is known
is that parent involvement in young adolescent students’ transition from middle to high
school is critical. (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000).
Freshmen Academy has improved grades.

They say the proof is in the pudding. If grades were pudding there would be plenty of proof. The 2008-2009 freshmen passed all core classes and had a very good showing with their non-core classes. Grades are not everything but they are what most people, including parents, look at to judge success. Increased parent involvement, improved behavior, and slightly improved attendance have all worked together to improve student scores.

Summary

There is no doubt that the two year comparisons and developed themes have shown that Freshmen Academy has contributed to the success of students. One could argue that perhaps this group of freshmen was just ‘better’. That is possible. No doubt the conclusion could be made to be more reliable if more previous freshmen class statistics could be used for comparison. However, those were not available to this researcher. Other than the variables that exists within each new class of freshmen the only difference between this year and last year’s freshmen class was Freshmen Academy.

The central phenomenon of the study was to explore the question, ‘What is the affect of Freshmen Academy?’ This question has been answered in relation to four areas. Freshmen Academy was found to have varying degrees of affect in these areas but all were positive.

The null hypothesis, as stated earlier in the paper was, “There is no relationship between Freshmen Academy and student achievement.” This was proven to be false and the alternative hypothesis was shown, by comparison of the statistics, to be true.
APPENDIX A

FRESHMEN ACADEMY HANDOUT (Given out at Freshmen Orientation Meeting)
Welcome to the Frontier High School Freshman Academy! We are excited to have you join the FHS Freshman Academy team. We feel that we have the best of everything here – students, parents, teachers, staff, and facilities. We are excited about learning, and know that you share that excitement.

Our Freshman Academy was created in part due to research ("Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution") indicating that ninth grade failure rates were larger than any other grade. We believe this is due mainly to the lack of transition traditionally provided. Therefore, Freshman Academy will provide a structured environment where the four core academic areas, based on Ohio Graduation Standards, are taught by a team of teachers each morning. Ninth graders also experience and interact with the traditional high school schedule as they disperse with the rest of the student body during lunch and in afternoon activity classes.

A new year presents opportunities - new courses, new faces (both students and teachers), and many social adjustments. One of our goals is to see that the students, as well as parents and guardians, feel at home at Frontier High School. High school is a time of many changes and responsibilities. Students will be faced with a wide variety of choices, including what elective classes to take, what organizations in which to participate, and whether or not to sign up for a sports team. Students will also begin to look at academic pathways and think about future opportunities. All of these decisions, freedoms, and requirements can seem overwhelming. Students grow from children to young adults during these years. FHS Freshman Academy wants to ensure that this time is both educational and positive for all. To ensure success, students must balance schoolwork and social life. There will be many obligations, such as attending school regularly, completing all assignments, and behaving appropriately.

Parents, we encourage you to become involved in your child's education. Encourage daily reading, check to be sure homework is completed, join our Parent Council, call, email, or schedule a conference with your child's teachers. If we work together as a community, we can make FHS Freshman Academy a place where all students enjoy learning and build a strong foundation to help ensure future success.

In this guide you will find important information about the FHS Freshman Academy. Please read all items carefully, as every student is responsible for knowing and following the rules and guidelines contained within. Parents and students should sign the verification sheet and return it to the child's homeroom teacher. We are looking forward to a great year!

Sincerely,

Frontier High School Freshman Academy Administration and Faculty

Gretchen Engnes, Laura Hall, Scott Murphy, and Dennis Williams, teachers
Lynn Alden and Marilyn Tilson, support staff
Chad Ruard, principal

Holly Cunningham, guidance counselor
Introducing the Frontier High School Freshman Academy

Purpose - The strongest predictor of a student's academic future (academics and attendance) comes in the ninth grade. Retention is a devastating blow to a student's chances of graduating. The Freshman Academy was created to reduce the failure rate and increase the percentage of ninth graders that graduate from Frontier High four years from their entry date; to provide a structured environment and curriculum conducive to the learning styles of freshmen; to ease the transition from middle to high school; and to prepare students for the OAT.

Concept - The traditional approach to ninth grade includes student independence, more rigid academic requirements, and a shift from developmental priorities to curricular priorities. The Freshman Academy utilizes the team approach commonly found in progressive schools today. Ninth graders are divided by homeroom to promote teamwork and activities that build self-esteem, organization skills, and other building blocks for success. This will allow teachers to get to know their students well, so academic and personal can be met by drawing on the strengths of the "whole" rather than individual teachers.

Program Design - There are three teams of approximately 25 students, four teachers, and support staff with an emphasis on state standards and the student as an active learner.

Schedule - Students are in core academic classes (English, Math, Science and Social Studies) form 8:20-11:25 daily. These classrooms are in the same area (rooms 101-104). Students have electives during the afternoon hours.

What is it like for Students?
- Teachers see the students every day, providing the stability adolescents need.
- Academic progress builds upon strong relationships.
- Better transition to high school.

What is it like for Teachers?
- Teachers work together to develop the instructional program for their team.
- Teachers plan together daily.
- Teachers are a part of a program that prepares students academically and developmentally.

Philosophy - The goal of our program is to ensure success for all freshmen as they transition from middle school to high school and provide a positive, personal atmosphere. It is our belief success can only be achieved when teachers, students, and parents work together.

Mission Statement - We are committed to working collaboratively to provide a quality learning environment in which ALL students can learn and develop to their maximum potential.

Responsibility - This is the time for freshmen to realize they are responsible for their learning and their actions. We will do everything we can to help them. It is important for freshmen to know what is expected of them. It is up to them to get all of their material for each class and to get to each of their classes on time.

Parent Council - Parent Council was created to support student academics, activities, and athletics. Parent Council also serves as the communication link between parents and staff. All parents are encouraged to attend monthly meetings the first Monday of each month at 6:30 p.m. in room 103.

Rewards - Freshman Academy includes an incentive program that encourages students to excel. The program includes trips, Friday Fun Days, and unannounced activities. Students are rewarded for academics, attendance and attitude (AAA). To participate, students must meet ALL requirements:
1. Passing all classes
2. Completing all assignments
3. No unattended detentions or help sessions
4. No more than one office referral
5. No I.O.U.s

Behavior Standards - Any student exhibiting disruptive behavior (as defined in the student handbook) may be dealt with as follows:

Between Teacher & Student
1) Nonverbal cues.
2) Verbal warning.
3) Discussion between teacher and student.
4) Action Plan (see handbook).
5) Lunch Detention. Students who fail to serve an assigned detention will be assigned two lunch detentions.

Between Teacher, Student, and Parent
6) The teacher will make three attempts to contact the parents by phone, notes home, email, or progress book. If attempts are not successful, the principal will be notified.
7) Attempt to schedule a face to face parent – teacher conference.
8) Attempt to schedule a face to face parent – Freshmen Academy Team Conference.

Between Teacher, Student, and Principal
9) Student will be referred to the principal. (See Handbook)

Students who exhibit violent, abusive, or threatening behavior will be immediately sent to the principal's office.
MAKE UP WORK AND MISSING ASSIGNMENTS

- All students are responsible to make up any work done in class during their absence.
- It is impossible to re-teach a whole class period because one student missed. That one student might benefit, but the rest of the students would find it redundant.
- Several times a week, teachers will discuss students with missing assignments.
- Students may be required to stay 15 minutes after 4th period for a Lunch Help Session before going to lunch. Students will stay long enough to complete missing work.
- Students who have not been able to complete work within two days from the time due or within two days of returning from an absence will be required to attend an after-school help session, held from 3:00 to 3:45 on Monday and Wednesday. Parental notification will be made on Thursday by phone and mail.
- After school help sessions are held simultaneously with after school detentions, but are not the same as you can see below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways the After School Help Session is Like Detention</th>
<th>Ways the After School Help Session is NOT Like Detention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>After School</td>
<td>Students may leave whenever work is completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required</td>
<td>Students may come to get extra help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Goal of Help Session is not punishment but encouragement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Failure to attend an assigned After School Help Session will result in referral to the office and likely an after school detention.

NOTE: Completion of the assignment(s) prior to the serving of either type of Help Session (Lunch or After School) will negate the requirement of attendance.

Procedures and Expectations - Our goal as your Freshman Academy Teachers, in terms of procedures and policies, is for you to know what we expect, including:

- Bring your materials and supplies: pencils, pens, book, notebook, paper, and materials specific to each class. Students will be able to purchase a pencil during homeroom. Pencils will cost ‘a silver coin’. Students who do not have money will be given a pencil and an I.O.U. Money raised from pencils will be put toward rewards.
- Throwing of anything is prohibited.
- Entering the classroom – enter with respect (not like one seeking attention.)
- Sit in assigned seat and get ready for the day’s work.

Because the home-school link is vital to freshman success, the Freshman Academy teachers invite parents to contact them at any time. The staff includes:

Gretchen Engnes, English
f-engnes@seovec.org
Ext. 2104

Laura Hall, Science
f-hall@seovec.org
Ext. 2103

Scott Murphy, Social Studies
f-smurphy@seovec.org
Ext. 2101

Dennis Williams, Math
f-dwilliams@seovec.org
Ext. 2102

Chad Rinard, Principal
f-crinard@seovec.org
Ext. 2152

Holly Cunningham, Guidance Counselor
f-cunningham@seovec.org
Ext. 2124

Frontier High School Freshman Academy
44870 State Route 7
New Market, Ohio 45767
Phone: (740) 865-3441
Fax: (740) 865-2011
APPENDIX B

DOCUMENTS AND PICTURES ASSOCIATED WITH FRONTIER HIGH SCHOOL
FRESHMEN ACADEMY
Flyer sent out for 1st parent council meeting

Freshman Academy
Parent Council

1st Meeting

We planned on meeting the 1st Monday of each month; however, the first Monday in September is Labor Day and a day off at school, so we’ve moved our first meeting to...

SEPTEMBER 8th
@ 6:30 PM in
Room 103

Please tear off and return with parent’s signature to show you have shared the info with them. Parents may keep the flyer for a reminder!

Student Name: ___________________  Parent’s Signature: _______________
REFERENCES


L. Hall, personal communication, October 20, 2008


C. Rinard, personal communication, September 8, 2008