FACULTY PERCEPTION OF ATTRIBUTES AND FEATURES OF FRESHMAN ACADEMY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which the attributes of freshman academies (FA) are successfully implemented at Adams High School, Jefferson High School, and Washington High School, each located in southeastern North Carolina. Data were first collected via an online survey of educators, followed by interviews with academy leaders and focus group interviews with teachers and administrators involved with the freshman academies.

The FA at Adams High School has very successfully implemented personalization (teacher/student, teacher/teacher, and teacher/parent), successfully implemented both staff development specific to a FA and a contiguous setting, somewhat successfully implemented a common planning period, and achieved student outcomes closer to positive than very positive. The FA at Jefferson High School has implemented personalization somewhere between somewhat successfully and successfully, somewhat successfully implemented staff development specific to a FA, more successfully than somewhat successfully implemented a contiguous setting, very successfully implemented a common planning period, and achieved positive student outcomes. The FA at Washington has implemented personalization somewhere between somewhat successfully and unsuccessfully, implemented staff development closer to somewhat successfully and unsuccessfully, implemented a contiguous setting very successfully, somewhat successfully implemented a common planning period, and achieved few or no positive student outcomes.

The study suggests that at these three schools, without certain integral features such as personalization, the FA model cannot begin to yield the results that a FA was meant to achieve.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Chapter One: Introduction

“The need [for a Freshman Academy] was there. …You could see it. I mean, there were kids who were just lost. And that number has steadily decreased.” (Adams staff member, personal communication, February 25, 2010)

Background

In his 1959 book The American High School Today: A First Report to Interested Citizens, James Bryant Conant advocated for large, comprehensive high schools, schools “accommodating all the youth of a community,” schools “come into being because of our economic history and our devotion to the ideals of equality of opportunity and equality of status.” The shift to the comprehensive high school, Conant believed, could “be made satisfactory without any radical changes in the basic pattern” (Conant, 1959, p.8; Conant, 1959, p. 96). Fifty-one years later, the ability of the comprehensive high school to accommodate youth and to provide them with equity, the very premise of the school, may be gone: “Today, only one-third of our students graduate from high school ready for college, work, and citizenship. The other two-thirds, most of them low-income and minority students, are tracked into courses that won’t ever get them ready for college or prepare them for a family-wage job – no matter how well the students learn or the teachers teach. This isn’t an accident or a flaw in the system; it is the system” (Gates, 2005, p. 2). This system, it seems, is in need of a radical change.

Change to the system takes two forms: “top down,” where change is mandated by an entity outside of a school and “bottom up,” where a school implements change of its own volition. Agencies such as the federal government and state governments have utilized top down reform to address the problems of the high school. Examples of this reform are The No Child
Left Behind Act of 2001, implemented by the former, and the School-Based Management and Accountability Program (ABCs), implemented by the state of North Carolina.

Certain changes have been temporal in nature (Hopkins, 2006). For example, some school systems have implemented later start time for secondary students based on teens’ biological clocks. Others changed to the daily high school schedule: Instead of a traditional periods in which students attend six to eight periods lasting forty to fifty minutes, a block schedule places students in four classes a day with ninety minutes for each block. And others have looked at changing the yearly calendar, implementing a year-round schedule with shorter breaks as opposed to the traditional school calendar with a two and a half month summer break (Hopkins, 2006).

Changes in curriculum have been implemented as well. States such as North Carolina have advocated for a curriculum that addresses the skills needed by today’s students. Not only do students need a mastery of core subjects such as English, mathematics, social studies, and science, they also need to contextually understand ideas such as “global awareness; financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacy; civic literacy; [and] health literacy,” in addition to acquiring a 21st century skill set that includes the ability to think critically and problem solve, to be flexible and adaptive, to be media literate, and to be accountable and productive (Partnership for 21st Century Schools, 2007, p. 1-2).

New types of schools have been created to address the problems of the large, traditional comprehensive high school. Among these are the charter schools and the early college high schools. As described by the North Carolina General Statue § 115C-238.29A (1995), a charter school is an autonomous school or group of schools operating outside of, but often funded by, the school district in which they reside. The purpose of a charter school is to provide educational
choice to parents, students, and teachers alike by working to better student learning, increase learning opportunities for at-risk students and the academically gifted alike, and empower site-based faculty and staff (p. 129). Early college high schools, a type of small school reform, allow students to earn, in addition to a high school degree, as much as a two year associate’s degree or two years of credit towards a bachelor’s degree by engaging the student in a rigorous, compacted academic schedule.

**Statement of Problem**

Reform has addressed many variables of the comprehensive high school. Small school reform examines the ways in which the variables of school and class size may be manipulated so as to increase the likelihood of student success (Harris, 2007). Additionally, small learning communities for freshman, referred to as freshman or ninth grade academies, have been touted as possible solution to existing ninth grade problems (American Institutes for Research & SRI International, 2007). Little research on the academy movement has been conducted to determine the extent to which these academies align with the premise of their proponents.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which the attributes of freshman academies are successfully implemented at three selected public high schools, focusing primarily on the following two questions:

1. To what extent are the attributes of freshman academies successfully implemented in selected high schools?
2. What features of a freshman academy (FA) do educators who teach and lead in them consider integral to program success?

The research will also address the following:
1. What was the impetus for initiating a freshman academy?

2. What was the process used to plan, develop and implement a FA?

3. How was the whole faculty involved in planning and in learning from the results of the FA?

4. What are the results of the FA in terms of student achievement, other variables of student success, parent involvement and teacher development?

**Operational Definitions**

The following is a list of key terms operationally defined for the purpose of this study.

**Small Learning Community** - “Any separately defined, individualized learning unit within a larger school setting. Students and teachers are scheduled together and frequently have a common area of the school in which to hold most or all of their classes” (Sammon, 2000, as cited in Cotton, 2001, p.8).

**Freshman Academy** - A type of small learning community meant to ease a student’s transition from middle school or junior high to high school. Freshman academies two main goals are to increase the four year cohort graduation rate and to decrease the dropout rate (Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008)

**Autonomous governance** - The control of the faculty and administrators working in a freshman academy possess over program policies, instructional leadership teams, staffing issues, operating procedures, discipline policies, and budgeting issues (Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008).

**Personalization** - The extent to which one person is known by another (Darling-Hammond, Ross, & Milliken, 2007). Personalization is not an end for a Freshman Academy; rather, it is the means by which some desired end can be achieved.

**Rigor** - “Assignments that emphasize construction of knowledge require students to do more than
summarize or paraphrase information they have read, heard, or viewed; these assignments ask students to take what they already know and use that knowledge to create or explore new ideas through interpretation, analysis, synthesis, or evaluation of information” (American Institutes for Research & SRI International, 2007, p.9)

Relevance- Assignments that have “relevant context and real-world connections” (American Institutes for Research & SRI International, 2007).

Student academic performance- Performance on both measurements occurring in the classroom and state and federal standardized assessments.

Four year cohort graduation rate- A measurement of the percentage of students who begin ninth grade at a site and then graduate from that same site in four years.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The review of literature will address the issues facing large public high schools; the creation of small schools and small learning communities to addresses these issues; and the characteristics, features, and intended outcomes of a Freshman Academy, a type of small learning community.

History of Small School Reform

In the late 1950’s, former Harvard University president James Bryant Conant advocated large comprehensive schools due in part to the ability of the school to provide complete facilities and specialized teacher (Loveless & Hess, 2007). Because these schools would posses both human capital, in the form of the number of teachers, and physical resources, in the form of the number of facilities, unmatched by smaller schools, at these large comprehensive high schools, students would be provided with a greater array of academic and extracurricular choices. Despite these advantages others viewed the large high school as problematic due to the disconnect formed between the institution and the student. The 1964 Baker and Gump publication Big School, Small School, viewed by some as the impetus for the modern small school movement (Raywid, 1996; Schnedier, Wyse, & Keesler, 2007), concluded that students in smaller schools feel a greater need to participate in extracurricular activities than their large school counterparts; as a result, small school students may experience “satisfaction from participating directly, which leads [students] to feel needed, challenged, and more self-confident” (Darling-Hammond, Ross, & Milliken, 2007, p. 168). Building upon the work of Baker and Gump (1964), Grabe (1975) determined that, as opposed to students at smaller schools, students at large schools, where there is less pressure to participate in extracurricular activities, feel a greater sense of alienation,
perceive “their own priorities to be different from the expectancies of the school,” and a maintain a lower self concept than students at small schools (p. 8).

Today, comprehensive high schools are viewed by some as impersonal and ineffective (American Institutes for Research & SRI International, 2007; Cotton, 2001). These schools provide an effective education to only about fifteen to twenty percent of its population, the traditional comprehensive high school may graduate only seventy percent of its students that began ninth grade four years prior and may insufficiently prepare those who do graduate for either the workforce or higher education (Lundsgaard, 2005, p. 3). The comprehensive high school experience, while difficult for many students, is most challenging for its youngest students, freshmen.

**Freshman Transition**

The term *transition* may best summarize the ninth-grade experience. For many public school students, ninth grade marks a transition from one setting, a middle school or junior high, to another, a high school. At this new school, students may transition to a new schedule and a more demanding academic setting (Neild & Weiss, 1999; Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, & Sanchez, 2000). Citing research by Schiller (1999), Neild (2009) states that the ninth grade year also marks a social transition, as new dynamics begin to emerge in the relationship both with ones parents and with ones friends.

Positive social and positive academic effects can accompany this transitional time in a student’s life. Weiss and Bearman (2009), examining the academic and social effects of transition on ninth grade students, found that eighth grade students who had difficulty associating with peers, little attachment to school, or had been retained in middle school benefited from the transition. These positive effects, however, seem to be outweighed by the possible negative
academic and social experiences encountered by many ninth graders. Declines in grade point average (Weiss & Bearman, 2009; Neild & Weiss, 1999; Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, & Sanchez, 2000; Alspaugh, 2001); alcohol, drug, and tobacco use; the carrying of a weapon to school; and a reduction in school integration and college aspiration (Weiss & Bearman, 2009) are all noted outcomes in ninth grade students.

During this time a student may find him or herself academically off-track, a term defined by Neild (2009) as “not having earned sufficient course credits in the normally allotted time” (p. 55). According to Haney (2004), ninth-graders getting off-track is neither a new issue nor is it subsiding, as the national number of ninth graders compared to the number of tenth graders rose from a three percent advantage in 1970 to an eleven percent advantage in 2000 (as cited in Neild, 2009). An off-track ninth grader places him or herself in academic peril, as the student may be setting an academic precedent from which the student cannot recover (Reyes, Gillock, Kobus, & Sanchez, 2000). This academic peril may end in the student dropping out. Research has determined that for each ninth grade course failed, a student can increase the likelihood of dropping out by one-third (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenburg, 2008, as cited in Neild, 2009).

One effective solution to ninth-grade issues may be the small school.

The Case for Small Schools

Literature from the 1950s to the 1990s provides a multitude of reasons for and goals of a small school, such as “meeting the needs of at-risk students, solving the problems of failing schools, … providing education for all students, empowering teachers and extending their roles, [and] preventing dropouts …” (Raywid, 1999, p. 15). Examining the literature from the same time period, Darling-Hammond, Ross, & Milliken (2007) concur with the final previous statement, adding, “smaller schools tend to be associated with positive student attitudes about
school … and higher level of participation and attendance” (p. 178). More recent literature has found safety may be another reason for small schools, as the interconnected nature of the small school experience could reduce a contributing factor to school violence (Rice, 1997; Cotton, 2001).

Since Baker and Gump (1964), several major studies have examined the relationship between school size and various outcomes. Examining data from the High School and Beyond, a longitudinal study sponsored by the National Center for Educational Statistics involving 30,000 high school sophomores and 28,000 high school seniors from 1,015 nationwide high schools, Pittman and Haughwout (1987) determined school size to be “strongly correlated with a composite measure of school climate including student participation, interaction with faculty, sense of cohesion and infrequent problems with discipline” (Darling-Hammond, Ross, & Milliken, 2007, p. 169). Extrapolating from the aforementioned findings, Pittman and Haughwout (1987), as explained in Darling-Hammond, Ross, and Milliken (2007), determined that larger student bodies may yield a social environment conducive to detachment from both the institution and the general population.

While Pittman and Haughwout (1987) examined the connection between school size and student attitude, Raywid (1996) studied the potential effect school size has on student academic achievement. Via an examination of reports on small schools in New York City, Philadelphia, and Chicago, Raywid determined that a significant number of small schools in these cities “have been quite successful in accomplishing the purposes of better attendance, more positive attitudes towards school, greater academic productivity, and enhanced satisfaction with school” (p. 50). The author does note, however, that the size of a school alone is not a determining factor of student academic success, student behavior, or student satisfaction.
Wasley (2000) continued to examine small schools in Chicago, determining that when “examining a range of indicators to assess student achievement, the dates from 1997 to 1999 suggest that students in [Chicago] small schools: have better attendance rates; have significantly lower dropout rates; have higher GPAs; fail fewer courses; [and] have stronger achievement test scores, given that more students are taking the tests and the scores have not dropped …” (p. 20/27).

Investigating small schools in New York City, Darling-Hammond, Ancess, and Ort (2002) determined an increase in student academic achievement for students in small schools as compared to their similar large school counterparts. Students had higher scores on state reading and writing tests and comparable scores on state math tests. The study also found that student at small schools had a significantly higher rate of college attendance (Darling-Hammond, Ross, & Milliken, 2007).

Fine, Stoudt, and Futch (2005) compared data from students at the three international schools, created to serve “recently arrive English language learners (ELLs)” (p. 3), to both similar to non-similar students not attending an International school. Examining the four year cohort graduation rate, the study found that International schools students held a 12.5% advantage over non-ELL students and a 32.9% advantage over other ELL students. Additionally, only 5.2% of International students had dropped out, as compared to 19.9% of non-ELL students and 30.3% of ELL students not attending an International school.

Although the studies mentioned here as well as others highlight the benefits of small schools, researchers have noted that the size of a school does not necessarily yield positive results (Raywid, 1996). Other researchers have questioned the valued returned for the capital invested in small schools: “[The] benefits of small classes and small schools, while they may be
substantial in some cases, are often overwhelmed by the substantial costs. Research evidence, though admittedly scant, does not support the across-the-board reductions in class size that have occurred in recent decades, though research does not seem to support the general trend toward larger schools” (Harris, 2007, p. 156).

Types of Small Schools

Small schools vary according to such characteristics as degree of teacher autonomy, method of organization of students, and the focus of the curriculum (Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008). Cotton (2001) and Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, and Page (2008) each provide a list of types of small school. These lists include the following types:

1) focus school, an autonomous school that focuses upon a single theme;
2) historically small school, a term used to denote a school that is not small by design;
3) alternative school, a term often used when referring to a school for students with previous academic and social difficulty;
4) charter school, a “public school that operates under a contract which specifies its mission, program, goals, students served, methods of assessment, and ways to measure success” (Cotton, 2001, p. 11);
5) magnet school, a school with a particular academic focus that draws students from across a school district;
6) the small learning community (SLC).

Research on SLC

Several studies, comprised of one meta-analysis and two longitudinal ex post facto studies, determined that an SLC has the potential to yield positive academic and social results for students and teachers alike. In her meta-analysis of approximately fifty articles dating from 1996
to 2001, Cotton (2001) determined that SLCs produced “higher achievement; reduction of the negative effects of poverty on achievement; increased student affiliation with their school community; greater safety and order; much less truancy and many fewer dropouts; similar college entrance exam scores, acceptance rates, GPAs, and completion; higher levels of extracurricular participation in traditional small schools; higher levels of parent and community involvement and greater satisfaction; more positive teacher attitudes and satisfaction; comparable core curricula; and lower costs per student graduated” (p. 50). Despite these positive effects, the author does caution that the size of a SLC alone is not enough to produce such results; rather, the size is a means to achieve such ends (Cotton, 2001).

In their 2008 U.S. Department of Education analysis of SLC implementation, Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, and Page examined data from 1996 to 2003 pertaining to 119 SLCs. The authors note that their study is limited by the lack of a group with which to compare their findings; nevertheless, their findings revealed a uniform effort to increase personalization, upward trends in school-related behavior, and a decrease in school violence. Of the 103 SLCs that provided information about personalization, seventy-six percent stated that they used individualized assessments; sixty percent reported that their teachers also served as mentors and/or advisors, and forty-seven percent stated that their students were formally paired with a mentor (p. 7). Additionally, SLCs reported an increase in the number of community contacts made since the inception of the SLC and an increase in the utilization of parental input following the SLC’s second year (p.8). The study noted positive trends in student participation in extracurricular activities, promotion rates from ninth to tenth grade, student intention to attend a two- or four-year college or university following graduation, and a reduction in school violence.
The study found neither a positive nor a negative trend in student academic achievement on state assessments or college entrance exams (p. 15).

Unlike Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, and Page (2008), the American Institutes for Research and SRI International (2007) report for the Bill and Melina Gates Foundation examines SLCs via a comparison of a school’s data two years prior to implementing multiple SLCs with data two years after the same school implemented multiple SLCs. The study concluded that teacher assignments in English/Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics had increased in their degree of student relevance and slightly increased in academic rigor. The report also establishes an increase in the quality of student ELA work, where quality is defined as “the ability of their students to use written work to demonstrate a conceptual understanding of content, clear communication, facility with language, and the construction of new knowledge” (p. 4). This same increase in quality was not noted in student work in mathematics. The report also established that academic rigor and relevance was “positively correlated with the quality of student work” in both disciplines (p. 5).

**Solutions for Ninth Grade Problem**

Given the difficulty of the ninth grade year for many students and the potential benefits of a smaller environment, a small learning community for high school freshman may be a possible solution. Such small learning communities (SLC), defined by Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, and Page (2008) as an SLC that “is designed to bridge middle school and high school [and] … responds to the high ninth-grade drop-out rate experienced by some high schools” (Appendix B-8), are commonly known as ninth grade academies or Freshman Academies (FA). The characteristics and features of a FA have been found to be more effective than more traditional freshman orientation programs, which offer assistance only in terms of
acclimation to the physical structure of the student’s new school and assistance with scheduling, in addressing the pitfall associated with the ninth grade experience (Hertzong & Morgan, 1999, as cited in Dedmond, Brown, & LaFauci, 2006; Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

**Characteristics and Features of a FA**

Through the study of the literature regarding SLC in general and FA specifically, four characteristics of a SLC, which can be said to apply to FA, emerged: 1) autonomous governance, 2) separate space, 3) professional development, and 4) common teacher planning. In their study for the U.S. Department of Education regarding the implementation of SLCs, of the three characteristics that Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, and Page (2008) identified as critical to a FA, one was having an identity separate from the larger school in which the SLC resides. According to the study, two components of a separate identity are a separate, adjacent setting for the FA, as well as autonomous governance of the FA. The first component can benefit an FA in two ways: 1) helping to aid in the building of a high degree of teacher/teacher and teacher/student personalization and 2) working to reinforce the “smallness” of the FA, perhaps reminiscent of the ninth grade student’s middle or junior high school experience (Fouts, Baker, Brown, & Riley, 2006; Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008, p. 95). Both studies note that contiguous space is a means by which a FA may achieve its goals and not an end.

The third and fourth characteristics are professional development before and after the implementation and a common planning period for teachers in the same SLC or FA. Darling-Hammond, Ross, and Milliken (2007), Cotton (2001), Fouts, Baker, Brown, and Riley (2006), and Pecheone, Tytler, and Ross (2006) all cite professional development and common planning as a key factors in the implementation of a SLC, and, by extension, a FA. Without this professional development there is “little reason to believe that there will be improved retention
rates, test scores, or graduation rates for students, which, ultimately, are the desired products” of a SLC (Fouts, Baker, Brown, and Riley, 2006, p.12). Believed to be a “hallmark” of FA, the latter characteristic aids in both the cohesiveness of the student’s academic experience and the degree of teacher/teacher personalization (Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008, p. 94; Pecheone, Tytler, & Ross, 2006; Wallach, n.d.).

One concept that appears time and time again in the literature dealing with either small schools or SLC is the importance of personalization (Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008; Pecheone, Tytler, & Ross, 2006; Fouts, Baker, Brown, & Riley, 2006; Cotton, 2001; American Institutes for Research & SRI International, 2007; Raywid, 1996; Darling-Hammond, Ross, & Milliken, 2007). The need for this feature for teacher, student, and parent alike is logical, as the impersonal nature of the large, comprehensive high school acted as one of the impetuses for small school reform. Lee and Friedrich (2007) state that more recent literature frames the argument for increased personalization in schools in terms of the social capital, which refers to the benefits one receives as a member of a group or organization.

One of the beliefs held by those who support increased personalization is than an increase in academic rigor can occur. Personalization is highly correlated to academic relevance (American Institutes for Research & SRI International, 2007). Establishing this connection between personalization and rigor, Cotton (2001) states that a high degree of personalization allows for successful schools to engage in a “cheerfully unrelenting push for high achievement for all of their students” (p. 27). The research of Patterson, Beltyukova, Berman, and Francis (2007) provides anecdotal evidence from FA students that supports this connection: “Students [in the FA] noticed the high standards to which they were all held but seemed to understand and
accept these standards as coming from a place of teacher concern about the students themselves” (p. 136).

A final feature of SLC and FA is parental involvement. Cotton (2001) states that almost every one of fifty reports analyzed for her meta-analysis mentions the key role parents play in an SLC. Fouts, Baker, Brown, and Riley (2006) link parental involvement not only to the success of an SLC but also to the success of a student in a new SLC or FA model. Parental awareness can also pertain to a more holistic knowledge of their child’s academic and behavioral performance. Because the FA structure allows for teachers with common students to meet during a common planning period, teachers are allotted the time and opportunity to collectively contact the parent (Patterson, Beltyukova, Berman, & Francis, 2007). As one teacher involved with the research stated, “All four of us come in and say, ‘This is a problem in all four classes, and we’ve discussed it,’ because typically when we have these meetings, we are seeing negative behavior or grades or whatever across the board, so we’re not bombarding the parents with different bits of information” (p. 138).

Research on the Effect of Freshman Academies

Much of the research dealing with FA is imbedded with studies examining multiple types of SLC. There are few independent studies of the FA. For example, Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, and Page (2008), in their longitudinal study for the U.S. Department of Education, examined FA, as well as career academies, house plans, and magnet schools. Because the majority of the findings are not disaggregated by SLC type, few of the findings can be directly attributed to FA. One finding that was attributed to FA was a “statistically positive trend in the percentage of ninth-grade students being promoted to the tenth-grade” (p. 123). Because an increase in ninth-grade promotion rate is an intended outcome of a FA, this finding is significant.
One quasi-experimental longitudinal study that does primarily focus on FA examines the impact of the Talent Development model, created by the Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPAR), on student academic achievement and attendance rates (Kemple & Herliny, 2004). The study used data from five nonselective high schools implementing the Talent Development model from the first three years of implementation, and compared the data to other schools in the same urban district that had not implemented the Talent Development model. Ninth-graders at the implementing schools were found to have a higher rate of attendance; a higher percentage earning English, algebra, and math credits; a higher percentage earning four credits; a higher percentage earning all core (mathematics, English, science, and social studies) credits; and a higher percentage promoted to the tenth grade (p. 32). Similar to the findings of Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, and Page (2008), the last determination is significant because while the comparison cohort dropped 3.9 percentage points, the implementing cohort rose 6.5 percentage points (Kemple & Herliny, 2004, p. 32).

While the previous two studies are large in scope, Patterson, Beltyukova, Berman, & Francis (2007) examined the effects of a FA at a single site on student feeling of affiliation and belonging, the presence of safety and order, student attendance and graduation rates, and student achievement levels. The researchers, using both qualitative and quantitative measures, compared the attitudes of fifty freshman who were in the FA to similar freshman who were not and determined that FA students generally had a more positive opinion of school and the classroom environment; these finding are supported by the comments of one of the students interviewed:

I think it [the FA] has helped me a lot, because we got to know our teachers better than most other students did, and we got a relationship with them, so we wouldn’t want to miss school—we’d want to come to school, because we
knew that our teachers cared about us and they expected more from us, and
that made it more, like, you wanna get up, you wanna go, because you wanna
see your teachers. (p. 136)

Students in the FA had few unexcused absences, two for FA male students as compared to
eleven for non-FA male students, and a significantly higher tenth-grade promotion percentage,
74.4% for FA students as compared to 59.9% for non-FA students (p. 139). The researchers
determined that there was not a significant difference in the academic achievement between the
two groups, a finding that resembles the findings of other research on the effect of SLC
(Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008; American Institutes for Research & SRI
International, 2007). Parents, students, and teachers involved with the FA maintained a positive
view of academics, citing the personal attention given to students as a contributing factor (p.
141).

Summary

With a disproportionate number of ninth-grade students to tenth-grade students, a four-
year cohort graduation rate of about seventy-percent, and a high degree of student and teacher
anomie, the large comprehensive high school, once thought to be advantageous to the American
student, has been shown to be problematic. One solution is a reduction in size, which can take
many forms. One form of the small learning community is the Freshman Academy. Autonomous
governance, a separate setting, relevant staff development, and a common planning period are all
ideal characteristics of a Freshman Academy; furthermore, personalization, academic rigor,
academic relevance, and parental involvement are all features. By means of these characteristics
and features, Freshman Academies seek to decrease student truancy, increase student academic
performance, and increase the ninth- to tenth-grade promotion rate in order to ultimately increase
the four year cohort graduation rate. It is the goal of this study to determine to what extent the attributes of freshman academies are successfully implemented in three area high schools and what features of a Freshman Academy do educators who teach and lead in them consider integral to program success.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Method and Design

An explanatory mixed-methods design was used to determine the extent to which certain attributes and features of a Freshman Academy (FA) exist at three selected high schools. Data were first collected via an online survey of educators, followed by interviews with academy leaders and focus group interviews with teachers and administrators involved with the freshman academies at the selected public high schools in southeastern North Carolina. Written materials, web postings, articles and reports available about each school’s academy were also reviewed. The survey data, written documents, interviews and focus group interviews, served to create a mini case study of each freshman academy.

Setting and History of Freshman Academies

Washington.

Washington High School is located in a rural town in southeastern North Carolina with a population of 3,092, according 2005 U.S. Census data. The most recent data revealing more than the population of the town, the 2000 U.S. Census data, states that the population is primarily comprised of individuals who are Hispanic or Latino (of any race), 481 or 15.8%, White, 1,095 or 35.9%, or Black/African American, 1,542 or 50.5%. This same data set reveals that in 2000 61.5% of the town has graduated from high school or attained a level of schooling beyond high school, and the mean yearly household income was $32,677.

According to 2008-2009 data, the most recent data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the school is comprised of 506 students. In Table 1, data from the previous three school years regarding school population; school safety, which is comprised of the “number of acts of crime or violence reported per 100 students, which includes all acts occurring
in a school, at a bus stop, on a school bus, on school grounds, or during off-campus, school-sponsored activities” (North Carolina Report Card, 2008-2009); student out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, which details the “average number of short-term (10 days or less) and long-term (more than 10 days) out-of-school suspensions and expulsions per 100 students” (North Carolina Report Card, 2008-2009); and the average percentage of students who attend school daily is found. The data indicates a decrease in student population.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Student Population</th>
<th>School Safety</th>
<th>Short Term Student Out-of-School Suspensions</th>
<th>Long Term Student Out-of-School Suspensions</th>
<th>Expulsions</th>
<th>Daily Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>544</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>506</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 2 student performances over the last three years on two End-of-Course (EOC) exams that occur initially in the ninth-grade, the English I and Algebra I EOC, and data regarding the four year cohort graduation rate can be found. For the 2008-2009 school year, 53.8% of students tested were proficient on the English I EOC, 36.6% were proficient on the Algebra I EOC, and 60.4% of the students who began as freshman four years prior graduated.
### Table 2

**Washington/District English I EOC, Algebra I EOC, and Four Year Cohort Graduation Rate Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>English I (school)</th>
<th>English I (district)</th>
<th>Algebra I (school)</th>
<th>Algebra I (district)</th>
<th>Graduation Rate (school)</th>
<th>Graduation Rate (district)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>61.0%</td>
<td>66.0%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>74.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>52.7%</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>62.6%</td>
<td>70.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>60.4%</td>
<td>71.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the school website, the school’s mission statement states, “It is the mission of Washington High School to partner with our school community and create a standard of excellence; provide a safe, orderly, and caring learning environment; and prepare all students to become competitive, productive, and law-abiding citizens in a globally changing society.” The beliefs expressed in this statement acted as the impetus for the FA at the school. For reasons that will be addressed later, no further information regarding Washington’s FA was available.

**Adams High School.**

Adams High School is located in a suburban city in southeastern North Carolina. In 2005, U.S. Census Bureau reported that the city had a population of 69,688, 88.7% of whom had obtained a high school diploma. Additionally, according to 2000 U.S. Census data, the most recent data about the topic, the population was 10% Hispanic or Latino, 24% Black or African American, and 63.9% White, with the mean yearly household income at $42,255. It is
noteworthy that the city has a high percentage of active duty military personnel, approximately 48.8% of the work-age population.

According to 2008-2009 data, the most recent data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the school is comprised of 1,153 students. In Table 3, data from the previous three school years regarding school population, school safety, student out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, and average percentage of students who attend school daily is found. The data reveals negative trends in student population and short-term out-of-school suspensions, and positive trends in daily attendance and school safety.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Student Population</th>
<th>School Safety</th>
<th>Short Term Student Out-of-School Suspensions</th>
<th>Long Term Student Out-of-School Suspensions</th>
<th>Expulsions</th>
<th>Daily Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>1,275</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>1,240</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>1,153</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 4 student performances over the last three years on two End-of-Course (EOC) exams that occur initially in the ninth-grade, the English I and Algebra I EOC, and data regarding the four year cohort graduation rate can be found. A slight positive trend is found in
school English I EOC proficiency percentage and a positive trend is found in both the school and district four-year cohort graduation rate.

Table 4

Adams/District English I EOC, Algebra I EOC, and Four Year Cohort Graduation Rate Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>English I (school)</th>
<th>English I (district)</th>
<th>Algebra I (school)</th>
<th>Algebra I (district)</th>
<th>Graduation Rate (school)</th>
<th>Graduation Rate (district)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>79.0%</td>
<td>79.0%</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
<td>73.0%</td>
<td>67.3%</td>
<td>71.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>79.4%</td>
<td>78.8%</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
<td>78.1%</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
<td>69.5%</td>
<td>80.1%</td>
<td>79.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As stated on the Adams High School website, the school’s first and fifth goals are that “Adams High School students will be globally competitive through the mastery of a rigorous and relevant curriculum” and that “Adams High School will be supported by effective and efficient systems,” respectively. Both of these statements are relevant to the FA of the school, which, according to the Freshman Academy section of the school website, is in its seventh year. During those seven years, “the academy has been studied as a ‘Best Practice’ by other schools across the country. AHS Freshman Academy students feel more connected to the school: they are more involved in extra-curricular activities, they have fewer absences and discipline referrals, and they pass more classes.”

Two group forums with thirteen participants was conducted at Adams. From these forums, the reason for the FA at Adams became clear: Adams was losing its freshman. Prior to the 2001/2002 school year, freshman were dropping out, having discipline issues, and being
retained at a rate that did not resonate well with the faculty at the school. As one respondent stated, “The need [for the FA] was there; you could see it … There were kids who were just lost” (Adams staff FA, personal communication, February 25, 2010). As a result, during the 2000/2001 school year, administrators from the school attend multiple workshops dealing the FA concept in addition to examining the site-based data regarding freshman. During the next year, four core teachers were selected; these four teachers received training from workshops and attended another school in central North Carolina that had an FA already in place. Although only these four core teachers received training regarding the FA model, the entire faculty at Adams was made aware of the direction that the school was headed; in other words, staff buy-in to the FA model was in place prior to implementation.

The 2002/2003 school year marked the beginning of the FA. The four core teachers had a student cohort of 100 students who were deemed to be at-risk students; this cohort did not include any students with disabilities. The second year, students were admitted to the FA via an application process. The size of the teaching team and the student cohort stayed the same, but now all students who applied, including students with disabilities, could take part in the FA.

During either the third or the fourth year, the FA at Adams expanded to 200 students and eight core teachers, who, as one respondent stated, could be thought of as two teaching teams. Again, student applied for admittance to the FA, and this structure was kept in place until the 2008/2009 school year. Recognizing the feasibility of including all freshmen in the FA, the administration and staff decided to expand. One respondent put the rationale for the change this way:

What our data was saying with our 200 [FA students] … we thought [that] it’s going so well, it’s working for what we have here, let’s extend it to everybody, and hopefully
make a difference with them. Again, smaller is better, and we felt like if we could get
[students] into those teams as long as there were at least two to three teachers that they
knew they could come to say ‘This is what I need,’ ‘This is happening, ‘This is not
working for me’ … then [the school] would [make the change]. (Adams staff FA,
personal communication, February 25, 2010)

During the current school year, 2009/2010, each student in the FA has a paired English
and social studies teacher one semester. These teachers have a common planning period with
which the opportunity to plan common, overlapping lessons exists. In one instance an English
teacher and social studies teacher had their cohort group engage in one assignment that was
graded by both teachers.

**Jefferson High School.**

The final school in the study is located in a suburban city, which, according to 2009 U.S.
Census data, has an estimated population of 99,738; of that, 15.1% are Hispanic or Latino (or
any race), 12.3% are Black or African American, and 74.3% are White. Similar to the population
of Adams, 84.5% of the population twenty-five years old or higher has obtained a high school
diploma or higher. Regarding the population’s economic status, the mean average household
income from the year 2006 to 2008 was $60,401.

According to 2008-2009 data, the most recent data from the North Carolina Department
of Public Instruction, the school is comprised of 1,729 students. In Table 5, data from the
previous three school years regarding school population, school safety, student out-of-school
suspensions and expulsions, and average percentage of students who attend school daily is
found. The data reveals a positive trend in school safety and long term student out-of-school
suspensions.
### Table 5

**Jefferson: Safety, Suspension, and Attendance**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>Student Population</th>
<th>School Safety</th>
<th>Short Term Student Out-of-School Suspensions</th>
<th>Long Term Student Out-of-School Suspensions</th>
<th>Expulsions</th>
<th>Daily Attendance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>1,771</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2008</td>
<td>1,728</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2009</td>
<td>1,729</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 6 student performances over the last three years on two End-of-Course (EOC) exams that occur initially in the ninth-grade, the English I and Algebra I EOC, and data regarding the four year cohort graduation rate can be found. According to the data, a general upward trend exists at the school level.

### Table 6

**Jefferson/District English I EOC, Algebra I EOC, and Four Year Cohort Graduation Rate Data**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Year</th>
<th>English I (school)</th>
<th>English I (district)</th>
<th>Algebra I (school)</th>
<th>Algebra I (district)</th>
<th>Graduation Rate (school)</th>
<th>Graduation Rate (district)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006 - 07</td>
<td>74.0%</td>
<td>76.0%</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
<td>67.7%</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007 - 08</td>
<td>80.3%</td>
<td>77.9%</td>
<td>62.3%</td>
<td>70.0%</td>
<td>76.4%</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008 - 09</td>
<td>77.2%</td>
<td>77.1%</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>71.0%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

27
The idea for a FA at Jefferson High School was generated by the previous administration of the school in order to, according to the school’s website, “facilitate [the] growth of each student to become a productive and contributing member of society who is committed to lifelong learning. The Small Learning Community will provide a more rigorous and relevant educational experience by fostering meaningful relationships among teachers, peers, and parents.” According to one respondent, the previous principal, who had worked at a middle school prior to coming to Jefferson High School, liked the middle school model of four teachers working with a specific student cohort (Jefferson staff FA, personal communication, February 11, 2010).

During the 2005-2006 school year, the year prior to the implementation of the academy, a team comprised of one administrator and multiple staff members visited a school that had an academy system in place. It should be noted, however, that the visited school did not have a FA; rather, the entire high school was broken into thematic academies (Jefferson FA staff, personal communication, February 2, 2010). After that visit it is the consensus of those Jefferson FA staff interviewed that members of the faculty who were not to be apart of the FA were not consulted prior to implementation. This lack of faculty involvement in the planning, according to one respondent, may have been problematic: “Part of why it was so rough initially was because the rest of the staff saw it as [the former principal’s] baby and he was picking his own people and only certain people were allowed in or knowledgeable about [the FA]” (Jefferson staff FA, personal communication, February 11, 2010).

Started during the 2006-2007 school year, Jefferson’s FA was implemented to help ease the transition from middle school to high school, thus making the freshman feel more
comfortable; in addition, the ninth-grade year was seen by the creators of the FA as “make or break time” regarding a student dropping out of Jefferson, and the FA would allow teachers to keep closer tabs on the students, noticing “the ones who are kinda starting to fall behind” (Jefferson FA staff, personal communication, February 2, 2010). This first FA at Jefferson was made up of 100 randomly selected students and four core teachers, who were selected by the principal. Of these four core teachers, two had worked at the middle school level with the principal, one had worked in an academy before coming to Jefferson High School, and one was in her first year of teaching, which was seen as advantageous because she was not familiar with traditional high school teaching.

During this initial year, the school used monies from a General Electric Foundation Grant to provide incentives to students. As one teacher interviewed put it, “I think the funding was a big part of the success at the beginning as well. We had a GE [General Electric] grant that allowed incentives; it allowed for … field trips, which, again, kind of built that … sense of familiarity and community. [It helped] build those relationships” (Jefferson FA staff, personal communication, February 2, 2010). There was not a consensus among those interviewed as to whether or not the monies from the General Electric Foundation were still available to the program, but according to the administrator who oversees the FA, that external funding no longer exists.

During the second year of the FA and continuing to the current 2009/2010 SY, Jefferson’s FA is made up of three teaching teams, each consisting of four core teachers. The teachers added the second year were not hand-picked by the principal; rather, volunteers were asked for and accepted. One respondent stated:
The next year, when we brought it up to three academies … [we] tried to make it more all encompassing, you know, ask for volunteers who want to do it, because he [the principal] did realize afterwards that [hand-picking FA teachers] was a mistake. He thought [hand-picking FA teachers] was going to be the easier way because of the culture with the school the first year he was here. He wasn’t necessarily welcomed, so he just thought “If I could just get these folks who would be on-board,” a little bit less resistance, pilot [the FA] then try to open it up. (Jefferson FA staff, personal communication, February 11, 2010)

Additionally, all freshmen who attend Jefferson High School are members of the FA.

**Instruments Used**

Two instruments were used to collect data at each site: a voluntary online survey and a voluntary group forum. The online survey was comprised of four question about the participant’s professional experience, three question that used a Likert-scale response to rate the participants thoughts about characteristics, features, and intended outcomes of the FA at the participants school, one question about whether a particular feature of FA exists in the FA of the participant, and two questions that allowed participants to expand upon previous answers (see Appendix A). The group forum, which consisted of seven prepared questions in addition to follow up questions, involved a recorded interview with members at the three high schools involved with the FA who volunteered to participate (see Appendix B). I took short-hand notes during the forum to aid me in the transcribing process.

Prior to the researcher contacting any appropriate staff members and any of the three school, per Internal Review Board standards at University of North Carolina Wilmington, I
received written permission from the principal at each of schools to contact his or her staff members and to use his or her school for the group forum.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The first part of the research involved faculty and staff who work in conjunction with the FA at each of the three high schools participating in an anonymous, online survey. An invitation to complete the survey was sent to the appropriate faculty and staff via an electronic mail (e-mail), which contained a hyperlink to the survey. The initial e-mail was sent either by an administrator at the site, which was the case with Washington and Adams High School, or an e-mail directly from the researcher, which was the case with Jefferson. Each appropriate faculty and staff member at each participating school also received two subsequent e-mail invitations at one week intervals. Because of low electronic response rate, the staff at Washington also received a hard copy of the survey during one visit to the site, which occurred approximately three weeks after the distribution of the final e-mail invitation. One of the eleven recipients responded from Washington; thirteen of the twenty-four recipients responded from Adams; and seven of the twelve recipients responded from Jefferson. After the hard copy surveys were completed, ten from Washington had responded.

The second part of the research involved a group forum with members of the FA from each school. (For reason that will be explained later, no member from the FA at Washington High School participated in the group forum.) In order to set up the forum at Adams, I contacted the principal in charge of the FA, who then contacted the staff, and a date was set. I conducted two group forums at Adams, both on the same day at different times to honor various teacher schedules. The first consisted of nine faculty and staff members, while the second consisted of three faculty members. The range of experience varied from those who had been a part of the FA
since its initial conception to those who had been a part of it for less than two months. At Jefferson High School, members of the FA received two e-mails stating when and where the forum would take place. Just as at Adams, two forums occurred: the first consisted of three FA faculty members and the second, two weeks after the first, consisted of one FA staff member.

**Limitations of the Study**

The limitations of the study are as follows:

1. The study as comprised of only three schools, each located in southeastern North Carolina.
2. Each FA is in a different stage of existence: Adams is in its seventh year, Jefferson is in its fifth year, and Washington is in its third year.
3. The number of participants in the group forum was disproportional: twelve participants from Adams, four participants from Jefferson, and zero participants from Washington.
4. The opinions expressed in both the online survey and the group forums reflect the subjective perspective of the respondents.
5. I observed teacher/student interaction at Adams, interaction not observed at the two other schools.
Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter will summarize the findings of the study. It is divided into the following three sections based on the research questions:

1) To what extent are the attributes of freshman academies successfully implemented in selected high schools?

2) What features of a freshman academy (FA) do educators who teach and lead in them consider integral to program success?

3) Summary and interpretation of the findings.

In order to answer these questions, the researcher examined the results of the online survey, the transcripts of the group forums, multiple web sites, and various print materials.

Research Question One

To determine the extent to which the attributes of a FA have been successfully implemented at the three selected schools, I examined responses to the fifth question of the survey: “According to the literature, FA possess certain defining attributes. Please rate the degree to which these attributes have been implemented in your FA.” The four ratings are “I do not know if this attribute has been implemented,” “Not Implemented,” “Partially Implemented,” and “Fully Implemented.”

Adams High School.

Table 7, found below, contains the results from the faculty and staff of the FA at Adams High School who took completed the survey.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes of FA</th>
<th>I do not know if</th>
<th>Not</th>
<th>Partially</th>
<th>Fully</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This attribute has been implemented</td>
<td>Implemented</td>
<td>Implemented</td>
<td>Implemented</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and staff possess autonomous governance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academy classrooms exist in an adjacent setting</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff development is related directly to working/teaching in a FA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive, applicable staff development occurred prior to existence of the FA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academy teachers have a common planning period</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Autonomous governance.**

Of the five respondents who answered this component of question five, four stated that the FA had partially implemented autonomous governance at Adams, and no respondent felt as if the FA had fully implemented autonomous governance. During the course of the two group forums, no participant shared information relevant to autonomous governance, such as information dealing with FA control over program policies, instructional leadership teams,
staffing issues, operating procedures, discipline policies, and budgeting issues; these are the aforementioned components of autonomous governance.

Adjacent setting.

All five respondents from Adams FA faculty reported that the academy is located in an adjacent setting. Four of the five reported that the component was fully implemented. These responses are supported by the comments made during the first group forum. While at least one FA teachers, who does not teach a core subjects, is physically located outside of the FA building, the majority of FA teachers are housed in one space. One forum participant shared:

“Because of freshman academy, we are together, for the most part. Yes, some science people have to be over here because of lab situations or what have you, but for the most, we see each other every day, every class change, and it builds relationships.” (Adams staff FA, personal communication, February 25, 2010)

Staff development related to FA.

Nine respondents answered this component of question five; of those nine, seven felt as if FA teachers, to some extent, receive staff development that is related to teaching or working in an FA, with five of the seven responding that this component had been fully implemented. Over the course of the two group forums, participants gave no statements that would either corroborate or refute this data.

Extensive, applicable staff development prior to FA implementation.

Of the eight who responded to this part of question five, five reported that the four teachers who made up the initial FA teaching group were given extensive, applicable staff development prior to teaching in the FA, while two respondents did not know if this had occurred because they were new to the FA. The group forums revealed that, of the thirteen FA
faculty members who participated, only one was a member of the initial FA; in addition, of the thirteen who participated in the online survey, two worked in the FA for four or more years, and eight had two years experience or less in the FA. Most of the FA faculty who participated in either part of the study were not working in the FA during its inaugural year. One respondent, who began working in the FA during its second year, stated that the four teachers who made up the initial teaching cohort received training for a year prior to teaching in the FA. This training, according to the comments of multiple participants, consisted of FA-specific workshops and two visits to a school, located in central North Carolina, that had experience with the FA model, and prepared participants for the reality of working in an academy.

*Common planning period.*

The last component of question five produced the least participant agreement. Of the ten persons who responded, two stated they did not know if a common planning period had been implemented, two stated it had not been implemented, four stated it had been partially implemented, and two stated it had been fully implemented. The type of planning time was not addressed in the group forum..

*Jefferson High School.*

Table 8 below contains the results of question number five from the Jefferson High School FA faculty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes of FA</th>
<th>I do not know if this attribute has been</th>
<th>Not Implemented</th>
<th>Partially Implemented</th>
<th>Fully Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson High School Results of Survey Question 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Autonomous governance.

Five faculty members of Jefferson’s FA answered this portion of question five. Three of the five reported that autonomous governance has been partially implemented in their FA, one stating that it had not been implemented, and one stating that she did not know if it had been implemented. During the two group forums, no one shared comments pertaining to FA autonomy over instructional leadership teams, staffing issues, operating procedures, or budgeting issues, yet participants did make indirect comments about program policies and discipline policies, two aspects of autonomous governance. The teachers in the initial group forum revealed that they are required to distribute progress reports every two weeks, a practice that is more rigorous than the
requirements of teachers who teach outside of the FA at Jefferson High. FA teachers reported they also have the some similar classroom rules that are developed together: “Three bathroom passes, second tardy [is] a fifteen minute detention … for students, there is consistency. It’s not ‘Well, this teacher lets me do this, this, and this all the time and this teacher only allows this’ … For the most part, we try to keep our expectations pretty consistent so that students are aware of what their behavior is supposed to be like” (Jefferson FA staff, personal communication, February 2, 2010).

Adjacent setting.

Of the three respondents who answered this portion of survey question five, two believed that Jefferson had partially implemented this attribute, while one stated that the attribute had not been implemented. One comment made during the initial group forum summarized:

One plan, and we did do it the first year [of the FA], was to keep the four core teachers together, within a close proximity to allow for easy correspondence, even if it was just standing in the hall. That became more difficult when it was revealed that the science department had to be … pulled from, had to go upstairs and be in a different part of the building completely. And that did not break it, but it just made it more challenging in terms of that idea that the four core teachers who were working in the academy being right [next to] each other. (Jefferson FA staff, personal communication, February 2, 2010).

As noted with the FA at Adams High School, the issue of science teacher placement factored into the ability of the FA to create an adjacent setting.

Staff development related to FA.
Three of the five respondents who addressed this portion of question five stated that no staff development related to teaching and working in a FA has been implemented, while two believed that it had been partially implemented. The researcher did not ask questions about the topic, and participants made no comments dealing with this attribute during either group forum.

*Extensive, applicable staff development prior to FA implementation.*

None of the six respondents felt that this attribute was fully implemented at Jefferson, while three felt that it was partially implemented; two felt that it was not implemented. Teachers and staff in either group forum did not know how or when the first cohort of FA teachers at Jefferson was prepared to teach in an FA. One participant did state, however, that the principal who implemented the FA was well-versed in both the middle school model and the small learning community model (Jefferson FA staff, personal communication, February 11, 2010).

*Common planning period.*

All six respondents believed that FA faculty share a common planning period. During both group forums teachers in the FA reported that colleagues work effectively with one another, but participants did not provide information that establishes a connection between their common planning period and teachers working in conjunction with one another. The researcher asked no questions related to this possible effect of a common planning period.

**Washington High School.**

Table 9 reports the results of question number five as stated by the members of the Washington High School FA who took the hardcopy form of the survey. These were teachers who did not complete the original online survey (see “Data Collection Procedures” in chapter 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Washington High School Results of Survey Question 5</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attributes of FA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and staff possess autonomous governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academy classrooms exist in an adjacent setting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff development is related directly to working/teaching in a FA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive, applicable staff development occurred prior to existence of the FA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academy teachers have a common planning period</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nine of the ten participants believed that they possess autonomous governance to some extent at Washington High School; however, only two of respondents believed it to be fully implemented. Regarding the second attribute, adjacent setting, the all ten of those surveyed believed that this attribute has been implemented to some extent, and three believed it to have been fully implemented. Regarding the third attribute, staff development specific to working and teaching in a FA, seven out of nine respondents felt that it exists in some form; similarly, seven
out of ten believed that extensive, applicable staff development occurred prior to the existence of the school’s FA. Finally, six of the ten respondents stated that teachers within the FA at Washington High School do not have a common planning period.

Unlike the experience with Adams and Jefferson, a group forum at Washington did not take place. During the on-site meeting at which FA faculty and staff took the survey, I asked respondents to participate in the group forum that, according to IRB policy, is voluntary for participants. At that time no member of the faculty or staff chose to participate. After I held multiple communications with the administrator overseeing the FA, I proposed a possible date when I could return to the site and conduct a forum with FA staff during their planning periods. I placed multiple e-mails and phone calls in order to confirm the feasibility of the suggested date. A school administrator returned one of the e-mails, stating that he would check on the possibility of the date, but he did not confirm the date. During the next week, I placed multiple calls and e-mails to the administrator, as well as a phone call to the school principal. I had not heard back by the end of the week either via e-mail or telephone. At that point, I decided that a group forum at Washington was not feasible.

**Research Question Two**

Questions six and seven of the survey aim to gather data related to the second research question. Question six states, “Freshman Academies possess features that are considered integral to the success of students in the academy. Please rate the following features regarding their importance to student success in your Freshman Academy.” The four ratings were “Not Integral,” “Somewhat Integral,” “Integral,” and “Very Integral.” In addition, question seven asks respondents to state whether each feature exists at his or her FA.

**Adams High School.**
Table 10, located below, shows the responses of the thirteen members of the Adams FA faculty and staff who answered survey question six and seven.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integral Features of FA</th>
<th>Not Integral</th>
<th>Somewhat Integral</th>
<th>Integral</th>
<th>Very Integral</th>
<th>Existence of feature within FA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/student Personalization</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/teacher Personalization</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A focus on rigor for students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A focus on academic relevance for students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A focus on parental involvement and participation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teacher/student personalization.**

Ten out of thirteen of teachers and faculty working in the FA at Adams considered teacher/student personalization to be integral to the success of a FA; twelve of thirteen
respondents stated that this feature existed in their FA. Multiple times during the group forums, teachers and faculty stressed the importance of the relationship between a student and his or her teacher. One respondent noted that the teacher/student relationship component was a contributing factor to the ninth grade promotion rate, which, for the 2008/2009 school year, was 330 out of 350 students, a noted improvement from previous years. Another respondent stated that teams of teachers meet weekly, focusing primarily on the teacher/student relationship aspect of the FA. A third example of the importance Adams places on this feature is what the researcher witnessed during the time between the two group forums. The FA hosted a Freshman Night, held in the gymnasium and cafeteria. The event involved a number of activities including a pie eating contest, a limbo contest, a volleyball match, and a karaoke machine. The FA faculty invited all freshmen, and fifteen teachers at Adams who teach freshman attended. Prior to the activities, one group forum participant described the importance of such an event.

The things that happen outside the classroom directly impact what happens in the classroom. Like tonight, we have our Freshman Night, the coming together to do those things. The students see [and think] “Oh look, fifteen of my teachers are here at 8 o’clock at night with me to play volleyball or basketball or eat a pie.” They tend to interact with you differently in the classroom because they see you in a completely different light. … And the kids will tell you, “[The teachers] are here because they care.” (Adams staff FA, personal communication, February 25, 2010)

Put succinctly by a forum participant after the event, “Once you develop that relationship, things are easy” (Adams staff FA, personal communication, February 25, 2010).

**Teacher/teacher personalization.**
All respondents reported that teacher/teacher personalization was integral to the success of the FA. Eight of the thirteen viewed it as very integral. Ten of the thirteen responded that teacher/teacher personalization could be found within Adams FA. The responses in the group forum indicated that teacher/teacher personalization manifested itself in two ways: aid given to beginning FA teachers concerning general classroom practices and aid given to teachers struggling with a certain student such as relevant information about the student.

Eight of the thirteen respondents to the survey have two years experience or less working in the current FA. Seven of the thirteen had three years teaching experience or less prior to working in the FA. On several occasions during the forums, teachers expressed how they had benefited because of the personalization that exists among FA teachers. One first year teacher stated that it is not only the freshman who are in a transitional period; it is also first year teachers. This transition, she believed, was eased because first year teachers in the FA have a place to belong, a professional community of which they are a part: “Just like how it’s easier for the kids to transition in, this is my first year, so it made my transition a lot better, because not only did I have a place to belong, but I knew the kids were starting out the same way” (Adams staff FA, personal communication, February 25, 2010). I believed that these first year teachers would have less of a sense of belonging if not for the teacher/teacher personalization occurring within the FA. Another first year teacher described peer personalization at Adams as follows:

For me, this is my first year teaching, so to actually be in a small learning community where everyone is so obliged to help me is incredible. I’ve gotten a tremendous amount of support from [another teacher in the FA] more than anybody, but … all the teachers have given me so much ground for me to build off of and to learn and to grow. I just feel
that I was placed in a good academy. (Adams staff FA, personal communication, February 25, 2010)

Teachers in the FA also felt that knowing their peers helped when problems with students arise. For example, one respondent stated that she appreciates the chance to speak with three other teachers who are dealing with the same student in order to find out what works with that student. She stated that sometimes it helps with issues such as having the correct student contact information: “We often, in education, go, ‘Oh yes we [as teachers] do all of these things together, but a lot of times we are kind of in our own little world and we don’t interact like we could and should, but [we do] in the freshman academy” (Adams staff FA, personal communication, February 25, 2010).

A focus on academic rigor/academic relevance.

Of the thirteen respondents, most stated that these two features, a focus on academic rigor and academic relevance, were very integral to the success of an FA: seven of thirteen for the former and ten of thirteen for the latter. As to whether these features exist in Adams FA, nine thought student academic rigor to be present and eleven thought student academic relevance to be present.

A focus on parental involvement and participation.

Twelve of the thirteen respondents believed that a focus on parental involvement is integral to FA success, while nine of those twelve believed it to be very integral. Ten of the thirteen believe this feature exists in their FA. Participants in the group forum spoke about parents of freshman volunteering in the school’s front office and volunteering their time and money, in the form of supplies and food for students. The FA also has a Parental Advisory Board that, among other duties, solicits parents to become involved.
Multiple respondents reported that the FA encourages parents that their involvement is important prior to their child’s first day at Adams High School. During the freshman orientation program, a three-day event occurring the summer prior to a beginning of a student’s ninth-grade year, the last session is set aside exclusively for parents to address any questions or concerns they may have. In addition, when the FA coordinator and the administrator in charge of the FA go to the three feeder middle schools, the necessity of parental involvement is addressed.

Typically, when [kids] go to high school, the parents [feel that] the kid doesn’t need you anymore, the school doesn’t need you anymore; it’s just a different world. The message that [the FA coordinator and the administrator in charge of the FA] take when we go into the middle schools is “[That is] not the case.” So, from the get-go they are told, “No, we need you there, we want you there.” (Adams staff FA, personal communication, February 25, 2010)

Jefferson High School.

Table 11 below reports the responses of the six members of the Jefferson FA faculty and staff who answered survey question six and seven.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integral Features of FA</th>
<th>Not Integral</th>
<th>Somewhat Integral</th>
<th>Integral</th>
<th>Very Integral</th>
<th>Existence of feature within FA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/student Personalization</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/teacher</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher/student personalization.

Three respondents stated that teacher/student personalization is integral to FA success. Three stated that it is very integral. Of those same respondents, six of the seven felt that this feature is present in the FA at Jefferson. From the two group forums, two points regarding this feature immerge. First, the teacher/student personalization appears to benefit those students deemed to be at-risk, traditionally students of low economic status. One respondent specifically addressed this point.

[FA teachers] are more in tune with the child’s home needs. … They know what mom or dad can or can’t do. And [the FA teachers] become moms and dads … they become a second parent to the kids. And for those kids that don’t have anybody at home that cares whether they did their homework or whether they passed a test, the teacher then becomes
that person, and the [FA teacher] asks them, “How did you do on that Earth test? [The teacher] told me last time that you didn’t do very well. How did you do this time?” And the kids really do want that. They will buck and they will gripe, but they do want someone to hold them accountable. And [the FA teachers] do a really good job of monitoring them and babying them. (Jefferson FA staff, personal communication, February 11, 2010)

While speaking about the way in which those faculty members outside of the FA perceive the teacher/student personalization that occurs within in the FA, one respondent commented on the perception that exists.

I have heard statements like, “The ninth-grade academy just babies these kids.” And statements like “You’re not in ninth-grade any more. We aren’t going to hold your hand.” That kind of mentality. Which, on a certain level, we do, kinda, baby them more, hold them, guide them more, but I think that making statements like that kinda strongly implies almost like a negative tone to the whole idea of [a FA]. (Jefferson FA staff, personal communication, February 2, 2010)

Teacher/student personalization was reported to exist within Jefferson’s FA, yet the value of that personalization depended upon one’s proximity to the FA.

**Teacher/teacher personalization.**

Three respondents reported that teacher/teacher personalization is integral to FA success. Three reported that it was very integral to FA success. All seven reported that this form of personalization exists in the FA. One respondent participating in the group forum spoke of a constant sharing of information about both teaching practices and about the students. Echoing the sentiments of a first-year teacher from Adams, the same respondent spoke about how comforting
it was as a first-year teacher to have other, more experienced teachers with whom to plan. Another participant stated that, when he walked into another teacher’s classroom for their weekly meeting, he often found himself inspired by what he saw.

**A focus on academic rigor/academic relevance.**

Four of the six respondents perceived a focus on academic rigor as either integral or very integral, and five of the six viewed a focus on academic relevance in the same manner. Two believed a focus on academic rigor to be somewhat integral, and one stated the same regarding academic relevance. Four of seven participants reported the feature to be present in the FA at Jefferson.

**A focus on parental involvement and participation.**

Similar to their opinion regarding a focus on academic relevance, one respondent felt a focus on parental involvement and participation was somewhat integral, two thought it was integral, and three responded that it was very integral. Six of seven reported that this feature existed in their FA. According to one forum respondent, within the FA at Jefferson, parental involvement may range from tailgating before athletic events, where children in the FA and their parents are invited, to student-led conferences each semester. During student-led conferences, students, parents, and caretakers discuss the student’s academic progress. When asked what role the FA at Jefferson played in regards to parental involvement, one participant in the group forum responded:

I know I am making a general statement, but a lot of teachers don’t like change and don’t like added responsibility and paperwork. As soon as you start mentioning meetings and parent phone calls and progress reports, teachers don’t want to have anything to do with it: it’s extra, added work, [whereas] parent like that. They like … more contact, as long as
they’re not the ones who are having to initiate it. They are getting progress reports, they are getting these meeting set up for them, then they are probably going to support [the FA] more. (Jefferson FA staff, personal communication, February 2, 2010).

**Washington High School.**

Because I was unable to hold a group forum at Washington, the following section will be devoted to comparing the extent to which participating members of the Washington’s FA felt certain features of a FA are integral to program success to their belief regarding the existence of these features within their FA. The results are found below in Table 12.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Integral Features of FA</th>
<th>Not Integral</th>
<th>Somewhat Integral</th>
<th>Integral</th>
<th>Very Integral</th>
<th>Existence of feature within FA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/student Personalization</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/teacher Personalization</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A focus on rigor for students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A focus on academic relevance for students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A focus on parental</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For each feature, more than seven of ten respondents felt that the feature was either integral or very integral. For each feature, more respondents stated that the feature was integral than very integral. For example, of the nine respondents who rated teacher/student personalization either integral or very integral, seven viewed it as integral and two viewed it as very integral. Of the nine who rated a focus on academic relevance for students as either integral or very integral, six viewed it as integral and three viewed it as very integral. At least eight of the ten respondents felt that each feature, with the exception of a focus on parental involvement and participation, was in existence in their FA.

Summary and Interpretation of Findings

Participants from the FA at Adams High School stated that teacher/student, teacher/teacher, and teacher/parent personalization are the most integral features of a FA; on the contrary, a focus on rigor for students was reported to be the least integral and the least existent feature. A majority rated each integral feature of a FA as “very integral,” and a majority reported that each integral feature exists in their FA. A majority of participants believed that staff development related directly to working or teaching in a FA was implemented prior to the FA. Participants reported that a contiguous setting for the FA has been implemented. Respondents reported that common planning period for FA teachers has not been fully implemented.

Participants from the FA at Jefferson High School reported that teacher/student and teacher/teacher personalization were the most integral feature of a FA in general and the most existent feature at their FA. Participants reported that, of the five integral features, a focus on
student academic rigor and relevance were the least integral and the least existent features. A common planning period is the only attribute of the five that participants reported to be fully implemented.

Respondents from the FA at Washington High School believed that teacher/student personalization was the most integral feature of an FA and the most existent feature of their FA. Respondents reported that a focus on parental involvement and a focus of rigor for students were the least integral feature in a FA and the least existence feature in their FA. No more than three of ten participants rated any of the five features as “very integral.” A contiguous FA setting and faculty and staff possession of autonomous governance were the attributes that were implemented to the fullest extent. No respondent reported that a common planning period was fully implemented.

Figure 1 reports the degree of implementation of the most important features and attributes. Collectively, these ratings indicate the fidelity of the FA to the FA model based on my analysis. The term Personalization encompasses teacher/teacher, teacher/student, and parent/teacher/student personalization. The phrase Staff Development Specific to a FA encompasses staff development that occurred prior to the FA and staff development that has occurred since the creation of the FA. For each feature or attribute, a score of 4 represents very successful implantation. A score of 3 represents successful implementation. A score of 2 represents somewhat successful implementation. A score of 1 represents unsuccessful implementation. I also rated both academic and behavioral student outcomes. A score of four represents very positive student outcomes overall; a score of three represents generally positive student outcomes; a score of two represents some positive student outcomes; and a score of one
represents few or no positive student outcomes. The circles in Figure 1 indicate the location of the majority of the rating for each FA. These rating will be explained in chapter five.

Figure 1. Researcher’s analysis of the fidelity to FA model of each school.
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

The Freshman Academy movement has been touted as one important way to help drive reform in large, comprehensive high schools. This chapter will summarize the findings of my study, present the implications, propose recommendations for future research and share conclusions.

Summary of Findings

Figure 1 found in chapter four reveals the findings of the study. The FA at Adams High School has very successfully implemented personalization (teacher/student, teacher/teacher, and teacher/parent), successfully implemented both staff development specific to a FA and a contiguous setting, somewhat successfully implemented a common planning period, and achieved student outcomes closer to positive than very positive. The FA at Jefferson High School has implemented personalization somewhere between somewhat successfully and successfully, somewhat successfully implemented staff development specific to a FA, more successfully than somewhat successfully implemented a contiguous setting, very successfully implemented a common planning period, and achieved positive student outcomes. The FA at Washington has implemented personalization somewhere between somewhat successfully and unsuccessfully, implemented staff development closer to somewhat successfully and unsuccessfully, implemented a contiguous setting very successfully, somewhat successfully implemented a common planning period, and achieved few or no positive student outcomes.

Implications

Figure 1 found in chapter four presents the degree to which each FA authentically represents the FA model and student outcomes. Although each FA has at least one feature or attribute that is successfully implemented, an examination of the clusters reveals that the FA at Adams has the highest degree of fidelity, with just one attribute not successfully implemented,
while the FA at Washington has the lowest degree of fidelity, with the implementation of three of the four features and attributes being somewhere between somewhat successful and unsuccessful. All but one of the ratings for Jefferson fall between successful implementation and somewhat successful implementation. After examining the applicable data, personalization among key stakeholders appears to delineate one FA from another.

**Adams High School.**

At the FA at Adams High School, it is evident that personalization, in all its relevant forms, is the first priority. Comments often came back to building relationships with other key stakeholders. For example, when discussing the contiguous setting in which the majority of FA teachers are located, one respondent stated that the proximity itself helps build relationships among FA teachers: “For the most part, we see each other every day, every class change. And you build those other relationships, just like with the kids. You build relationships with people” (Adams staff FA, personal communication, February 25, 2010). This teacher/teacher personalization occurs without many FA teachers possessing a common planning period, previously determined by multiple researchers to be a key factor in the implementation of a SLC, and, by extension, a FA (Darling-Hammond, Ross, & Milliken, 2007; Cotton, 2001; Fouts, Baker, Brown, & Riley, 2006; Pecheone, Tytler, & Ross, 2006). It is possible that the FA professional development, which, according to seven of nine respondents, exists at Adams, aids teacher/teacher personalization.

A discussion about parental participation revealed another example of stakeholder personalization. It is clear that parents play a role in the FA: Parents make up the Parental Advisory Committee; parents volunteer in the front office; parents bring supplies when asked; parents even lend the use of their homes for school-related activities. But is this teacher/parent
personalization a result of the FA? Two participants spoke about the role of parents prior to the FA:

I would think you would have had one or two or three [parent volunteers] back then, but now you are more apt to get more because of lot of these kids’ older brothers and sisters [say] “Oh, we got to do this with Freshman Academy,” and so the parents are aware of what it has done to helps [their] kids, and so therefore they are more apt to do anything to help out the Freshman Academy.” (Adams staff FA, personal communication, February 25, 2010)

I graduated from Adams High School. I think I can think of two times, maybe, that my parents came here. They never knew what classes I took. I mean, yes, I was on the drill team, [and] they got me here for events, but parents can’t afford to be like that anymore. … Parents need to be here, and that’s what we tell them. “We need you; your child needs you.” (Adams staff FA, personal communication, February 25, 2010)

These comments indicate that the work of FA faculty and administration yields dividend with FA parents.

Positive relationships exist among John Adam’s FA staff and between the staff and FA parents; furthermore, proof of positive relationships between student and staff is evident. Students, who appeared to represent the full spectrum of the student population, arrived fifteen minutes early to interact with each other and their teachers at the Freshman Night hosted by the FA. And it seemed that students stayed for the duration of the event, playing video games with their teachers and doing the limbo with their teachers, among other activities. One participant in the group forum that followed the event provided a summation of the evening.
[It’s about] the whole sense of belonging. I think that’s a huge part with the transition [from middle school to high school], that they feel a part of something. And looking [at the] demographics of the group tonight; that’s the group [the FA] is targeting: the kids who very easily could get lost or go a different way. I think [the FA] has been very beneficial academically. (Adams staff FA, personal communication, February 25, 2010)

Whether these relationships have a positive effect on the academic and behavioral outcomes of students is unclear. The student results from the previous three years on two assessments given in traditional ninth grade courses, the English I and Algebra I EOC, are mixed. As Table 4 in chapter three indicates, there has been a slight upward trend during the past three years in English I EOC scores, and a significant downward trend over the past three years in Algebra I scores. This inability to establish a connection between a FA and student academic performance is similar to the findings of Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, and Page (2008) and American Institutes for Research & SRI International (2007). In terms of promotion rates, one forum participant stated that 330 of 350 ninth graders in 2008/2009 gained promotion to the tenth grade, an increase from prior years; this supports previous findings (Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, and Page, 2008; Kemple & Herliny, 2004; Patterson, Beltyukova, Berman, & Francis, 2007). Regarding the four year cohort graduation rate, for which data has been publicly available beginning with the 2005/2006 school year, the school experienced an increase from 65.6% in 2005/2006 to 80.1% in 2008/2009, but the extent to which the FA has contributed to this increase is unknown.

Anecdotal evidence related to a positive change in student behavior exists. One participant noted that in the past there was a “huge gap” between the number of tardies and behavioral referrals of ninth grade students and the rest of the student population. While there is
still a gap, the participant stated that it is “nothing like it used to be” (Adams staff FA, personal communication, February 25, 2010). Another participant stated freshman participation in extracurricular activities has increased: “[One coach] had the largest number of kids play tennis this fall, and the … softball numbers were up, just because [FA teachers] say, ‘We expect you to be out there,’ ‘This is what we need for you to do’” (Adams staff FA, personal communication, February 25, 2010). Comments such as these may be significant, as participation in extracurricular activities, in addition to its possible positive outcomes, is one noted benefit of a smaller learning environment (Baker & Gump, 1964; Darling-Hammond, Ross, & Milliken, 2007).

**Jefferson High School.**

When I meet with the science department, the academy teachers … it’s almost like [the FA science teachers] are not part of that team. …They are still kinda of like this group outside. It’s weird. It has not jelled very well. We have had a lot of budget issues with department heads. [These department heads say,] “Well, [the FA] has separate funding.” No, [FA teachers] don’t. They have a lot more work, but they don’t have an extra pool of money. …When [department heads] were buying toner for their department, they weren’t taking into account the [FA teachers], so there were a lot of growing pains, especially when we expanded to the three academies, because it affected more people. (Jefferson FA staff, personal communication, February 11, 2010)

I don’t think the academy has had an effect on parent involvement. It’s definitely that academy that is the aggressor, I guess, in that case. (Jefferson FA staff, personal communication, February 1, 2010)
The two participant comments above provide insight into personalization among key stakeholders in the Jefferson High School FA. FA teachers bond with one another, aided by their common planning period and adjacent setting. They are also accountable to one another. As one participant put it, he feels compelled to issued progress report in accordance to FA policy because he knows his students will tell his partnering teacher if he has not.

This teacher/teacher personalization, however, may be present because of a sense of alienation from stakeholders like teachers outside the FA and FA parents. The former participant’s comment suggests that FA teachers are not seen as members of the larger faculty body; rather, they are seen as a separate faculty with separate funding, separate rules, and, as other comments suggest, a separate mission. As one participant stated, “Based on what I have overheard other faculty saying, I just think that maybe a lot of them don’t even understand what [a FA] is” (Jefferson FA staff, personal communication, February 1, 2010). One possible explanation for the lack of understanding is the lack of communication about the FA and its purpose that occurred at the outset of the FA. Multiple participants note that the entire faculty was not involved in the process of implementing the FA, a belief corroborated by the survey results found in Table 8 located in chapter four. This is significant because the FA has expanded since its inception, and this expansion has meant that faculty members who were not informed as to the initial reason for the FA have become a part of the FA, without, as the survey results indicate, staff development that is directly related to working or teaching in a FA.

The FA faculty includes parents via extracurricular events such as the FA tailgate parties and student-led conferencing, and via academic updates such as bimonthly progress reports and phone calls when students are having academic or behavioral difficulties. This contact presumably helps create parental support for the FA, a topic on which one participant
commented: “When we did this past student-led conferencing, I know a lot of parents were wondering if [the FA] was going to continue throughout next year and they said they appreciated it and that they wished [the FA] was something that would happen” (Jefferson FA staff, personal communication, February 1, 2010). As the second opening comment makes clear, however, some FA teachers feel that the communication is one-way, with the teachers consistently initiating contact; moreover, the fact that teachers are consistently initiating contact has made some FA teachers frustrated. As one participant succinctly stated, “The parents really like it, and the teachers really don’t” (Jefferson FA staff, personal communication, February 1, 2010). This potentially adversarial relationship, according to the research, may prove problematic, since parents are seen as playing a key role in a SLC in general (Cotton, 2001), and with student success specifically (Fouts, Baker, Brown, & Riley, 2006).

Between FA students and staff, all indicators point toward a high degree of personalization. Respondents stated that FA teachers act like moms and dads to their students, holding and guiding student through this transitional phase of their education. Because many students return to interact with their FA teachers after ninth grade, a statement made by two participants during different forums, the bond established between teacher and student appears to transcend the FA experience. Whether this bond translates into improved student academic and behavioral outcomes is uncertain.

As with Adams High School, student academic achievement on traditional ninth grade standardized assessments is mixed. As seen in Table 6 in chapter three, the past three years have seen an improvement in English I EOC scores as compared to the district average; on the other hand, while the district average on the Algebra I EOC has experienced an upward trend over the past three years, Jefferson’s scores have not, going from 56% proficiency in 2006/2007 to 62.3%
in 2007/2008 to 56.6% in 2008/2009. Again, this lack of correlation between a FA and student academic achievement supports some previous findings (Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008; Kemple & Herliny, 2004; Patterson, Beltyukova, Berman, & Francis, 2007).

Student behavior outcomes have also been mixed. In 2005/2006, the four year cohort graduation rate was 63%. The year the first FA student cohort graduated from Jefferson, the 2008/2009 school year, the rate was 70%, an increase of seven percentage points, as compared to the 5.1 percentage point increase in the district average during the same time period. Like Adams, only anecdotal evidence supports the positive effect the FA has had on ninth grade tardies and referrals, and, according to one participant, the school has not maintained information about student promotion rates.

**Washington High School.**

A lack of personalization among key FA stakeholder, it would appear, is the most pressing issue facing the FA at Washington High School. For example, rating how integral a focus on parental involvement is to the success of an FA, only one of ten respondents rate it as “very integral,” while three rate it “somewhat integral,” and only six respondents state that this feature exists in the FA. When compared to the responses from respondents from the FA at Adams, where nine of thirteen rated the same feature as “very integral,” and only one of thirteen rated it as “somewhat integral,” significant differences exist. When rating how integral teacher/teacher personalization is to the success of an FA, none of the ten respondents rate the feature as “very integral,” as compared to eight of thirteen respondents from Adams. (This may be due to the lack of a common planning period, as participants indicate; however, seven of ten respondents did indicate that the FA exists in a contiguous setting. What makes these responses intriguing is that they mirror the responses from participants at Adams.) Finally, when rating
how integral teacher/student personalization, one of the defining features of an FA, is to the success of an FA, only two of ten rate the feature as “very integral,” as compared to three of six respondents from Jefferson and ten of thirteen respondents from Adams.

The FA at Washington began during the 2007/2008 school year. The year prior, English I EOC scores were at 61% and Algebra I scores were at 45%, both of which were below the district average. For the 2008/2009 school year, after two years of using the FA model, English I EOC scores were at 53.8% and Algebra I EOC scores were at 36.6% (see Table 2). Even though some previous research establishes the lack of connection between the existence of a FA and an increase in student academic achievement (Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008; Kemple & Herliny, 2004; Patterson, Beltyukova, Berman, & Francis, 2007), a decline in student achievement that is not in line with an overall district decline seems problematic.

Darling-Hammond, Ross, and Milliken (2007) operationally define personalization as the extent to which one person knows another. In order for personalization to occur, communication must take place. After looking at all the data collected with both instruments, I concluded that these three FA choose to communicate with key stakeholders to vary degrees, a decision that may play a role in the success of a FA. At Adams, communication begins before the student and parent are even a part of the FA, and that communication continues once the student begins, if for no other reason than the fact that each stakeholder is invested in the FA. Parents make up the Parental Advisory Team; previous student feedback led to the creation of Freshman Night by the FA faculty and administration. At Jefferson, communication within the FA is evident, but communication to those outside of the FA is lacking. FA teachers and students have a high degree of personalization, but this occurs at a site where it seems that not many staff outside of the FA know anything about it, and FA teachers feel overwhelmed with the amount of one-way
communication with FA parents. At Washington, communication is seriously lacking, as I experienced firsthand in my dealings with the assistant principal in charge of the FA.

**Recommendations**

The key stakeholders in the FA at Adams possess a high degree of personalization, yet this has not translated into consistent student academic success. Changes for the FA could include an increase in the amount of time allotted in a school day for FA teachers to meet with one another by way of a common planning period and the creation of more teaching teams (Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008; Pecheone, Tytler, & Ross, 2006; Wallach, n.d.). Teaching teams consisted of only the English I and World History teachers, who share a common planning period. At Jefferson the teachers and students possess a high degree of personalization, but this personalization does not extend beyond those two FA stakeholders. Two recommendation for the FA would be increasing the transparency of the FA and its results for other faculty and staff as well as parents (Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008, p. 6), and promoting the idea of teacher/student personalization for all students, not only those in the FA (Bernstein, Millsap, Schimmenti, & Page, 2008, p. 4). As noted by multiple participants, the FA began without a diffusion of pertinent information; perhaps it is time for the diffusion of FA information to be expanded. If the FA at Washington High School is to be successful, all of its members must believe that personalization, and by extension communication, among all stakeholders is a necessity (Patterson, Beltyukova, Berman, & Francis, 2007, pp. 135-137; Cotton, 2001, p. 29). If they do not, they will continue to see features such as parental involvement and teacher/teacher personalization as nonessential. A parental advisory committee, such as the one at Adams, and student-led conferencing, as exists at Jefferson, may be the first steps to increasing personalization. All stakeholders, parents, students, and staff alike, should
jointly participate in workshops that address the integral features and necessary attributes of an FA.

**Suggestions for Further Research**

The theme of personalization and its importance to an FA emerged. This issue and others could provide basis for further research, which could include the following:

1. Other studies might be conducted using more FA from more diverse geographical areas.
2. Other studies might be conducted with a specific focus on the way in which personalization impacts other integral features and necessary attributes of an FA.
3. A study would be beneficial that focuses on logistical issues facing a FA such as when there is not space to house some teachers in the academy in a contiguous setting.
4. More studies are needed to specifically focus on FA, as the majority of studies found in the literature deal with SLC in general, of which FA is just one type.

**Summary**

When James Bryant Conant advocated for large, comprehensive high schools, schools “accommodating all the youth of a community,” he envisioned schools that accommodated students by way of offering more: more extracurricular choices, more foreign language courses, more elective classes (Conant, 1959, p.8). But more, paradoxically, can lead to less. More course offerings and more teachers and more students can create less personalization. The extent to which teachers and administrators working in a FA feel necessary attributes of an FA exist at their FA reveal whether or not an FA has been faithful to the FA model. Without certain integral features such personalization, however, the FA model cannot begin to yield the results that a FA was meant to achieve. Through both adequate staff development related to working and teaching
in a FA and a desire to address the negative byproducts of the large, comprehensive high school, high school faculty and administrations can evoke sustainable reform.
References


North Carolina General Statues. § 115C-238.29A. page 129. Retrieved from
http://www.ncleg.net/enactedlegislation/statutes/pdf/bychapter/chapter_115c.pdf


APPENDICES

Appendix A

Perception of Characteristics and Features of FA Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes of a Freshman Academy: Teacher/faculty perception</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Freshman Academy</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. In which Freshman Academy (FA) do you work?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ E.A. Lasey High School Freshman Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Jacksonville High School Freshman Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ James Kenan High School Freshman Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What is your role in your Freshman Academy? (Please check all that apply.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Assistant Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Freshman Academy Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Resource Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How many years of K-12 teaching and/or administrative experience did you have prior to becoming a part of your Freshman Academy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ One to three years prior experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Four to nine years prior experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Ten to fourteen years prior experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ More than fifteen years experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How many years experience do you have working with Freshman Academies at your current school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ This is my first year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ One year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Two years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Three years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>✓ Four or more years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Attributes of a Freshman Academy: Teacher/faculty perception

#### 5. According to the literature, Freshman Academies possess certain defining attributes. Please rate the degree to which these attributes have been implemented in your Freshman Academy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Not Implemented</th>
<th>Partially Implemented</th>
<th>Fully Implemented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty and staff possess autonomous governance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academy classrooms exist in an adjacent setting.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff development is related directly to teaching/working in a Freshman Academy.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensive, applicable staff development occurred prior to existence of the Freshman Academy.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academy teachers have a common planning period</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 6. Freshman Academies possess features that are considered integral to the success of students in the academy. Please rate the following features regarding their importance to student success in your Freshman Academy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Feature</th>
<th>Not Integral</th>
<th>Somewhat Integral</th>
<th>Integral</th>
<th>Very Integral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/student personalization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher/teacher personalization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A focus on rigor for students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A focus on academic relevance for students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A focus on parental involvement and participation</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Attributes of a Freshman Academy: Teacher/faculty perception

7. Which of these features are in existence in your Freshman Academy? (Check all that apply.)
   - Teacher/student personalization
   - Teacher/teacher personalization
   - A focus on rigor for students
   - A focus on academic relevance for students
   - A focus on parental involvement and participation

8. Other than the above, what features does your Freshman Academy possess that you consider integral to the success of students?

9. According to the literature, Freshman Academies can contribute to certain positive outcomes. Please rate the extent to which your Freshman Academy has contributed to the following possible positive outcomes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I do not know if the Freshman Academy has contributed to this positive outcome.</th>
<th>Not contributed</th>
<th>Somewhat contributed</th>
<th>Contributed</th>
<th>Fully contributed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A decrease in the truancy rate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An increase in student academic performance.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An increase in the promotion rate.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An increase in the four year cohort graduation rate.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

10. Please share any comments related to Freshman Academies and your experiences working in your Freshman Academy.
Appendix B

Group Forum Questions

1. What was the impetus for initiating a freshman academy?
   1A. Follow-up question based on response.

2. What was the process used to plan, develop and implement a FA?
   2A. Follow-up question based on response.

3. Was the whole faculty involved in planning and is the whole faculty involved in learning from the results of the FA?
   3A. Follow-up question based on response.

4. What are the results of the FA in terms of student achievement?
   4A. Follow-up question based on response.

5. What are the results of the FA in terms of other variables of student success?
   5A. Follow-up question based on response.

6. What are the results of the FA in terms of parent involvement?
   6A. Follow-up question based on response.

7. What are the results of the FA in terms of teacher development?
   7A. Follow-up question based on response.