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Specifications for Manuscript Submission

Focus

Manuscripts should be original works not previously published nor concurrently submitted for publication to other journals. Manuscripts should be written clearly and concisely for a diverse audience, especially educational professionals in K-12 and higher education. Topics appropriate for *The Journal of At-Risk Issues* include, but are not limited to, research and practice, dropout prevention strategies, school restructuring, social and cultural reform, family issues, tracking, youth in at-risk situations, literacy, school violence, alternative education, cooperative learning, learning styles, community involvement in education, and dropout recovery.

Research reports describe original studies that have applied applications. Group designs, single-subject designs, qualitative methods, mixed methods design, and other appropriate strategies are welcome. Review articles provide qualitative and/or quantitative syntheses of published and unpublished research and other information that yields important perspectives about at-risk populations. Such articles should stress applied implications.

Format

Manuscripts should follow the guidelines of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th ed.). Manuscripts should not exceed 25 typed, double-spaced, consecutively numbered pages, including all cited references and illustrative materials. Submitted manuscripts that do not follow APA referencing will be returned to the author without editorial review. Tables should be typed in APA format. Placement of any illustrative materials (tables, charts, figures, graphs, etc.) should be clearly indicated within the main document text. All such illustrative materials should be included in the submitted document, following the reference section. Charts, figures, graphs, etc., should also be sent as separate, clearly labeled jpeg or pdf documents, at least 300 dpi resolution.

Submission

Submit electronically in Microsoft Word, including an abstract, and send to the editor at edu_rar@shsu.edu for editorial review. Manuscripts should also include a cover page with the following information: the full manuscript title; the author's full name, title, department, institution or professional affiliation, return mailing address, email address, and telephone number; and the full names of coauthors with their titles, departments, institution or professional affiliations, mailing addresses, and email addresses. Do not include any identifying information in the text pages. All appropriate manuscripts will be submitted to a blind review by three reviewers. Manuscripts may be submitted at any time for review. If accepted, authors will be notified of publication. There is no publication fee.

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Authors are encouraged to submit appropriate book reviews for publication consideration. Please include the following: an objective review of no more than five, double-spaced pages; full name of the book and author(s); and publisher including city, state, date of publication, ISBN number, and cost.

Submit Manuscripts to

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Concurrent Validity of the Independent Reading Level Assessment Framework and a State Assessment

Nicole C. Ralston, Jacqueline M. Waggoner, Beth Tarasawa, and Amy Jackson

Abstract: *This study investigates the use of screening assessments within the increasingly popular Response to Intervention (RTI) framework, specifically seeking to collect concurrent validity evidence on one potential new screening tool, the Independent Reading Level Assessment (IRLA) framework. Furthermore, this study builds on existing literature by disaggregating the validity evidence across grade, program, and race/ethnicity to better understand how the assessment functions amongst varying demographic categories. We add to the limited research base of evidence that the IRLA tool may be an important instrument for bridging the gap between screening and providing intensive, systematic instruction as detailed by the What Works Clearinghouse (Gersten et al., 2008).*

The use of Response to Intervention (RTI) has become increasingly popular in schools since its recommendation by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reauthorization in 2004. RTI is a multitier approach to support students with learning and behavior needs, emphasizing high-quality, scientifically based instruction, and ongoing student assessment (RTI Action Network, n.d.). In the last decade, the use of the framework has proliferated. In 2011, 94% of respondents to the *RTI Adoption Survey* reported their schools were at some stage of RTI implementation, while 68% of respondents were either in process or full implementation districtwide, up from only 24% in 2007 (Castillo & Batsche, 2012; Spectrum-K12, 2010; 2011). However, less is known about how RTI screening tools can serve as an important instrument for providing additional instructional supports.

This study investigates the use of screening assessments within the RTI framework. More specifically, we seek to: (a) collect concurrent validity evidence on one potential new screening tool, the Independent Reading Level Assessment (IRLA; American Reading Company, n.d.) framework that identifies which students need placement in RTI to improve their academic and behavioral skills; and (b) to document one district's journey, under the RTI framework, to find a screening tool that best matched the district's unique needs. We extend the literature further by disaggregating the validity across grade, program, and race/ethnicity to better understand how the assessment functions amongst varying demographic categories.

Background

The use of universal literacy assessment (i.e., screening) has surged in conjunction with the rise in popularity of RTI (Fuchs, Fuchs, & Compton, 2012). "The primary purpose of screening in an RTI framework is to identify those students who without further intervention will be likely to develop reading problems at a later time" (Johnson, Pool, & Carter, 2011, p. 1). Screening tools are generally quick, low-cost, accessible to all students, easy to administer and

score, and can be repeated throughout the year. Screening tools are designed to identify students who are not making expected progress and may need further assessment and/or instruction within the second and third tiers of the multitiered RTI framework to improve their skills.

A variety of instruments are used in the RTI framework to identify which students need additional instruction to improve their academic and behavioral skills (RTI Action Network, n.d.). For example, many districts utilize Curriculum-Based Measurement of oral reading fluency (CBM-R) as their screening tool. CBM-R first emerged in the 1970s in an effort to create measurement procedures that had the potential to efficiently monitor student progress (Deno, 1985). CBM-R requires students to read a passage aloud at their grade or instructional level for one minute. Passages are scored for the number of words read correctly aloud during that one minute, which results in an oral reading fluency number. CBM-R's characteristics as an easy, quick, and inexpensive method encouraged calls for use of the tool for both progress monitoring and screening (Jenkins, Hudson, & Lee, 2007). In response to this growing popularity, many CBM-R products are on the market today including AIMSweb, DIBELS (both DIBELS 6th Edition and DIBELS Next), Edcheckup, Formative Assessment System for Teachers (FAST), and easyCBM.

Over 30 years of research supports the reliability and validity of CBM-R. For example, Reschly, Busch, Betts, Deno, and Long (2009) conducted an extensive meta-analysis examining the correlational evidence between CBM-R and a variety of different standardized measures of reading achievement for students in grades one through six. Across all 289 correlation coefficients, the median coefficient was 0.68 with most coefficients in the 0.60 to 0.70 range, indicating that less than half (approximately 46%) of the variance in reading scores was accounted for by CBM-R scores (Reschly et al., 2009). Correlations with state-specific tests were weaker than with national tests, and the strength of correlations tended to decline as students increased in grade level. Although these overall correlations

were relatively strong, the pattern suggests that CBM-R may not be identifying a wide range of subpopulations of students, such as students at risk and older students. Technical reviews conducted by the Center on Response to Intervention (2014) supported these findings. While evidence of the reliability of CBM-R tools is compelling, less convincing evidence exists for validity (i.e., does this tool really measure reading ability?) and classification accuracy (i.e., are there too many false positives and/or false negatives?). Further, a major limitation of these studies was a lack of data disaggregation by demographic information to ensure the screening tools were accurately measuring students across different subpopulations (Reschly et al., 2009).

These limitations notwithstanding, the What Works Clearinghouse released a practice guide describing five recommendations for implementing RTI for student success (Gersten et al., 2008). The authors indicated there was moderate evidence to implement screening "all students for potential reading problems at the beginning of the year and again in the middle of the year [and to] regularly monitor the progress of students at risk for developing reading disabilities" (Gersten et al., 2008, p. 6). Additionally, there was strong evidence to "provide intensive, systematic instruction on up to three foundational reading skills in small groups to students who score below the benchmark score on universal screening" (Gersten et al., 2008, p. 6). However, these recommendations still leave many district representatives to question how a teacher can provide this intensive and systematic instruction based simply on the information provided through a screening tool.

IRLA Framework and Validity Evidence

In an ever-expanding education assessment market, school districts are increasingly looking for assessment products that offer multiple functions. IRLA is one example of a multipurpose assessment that is a "unified standards-based framework for student assessment, text leveling, and curriculum and instruction" (American Reading Company, n.d., p. 1). First published in 2010, IRLA is now used in over 4,000 schools, impacting over 900,000 students across the United States.

Two unique features set IRLA apart from CBM-R and other assessments. First, IRLA is based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and assesses every standard in literature and informational text, as well as language standards that are necessary for reading success for all grades pre-K through twelfth grade. These features are quite different from CBM-R, which assesses only fluency. Second, the IRLA is both a diagnostic and a formative assessment tool, allowing teachers to track progress in real time. Students receive points on a continuous growth scale in each formative-assessment conference based on the standards they have mastered (i.e., from a reading level of 3.05 to 3.32 to 3.68 to 3.97 across third grade). Teachers assess students one-on-one to find the student's baseline reading level in a 10 to 15 minute individual interview. Although IRLA is more expensive and time consuming than typical CBM-R measures (i.e., DIBELS is free and requires approximately three minutes per student), the

diagnostic information ILRA provides can also guide instructional practices.

Despite IRLA's rapid growth since its inception in 2010, the program was not included on the Center on Response to Intervention's (2014) screening tools chart. Furthermore, little reliability and validity evidence has been collected to date. However, Griswold and Bunch's (2014) preliminary research, commissioned by the creators of IRLA, examined validity evidence of the program by studying approximately 600 K-5 students in one Rochester, MN, school. Content specialists confirmed the content was grade-level appropriate, aligned to the CCSS, and was bias-free (Griswold & Bunch, 2014). Moreover, one expert stated that "the ILRA framework can be used to find a valid and reliable baseline for independent reading levels, PK-12" (Conradi as cited in Griswold & Bunch, 2014, p. 27). Survey results were also collected from teachers, reading specialists, and administrators regarding the use of the assessment tool. Overall, teachers reported IRLA was well-aligned to the CCSS, increased their familiarity with CCSS, and served a diagnostic function to help identify students' learning needs (Griswold & Bunch, 2014). Finally, concurrent validity correlation coefficients between the IRLA and Northwest Evaluation Association's (NWEA) Measurements of Academic Progress® (MAP®) tool were analyzed. IRLA and MAP scores were collected at five time intervals from 2012-2014, and the criterion-related evidence correlations remained consistent: 0.88, 0.88, 0.88, 0.88, and 0.90. The researchers also collected construct validity evidence by demonstrating how student scores increased on the IRLA between test administrations. None of the information was disaggregated by grade level, program (e.g., English Language Learners or Special Education), or race/ethnicity.

This Study

One school district turned to the research-practice partnership to study the concurrent validity evidence on the IRLA with the statewide assessment, the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS), as part of the district's quest for an instrument that ultimately could help raise its students' test scores by using a screening tool matched to the student population's unique needs. The public school district serves almost 11,000 ethnically and linguistically diverse students with nearly 75% qualifying for free/reduced lunch (Oregon Department of Education, 2014). The district was facing increasing concerns about its low performance on the OAKS, particularly for English Language Learners, a rapidly increasing student subpopulation. Coupled with criticism surrounding the district's oral reading fluency (CBM-R) screener and its validity and classification accuracy, the district began researching alternative screening instruments that could also be used regularly by teachers and school specialists for progress monitoring. This approach would provide evidence about whether students were moving toward meeting state benchmarks, as well as offering diagnostic and formative assessment data to guide instruction. The district selected IRLA as an all-in-one instrument: a screener, a diagnostic

assessment, and a progress monitoring tool—providing rich information about student reading ability and reading levels while using the CCSS architecture as a base. However, the district also wanted additional evidence documenting its reliability and validity.

The district was interested in using the IRLA only if it were predictive of students' performance on the OAKS. More specifically, the district hoped the IRLA would have higher correlations with the state assessment than its previous screener, CBM-R. If the calculated correlation coefficient between the IRLA and the OAKS were moderate or strong, then the IRLA could be considered predictive of OAKS, especially its performance by grade level, program (e.g., ELL, Special Education), and race/ethnicity to better examine for whom the concurrent validity coefficients were highest. These data would add evidence to the validity of the IRLA, as both tools measure reading comprehension.

Methods

Our data analyses examined the relationship between the reading scores of two different concurrently administered reading assessments, the IRLA and the OAKS, with students in grades three through five in one school district. Both the IRLA reading level score and the OAKS standard score are standardized, interval-level variables; therefore, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationship between the IRLA and OAKS. Percent exact agreement was also used to measure the categorization accuracy of students being categorized as either meeting benchmark or not meeting benchmark by the two assessments. This was calculated by dividing the number of matches by the total number of opportunities to match. The data were further disaggregated to examine the relationships among the different demographic groups. The practical significance of the relationships was examined through R^2 effect sizes.

Participants

Participants included 2,303 students attending 11 elementary schools in one school district in the Pacific Northwest: 803 third-grade students (35%), 720 fourth-grade students (31%), and 780 fifth-grade students (34%). Thirty-seven students were excluded from the sample because they did not complete the OAKS, and instead they completed the alternative state assessment (36 of the 37 students were receiving special education services). Table 1 provides additional participant demographics, including gender and race/ethnicity information.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Demographic Variable	Third Grade	Fourth Grade	Fifth Grade	Overall
Gender				
Male	52%	50%	53%	52%
Female	48%	50%	47%	48%
Program				
Receiving Talented and Gifted (TAG) Services	9%	6%	9%	8%
Receiving Special Education Services	13%	12%	16%	14%
Being Monitored for ELL Services (exited)	13%	13%	20%	15%
Receiving ELL Services	39%	31%	26%	32%
Race/Ethnicity				
American Indian/Alaskan Native	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Asian	6%	8%	7%	7%
Black/African American	9%	9%	8%	9%
Latino/Hispanic	45%	42%	45%	44%
Multi-Racial	6%	5%	6%	6%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	3%	3%	3%	3%
White	31%	34%	31%	32%

IRLA. IRLA provides an interval-level score on a growth scale continuum. The IRLA mean scores and IRLA percent at each performance level are displayed in Table 2. Students are also assigned a risk category based on their score. Students who are "on grade level" or "benchmark" are "low risk" and read within their grade level (i.e., a third-grade student has a score of 3.00 and above), while a student with "some risk" reads up to one year below grade level (i.e., a third-grade student has a score of 2.00-2.99), and a student "at risk" reads one or more years below grade level (i.e., a third-grade student has a score of 1.99 or less). The percent of students in each category in each grade is also reported in Table 2.

OAKS. The Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS; Oregon Department of Education, 2010) is the standardized test for students in grades three through five aligned to the 2002 State English Language Arts content standards. A lengthy technical manual details reliability and validity evidence, including high concurrent validity scores with the California Achievement Test ($r = 0.75 - 0.80$), the Iowa Test of Basic Skills® ($r = 0.78 - 0.84$), the NWEA Subject Tests ($r = 0.73 - 0.81$), and the Lexile Scale® for reading ($r = 0.76 - 0.77$). Although the CCSS were adopted in the state in October of 2010, full implementation of CCSS occurred in the 2014-15 school year, at which point Smarter Balanced was to be used as the statewide assessment. During this 2013-14 school year, the district was in the process of converting to CCSS while still assessing the state content standards via the OAKS. An analysis of a state-conducted crosswalk of state standards and CCSS showed that, for the most part, the two sets of standards were fairly well aligned (Oregon Department of Education, 2013a, 2013b). The standards were partially or strongly aligned for 72% of the third-grade English Language Arts Standards and for 82% of the third-grade Mathematics Standards, for example. Smarter Balanced, which is aligned to CCSS, replaced OAKS for the 2014-2015 school year. The OAKS cut score for meeting benchmark increased five points each year: from 211 in third grade to 216 in fourth grade to 221 in fifth grade. The percent of students in each category in each grade is also reported in Table 3.

Results

The overall correlation between OAKS and IRLA data for all students was 0.766 ($p < .001$), indicating that approximately 59% of the variance in OAKS scores is accounted for by the IRLA scores. Overall, IRLA appeared to be a strong predictor of OAKS. Across all students, 80%

Table 2

IRLA Performance Results

Grade	*n*	IRLA Mean Score	IRLA Percent At Risk	IRLA Percent Some Risk	IRLA Percent Low Risk
Third Grade	803	2.78 (*SD* = 1.13)	18%	32%	50%
Fourth Grade	720	3.48 (*SD* = 1.24)	34%	23%	43%
Fifth Grade	780	3.98 (*SD* = 1.59)	45%	22%	32%
Overall	2,303	3.41 (*SD* = 1.42)	32%	26%	42%

Table 3

OAKS Performance Results

Grade	*n*	OAKS Mean Score	OAKS Not Meeting Benchmark	OAKS Meeting Benchmark
Third Grade	803	208.34 (*SD* = 11.73)	56%	44%
Fourth Grade	720	215.27 (*SD* = 10.68)	50%	50%
Fifth Grade	780	219.15 (*SD* = 10.28)	54%	46%
Overall	2,303	214.17 (*SD* = 11.83)	53%	47%

of students were categorized as either meeting benchmark or not similarly on IRLA and on OAKS (see Table 4).

Concurrent Validity by Grade

Because one of the variables (IRLA) uses a continuous score across the grades, while the other variable (OAKS) uses a benchmark score that grows slightly but is fairly consistent across the three grades, it is important to investigate the correlation coefficients by grade. Table 4 shows the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients, the associated R^2 effect sizes, and the classification accuracy of students' meeting/not meeting benchmarks as measured by percent exact agreement for each of the three grades. The effect sizes of the correlations are all large as defined by Cohen (1988). It appears that the correlation is highest for fourth-grade students, yet the prediction matching of benchmarks is the highest for third-grade students.

Concurrent Validity by Program

Table 5 shows the concurrent validity data by program. The effect sizes of the correlations are all large, except for ELL students who have exited and are being monitored, which is a moderate effect size (Cohen,

1988). As mentioned previously, the values for students receiving special education services may be overinflated because of the removal of 10% of the special education students. While the percent exact agreement for Talented and Gifted (TAG) students is high, the correlation is low. Conversely, it appears that both the correlation coefficients and the percent exact agreement are lower for ELL students, both those actively receiving services and those being monitored; however, these scores are lowest for monitored ELL students.

Concurrent Validity by Race/Ethnicity

Table 6 shows the concurrent validity data by race/ethnicity. The effect sizes of the correlations are all large (Cohen, 1988). American Indian/Alaskan Native students were not included in this analysis because the total number of students was fewer than 10, and the correlation for Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students must be interpreted cautiously as well due to the small sample size. Multiracial students had the highest correlation coefficient, while White students had the largest percentage exact agreement. Both the correlation coefficient and the percent exact agreement were smallest for Asian students.

Table 4

Concurrent Validity of IRLA and OAKS by Grade

Grade	n	r	R^2	Percent Exact Agreement
Third Grade	803	0.713*	51%	83%
Fourth Grade	720	0.775*	60%	79%
Fifth Grade	780	0.751*	56%	77%
Overall	2,303	0.766*	59%	80%

*p < .001

Table 5

Concurrent Validity of IRLA and OAKS by Program

Program	n	r	R^2	Percent Exact Agreement
TAG	178	0.534*	29%	91%
Special Education	324	0.789*	62%	90%
ELL Monitored (exited)	350	0.477*	23%	71%
ELL Active	736	0.644*	41%	86%

*p < .001

Table 6

Concurrent Validity of IRLA and OAKS by Race/Ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	n	r	R2	Percent Exact Agreement
Asian	157	0.684*	47%	73%
Black/African American	197	0.771*	59%	77%
Latino/Hispanic	1,011	0.751*	56%	81%
Multi-Racial	127	0.778*	61%	74%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	62	0.697*	49%	87%
White	741	0.753*	57%	80%

*p < .001

Discussion

This study examines the concurrent validity of the IRLA reading assessment with the OAKS state standardized reading test, disaggregating the data by grade level, program, and race/ethnicity to better examine for whom the concurrent validity coefficients are highest. We add to the limited research base of evidence that the IRLA tool may be an important instrument for bridging the gap between screening and providing intensive, systematic instruction as detailed by the What Works Clearinghouse (Gersten et al., 2008), especially for ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged student subpopulations.

Our results parallel those conducted by Measurement Incorporated (Griswold & Bunch, 2014), although we found slightly lower correlations between IRLA and standardized reading tests. Our study was conducted with a greater number of schools (i.e., 11 schools vs. 1 school) and likely across a more diverse population. One potential reason the correlations between MAP and IRLA (Griswold & Bunch, 2014) may have been higher than the correlations described in this study is that the OAKS assessment is summative where both MAP and IRLA assessments are designed to measure growth. The OAKS also has a small range of possible scores, which may cause a range limitation. Additionally, the results could be underestimated due to the misalignment of standards between OAKS and IRLA. Future studies between IRLA and Smarter Balanced and/or other CCSS-aligned measures may produce higher coefficients.

Additionally, the correlation coefficients reported here are higher than the median coefficient of 0.68 reported in the meta-analysis conducted by Reschly and colleagues (2009) on CBM-R. While approximately 49% of the variance in reading scores was accounted for by CBM-R, 59% of the variance in state standardized reading score was accounted for by IRLA. Furthermore, this study is the first attempt to disaggregate the validity evidence across grade, program, and race/ethnicity to better understand how the assessment functions across varying demographic categories. This strategy is severely lacking in the literature on CBM-R as well as with IRLA. It is imperative that accurate assessment tools, validated for all grades, programs, races/ethnicities, and other student subgroups, be utilized to best reach students of various demographics. While RTI creates a framework for closing the achievement gap, tools like IRLA provide methods of making decisions based on individual student data on what types of high-quality, evidence-based instruction is necessary.

Limitations and Future Research

There are several limitations with this dataset. First, as discussed previously, 10% of students receiving special education services (i.e., 36 of the 360 total students) were removed from this analysis because they completed an alternative state assessment instead of the OAKS. Therefore, all information regarding students receiving special education services should be interpreted cautiously. Second, these data are from only one district in one area of Oregon. Future research should investigate the validity evidence of IRLA in wider, more diverse populations. Third, this school district was in its first year of implementation of IRLA. IRLA is quite different from CBM-R, which the district was using previously. Program fidelity is a concern as teachers learned to use a new assessment tool that required some adaptation and a learning curve. Future research should investigate not only teacher implementation over time and how implementation affects use of the tool and student growth, but also the relationship between the new Smarter Balanced assessment, CBM-R, and IRLA.

Implications for Practice

Overall, the IRLA appeared to predict state standardized reading scores well, and this prediction appeared to remain consistent when disaggregating across subgroups. These results have initial implications for practice, both

for the participating district and other districts. Although assessments that use curriculum-based measures have many benefits, including lower cost, efficiency, etc., there are other assessment options available for districts, particularly for those districts with an ethnically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged student population. In this one particular district, interviews with district personnel revealed that they were exceptionally pleased with the first year's results of the IRLA. For example, one district administrator said, "Our teachers are becoming expert teachers of reading—many stating that they have never so deeply understood their students' abilities and needs."

Further, preliminary indicators from the second year of implementation indicate higher IRLA scores than the previous year at the same time in the school year. Thus, district personnel are hopeful that these results will also be reflected on the state standardized tests. More research is necessary to ensure this pattern holds. Finally, district leadership believes IRLA provides teachers and principals with formative assessment data that can be immediately used and tracked to make instructional and leadership decisions, unlike CBM-R could do previously. Ongoing data collection will be interesting to study, both as teachers gain familiarity with using the tool (i.e., their use of interim scores increases) and as the district moves from measuring student progress with OAKS to using the Smarter Balanced assessment.

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Transition Supports for At-Risk Students: A Case Example

Rohanna Buchanan, Traci Ruppert, and Tom Cariveau

Abstract: *Middle school students with emotional and behavioral disorders are at risk for myriad negative outcomes. Transitioning between schools may increase risk for students being reintegrated into their neighborhood school. The current study seeks to inform supports for students and their families during these transitions. Students With Involved Families and Teachers (SWIFT) is an initiative being conducted in a small urban area in the Pacific Northwest, USA. Parent, student, and school-based supports were provided across a yearlong transition for students receiving special education services in a behavioral day-treatment program. A case example is used to describe the essential features of SWIFT, illustrate the experience of a student and his family, and outline lessons learned for successful home-school collaboration.*

Students with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) often struggle in school and addressing their needs can exert considerable strain on school districts and social services. For example, students with EBD tend to earn lower scores on achievement tests than their typical peers and peers with other disabilities, a negative trend that widens as students age (Wagner et al., 2006). In addition, students with EBD often have lower rates of participation in classroom activities, and teachers can have lower behavioral and academic expectations for these students (Bradley, Doolittle, & Bartolotta, 2008).

Many students with EBD are removed from mainstream educational settings and placed in treatment settings, such as self-contained classrooms, day-treatment schools, or residential placements (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Further, data show that when reintegrating students with EBD into less restrictive environments (e.g., their neighborhood school), the intensive services provided in more restrictive settings are not sustainable and the intensity of support abruptly decreases (Wagner et al., 2006). As a result, students with EBD who experience success in highly structured, well supervised, and encouraging settings can be at risk when they transition to schools without similar systems in place (Wagner et al., 2006). Targeted support for students with EBD is necessary to promote their successful transition to less restrictive environments. Coordinated interventions targeting emotional and behavioral skills and family involvement have the potential to maintain students in least restrictive settings and increase high school graduation rates.

The SWIFT Intervention

Students With Involved Families and Teachers (SWIFT) is grounded in social learning theory, a theory suggesting that children and adolescents learn from their social environments. According to social learning theory, students who demonstrate behavior problems often have significant skill deficits and their problem behaviors may inadvertently be reinforced such that they lack a sufficient range of alternative behavioral responses to use even if they are motivated to do so (Chamberlain, 2003).

SWIFT staff actively collaborate with the parent(s), student, and school team members (teachers, school psychologists, administrators, etc.) on goal setting and intervention designed to ensure a good contextual fit for all settings. We have found that such collaboration promotes consistency of supports across settings and increases adherence to the intervention plan. In addition, prior studies have shown that parents must be engaged as a part of the student's intervention team to make sure that positive changes last (e.g., Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry, & Childs, 2004; Minke & Anderson, 2005). SWIFT includes four integrated components adapted from Multidisciplinary Treatment Foster Care (MTFC; Chamberlain, 2003): (a) weekly behavioral progress monitoring data from parents and teachers, (b) program supervision to facilitate communication and coordination, (c) parent coaching, and (d) skills coaching for the student.

Behavioral Progress Monitoring

The Parent Daily Report (PDR) and the Teacher Daily Report (TDR) are used for behavioral progress monitoring. The PDR includes 37 problem and 17 prosocial items and the TDR includes 42 problem and 21 prosocial items. An assessor calls the parent or teacher once a week and asks whether the student engaged in any of the prosocial behaviors on the list or any of the problem behaviors and, if so, if it was stressful. This call takes approximately 3–5 min. Parents and teachers also have the option of entering the data directly into a secure web-based database. The PDR and TDR data are graphed over time and used to identify problem behaviors to target in weekly interventions, to identify the prosocial behaviors students exhibit, and to monitor progress over time throughout the intervention.

Program Supervision

The program supervisor (PS) is the primary contact between the SWIFT team and the school teams. Contact from the PS includes providing updates about relevant family information, problem solving the myriad problems that arise during the transition, and helping translate the supports provided at the day-treatment school to the

neighborhood school. The PS is also responsible for coordinating and supervising the student skills and the parent coaches. During a weekly clinical supervision meeting, the PS provides the team with an update on the student's progress and support needs from the perspective of the school team. Then the PS reviews weekly PDR and TDR data to identify behaviors to target in weekly sessions and to evaluate whether such interventions were successful. Next, the student skills and parent coaches give an update about the skills addressed with the parent and the student. Planning for the content of the next week's sessions incorporates the PDR and TDR data; the needs and/or barriers faced by the student, family, and school; and the skills and strengths of the student, family, and school.

Parent coach (PC). The PC focuses on supporting the parents in their communications with the school and on coordinating routines at home. SWIFT PCs help parents practice communicating with the school team, prepare parents for school meetings, and help parents set up charts and other encouragement systems at home. The PC meets with the family once a week at home, at the school, or at a location requested by the parent. The PC is also available for support between meetings by phone, email, text, or in person as needed.

Skills coach (SC). The SC is typically a young adult (i.e., graduate student) who coaches and models appropriate behavior at school and in the community. SCs focus on helping the student develop prosocial skills and reinforce the use of these positive skills with the student's peers and adults. The SC meets with the student once a week at school or in the community.

Case Example

Tyler, a 12-year-old Caucasian male, entered the SWIFT program in the spring of sixth grade. He lived with his parents and sister in an urban county in the Pacific Northwest, USA. Tyler was receiving special education services for emotional disturbance and a learning disability at a local behavioral day-treatment school. He was identified for SWIFT because he had successfully progressed through the school's level system and had reliably self-monitored his behavior. These criteria triggered the transition back to his neighborhood school. Each week Tyler met one-on-one with the SC. On average, these sessions lasted 45 min. Parent sessions were conducted weekly with his mother for 1 hr. In addition to the SWIFT team, Tyler's transition support team included Tyler's day-treatment school transition classroom teacher, classroom teachers at both schools, and the school psychologist at the neighborhood school. The SWIFT intervention occurred in three phases: (a) engagement, (b) skill development and practice, and (c) maintenance.

Phase 1: Engagement

Engagement is the first phase of the SWIFT program and includes rapport building, goal identification, and exploring methods to assist the family during the transition. This information is used to inform interventions in

Phase 2. The engagement phase lasts for approximately four weeks.

Program supervision. Prior to the PC and SC sessions, the PS met with Tyler's mother to introduce the SWIFT program and to orient her to the staff roles and the supports available to the family and school. During Phase 1 the PS met with Tyler's day-treatment school transition classroom teacher and the school psychologist at the neighborhood school to introduce the SWIFT program and to gather information from their perspectives on Tyler's strengths as well as his skill and support needs for the upcoming transition. They identified that Tyler was highly motivated to return to his neighborhood school and would benefit from skills that would allow him to follow directions without arguing, to be patient with the transition process, and to complete homework consistently. During the clinical supervision meetings, the SWIFT team identified initial intervention targets based on information gathered across settings. After the clinical meetings, the PS updated the teacher and school psychologist on the initial intervention targets for skills coaching.

Parent coach. During Phase 1, the PC met with Tyler's mother in their home. The goal of initial PC meetings was to build rapport and gather information on the strengths and needs of the family. Sessions focused on: (a) outlining his mother's goals for the transition, (b) identifying Tyler's strengths and his mother's strengths, (c) establishing and following homework routines, and (d) identifying anything else that she would like help with at home. His mother identified that goals for Tyler's transition were for him to have clean and sober friends at the new school and for him to complete his homework. She identified that Tyler was social, compassionate, and open to trying new things and that she was patient, engaged in his education, and consistent with consequences. Tyler did not have a consistent homework routine and his mother asked for help structuring such a routine. His mother identified that she also wanted assistance to increase his help with chores and improve his behavior at home by addressing his arguing, attitude, tone of voice, and use of cuss words.

Skills coach. Tyler met with the SC at the day-treatment school during Phase 1. Skills coaching sessions were coordinated with teachers to avoid disrupting instructional time. The goal of initial sessions was to identify areas of strength and ways to incorporate Tyler into school activities. Session activities included playing games (e.g., football, basketball), talking about Tyler's interests and self-identified strengths, and a snack. Tyler's interests were playing sports, skateboarding, rollerskating, and ways to make money by helping out in his neighborhood (e.g., collecting cans, helping with yard work). Although Tyler struggled to identify his own strengths, the SC observed that he was a positive leader in the classroom, a hard worker, and very personable.

School meetings. A transition planning meeting was held during Phase 1. Prior to the meeting, planning was completed with the school team, with Tyler's mother, and with Tyler. As mentioned, the PS met individually with the day-treatment transition teacher and the school psychologist at the neighborhood school to discuss their

concerns for his transition. Their main concerns centered on Tyler's history of significant disruptive behavior and the neighborhood school's ability to provide a safe educational environment for him and his fellow students. The PC and Tyler's mother prepared for the meeting by outlining Tyler's strengths for the transition, reviewing her concerns about the transition, and identifying supports that she wanted at the neighborhood school to make the transition as successful as possible. Tyler's mother had a long history of challenging school/IEP meetings for both Tyler and his older brother. She reported that she felt as though the school staff talked down to her in meetings. She also shared that she was concerned that the transition planning meeting had taken a long time to schedule and was worried that the neighborhood school was delaying his transition because the staff did not want him there. The SC and Tyler prepared for the meeting by identifying his strengths and practicing by talking about his needs for the transition. Tyler reported that he felt ready to be at the neighborhood school full time.

The transition planning meeting was led by the transition teacher at the day-treatment school. Tyler, his mother, the SWIFT staff (PS, PC, and SC), and the school psychologist from the neighborhood school attended the meeting. After introductions at the start of the meeting, the PS briefly explained the SWIFT program and supports available for Tyler's transition. The school psychologist expressed enthusiasm for him to return and also raised concerns about Tyler's past behavior. Once the team agreed that the neighborhood school had sufficient supports in place to meet Tyler's academic and behavioral needs, they outlined a gradual transition plan. The plan started with a visit to the neighborhood school to meet teachers and tour the school. Once he had visited the school, the plan incorporated a slow integration into the school involving his attending the neighborhood school during the first two periods of the day and adding additional periods once he reported feeling confident and had demonstrated success as measured by consistently earning 80% of points on his daily point card. After the meeting, Tyler's mother indicated that preparing for the meeting helped her advocate for her son and helped her stay calm during difficult moments.

Phase 2: Skill Development and Practice

SWIFT participants spend the majority of Phase 2 time in student and parent skill development and practice. Phase 2 lasts for 6–9 months depending on the needs of the student and often includes support and engagement during the summer months.

Program supervision. During Phase 2, the SWIFT PS had regular email and phone contact with both the day-treatment and neighborhood school teams to keep all transition team members up-to-date and informed about Tyler's transition progress. Communication included updates on Tyler's progress with skills coaching interventions, helping the school team problem solve issues at school, and relaying pertinent information from home or school to all participants. In addition, the PS encouraged teachers and the school psychologist to contact Tyler's mother regularly with positive reports as well as any concerns. As Tyler progressed through his transition and added classes at the neighborhood school, the PS and school psychologist collaborated to help new teachers implement his support plan. The weekly supervision meeting was essential to ensure that the needs identified by teachers at both schools were integrated into weekly skills practice and that the parent was included in school-related decision making, especially when Tyler's behavioral data showed that he was ready to increase time at the neighborhood school.

Parent coach. During Phase 2, the PC and Tyler's mother problem solved parenting strategies to improve his behavior at home. His mother was open to suggestions while being clear about what would and would not work in her home. As the family progressed through Phase 2, the PC and Tyler's mother worked together to set up a chore chart, structure evening and homework routines, and design an incentive to reduce the frequency of Tyler's arguing and swearing. For example, Tyler's mother asked for help setting up an evening routine checklist to help Tyler remember to have his parents sign his daily school card, complete his daily chore, and follow his homework routine. When he completed the tasks on the checklist, he could choose a privilege from his choice list (i.e., play outside, friend time, TV time, earn money). The PC and Tyler's mother also problem solved strategies to facilitate regular contact with his teachers about his assignments and behavior at school. After a few months of participating in SWIFT, Tyler's mother reported that she felt more organized at home and that she had a system for emailing his teachers each week for a list of late assignments and assignments he needed to complete for the following week.

Skills coach. Skills coaching in Phase 2 included direct skill building related to the goals identified by Tyler, his parents, and teachers: reduce arguing and swearing, increase patience, and build study skills. To ensure contextual fit for all interventions, the content of skills coaching with Tyler was coordinated with parents and teachers. Sessions regularly included Tyler and the SC role-playing positive alternative responses to replace problem behaviors (e.g., complying with a request or asking for additional time to replace arguing). Later SC sessions included reinforcement (praise and contingent tangibles) for teacher reports about his use of positive alternative responses, additional practice, and problem solving for situations that were difficult. Since Tyler was an athletic student, his SC embedded skills practice within a game of basketball or "catch" to keep Tyler engaged.

School meetings. A school meeting took place at the neighborhood school the week before Tyler started attending morning classes in the resource room. The purpose of the meeting was for Tyler's mother to meet his resource room teacher, to introduce the SWIFT team and describe available supports, and to work with his resource room teacher to translate the accommodations and supports he was receiving at the day-treatment school to her classroom. Prior to the meeting, the PC helped Tyler's mother outline questions and suggestions she had for the teacher. Tyler's mother and the SWIFT team attended the meeting. Tyler

did not attend because he had met the teacher during an earlier visit to the school.

When Tyler became a full-time student at the neighborhood school, the day-treatment school held a graduation for him. His graduation was attended by his mother, the teachers, students at the day-treatment school, and the SWIFT team. The comments from teachers and students reflected how well-liked and respected Tyler was at the school.

Phase 3: Maintenance

The third and final phase of SWIFT occurs once the student has fully transitioned to the neighborhood school. This phase lasts approximately eight weeks during which the SWIFT team fades supports. For Tyler, Phase 3 included the last few weeks of the summer break and lasted until his IEP meeting midway through the fall trimester.

Program supervision. The PS and school psychologist strategized the best way to fade SWIFT supports as Tyler maintained stability and engagement at the neighborhood school. During the weekly clinical supervision meeting, the PS encouraged the PC and SC to increasingly remind Tyler and his mother of their skills for maintaining stability at the neighborhood school during their weekly sessions.

Parent coach. During Phase 3, the PC provided positive feedback to Tyler's mother for her consistent communication with the school and problem solved strategies to maintain routines and her use of new parenting skills without SWIFT. For example, the SWIFT program had been helping to fund and deliver the incentive Tyler earned for using alternative responses to arguing and swearing. The PC and Tyler's mother developed a plan to maintain an incentive once the program ended.

Skills coach. The maintenance phase for Tyler focused on providing reinforcement for appropriate behavior at home and school. SC sessions continued to take place at the school and involved playing a game that he liked and providing incentives and positive feedback for the positive things that parents and the school team reported about his behavior in home and school settings. In final sessions they outlined goals for his future. Tyler identified that he wanted to become an electrician and was motivated to stay in school to be eligible for a job training program.

School meetings. Tyler's IEP meeting was held at the neighborhood middle school after his transition was complete. He was in the seventh grade. Prior to the meeting, the PS met with the school psychologist and resource teacher to discuss his progress and ongoing support needs. The PC and Tyler's mother met to outline his strengths and her concerns to share at the meeting. For example, his mother wanted to ask for a daily planner check to help track his assignments and for him to have a regular check-in/check-out routine. The SC and Tyler made a list of his school and career goals so that he could share them at the meeting.

The IEP meeting was led by the school psychologist and was attended by Tyler, his mother, SWIFT staff, and the special and general education teachers for each subject. Tyler shared his goals with the team at the start of the meeting and

impressed his teachers with his confidence and articulation. His teachers agreed that Tyler was doing very well at the middle school both behaviorally and academically and the team updated his IEP to include additional mainstream classes with ongoing support in math and language arts. The school team agreed to his mother's request for the daily planner check and check-in/check-out routines. Finally, the team reviewed his behavioral data for the year and determined that he had met his behavior goal objectives and the behavior goal was removed from his IEP. His mother later reported that she was proud that Tyler was able to overcome his past reputation and experiences with the teachers and students.

SWIFT graduation. The timing for Tyler's graduation from SWIFT was based on his successful transition to the neighborhood school and the consistency of communication systems in place between school and home. Tyler's graduation from SWIFT was attended by his family, the SWIFT team, and teachers from both schools. The graduation served to highlight the progress Tyler had made over the past year and the skills he and his family used that resulted in his successful transition to the neighborhood school.

Student and Family Outcomes

Tyler's behavior was measured using the PDR and TDR. Figure 1 shows a graph of the total number of problem and prosocial behaviors at home and at school during each phase. Data were collected once per week. During Phase 1, the total number of problem behaviors were similar at home (average = 7, range = 3 – 11) and at school (average = 9, range = 5 – 16). Tyler's prosocial behaviors were fairly high at home (average = 13, range = 10 – 16) and at school (average = 17, range = 11 – 21). In Phase 2, Tyler's behavior at school became more consistent and his problem behaviors decreased over time (average = 4, range = 0 – 14) while his prosocial behaviors increased (average = 20, range = 17 – 21). At home, Tyler's problem behavior decreased during the school months with a slight increase during the summer months (average = 4, range = 0 – 7). The increase in problem behavior over the summer months was mirrored by his prosocial behavior at home also decreasing slightly during that time (average = 12, range = 4 – 17). Tyler's mother suggested that the difference in his behavior during the summer might have been related to less structure over the summer break. In Phase 3, Tyler's problem behavior decreased at the end of the summer break and stayed low at home (average = 2, range = 0 – 4) and at school (average = 4, range = 2 – 5) until he graduated from SWIFT. His prosocial behavior remained high at both home (average = 13, range = 10 – 15) and school (average = 16, range = 15 – 18). The graphed PDR and TDR data (Figure 1) show that, overall, Tyler's behavior was appropriate at home and at school.

In addition to the PDR and TDR data, Tyler's mother was given a client satisfaction questionnaire (CSQ) once every 3 months. The CSQ includes eight items, such as "How would you rate the quality of the service you received?" and "To what extent has our program met your needs?" Items are
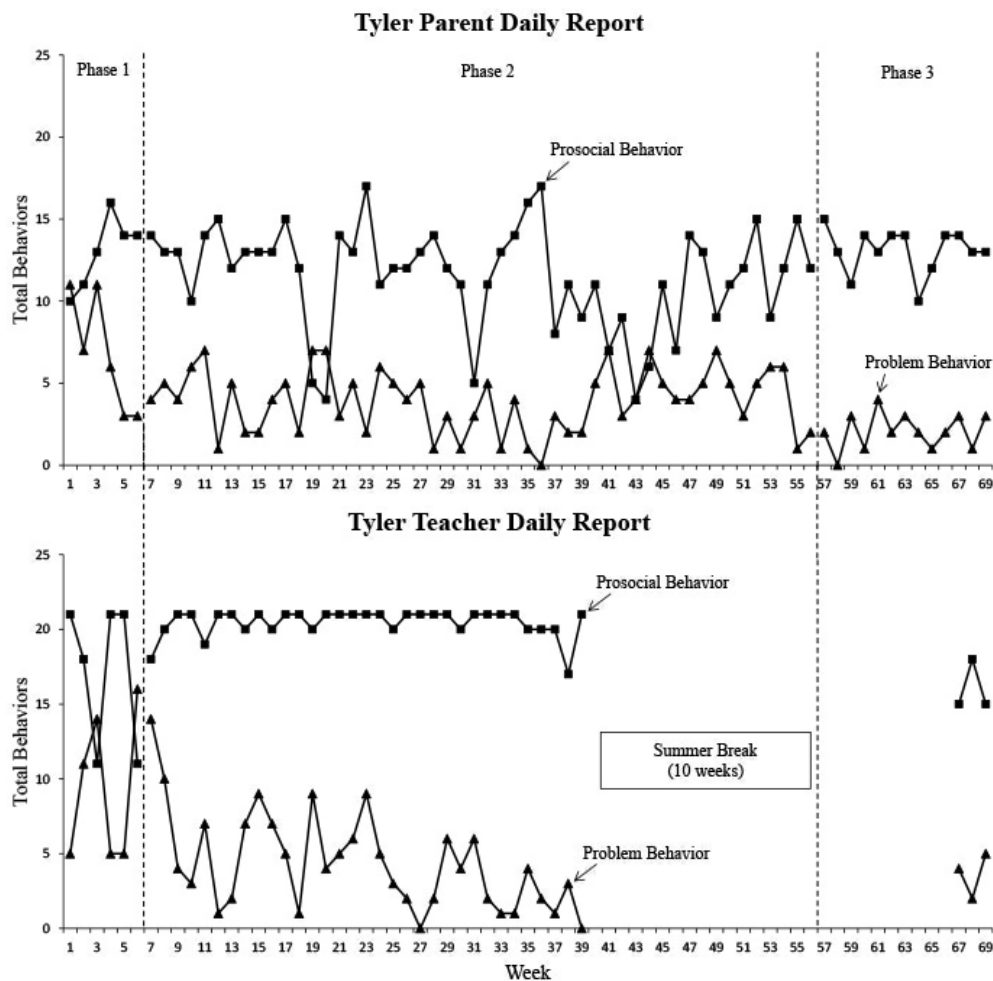
Figure 1. Tyler's parent and teacher daily report graphs.

rated on a 1–4 Likert-type scale, resulting in a possible total score between 8–32. The average rating by Tyler's mother across three CSQs of 31.67 (*SD* = 0.58, range = 31.00 – 32.00) represents a consistently very high satisfaction score.

The PC and SC documented each contact with the family or the school staff. Table 1 presents a summary of the number, length, and type of contacts for Tyler and his mother by the PC and SC. The majority of the weekly sessions with Tyler and his mother were 30 min or longer. Tyler's contacts were typically one-on-one sessions, while contacts with his mother included one-on-one phone and text message.

To ensure social validity, qualitative interviews were conducted with parents and teachers to solicit feedback on the effectiveness of the intervention and how the SWIFT team could refine the supports to better meet their needs and the needs of students, families, and school teams. Qualitative data show that Tyler's mother thought that the PC was valuable for problem solving during weekly check-ins and that the PC made useful suggestions that were not "teachy" in nature. She shared that Tyler benefitted from one-on-one sessions with the SC and that she appreciated that the skills she identified were practiced during their time together. Qualitative data for teachers showed that they liked that Tyler had a team to attend meetings who knew him and his family. They also identified that Tyler and his mother benefitted from having individual supports customized to specific needs.

Table 1

SWIFT Parent Coach and Skills Coach Contact Data

	Parent Coach	Skills Coach
Number of contacts	65	44
Session length (range)	5 min–1 hr 50 min	1 min–1 hr 45 min
% of sessions 30+ min	58.5%	88.6%
Person Contacted		
Parent	100.0%	4.5%
Student	16.9%	100.0%
Teacher	7.7%	.0%
Type of Contact		
In-person 1:1	49.2%	86.4%
School meeting	7.7%	4.5%
Phone	13.8%	2.3%
Text message	26.2%	2.3%
Email	0.0%	0.0%

Conclusion

The SWIFT intervention emphasizes collaboration between home and school. A body of literature cites parent and educator collaboration as a best practice for serving students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (e.g., Epstein, Coates, Salinas, Sanders, & Simon, 1997; Sailor, Dunlap, Horner, & Sugai, 2009; Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007). This paper is intended to provide an illustration of how to facilitate such collaboration based on three main lessons learned during an intervention trial.

First, we found that the key to successful collaboration between home and school is proactive communication. Such communication should occur not only between the parent and school, but also between the two school placements during the transition. Communication should be supported and encouraged between the parents and school teams from both placements to help with consistency across environments for academic and behavioral needs. Tyler's mother had a positive relationship with the day-treatment school team, but was apprehensive about communicating with the team at the neighborhood school even though she knew communication was critical for his success there. For Tyler, school meetings with all team members in attendance paired with proactive communication between the schools and home helped his team consistently provide the supports he needed to successfully transition to the neighborhood school.

Second, we learned that it is critical to take the time to build and cultivate relationships with everyone on the student's team. Building relationships includes understanding the existing relationships between school staff, learning the systems through which the student is served, and explaining the ways by which the student and school benefit from the supports offered. Our experience shows cultivating relationships to involve key stakeholders is critical to bring about the discussion of the student's needs and strengths *early on* and to increase the likelihood of a smooth transition. When key people were involved early, the family and student were able to access more local and state services and supports. When school staff turnover occurred, the SWIFT team capitalized on existing relationships to cultivate relationships with new staff. For example, SWIFT team members relied on the school psychologist to provide introductions to new teachers and navigate potentially tricky personnel dynamics at the school.

Finally, we learned that, even though team members might have different ideas about how to support the student, it is important to remember that we are on the same team. Conflicts can arise among team members with differing opinions about what is best for a student. To avoid or ameliorate conflict among Tyler's team members, it was helpful to use the student's strengths and quality of life as a guide for supporting the student's needs. The first school meeting for Tyler had the potential for conflict between the family and the school staff due to concerns regarding the severity of Tyler's prior behavior and his mother's frustration with what she perceived as the district's delaying his return. To proactively diffuse anticipated conflict,

SWIFT staff emphasized that the goal was to meet Tyler's educational needs in the safest and most appropriate setting. This approach helped Tyler's mother report that reminders that the school team had his best interests in mind helped her focus on problem solving to meet his needs, rather than thinking that the school staff did not want him to attend his neighborhood school.

Although students moving from more restrictive to less restrictive environments can be at risk during such transitions, Tyler's case illustrates how a system of communication and supports can increase the likelihood of success in the new setting. The lessons learned about proactive communication, relationship building, and team collaboration outlined in this paper show how school practitioners can help facilitate the smooth integration of students transitioning into new environments. Tyler's case represents an example of a student transition that, despite a few bumps along the way, resulted in a very successful placement in a less restrictive environment.

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Authors

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Preparing Teachers for a Mission: Six Lessons Shared With the Military

Kathleen L. Vespia, Barbara E. McGann, and Thomas J. Gibbons

Abstract: *Vast research and personal testimonies provide strong evidence that a highly effective teacher plays a critical role in the successes of their students, particularly those at risk of underachievement. That same evidence is now being demanded of teacher preparation programs. By comparison, military preparation programs have long been outcome-based and scrutinized for their ability to prepare military professionals for readiness in the field or their failure to do so. In this paper, authors with extensive backgrounds in teaching and/or military preparation examined their respective strategies of preparing students for professional missions. They identify and discuss six lessons shared by both teaching preparation programs and military preparation programs, which based on their experience and extensive relevant research, have contributed to the effectiveness of education and military professionals in the field. In their conclusion, the authors discuss the critical importance of developing a Battlemind, defined as an empowering mindset for promoting professional sustainability and success in achieving specific, meaningful outcomes in the field.*

A widely held belief, gleaned from personal testimonies and research, is that a highly effective teacher plays a critical role in the successes of students, particularly those at risk of underachievement (National Dropout Prevention Center/Network, n.d.). That same evidence is now being demanded of teacher preparation programs. Leaders of teacher education, or more specifically preparation programs, are examining the strength of their programs and seeking to modify them to meet current and future standards of excellence and accountability. By comparison, military preparation programs have long been outcome-based and scrutinized for their ability to or failure to prepare military professionals for readiness in the field. The stakes for military programs and their graduates to achieve excellence have always been high. The focus on outcomes for the military is based on a long history of dealing with life and death on the battlefield. With the education reform movement, and more important, knowledge of the dire impact of students not completing high school, battles are being waged in public schools. The stakes for teacher preparation programs and their graduates have never been higher.

It is crucial for teacher education programs to look inward, but equally crucial to look outward for training models with documented success that can be replicated in teacher education programs. Teacher education leaders would be well advised to examine the valuable lessons modeled by other training programs that have successfully prepared professionals to achieve their career goals. The authors of this article, although from seemingly different backgrounds, have discovered striking commonalities within their respective preparation programs.

A small island is host to two outwardly dissimilar higher education institutions—a small liberal arts university and a military college. Yet upon further examination, one finds that the preparatory education that takes place in each institution has remarkable similarities. Through their respective programs, one at the liberal arts university with teacher preparation and the other at the military college with military preparation, they both cultivate a talented group of individuals who can successfully perform a mis-

sion. Both strive to create leaders who possess the wisdom and knowledge to transfer their skills to real-life settings. Both must effectively integrate innovative technologies into the curriculum and support sustainable preparation programs that achieve meaningful outcomes that promote a better world.

Few would question the need for the military to maintain sustainable preparation programs and achieve meaningful, measurable outcomes. In light of the accountability movement regarding teacher preparation and the need for highly effective teachers, few now question the need for teacher preparation programs to follow the same course of action. The quality and effectiveness of teacher preparation programs are becoming increasingly determined by outcome measures, including the results of value-added student assessment, administrator and teacher satisfaction ratings, job placement, and retention data. Graduates of teacher preparation programs are being examined not only for their course of study, demonstrated skills, and knowledge upon graduation, but more important, what they can deliver in measurable outcomes when they are practicing teachers as well. Graduates of military preparation programs have long been held to this standard of achieving success in the field, making examination of their training particularly meaningful and timely.

In scrutinizing the work that goes on separately in military preparation and in teacher preparation programs, the authors find striking alignment of strategies that prepare, first, military professionals for a military mission and, second, teachers for an educational mission in public schools. In this article, the authors discuss the similarities found in both programs and the value and purpose of the shared lessons. Both preparation programs seek to cultivate human resources that can successfully perform their respective missions. The authors have come to realize that both institutions strive to develop knowledgeable and skilled professionals who, through their successes in the field, do much to enhance the reputation of their respective preparation programs.

Research by McCree (1993) has suggested that military training provides skills that can be transferred to

the teaching profession. In his study, McCree found that career enlisted personnel are highly trained in skills directly transferable to the civilian sector, such as personnel management, resource allocation, high level technologies, counseling, and training skills. He writes:

> Considered as a group, post-military personnel possess characteristics, such as the belief that all can learn the ability to function under stressful conditions, a strong sense of dedication to the community, pride and self-confidence, and a desire to excel. (p.1)

Preservice teachers and beginning teachers, now more than ever, need to develop these skills and dispositions that will empower and sustain them in the field. Both military professionals and teachers need to be prepared to face the challenges of their defined mission and demonstrate resiliency and grit. The six shared lessons provide a toolkit for achieving those goals. A Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR) document prepared by the Land Combat Study Team (WRAIR, 2010) provides a model of training that also mirrors the *basic training* of preservice teachers.

The authors with extensive teacher preparation and/or military experience identify and discuss six lessons shared by both military preparation and teacher preparation that contribute to the quality and effectiveness of their programs. The purpose of these lessons is to cultivate the acquisition of the knowledge, skills, and dispositions essential for success in the field. The six shared lessons are:

1. Trust Your Training
2. Be a Battle Buddy
3. Be a Leader
4. Nurture Yourself
5. Steel Your Battlemind
6. Foster Reflective Practice

These lessons are examined from the perspectives of both teacher preparation and military preparation. Preservice teachers, discussed throughout, are defined as aspiring teachers who have been accepted into an accredited teacher preparation program and who are working towards graduation and teacher certification.

Trust Your Training

> "Your combat training is high; trust it . . .
> When under strain, stress, or enemy attack,
> do as you were trained." (WRAIR, 2010)

Classroom training for preservice teachers must provide realistic opportunities to practice learned skills. Throughout their training, teacher candidates are required to work with diverse populations and to address the needs of all students from gifted to challenged learners. They are provided with numerous opportunities to plan and execute effective and meaningful lesson plans, which include setting clear and measureable learning objectives,

differentiating instruction, and assessing student work. Preservice teachers must develop their content knowledge and pedagogical skill to promote student learning and to prepare their future students for college and careers. Teacher candidates need to become knowledgeable of high-stakes standardized tests and must be able to support students faced with the demands placed upon them during testing. Teacher preparation programs also must provide a comprehensive and realistic support system for the aspiring teacher to understand and respond to both the written and informal curriculum of a school and how to effectively work with students, parents, and colleagues.

Teacher preparation programs, as do military programs, need to be cutting edge and incorporate innovative technologies that support teaching and learning. Not to do so potentially places graduates as underdogs in their effort to carry out their respective missions. Military programs will avoid this at all costs which taxpayers know are massive. Maintaining a state-of-the-art profile by teacher preparation programs, while far less costly, will require a commitment on the part of all teacher preparation faculty to remain current and willing to use technology in their coursework, modeling its use to foster student engagement. In their award-winning book *Disrupting Class: How Disruptive Innovation Will Change the Way the World Learns* (2010), Christensen, Horn, and Johnson provide a clear wake-up call that all teacher preparation programs need to heed: Technology has changed the way students learn and disruptive innovation is essential for improving schools. This will also necessitate greater understanding of current research on the impact digital technologies have on the brain and learning, as brilliantly discussed by renowned neuroscientist Susan Greenfield in *Mind Change* (2015).

Graduates of both preparation programs will be entering a world that will require knowledge of and skill using current and future technologies. For teachers, that will include learning management systems, e-learning, education apps, and social media. A commitment to ongoing professional development to explore the use of new technology tools as they emerge will be essential for candidates in both preparation programs.

Leaders of military preparation programs know the human cost that can result from failure to provide military professionals with proper training: It is not an option. The military today emphasizes battle drills in training to acclimate service members to stressful situations. Under stressful situations, when there is little time to think, military professionals have to trust their training and rely on it to instinctively do the right thing and ultimately get the job done. New pilots are taught emergency procedures and drilled consistently during flight training so that they instinctively execute the correct procedure. Consequently, in an actual emergency while under stress, they are prepared to react and do the right thing rather than respond indecisively.

The same training must take place in teacher preparation courses with the goal that indecisiveness does not set in when novice teachers find themselves in difficult situations in the classroom. For example, a high school

teacher needs to be prepared to deal with classroom management issues, such as a blatant power struggle with a challenging adolescent or a disengaged student who sees no relevancy in learning. Teachers make countless instructional and management decisions every day; they must be able to trust their training and act decisively. To enter the field confidently, preservice and new teachers need to trust their training as they respond to classroom demands and, at times, exceptionally stressful situations. During the course of teacher preparation, preservice teachers need to be provided with extensive opportunities to practice acquired skills in supervised field placements in urban, suburban, and rural settings. With societal changes and demographics changes in schools, an ever-expanding body of educational research, and the demand for accountability, the teacher preparation program curriculum needs to be continuously reviewed and responsive to current needs of the students they serve in the field.

Once candidates have provided evidence that they meet the criteria for admission into either a teacher preparation or a military preparation program, then one of the most important tasks becomes fostering the growth of those individuals so that they are prepared to enter their respective professions with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be highly effective and successful. However, an equally important task of preparation programs is to engage in ongoing assessment of those individuals and *counsel out* those individuals who do not meet the performance standards of their preparation program. Another lesson we could take from the military is that attrition identified during initial training is less costly attrition relative to attrition that occurs after major investments have been made. The military services are conscious of the need for the disposition to serve in an all-volunteer military environment, and basic training provides an opportunity to send a young recruit home prior to costly investment. Teacher preparation programs can and should judiciously assess a candidate's disposition to teach, particularly at the secondary level, and assess a candidate's eagerness to focus on students as well as content. As military preparation programs do, teacher preparation programs need to assist those candidates they find who lack those dispositions to transition to other pipelines better suited for them.

Be a Battle Buddy

> "Buddies make a difference. Most soldiers say they made it through the deployment because of their buddies." (WRAIR, 2010)

A powerful activity developed by Skip Downing (2005) simply, but brilliantly, demonstrates the critical importance of collaboration with others—*one's buddies*. In an exercise that fosters a deeper understanding of the power of collaboration, a student volunteer is asked to "cause a chair with another student sitting in it to be 18 inches off the ground" (p. 145). Routinely, the volunteer becomes dismayed upon realizing that this task cannot be achieved through the individual volunteer's manpower. In reality,

the directions do not preclude teamwork. When this fact is realized, often by a classmate, the task is successfully accomplished. Through this quick and meaningful exercise, all involved feel useful, successful, and connected. Both leaders of teacher preparation and military preparation programs include these types of activities to instill in candidates that when they are in the field and faced with seemingly impossible tasks, they can take on those tasks with battle buddies.

The military services have embraced war games, simulations, and battle drills for over two centuries to prepare military professionals for their combat missions. For the remainder of his life following World War II, Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz talked about the preparation and war gaming that took place at the United States Naval War College and how most critical strategies and tactics had been practiced by working teams before they were actually used during the war. Teacher preparation programs are now incorporating more on-site supervised clinical placements and simulations, case studies, and exercises into the classroom experiences.

The demands of teaching can be overwhelming and having collaborative battle buddies can prove to be critical to the success of new teachers. When teacher candidates were asked to interview veteran teachers, invariably, experienced teachers expressed that such collaboration was critical to their success. Ed Joyner, Executive Director of the Yale School Development Program, speaks of the need for staff development that helps teachers learn to work together and develop *esprit de corps* (Senge et al., 2000). When teachers look back at their best years in education, those memories usually center on supportive colleagues and positive working relationships.

New military recruits become part of a large organization, the U.S. military, an entity larger than themselves or any other entity to which they have ever belonged. New recruits are members of a team and, as members, they share rights, privileges, and responsibilities, a characteristic they have in common with new teachers. New recruits soon realize that they have to rely on other team members, especially in combat. They rely on their *battle buddies*.

Why do members of military units fight when they are tired, hungry, and thirsty and are far from home and a familiar way of life? Do they fight for ideals and political rhetoric? Do they fight for medals and ribbons? Overwhelmingly, military professionals will say that they fight for each other—the man or woman on their left or right in the foxhole, in a tank, or standing watch at sea. Military professionals risk their lives to protect the other members of their team, their officers, their battle buddies.

Teaching can be a very lonely profession in the absence of enlightened school leaders and in the face of a set of job responsibilities that can remain stagnant over time. Such circumstances can leave teachers feeling burnt out and even lead to the complete loss of effectiveness. There are some simple low-cost ways to counter stagnation and isolation and they need to be introduced to candidates in teacher preparation programs. Some examples of how schools can support teachers in developing their connections to their battle buddies follow.

In her multiple roles in education leadership both in the U.S. Navy and in public education and having served as Rear Admiral/Provost of the U.S. Navy War College and superintendent, respectively, co-author Barbara McGann found that teachers love to observe other teachers. The simple act of watching a colleague teach can be a source of renewal in itself. Such experiences provide very valuable professional development when a teacher sees a colleague intervening to resolve a situation the teacher may have faced in his or her own classroom.

Team teaching is another source of renewal that is extremely easy to implement with no additional cost by combining two classrooms to pursue a common learning objective. In Baltimore, teachers are given the opportunity to remain in their classrooms for part of the day, but then to spend some time leading their colleagues in lesson planning or instructional coaching (Goldstein, 2014). Common planning time, when all of the teachers in a grade level plan together irrespective of discipline, can be a powerful opportunity to discuss individual students and how each student will be supported across content areas. Common planning time can also be a source of professional renewal as teachers, through collaboration, finally discover a way to support a struggling student.

Some of the most meaningful work in education over the past several decades may be the development of the concept of professional learning communities, or PLCs (Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004). Ironically the concept of a PLC reflects the human biological need to be a part of a community and has been characteristic of military professionalism throughout its history, perhaps a fact that brings the military services and the teaching profession closer together than ever before. Embedded in the concept of a PLC is the idea of collaborative coaching and learning where teachers foster peer-to-peer leadership as technical experts of the teaching profession in the same way medical doctors are empowered to lead the medical profession. Instructional rounds are a logical parallel to medical rounds and peer-to-peer leadership of learning communities in America's teacher preparation and military preparation programs. Peer-to-peer observations are not only a meaningful way to improve teaching practice, but a way to simultaneously foster the powerful positive relationships critical to an effective learning community as well.

The days of isolation for aspiring and new teachers need to end, and teacher preparation programs need to place teacher candidates in schools where they see collaborative approaches being utilized. In preparing candidates for job interviews, faculty should encourage candidates to ask during interviews about the availability of such collegial practice in prospective school settings. The response they receive will give job seekers important information about the school culture and opportunities to work as part of a team. Information regarding school culture and the opportunity for team work is particularly important with respect to those dedicated teachers who choose to work in struggling, underperforming school environments or schools with a history of violence. Given the stressful working conditions often found in many impoverished urban and rural area schools, teachers share a common bond with military professionals in combat and need to work together to get the job done and to demonstrate the same *esprit de corps* found in the military.

Be a Leader

"If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader." John Quincy Adams

Leadership development for military professionals begins the first day of basic training, but something else transformative happens. The new recruit becomes part of a team and, for the duration of that person's military professional experience, the person embraces the philosophy that the team is always smarter than the smartest person on the team. Every person on the team, in essence, has leadership responsibilities. History itself is filled with case studies of leadership failures when the leader rejected or ignored this principle. Very quickly, military professionals learn that the potential life-threatening circumstances being faced will require the collective wisdom and problem solving capabilities honed by years of practice in a wide range of diverse missions practiced in drills and war games. Perhaps more important than the drills and war games is the after action work that analyzes input on how the operation was executed and proposes changes in strategy and tactics necessary to correct whatever went wrong. The voices of all involved are critical.

The authors would argue that the challenges faced every day by teachers are as complex as those faced by military professionals. The stakes are equally high when the success or failure of a child hangs in the balance. For this reason, teacher preparation must foster and leverage the leadership potential and capabilities of preservice teachers by requiring them to work collaboratively, evaluate effectiveness, and propose changes to correct what went wrong. This cycle of collaboration and continuous improvement leads to greater success in both military and educational arenas.

Throughout their development, military professionals are used to practicing for positions of increased responsibility. Using a concept referred to as acting, members of a military team are designated the responsible official in the absence of the commander, the department head, the leading petty officer, or other key leader in the organization. Military professionals practice for the day when they will pass the baton to someone equally prepared because of practice. Without question, teacher preparation is on the right track when a preservice teacher is able to take over responsibilities in a clinical setting, exhibiting a commanding presence as the educational leader in a classroom by creating a learning environment in which children demonstrate joy about being there and learning.

Powerful positive relationships between and among adults and students in a learning community are essential. In fact, our biology demands those relationships as is now scientifically proven by a large body of cognitive neuroscience

research. Content teachers, physical education teachers, music teachers, art teachers, custodians, bus drivers, and cafeteria teams can be the key to a positive experience and outcomes for a particular student. They must all be viewed as potential leaders of change. A visitor to the team meeting of a highly effective learning community probably would not be able to tell which member of the team is the principal of the school. Again, teacher preparation programs need to provide preservice teachers with specific learning experiences within the learning community, such as scavenger hunts which require preservice teaching students to find and communicate with the numerous human resources within their clinical settings and communities. For some preservice teachers, requiring community involvement places them outside their comfort zone, but it is essential for developing their roles as community contributors as those roles are assessed by our current state teacher evaluation process.

Military professionals are also part of cultures of recognition that are easy to replicate in teacher preparation programs and schools. The Golden Apple, an award for exemplary teaching, is a particularly meaningful example of teacher recognition because nominations come from students, parents, or other teachers. However, the much more frequent, spontaneous, and informal recognition that takes place in military units is also possible in school settings and can be facilitated by information technology. Military leaders have many sources of on-the-spot recognition and routinely look for on-the-spot recognition opportunities. The same opportunity exists in schools for principals and school leaders to surprise a classroom teacher with an unexpected recognition of sustained superior performance or any noteworthy contribution to the learning community and student growth. Advances in information technology provide the means to create inexpensive awards and certificates for spontaneous presentations in front of students that will be treasured by unsuspecting recipients. Students will return home that day and talk about the celebration of their teacher, fostering positive energy about what happens at school. Teacher preparation programs have long recognized the value of awards, such as acknowledging students who make the Dean's List or have the highest GPA in a content area. Good work deserves recognition and such recognition can inspire individuals to seek out greater leadership responsibilities.

Nurture Yourself

"Your relationships back home are a source of support and strength." (WRAIR, 2010)

Teacher preparation programs must address the academic and socio-emotional needs of preservice teachers, and it is becoming increasingly important to prepare these aspiring teachers to actively and personally address those needs after graduation. Job satisfaction and professional effectiveness may depend upon it. New and proposed state and federal regulations that examine teacher program quality and effectiveness require the collection of data on teacher retention. Retention, in the personal experiences

of the authors, is highly influenced by job satisfaction, something near and dear to millennials. The authors have seen that when young teachers' needs are not being met, they seriously reconsider their decision to go into teacher education, regrettably often after committing significant funds and time earning a teaching degree.

New teachers leave the field for many reasons. Reports on teacher attrition (Boe, Cook, & Sunderland, 2008; Brill & McCartney, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2003) discuss many variables contributing to stress experienced by teachers. Teachers do not enter the profession with the intention to leave and circumstances outside of their control, often related to economics, can result in their unemployment. Friends and family can play a key role in helping teachers maintain an optimistic attitude and weather the storms they face in their careers. For example, in one local community, scores of beloved and talented teachers received letters of termination. In Providence, RI, all teachers, nearly 2,000, were fired (Johnson, 2011). Teachers reached out to their colleagues and their families to address their personal needs, a healthy and needed step in restoring the teachers' confidence in themselves as professionals and in the educational system. Following this temporary employment crisis, educators were able to return to their teaching positions with the ability to focus on their mission of meeting the needs of their students.

Military professionals are trained to be resilient and recover from temporary setbacks. Fortunately, now more than ever, the military services have embraced the importance of openly and transparently addressing combat stress and actually employ Battalion Aid Stations and Combat Stress Control Teams in recognition that buddies and leaders are the most critical resource in managing stress. It is also important for military professionals, especially those involved in combat, to "maintain contact back home" (WRAIR, 2010) so that they do not lose their perspectives and grounding beliefs. Stress can eat away at military professionals and there needs to be an outlet for it. Talking to others about problems is good therapy, and family members at home can provide a welcome ear when an individual is under stress.

Burnout and stress-related issues can also be intense for those working in schools, even for the most dedicated teacher, whether the burnout and stress comes from dealing with the day-to-day challenges or following a violent incident that claimed the life of a student or teacher. Recognition that public education has been and continues to be one of America's most embattled professions is increasing, but teachers themselves remain the greatest asset in keeping teams of teachers focused on the mission of educating our youth. Although the circumstances faced during teacher preparation are far less extreme, stress can take its toll on preservice teachers. Stress reduction training and learning how to access support systems need to be part of every teacher preparation program, given the teaching profession's many challenges, including economic and safety challenges.

Teacher preparation programs can respond to their preservice teachers' stress-related needs by building in

quality time for communication between students and their supervisors and advisors. In our teacher education program's student teaching seminar, less time is now spent in structured, planned discussions and more time allotted for fielding questions and addressing concerns from teaching candidates in the field. Each week in seminar, students valued the time and confidential space to address their concerns with classmates and instructors. In addition, professors have found that being available online and through mobile device support has proven to be invaluable for quickly addressing candidates' concerns before they become more unmanageable and result in a crisis.

On a day-to-day basis, the work of teachers can be exhausting and all-consuming. Our preservice teachers are taught ways to nurture themselves, identify and respond to signs of stress, and know when and how to grab a lifeline. They must also show evidence of their commitment to ongoing professional development, such as membership in a professional organization that gives opportunities for professional stimulation and renewal.

Such opportunities for personal and professional renewal are built into the lives and careers of military professionals. Periods of rest and recuperation, periods of leave in the course of assignments, and training that provides sources of additional expertise or preparation for a particular military assignment not only improve the professional capacity of individuals, but also provide a source of refreshment and renewal.

Based on brain-based research, Willis (2007) emphasized the importance of fun in learning. Therefore, the many effective education and military professionals who name their most enjoyable work settings as ones in which they worked hard and played hard is not surprising. Given that teacher preparation programs must now remain vigilant regarding the retention of their graduates in the field, it becomes increasingly important to guide the graduates in their selection, whenever possible, towards jobs that will support a rewarding and, on occasion, fun-filled professional experience for them. The military, with an all-volunteer force, has long recognized the importance of creating work environments that support its members, from the quality meals the military serves to the social outlets and entertainment it sponsors.

Steel Your Battlemind

"Expect success . . . Remember that obstacles
and setbacks are part of all deployments."
(WRAIR, 2010)

New military recruits are indoctrinated from day one of basic training with the *Warrior Ethos*: "I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade" (U.S. Army, n.d.). The Warrior Ethos becomes a part of their lives so that, if and when they are faced with a life-and-death situation, they react instinctively and complete the mission successfully with minimal losses. This ethos is what Battlemind is all about. Programs that have provided preservice teachers with extensive classroom and clinical experiences to steel their Battlemind in training will prepare them for difficult situations they may encounter in the classroom of the future. These teachers will be better able to make good decisions with a guiding and empowering mindset.

Success in the classroom is rarely immediate. Mistakes are made and reflection leads to corrective action. Teachers need to possess the characteristics of strong self-efficacy, resilience, and a confident and optimist mindset. Saphier, Haley-Speca, & Gower (2008) stress that teachers must continuously communicate three messages to students: "This is important, you can do it with effective effort, and I won't give up on you" (p.82). While there are challenges in working in schools where there is poverty, violence, and resistance to learning, these challenges can be overcome by determined teachers who have steeled or fortified their Battlemind. These teachers have developed an unyielding sense of purpose and conviction. Movies based on true stories, such as *Freedom Writers* and *Stand and Deliver*, portray the amazing power of individuals who have steeled their mindset, their Battlemind, and taught with guiding, unshakable beliefs. Their empowering mindset allowed them to overcome major obstacles, identify and focus on meaningful long- and short-term goals, and accomplish great things in the classroom. Carol Dweck in *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2006) writes, "Those with a growth mindset found success in doing their best, in learning and improving. And this is exactly what we find in the champions" (p. 98).

An effective exercise used by co-author Kathleen Vespia for helping preservice teachers identify their personal sense of purpose is modeled after the National Collegiate Athletic Association's March Madness brackets, used in selecting the winning team in college basketball in the United States. In her exercise, preservice teachers identify the four most personally meaningful outcomes they hope to achieve with their students by the end of the school year. Then, they are asked to narrow those outcomes to two and then one. Responses have included:

- being lifelong learners
- being confident in themselves as learners
- developing a passion for the study of history
- learning to love learning
- learning they are beloved members of a community

Helping preservice teachers steel their Battleminds or mindsets is like putting a compass in the hands of a navigator. It can help them to find their way when they feel they are lost and to focus on their purpose.

In preparing for the mission of educating all students, extensive training and support helps a preservice teacher develop a realistic and guiding mindset. The preservice teacher will be better prepared and mentally ready for the challenges and, more important, opportunities the teacher will face in the future.

Foster Reflective Practice

"A battle lost or won is easily described, understood, and appreciated, but the moral growth of a great nation requires reflection, as well as observation, to appreciate it." Frederick Douglass

The final, and perhaps most important, lesson shared by teacher preparation and military preparation programs is the need to foster reflective practice. In our teacher preparation program, students are required to submit personal reflections on all delivered lesson and unit plans, classroom observations, and videotapes of delivered lessons in both classes and clinical settings. The two essential questions directed to students are:

• What have you learned from this experience?
• What would you do to enhance your performance in the future?

Such metacognitive exercises provide preservice teachers with opportunity to grow and improve their practice, an essential skill for remaining effective throughout their professional careers. In the military, the same applies. Reflection is a simple, but important, process that enables one to contemplate and think about what went right, what went wrong, and what can be changed in the future to improve the military operation. Reflection takes only five to ten minutes each day but can pay big dividends in saving lives, equipment, and property, especially in combat. Reflection enables leaders at all levels to leverage learning opportunities.

In combat aviation, reflective processes are employed after every mission to make sure the lessons learned are captured and then shared in pilot briefs with the rest of the squadron. These reflective processes are especially critical when resources are tight because other pilots do not have to make the same mistakes again and again to learn these lessons themselves. Military training centers conduct an After Action Review (AAR) with key players after every operation. In many cases, these AARs are explicit and even brutal to watch because they do not hold anything back. Observer controllers point out discrepancies and highlight what could have been done differently to impact the mission.

Teachers would be well served to incorporate reflection into their daily routine. Reflection takes only a matter of minutes, but the payoff can be important. One of the U.S. Army's leadership principles is to *know yourself*. The Army maintains that a person must understand his or her own strengths and weaknesses to lead others. Knowing and understanding ourselves and our students better is accomplished through reflection.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to examine a model for developing highly effective teachers. Such teachers maximize student learning in the classroom and skillfully address the needs of their students. This is the primary goal for aspiring teachers. Through analysis of the critical components of effective teacher preparation and military preparation programs, the authors have identified six shared lessons deemed critical for developing highly effective professionals.

Core values matter and career satisfaction of new teachers can be greatly influenced by the developed core values or Battlemind of program graduates. While great emphasis is placed on achieving professional teaching standards, equal attention should be directed towards the development of each teaching candidate's core values. In the military, these values serve as a moral compass for soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines to guide their ethical decision making on a daily basis. The U.S. Army's core values are loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. The first letters of each spell out the acronym LDRSHIP, making the core values easy to remember.

Teachers, by the nature of their chosen profession, are all leaders. They are responsible for leading their students to social, emotional, and academic growth. Teacher preparation programs are well served by examining models that promote career sustainability, professional commitment, and satisfaction in a future work environment in which either peace or tension may reign. When teacher preparation programs focus on these criteria, new teachers are better prepared for rewarding careers in which they achieve the meaningful goals they set out to achieve in working with youth.

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Keeping Students on Track to Graduate: A Synthesis of School Dropout Trends, Prevention, and Intervention Initiatives

Meghan Ecker-Lyster and Christopher Niileksela

Abstract: *This article reviews the literature on dropout trends, prevention, and intervention initiatives for school-aged children. Theoretical and consequential trends are highlighted to offer educators a perspective in which to view the dropout problem. This article also examines current trends in prevention and intervention initiatives aimed at reducing dropout. Drawing from current research, practical suggestions and recommendations are provided to guide dropout prevention and intervention planning efforts.*

High school graduation rate is often looked upon as a barometer of the performance of the American school system, as well as a proxy for the general health of American society (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010). Unfortunately for the United States, almost one-third of all public secondary students drop out of school each year (Snyder & Dillow, 2010). This high percentage of students leaving school prior to graduation does not bode well for the performance of America's educational system. To combat this problem, policymakers and school districts need to work together to implement effective dropout prevention initiatives. To assist in these efforts, this paper offers educators an examination of theoretical and consequential trends associated with dropping out of high school, data-driven prevention and intervention initiatives designed to reduce dropout rates, and practical suggestions and recommendations to guide dropout prevention and intervention planning efforts.

Theoretical Perspective on Dropout Trends

A robust body of research highlights the negative consequences associated with dropping out of high school and how these outcomes impact individuals, families, and communities (Edmonson & White, 1998; Levin, Belfield, Muennig, & Rouse, 2006; Lochner & Moretti, 2004; Mitra, 2014; Moretti, 2007; Muennig, 2007). For example, over the course of a lifetime, projections are that a student who drops out will earn $630,000 less than a high school graduate earns (Rouse, 2007). Despite these well-known negative outcomes, students continue to drop out of school. To combat this societal problem, understanding why students drop out of school is necessary. While specific reasons for dropping out vary from person to person, several theories have emerged to provide a lens through which to investigate this problem.

In an attempt to explain dropout behavior, Jordan, Lara, and McPartland (1994) and Watt and Roessingh (1994) pioneered a framework which articulates how students are either *Pushed*, *Pulled*, or *Fall* out of school. "Pull-out" theories rely on a contextual framework to explain dropout and assume that school is only one part of the adolescent's life that coincides with other external factors, which include family, peers, and the economic climate (Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Based on this perspective, a variety of external factors pull students out of school, including financial obligations, employment, family needs, childbirth, or illness (Doll, Eslami, & Walters, 2013). Within this framework, it can be argued that students examine the opportunity cost for staying in school based on these proximal variables, and this analysis guides their decision to remain in school or drop out. If the external factors are weighed more heavily than the benefits of remaining in school, the student will choose to drop out.

In contrast, "Push-out" theories focus on internal school factors that influence a student's decision to remain in school. This framework concentrates on factors located within a school that could potentially push students out, such as poor academic supports, mismatch between instruction and student ability level, transportation resources, and discipline policies (Doll et al., 2013; Stearns & Glennie, 2006; Rotermund, 2007). For example, schools with limited busing systems may inadvertently cause decreased student attendance which could impact the student's decision to remain in school. While individual Push-out factors may impact a student, a student likely will experience a combination of these factors. For instance, a student who misses a large amount of school over the course of a year (e.g., attendance rate below 90%) due to transportation issues likely will fall behind in his/her courses also. Without proper intervention or academic support, the student may feel discouraged and unsupported by the school. It is important to remember the major tenet of the Push-out theory is that the aversive situation was created within the school environment (Doll et al., 2013).

Finally, "Fall-out" theories posit that students drop out as a result of inadequate academic progress, which causes them to fall off track. Fall-out and Pull-out factors can be easily confused; the major difference between the two theories is that Pull-out factors have distinct external attractions/distractions that are directly pulling the student out of school whereas Fall-out factors do not have these attractions and/or distractions. Fall-out factors highlight a process in school dropout whereby a student's disengagement in school gradually increases over time (Doll et al., 2013). Students who are influenced by Pull-out factors may not become disengaged with school because they are not

making adequate progress. Rather, other circumstances in their lives (e.g., family facing financial hardship) may have more immediate value than going to school. In contrast, poor study habits, lack of parental interest or support, negative student attitude towards school, and overall dissatisfaction with school have all been cited in the research literature as Fall-out factors (Doll et al., 2013). Because these students fall off track, Watt and Roessingh (1994) speculated that this causes students to become apathetic and disillusioned with school completion, which results in overall academic disengagement.

Push-, Pull-, and Fall-out theories attempt to provide educators a more parsimonious outlook on dropout behavior. Unfortunately, dropping out of school is a complex process influenced by a variety of variables, including developmental level (e.g., Doll et al., 2013) and personal characteristics, such as gender (e.g., Stearns & Gleannie, 2006). To more fully understand the complexity of the dropout process, research has begun to examine variables within the student's larger environmental context.

Moving Beyond Student-Level Characteristics

Historically, research on dropout behavior has focused on factors associated with student behavior and background characteristics, such as academic ability, course completion and failures, and socioeconomic status (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Belfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Curran Neild, 2009; Curran Neild, Stoner-Eby & Furstenberg, 2008). This type of research generally revolves around the concept of *risk factors*, which are divided into two categories: (a) social risk factors and (b) academic risk factors (Lee & Burkam, 2003). Several researchers have argued that when research frames dropping out as a function of the student's behavior and background characteristics, it places the blame on the student and does not consider organizational implications of the school (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007; Jerald, 2006; Lee & Burkam, 2003). Another downfall of focusing dropout research on student-level characteristics is that many of these variables are not amendable to change. Fortunately, the current trend in dropout research is framed around a more flexible school-level perspective (Fall & Roberts, 2012).

Christle et al. (2007) implemented a mixed methods design to investigate the relationship between school characteristics and dropout rates. In this study, the authors examined dropout rates for 196 Kentucky high schools. The authors found significant negative correlations between dropout rate and academic achievement, school attendance rate, and rate of successful transition to adult life (as measured by postsecondary enrollment, full-time employment, or active military duty), and percentage of students of White ethnic background, where a higher percentage of White students was associated with lower rates of drop out. Academic achievement had the strongest relationship with dropout, followed by school attendance rate. Gender, school size, and expulsion rate variables were not significantly correlated with dropout rate. In addition to the correlational analyses, the authors used purposeful sampling procedures to compare 20 schools within the sample representing the lowest dropout rates (LDOS) and 20 schools reporting the highest dropout rates (HDOS). The results indicated that HDOS schools had a higher percentage of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, higher annual grade-level retention and suspension rates, and more board of education violation incidents. The two groups did not differ on law violation rates, student body ethnicity, gender composition, enrollment, or expulsion rate. Finally, eight schools (four schools from the LDOS sample and four from the HDOS sample) were selected to gather qualitative information through administrator surveys, staff interviews, and on-site observations to investigate school process and climate characteristics. Results from the qualitative analysis revealed that HDOS schools had administrators with less experience, poor family involvement, and a more negative overall school climate compared to LDOS schools. For example, onsite observations revealed LDOS schools were in better physical condition, staff were dressed more professionally (e.g., male staff wearing ties), and more students were smiling in the halls compared to HDOS schools.

Lee and Burkam (2003) recommend that research on dropout go beyond examining general high school demographic characteristics, such as the average family's socioeconomic status and minority enrollment. They recommend extending the investigation to school characteristics that can actually be changed through policy interventions. In their study, Lee and Burkam used a nationally representative sample of urban and suburban schools from the High School Effectiveness Supplement (HSES), a subsample drawn from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS: 88). The NELS: 88 was the first stage in a longitudinal effort designed to provide national trend data highlighting students' experiences as they progress through the educational pipeline (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2015). Lee and Burkam (2003) examined dropout behavior and school composition for 190 schools serving 3,840 students in the 30 largest metropolitan areas of the United States. This study identified several malleable variables associated with dropout. For example, schools that provided more challenging courses and offered fewer remedial/nonacademic courses tended to have higher graduation rates. School size was also found to influence dropout rates. Interestingly, medium-sized schools ($n = 601 – 1,500$) demonstrated the highest graduation rates, with large schools ($n > 1,500$) producing the lowest rates. Lee and Burkam argued that school size does not produce a direct influence over dropout behavior, but rather the organizational factors associated with size mediate the influence. For example, smaller schools tend to have a lower student-teacher ratio which has been found to be correlated with higher graduation rates.

In a similar study using the same national dataset (HSES from the NESLS: 88), Rumberger and Thomas (2000) found that school-level characteristics accounted for almost half the variance in dropout and student turnover rates within 247 urban and suburban schools across the nation. School-level characteristics included: *student composition* (e.g., mean SES of students in the school); *structural*

characteristics (e.g., size of the school); *school resources* (e.g., student-teacher ratio); and *school processes* (e.g., the turnover of teachers). School resources were found to significantly influence dropout rates. For example, schools with lower student-teacher ratios had lower rates of dropout. Rumberger and Thomas also found that schools in which students reported higher ratings for quality teachers, as measured by a student administered survey, had substantially lower dropout rates than schools with lower rated quality teachers. The importance of a quality student-teacher relationship is further corroborated from research that found students who leave high school prior to graduation often cite a lack of support or feeling unconnected with teachers as a reason for dropping out (Lee & Burkam, 2003). These findings provide support for malleable school-level characteristics, including quality student-teacher relationships, as a student retention safeguard.

Research extending beyond student-level characteristics to examine more flexible school-level variables provides practitioners a more malleable outlet to impact student dropout. Policymakers and districts can influence the number of rigorous courses (e.g., Advanced Placement) offered far more easily than changing a student's socioeconomic status. For this reason, districts are encouraged to adopt and implement multidimensional dropout prevention and intervention programs that aim to enhance the overall school climate.

Prevention Efforts

By definition, prevention efforts should occur prior to a dysfunction or problem, with the aim of these efforts focusing on mitigating risk factors, while reinforcing protective factors (Coie et al., 1993; Strein, Hoagwood, & Cohn, 2003). Broadly speaking, two major dimensions characterize prevention efforts: the level at which services are delivered and the method in which the populations are targeted (Durlak & Wells, 1997). The level of intervention can occur either at the individual level or at the systems level (including building, district, or state levels) and there are three ways to target selected populations: primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention initiatives (Durlak & Wells, 1997; Mac Iver, 2011).

As school districts begin to develop and design dropout prevention programs, they should consider the Institute for Education Sciences (IES) *Dropout Prevention Practice Guide* as a potential resource to inform programming decisions (Dynarski et al., 2008). This comprehensive guide addresses all levels of prevention (i.e., primary, secondary, and tertiary) as well as provides a mix of recommendations at both the individual and the systems level. The IES Practice guide provides six general recommendations for reducing dropout rates. These include: (a) Utilize data, (b) Assign adult advocates to students, (c) Provide academic support, (d) Improve students' social skills and classroom behavior, (e) Personalize the learning environment, and (f) Provide relevant instruction. These six recommendations are divided into three broad categories: (a) diagnostic, (b) targeted interventions, and (c) school-wide reform.

The first recommendation category encompasses a data-driven diagnostic method to identify student-level and school-wide dropout factors. IES recommends that this diagnostic system include, at a minimum, data on student absences, grade retention, and low academic achievement. The second category recommends the use of targeted interventions for students identified at-risk in middle and high school. Under the umbrella of targeted interventions, IES includes assigning an adult advocate to students who are at-risk, encouraging classroom teachers to provide academic support and enrichment to improve student performance, and implementing programs to improve students' classroom behavior and social skills. Finally, the third recommendation category focuses on school-wide reforms which include personalizing the learning environment to foster a sense of belonging and providing rigorous instruction to better engage all students.

Early Warning System

In line with the first recommendation from the IES Dropout Prevention Practice Guide, an early warning system can serve as a diagnostic tool designed to identify student-level and school-wide dropout problems. Research has found that the strongest indicators of dropping out of school are attendance, behavior, and course failure, known as the ABC's of dropout (Allensworth & Easton, 2007). While prior research can serve as a guide to help districts identify variables to include in their early warning system, it is recommended that school administrators explore local data to identify the most salient variables related to dropout within their district (Jerald, 2006). Since most schools already track several student-level variables, such as grades, attendance, and disciplinary referrals, implementing this tool should be relatively easy. The major challenge with implementing an early warning system is moving educators beyond viewing these variables as stagnant numbers and shifting their focus to investigating the dynamic trends captured by these variables (Jerald, 2006). There are several comprehensive guides available to aid school districts with creating an early warning system, including *National High School Center's Better High Schools Guide* (Heppen & Therriault, 2008) and Jerald's (2006) article *Identifying Potential Dropouts: Key Lesson for Building an Early Warning Data System: A Dual Agenda of High Standards and High Graduation Rates.*

Middle School

Traditionally, studies examining dropout predictors have utilized samples of students who are in high school. Although this research has yielded excellent information that can inform early warning system practices, research has demonstrated that the trajectory for dropping out of school begins prior to the time that students actually step foot on a high school campus (Curran Neild, 2009; Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007). To combat emerging disengagement, early warning systems must adhere to their namesake and identify students as early as possible.

Balfanz et al. (2007) used longitudinal analyses to investigate and identify indicators in sixth grade that

predicted future dropout. Consistent with findings from other studies (e.g., Allensworth & Easton, 2007), Balfanz et al. identified five highly predictive indicators of dropout: attendance rate less than 80% of the time during sixth grade, failure of sixth-grade math, failure of sixth-grade English, at least one out-of-school suspension, and a final unsatisfactory behavior grade in any subject during sixth grade. Although each of these indicators alone was found to be predictive of dropout, the odds of dropping out significantly increased with each additional flag that student acquired, regardless of the combination of variables. For example, a student who has an F in both sixth-grade English and sixth-grade math is at a greater risk for dropping out of school compared to a student who has an F in math only. Given this prominent finding (e.g., Bowers, 2010; Casillas et al., 2012), it is critical that districts employ early warning systems throughout both middle and high school.

Simply identifying at-risk students does nothing to alleviate the risk these students face. For early warning systems to make an impact and prevent students from dropping out, school districts must tailor intervention and prevention efforts based on the data. Pinkus (2008) recommends that when school districts are building an early warning system, they should think about how each selected variable will inform future interventions. If school districts do not have the resources to provide at-risk students with supplemental academic and behavioral supports, then the effectiveness and integrity of the early warning system will be reduced (Pinkus, 2008). The flexibility afforded from an early warning system allows districts to track the most prominent variables related to dropout within their district.

Targeted Interventions

After districts have created an early warning system, the next step recommended by the IES Practice Guide is to design targeted interventions for students flagged as being at risk for dropout. There is consensus among the research literature which indicates that interventions aimed at remediating dropout rates must focus on enhancing students' overall academic and social development (Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). In a comprehensive review of the intervention literature on school dropout, Prevatt and Kelly (2003) identified 217 articles, spanning the 20-year period from 1982-2002. Of the 217 articles, only 18 met the following rigorous criteria: (a) article published in a peer-reviewed journal; (b) article described an intervention program that was identified by the authors as relating to dropout prevention; (c) study included an empirical analysis of the effectiveness of the intervention; and (d) study included a measure of dropping out as one of the dependent variables. *The Procedural and Coding Manual for Review of Evidence Based Instructions* developed by the Task Force on Evidence Based Interventions in School Psychology (2003) was used to evaluate each study. In their review, Prevatt and Kelly (2003) identified four key intervention focus areas: academic enhancement, mentoring and supportive relationships, psychosocial skill development, and teacher training in child behavior management. Of the four areas,

the most frequently employed intervention strategy was adult mentoring. Unfortunately, the authors found that the majority of studies utilized a multi-modal approach to intervention, which made teasing apart the specific aspects of the program that were most effective difficult. The following section outlines examples of dropout interventions focusing on each of the four key areas identified by Prevatt and Kelly (2003).

Academic Enhancement

Service-learning and community engagement projects have traditionally been used as character development programs; however, research has found that these activities also promote school retention and engagement (Manzo, 2008). Focus group interviews revealed that students involved in service-learning projects indicated that these projects provided relevant hands-on activities that were more engaging than traditional classroom instruction. An example of a service-learning activity is students collecting and distributing food or clothing items to a local homeless shelter.

Mentoring and Supportive Relationships

Research has found that social connectedness to school is linked to higher rates of student academic success (Bradshaw, O'Brennan, & McNeely, 2008). Both teachers and peers can serve as sources for facilitating this social connection. Blum (1993) found that weekly peer-support group meetings that focused on enhancing students' academic and interpersonal skills, combined with daily one-on-one interactions with an adult mentor, resulted in improved outcomes for students flagged as potential dropouts. The peer-support group consisted of six to eight same-sex participants in the 6th, 7th, or 8th grades who had problems such as poor academic performance, low self-esteem, poor study habits, or poor interpersonal relationships. The group met once a week for 10 weeks, with each session lasting one class period. For a full description of each session, see Blum (1993). Adult mentors in Blum's study were volunteers from the school (e.g., teachers, secretaries, cafeteria workers). Results included improved classroom behavior, increased academic engagement, and more positive peer and teacher interactions.

Psychosocial Skill Development

Disruptive behavior and poor social skills are considered academic risk factors that have the potential to influence a student's decision to drop out of school. To avoid this trajectory, several dropout interventions centered on prosocial skill development have been created (e.g., Tremblay, Pagani-Kurtz, Masse, Vitaro, & Pihl, 1995). Vitaro, Brendgen, and Tremblay (1999) investigated the impact of Tremblay et al.'s prevention program aimed at reducing early disruptiveness in grade-school children on subsequent dropout. This intervention included a social skills training component for children, as well as a parent-training piece. Vitaro et al. reported a 12% dropout rate for the treatment group at age 17 compared to the 22% dropout rate for the active control group.

Teacher Training in Child Behavior Management

As students move from middle to high school, there appears to be a shift in behavior management techniques that schools utilize to address rule violation (Davis, 2011). During middle and elementary school, positive behavior support systems are put in place to prevent rule violations; however, these preventive systems are often neglected at the high school level and more punitive measures are utilized to address rule violations. For example, high school administrators tend to address rule violations through exclusionary consequences, such as detention, suspension, and expulsion (Sugai & Horner, 2002). Positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS; U.S. Department of Education, 2014) is an approach to discipline that encourages and rewards positive behavior, as opposed to solely focusing on the negative behavior. Research found several positive student outcomes in high schools that had implemented a schoolwide PBIS system. Davis (2011) reported a significant decrease in dropout rates for a western Kentucky school district that had implemented PBIS within its high schools.

Each of these intervention strategies offers educators a starting point to address dropout factors and issues. Unfortunately, the dropout problem is complex and stems from many different causes. Despite the methodological issues associated with studying a multimodal intervention, educators are encouraged to espouse this approach for dropout prevention planning. Further research that helps tease apart the individual effects of the different components of intervention efforts (i.e., component analysis) is needed. To aid in this effort, the IES Practice Guide recommends that districts adopt comprehensive schoolwide reform.

Schoolwide Reform

Freshman year of high school is a pivotal year for preventing subsequent dropout. Since freshman year of high school is the first opportunity students have to begin earning credits towards graduation, success within this year is crucial to keeping students on track. Allensworth and Easton (2007) found that students who were on track at the end of their freshman year (as defined by successful completion of all freshman course requirements) were four times more likely to graduate than students who were off track. Unfortunately, it is easy for freshman to quickly fall off track. Research has found that approximately 35-45% of students entering high school demonstrated a need for additional behavioral or academic support (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010; McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008). Given this high percentage of students who are underprepared, it comes as no surprise that ninth grade marks the year with the highest percentage of grade retention (nonpromotion) rates (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009; Curran Neild, 2009).

To lessen the impact of this sensitive transition from middle to high school, comprehensive school reform models are being implemented nationwide. Effective transition programs are comprehensive programs that focus on improving attendance, achievement, and retention and include diversified activities for parents, teachers, and students (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). On average, schools that implement transition programs report an 8% dropout rate, while schools without such programs report average rates close to 25% (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). The following section highlights two comprehensive models implemented in large, urban school districts as a method to reduce dropout.

Project Transition

The Project Transition reform model was piloted at two high schools, Pulaski High School in Milwaukee, WI; and Schlagle High School in Kansas City, KS. This model was created by the private, nonprofit organization Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC). This reform model established student-teacher learning teams comprising approximately 120 students paired with a set of four core academic teachers (math, English, science, and history). The primary purpose of these learning teams was to create a small learning community of students who shared schedules. This model also set aside time during the academic day for daily teacher collaboration and professional development (PD) team meetings. A specialized coaching position was created to enhance PD efforts. Quint, Miller, Pastor, and Cytron (1999) evaluated the impact of this model using a cohort comparison design and found that the Project Transition model created a more supportive school environment by improving student-teacher and student-peer relationships at both schools. The evaluation also found that the model produced small effects in student achievement for students with low attendance rates at Schlagle High School; however, the same academic effects were not found at Pulaski High School. The evaluators speculated that the difference in findings was largely due to implementation issues since the model was not implemented with adequate fidelity at Pulaski High School.

Talent Development High School

The Talent Development High School model is another reform model targeted at keeping students on track in ninth grade. Researchers at the Center for Research on Education of Students Placed At Risk at Johns Hopkins University developed this comprehensive model. A central component of this model is systemic restructuring, which includes relocating all ninth graders to their own floor or wing and dividing this cohort into smaller learning communities based on career themes. These smaller learning communities constitute the Ninth Grade Success Academy, aimed at fostering a strong relationship between teachers and students. Students remained in their small learning communities throughout high school. Additional elements to this model included a Freshman Seminar designed to help students improve their study skills and a Twilight Academy in which students can make up credits and receive additional academic services outside of the traditional school day. Using a comparative interrupted time series analysis, Kemple, Herlihy, and Smith (2005) found that first-time freshman attending a school using the Talent Development model demonstrated significantly higher attendance rates, increased number of academic

course credits earned, and improved promotion rates to the next grade as compared to first-time freshmen from non-Talent Development schools. Furthermore, the evaluation found that impacts on credits earned and promotion rates sustained through eleventh grade. These gains may have sustained longer than 11th grade; however, the study concluded follow-up evaluations at 11th grade. Therefore, no further information was available. It is important to note that despite the conclusion of the evaluation, students continued to receive programming through their small learning communities throughout their 12th grade year. The evaluation findings also indicated that the Ninth Grade Success Academy was the most consistently implemented element of the reform effort.

Both the Project Transition and Talent Development reform models highlight activities high schools can implement to help keep students on track and reduce dropout rates. Based on the evaluation results from each of these models, it is apparent that fostering a positive school climate is an essential ingredient for a successful transition. Furthermore, these two examples provide evidence that fidelity of implementation is crucial to maintaining and sustaining positive impacts.

Summary

Remediating the dropout crisis that plagues our nation has proven to be a challenge. Despite well-known negative consequences, students continue to drop out of school each year. Traditional dropout theories tend to examine the issue through a lens that primarily focuses on student-level variables, which fail to account for the complex interplay between individuals and their environments (Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz et al., 2007; Curran Neild, 2009). Incorporating a more robust system-level perspective into dropout research has served to shed light on identifying variables that are more responsive to change (Curran Neild et al., 2008).

The dropout problem is complex, but an improved American educational system is possible. Synthesized from findings from current research, the following recommendations encourage educators to refine their dropout prevention and intervention practices to include comprehensive, evidenced-based strategies:

- Utilize current district data to develop an early warning system that spans across middle and high school. The IES *Dropout Prevention Practice Guide* and the National High School Center's *Better High Schools Guide* can aid districts with the development.
- Select variables for the early warning system that are responsive to change. Districts are encouraged to focus on variables that they have the resources to modify. For example, if the district does not have the resources to provide adequate transportation for students, including a variable measuring absenteeism may not be appropriate to include in the early warning system. If districts cannot provide students additional transportation support,

flagging students with this variable may cause the student to further feel pushed out by the school. While this variable is important and should be monitored by schools, it should not be included in the early warning system until the appropriate infrastructure is in place to provide supports.
- Encourage teachers to implement service-learning as part of their traditional curriculum activities. Service-learning has been found to be more engaging for students than traditional lectures (Manzo, 2008). If students are engaged with the curriculum, they will be less tempted to leave school early.
- Incorporate a multimodal approach to dropout intervention planning that extends across both middle and high schools. For example, to encourage a smooth transition from middle to high school, districts could implement a summer bridge program in which high school students serve as peer mentors for middle school students. Promoting these positive peer relationships will not only aid students as they make the transition to high school, but will also encourage a more positive school climate.

By heeding current research trends, policymakers and district administrators can continue to implement additional effective ways to keep students *in school* and *on track* for a high school diploma.

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Supporting Transition of At-Risk Students Through a Freshman Orientation Model

Shawna DeLamar and Casey Graham Brown

Abstract: *This study examines the issues surrounding middle school students' transitions to high school and the degree to which freshman orientation models can help them. The attendance, discipline, report card grades, and end-of-course exams of 60 students who participated in a freshman orientation were compared to those of 150 students who were invited to participate in the program but did not. Students who participated experienced gains in science end-of-course state exams; increases in math, science, and English course grades; and positive changes in discipline and attendance data. Parents of program participants shared that, overall, the program helped their children make a smooth transition to high school.*

Researchers have referred to the freshman year of high school as precarious, awkward, and even pivotal (Ascher, 1987; Black, 2004; Donegan, 2008; Willens, 2013). The transition from middle school to high school for any student can be extremely difficult, but it poses even bigger challenges for at-risk students (Ascher, 1987; Montgomery & Hirth, 2011). Transitioning students from eighth- to ninth-grade requires that middle and high schools work together on initiatives to prepare students for high school (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Williamston, 2010). It is especially important to provide support for students at risk for academic failure (Dorman, 2012).

The need for ninth-grade transition programs has received increased attention in recent years (Frank, 2011; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Montgomery & Hirth, 2011). Students who participate in transition programs are better prepared for the challenges of high school (Steele, 2010; Sutton, 2009). A collaborative effort on the part of administrators, teachers, and parents is necessary to address students' needs as they make the transition to high school (Dorman, 2012; Education Partnerships, Inc., 2012; Frank, 2011; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). According to Neild, Stoner-Eby, and Furstenberg (2008), adverse effects of challenging school transitions include retention, placement in remedial courses, and dropping out.

The freshman year transition to high school is vitally important to students' success throughout their high school career. Ninth-grade students who experience academic and social issues are more likely to drop out (Sims, 2010). Effective programs must offer a myriad of best practices that address academic, social, and procedural challenges for all students (Akos, 2004; Ascher, 1987; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Dorman, 2012; Smith, 1997). Comprehensive transition programs that include numerous activities geared toward the concerns and needs of students, parents, and teachers can be effective in helping at-risk students transition to the ninth grade. Effective transition programs improve attendance, achievement, and retention among students (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Such programs can help students transition to a new school with less anxiety and more academic success. School administrators can ease transitions by facilitating programs that address student and family needs and by supporting communication attempts between middle and high school faculty and staff members (Education Partnerships, Inc., 2012).

Researchers in the area of transition have proposed that communication and solid research are needed to ensure that educators are providing the best resources to help students succeed (Akos, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). Benner and Graham (2009) and Isakson and Jarvis (1999) indicated that transition from middle school to high school is a year-long process. Few studies have incorporated a parent perspective or reviewed student end-of-course (EOC) exams, grades, attendance, and discipline data in an attempt to determine whether there were cause-effect relationships among the variables.

A quantitative, causal-comparative design was used to examine On the Block, a freshman transition program that focuses on providing students with knowledge about high school prior to their first day attending high school. Qualitative data were obtained from responses of participants' parents to open-ended survey questions. Goals of the research included adding to the body of knowledge on transition practices and providing the school district with information regarding the impact of the On the Block (OTB) transition program.

Background Literature

Educators, parents, community members, and health-care professionals identify a person as *at risk* if he or she may be in need of interventions to help him or her cope with the transition into a new environment. According to Balfanz (2011), the three key indicators of student success are attendance, behavior, and course failure. The Texas Education Agency lists 13 criteria (TEA, 2011) to use to identify at-risk students. Students from low-income families who are coded with one of these indicators typically have a 25% chance, at best, of graduating from high school (Balfanz, 2011). Approximately 80% of eventual dropouts display distress signs in one of these 13 areas during grades six to nine (Balfanz, 2011).

Secondary educators are essential to helping students at risk for dropping out (Akos, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Montgomery & Hirth, 2011). Decreasing the number of students who drop out necessitates being attentive to high school transitions (Neild et al., 2008). According to Neild et al. (2008), dropout rates

cannot be improved if students are not provided assistance with high school transitions. Teachers hold students accountable by providing constructive feedback, refusing to accept halfhearted efforts, providing assistance when needed, and refusing to give up on students (Stipek, 2006). Strong communication efforts can build mutual trust between families and schools (Bardwell, 2011; Meier, 2002). To lessen the stress associated with transitions, middle school staff should start preparing students for transition around sixth grade.

High School Transition Practices

The transition from middle school to high school can be a pivotal time that requires students to traverse settings that are larger and less welcoming that those they experienced in middle school (Black, 2004). This transition creates a stopping point for freshman known as the "ninth-grade bulge," where almost 25% of students are held for another year (Black, 2004, p. 43). The freshman year experience for students can be a predictor as to whether or not a student will stay in high school and graduate (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

Several strategies and programs have emerged over the last few decades to address this growing epidemic of how to support freshman transitions (Sims, 2010); some high schools utilize freshman academies to create smaller learning communities to ease ninth-grade transition, while others utilize orientation meetings, school redesign, and special courses to support students during this time (Reents, 2002; Sims, 2010). Another strategy that is widely used to help students transition to high school and feel more connected as high school freshmen is to break down a large high school into smaller groups (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010; Reents, 2002). Smaller groups allow students to receive special attention, build relationships, and decrease alienation. While it can be beneficial to put students into smaller groups, it is also important to provide them with effective teachers (Donegan, 2008; Pellicer, 2003).

The preparation process for students who are entering high school should be accompanied by special programs that orient students and parents to the school. Providing an orientation allows parents and students to become familiar with procedures and rules and to feel as though they are part of the school culture (Bardwell, 2011). Ascher (1987) suggested several orientation practices used to smooth the passage from eighth grade to high school. The practices included: (a) afterschool activities, (b) small group visits, (c) shadowing, and (d) orientation programs. These practices can be used alone or in conjunction with one another to provide support to at-risk students and their parents (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

Student Perceptions of the Transition to Ninth Grade

Mizelle and Irvin (2000) posited that one of the fundamental goals of any middle school should be to present support to students and to help them make a successful transition. Despite the need identified throughout the literature to support students during transition, some schools have not been able to help make the transition to high school a smooth passage (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000). For example, according to Smith-Maddox and Wheelock (1995), many disadvantaged students, particularly those in high-poverty school districts, are not always aware that courses taken in high school are critical to their future opportunities. Reversing this situation requires support and guidance from counselors and teachers (Smith-Maddox & Wheelock, 1995).

Students have noted concerns about transitioning to high school as freshmen. Some appear to be concerned about getting lost, interacting with older students and bullies, understanding the school rules, making new friends, successfully opening lockers, and having too much homework (Akos & Galassi, 2004). Beresford (2013) found that students were most concerned about academic success. Parents and teachers can influence student perceptions of high school; however, parents and siblings may communicate warnings to students that contain sensationalized information (Akos & Galassi, 2004).

Parent Perceptions of the Transition to Ninth Grade

Educational transitions present challenges and opportunities for students, parents, teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors (Montgomery & Hirth, 2011). The freshman transition is a time that is associated with achievement loss (Smith, 2006; Smith, Feldwisch, & Abell, 2006). Smith et al. (2006) found that, in general, students and parents were excited about the opportunities available in the high school setting.

Parents need access to accurate information regarding the organizational and academic changes their children are likely to encounter as they enter the ninth grade (Dorman, 2012; Education Partnerships, Inc., 2012). It is not possible for parents or school staff members to describe and prepare students for all the changes and experiences they will face in high school, but it is possible to improve students' chances of success by providing research-based transition programs and orientations to students who are entering their freshman year of high school and to their parents (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Smith, 2006).

On the Block

On the Block (OTB) is an orientation and intervention program that begins in middle school and continues through students' freshman year to help prepare students for the high school transition. An aim of the program is to help students build relationships with adults at the high school level. Middle schools and high schools work together to plan activities, invite parents and students to informational meetings, and target at-risk students to attend the program.

On the Block is an invitation only, fast-paced preview of high school. High school at-risk counselors facilitate the program. School staff members identify students to participate in the program using at least one of the 13 at-risk criteria listed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2011). Statutory criteria for at-risk status include a student who is under 21 years of age and who:

1. was not advanced from one grade level to the next for one or more school years;
2. is in grades 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, or 12 and did not maintain an average equivalent to 70 on a scale of 100 in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum during a semester in the preceding or current school year or is not maintaining such an average in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum in the current semester;
3. did not perform satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered to the student under TEC [Texas Education Code] Subchapter B, Chapter 39, and who has not in the previous or current school year subsequently performed on that instrument or another appropriate instrument at a level equal to at least 110% of the level of satisfactory performance on that instrument;
4. is in prekindergarten, kindergarten, or grades 1, 2, or 3 and did not perform satisfactorily on a readiness test or assessment instrument administered during the current school year;
5. is pregnant or is a parent;
6. was placed in an alternative education program in accordance with §TEC 37.006 during the preceding or current school year;
7. was expelled in accordance with §TEC 37.007 during the preceding or current school year;
8. is currently on parole, probation, deferred prosecution, or other conditional release;
9. was previously reported through the PEIMS [Public Education Information Management System] to have dropped out of school;
10. is a student of limited English proficiency, as defined by §TEC 29.052;
11. is in the custody or care of the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services or was, during the current school year, referred to the department by a school official, officer of the juvenile court, or law enforcement official;
12. is homeless, as defined by 42 U.S.C. Section 11302 and its subsequent amendments; or
13. resided in the preceding school year or resides in the current school year in a residential placement facility in the district, including a detention facility, substance abuse treatment facility, emergency shelter, psychiatric hospital, halfway house, or foster group home. (TEA, 2011)

An informational meeting to inform parents and students about the program is held at the end of the school year preceding the summer that students are scheduled to attend On the Block. At the meeting, district personnel share information with parents and students about transitioning to high school and encourage program participation.

Students who participate in On the Block receive one-half of a local credit for attending a two-week orientation the summer before freshman year, Monday through Thursday, 8:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Participation in OTB serves as a student's first opportunity to experience a block schedule, eat lunch in the cafeteria, and attend high school classes. The goal is to show students what a typical day might be like so that students can be better prepared, feel more comfortable, and build relationships before the first day of high school.

Participating students are exposed to the campus layout prior to the first day of school and are taught how to open a locker. Other information items shared include cafeteria procedures, how grade-point averages are determined, and how to get involved in extracurricular activities. The students find out class schedules and locations and experience a 90-minute class period, a new experience for freshman students because the district's middle schools utilize 45-minute class periods. To culminate the summer session, each high school invites its respective band, athletic team members, and teachers to interact with the OTB students in a celebration similar to a pep rally.

Research Questions

The primary purpose of this study was to determine if On the Block made an impact on students who participated in the program. The study included an examination of student attendance, discipline, report card grades, and EOC exams between students who participated in OTB and those who did not participate. Parents provided perceptions about OTB via survey responses. Data were used to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there a difference between OTB students and non-OTB students on end-of-course exams, grades, attendance, and discipline?
2. How do parents of OTB students perceive the value of the orientation program?

Method of Procedure

The student participants in this study were selected from a large Texas suburban school district and chosen based on their participation in the On the Block transition program during the summer of 2011. The particular large suburban school district involved in this study was selected for two reasons: (a) its accessibility to the investigator, and (b) the OTB program being studied was unique to this district. A preexisting treatment group was comprised of 60 students from three of the district's high schools who had participated in the OTB program during the 2011-2012 school year. The group of students who participated in OTB was compared to a group of students who did not participate. The non-OTB group included 150 students (50 from each campus) from the same three high schools as the students who participated in OTB. The adults who participated in the survey were the parents of students who attended OTB.

The first research question examined passing/failing grades for student end-of-course exams, report card grades, attendance, and discipline. The question was answered by analyzing individual student data from the district's student

information systems. Data were tabulated and analyzed using SPSS 18.0, a statistical software package for the social sciences. Individual student data between On the Block students and non-On the Block students were analyzed using one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs). The independent variable was the group status for the OTB program. Dependent variables for each ANOVA were the outcomes of attendance, discipline, report card grades, and EOC exams. Statistical tests determined whether a relationship existed between the independent variable at a .05 alpha level.

To answer the second research question, 60 parents of students who attended the On the Block transition program were mailed a researcher-created survey to solicit their perceptions of how the OTB program impacted their children's successes during their freshman year. Parents were asked specific questions regarding whether the OTB program helped their children feel more comfortable the first day of school, understand the expectations of high school, build relationships with teachers and staff, and navigate the school building. The open-ended response data were organized and coded to determine whether themes existed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Findings

The On the Block program provided students with eight days of mock lessons in math and science, technology training, and a review of procedural items to help students understand the differences between middle school and high school. OTB also offered students an opportunity to get to know faculty members, administrators, and other students before the school year started so that students would feel more prepared during the first weeks of their freshman year.

Research Question 1

The first research question investigated the passing/failing grades for student end-of-course exams, report card grades, attendance, and discipline. The independent variable was the group status for the On the Block program

(experimental or control). Dependent variables for each ANOVA were the outcomes of end-of-course exams, report card grades, attendance, and discipline.

End-of-course exams. One-way analyses of variance were conducted to evaluate the differences in end-of-course exams for the core subjects of math, science, social studies, and English. The independent variable was program status (On the Block or non-On the Block) and the dependent variable was EOC exam score (see Table 1). All exam results were collected for both the OTB students and the non-OTB control group.

The minimum percent correct required for students to pass the Algebra I (math) EOC exam was 37%. A greater percentage of On the Block students passed the math EOC (86%); however, a one-way ANOVA showed that the difference in math end-of-course exam scores between the OTB group ($M = 52.04$, $SD = 15.33$) and the non-OTB group ($M = 46.77$, $SD = 16.42$) was not statistically significant, $F(1,167) = 3.81$, $p = .053$, $\eta^2 = .022$. The minimum percent correct required for students to pass the Biology (science) EOC exam was 37%. For science, a greater percentage of OTB students passed (84%). A one-way ANOVA showed that the difference in science end-of-course exam scores between the OTB group ($M = 50.60$, $SD = 14.13$) and the non-OTB group ($M = 45.56$, $SD = 13.37$) was statistically significant, $F(1,182) = 5.34$, $p = .021$, $\eta^2 = .029$.

The minimum percent correct required for students to pass the World Geography (social studies) EOC exam was 46%. For social studies, a greater percentage of On the Block students passed (70%); however, a one-way ANOVA showed that the difference in social studies end-of-course exam scores between the OTB group ($M = 52.96$, $SD = 14.25$) and the non-OTB group ($M = 48.67$, $SD = 14.81$) was not statistically significant, $F(1,181) = 3.37$, $p = .068$, $\eta^2 = .018$. The minimum percent correct required for students to pass the English I Reading (English) EOC exam was 54%. For English, a greater percentage of OTB students passed (45%); however, a one-way ANOVA showed that the difference in English end-of-course exam scores between

Table 1

EOC Exam Means and Standard Deviations for the 150 Non-OTB and 60 OTB Students

Subject	Non-On the Block			On the Block		
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Math	117	46.8	16.4	51	52.0	15.3
Science*	126	45.6	13.4	57	50.6	14.1
Social Studies	125	48.7	14.8	57	53.0	14.3
English	123	49.1	13.3	58	51.6	15.0

Note: An asterisk (*) denotes statistical significance at the .05 level.

the OTB group (M = 51.64, SD = 14.98) and the non-On the Block group (M = 49.07, SD = 13.28) was not statistically significant, $F(1,180)$ = 1.35, p = .246, η^2 = .008.

Report card grades. One-way analyses of variance were conducted to evaluate the difference in report card grades for the core subjects of math, science, social studies, and English. The independent variable was the program status of treatment (On the Block or non-On the Block) and the dependent variable was the report card grade (see Table 2). Students who received the OTB intervention showed significant gains in grade point averages in the areas of math, science, and English.

A one-way ANOVA showed that the difference in math report card grades between the On the Block group (M = 78.53, SD = 7.71) and the non-On the Block group (M = 74.57, SD = 9.62) was statistically significant, $F(1,196)$ = 7.80, p = .006, η^2 = .038. The difference in science report card grades between the OTB group (M = 79.47, SD = 8.22) and the non-OTB group (M = 74.94, SD = 9.86) was statistically significant, $F(1,196)$ = 9.61, p = .002, η^2 = .047. A one-way ANOVA showed that the difference in English report card grades between the OTB group (M = 80.60, SD = 7.87) and the non-OTB group (M = 76.14, SD = 9.86) was statistically significant, $F(1, 197)$ = 9.59, p = .002, η^2 = .047.

The one report card subject area where there was no significant gain was in social studies. A one-way ANOVA showed that the difference in social studies report card grades between the On the Block group (M = 78.73, SD = 10.01) and the non-On the Block group (M = 76.45, SD = 9.12) was not statistically significant, $F(1,196)$ = 2.43, p = .121, η^2 = .012.

Attendance and discipline. Students who participated in On the Block had fewer office referrals and fewer absences (see Table 3). The OTB group had 2.15 fewer office referrals than the non-OTB group. A one-way ANOVA showed that the difference in office referrals between the OTB group (M = 2.27, SD = 4.51) and the non-OTB group (M = 4.42, SD = 6.99) was statistically significant, $F(1,205)$ = 4.73, p = .031, η^2 = .023. For attendance, the OTB group missed an average of 2 fewer days in the school year than the non-OTB group. The difference in attendance between the OTB group (M = 3.52, SD = 4.17) and the non-OTB group (M = 5.57, SD = 6.80) was statistically significant, $F(1,205)$ = 4.84, p = .029, η^2 = .023.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations for Grades by Treatment for the 150 Non-OTB, 60 OTB Students

| | Non-On the Block | | | On the Block | | |
Subject	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Math*	138	74.6	9.6	59	78.5	7.7
Science*	138	74.9	9.9	59	79.5	8.2
Social Studies	138	76.5	9.1	59	78.7	10.0
English*	138	76.1	9.9	60	80.6	7.9

Note: An asterisk (*) denotes statistical significance at the .05 level.

Table 3

Means, Standard Deviations for Attendance, Discipline for the 150 Non-OTB, 60 OTB Students

| | Non-On the Block | | | On the Block | | |
Criterion	N	M	SD	N	M	SD
Discipline*	146	4.4	7.0	60	2.3	4.5
Attendance*	146	5.6	6.8	60	3.5	4.2

Note: An asterisk (*) denotes statistical significance at the .05 level.

Research Question 2

The second research question was used to examine the perceptions of the parents of On the Block students. A total of 33 out of 60 parents responded. The parents shared very few recommendations for program changes. Parents reported that they believed that the program helped their children make the transition to high school. The parents felt that program participation gave their children advantages of knowing where things in the high school were located and how to find classes on the first day of school.

When asked if the On the Block transition program was a positive experience for their children, parents responded that the program was "wonderful and very beneficial" and a "big help" to their children. Several parents shared that they felt that the program helped ease some of their children's fears about starting a new school.

Common themes that emerged included: (a) appreciation to staff for program implementation, (b) need for program continuation, and (c) accentuation of the program's success. Parents were asked to list any suggestions or comments they had for the On the Block program in the future. Their recommendations included:

1. I would like to continue these programs in the summer.
2. The program was too short; more meetings need to be included once school starts... maybe like an afterschool program.
3. More kids from different schools should get to participate.

Of the 33 respondents, three parents made comments that pertained to adding to or adjusting the program.

Discussion and Implications for Practice

Researchers have indicated that the transition from middle to high school is difficult for any student, but especially for at-risk youth (Reents, 2002). Educators in the 21st century must focus on creating better programs and supports that will enable more at-risk youth to be successful in high school (Baker, 2008). Research conducted by Astbury (2010) emphasized the need to review student data sources such as grades, attendance, discipline, and test scores to assess the impact of programs like On the Block. Such evidence of student success or difficulty is valuable when assessing whether a transition program has provided support to students. Researchers refer to attendance, behavior, and course failure as key indicators of success (Balfanz, 2011; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

The results of this study focused on key indicators to determine whether or not the program was a success. Significant differences existed between students who attended the On the Block transition program and those who did not for one end-of-course exam, science, and for report card grades in math, science, and English. There also was a significant difference in absences and office referrals between students who participated in the OTB program and those who did not.

Researchers have offered some understanding as to why students who participated in On the Block experienced significant gains in grades, increased attendance, and decreased discipline referrals (Copeland, 2006; Dean, 2011; Jones, 2007; Little, 2010). The OTB transition program provided students the opportunity to build strong relationships with staff and students before school started. Relationships with teachers are what motivate students to work hard and seek the support they need (Frank, 2011; Knesting, 2008; Milliken, 2007; Popadiuk & Oliver, 2001; Smith, 2007; Stipek, 2006).

The results of this study confirmed results and recommendations from previous studies that have been conducted in the area of freshman transition. Steele (2010) suggested that, especially during the ninth-grade year, students need the support of well designed transition programs that address academic, social, and emotional needs. Straksis (2010) revealed similar findings in a study conducted in a large school district. Significant effects have been observed that link positive perceptions of a highly structured transition program to an increase in grade point averages and a reduction in failures (Straksis, 2010).

Parents displayed positive perceptions about the program and responded in ways that indicated that the program was a support for their children. These types of data are instrumental in developing a program that can meet the needs of struggling parents during times of transition (Astbury, 2010). Parents need access to accurate information to prepare students for transition to high school and to provide the support needed to navigate through this difficult time (Isakson & Jarvis, 1999). Researchers have posited that parents are an important resource to help students experience success and that parents should be provided with research-based transition programs and orientations to support students (Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Smith, 2006).

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research should include pretests and posttests for students entering high school and for their parents. Gaining feedback before program implementation and after program completion can help measure whether the program met the needs of the students and the parents. Parent perceptions were the only perceptions identified in this study; future studies could examine the perceptions of students and teachers.

Research pertaining to the connection between relationships and freshman transition practices needs to be conducted. Relationships are mentioned throughout the research as a factor that impacts student success (Frank, 2011; Knesting, 2008; Milliken, 2007; Popadiuk & Oliver, 2001; Smith, 2007; Stipek, 2006). The number of at-risk youth in the United States is increasing, and this increase is affecting the way schools operate (Baker, 2008). The strategies and characteristics of these programs need to be shared with school districts' leaders so that that they can work to implement effective transition programs for all students.

Summary

A collaborative effort on the part of administrators, teachers, and parents is necessary to address students' needs as students transition to high school (Akos, 2004; Ascher, 2006; Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; Smith, 1997). As the educational community evaluates its practices with regard to students transitioning from middle school to high school, it is imperative that educators and administrators recognize that it requires everyone working together to attempt to meet the individual needs of all students (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Mizelle & Irvin, 2000; Morgan & Hertzog, 2001).

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Book Review: *A White Teacher Talks About Race*

Reviewed by Nicole Austin

In my work with students the school system has labeled "at-risk," I find myself needing reassurance that I am "doing it right." I am constantly questioning my practices and myself. Am I reaching them? Do my students trust me? Do I follow through? I chose Julie Landsman's book because I was instantly drawn to the title, *A White Teacher Talks About Race.* I was intrigued. Can this woman sum up how I feel as a White female teacher who works with many students who are not the same race as I or do not share a common cultural background with me? Could she also provide insight into best practices for working with this population? *A White Teacher Talks About Race* discusses the importance of acknowledging race and culture and how that acknowledgement impacts schools, classrooms, students, and society. Landsman lets us in on what has worked for her with real students in real schools.

The author describes a composite day teaching at an alternative school in Minnesota. She depicts her interactions with her students and colleagues. As an educator in a situation similar to Landsman's, I find her thoughts and ideas to be very much aligned with my own. It was as if I could place myself in Landsman's shoes during her exchanges with students, parents, and other educational professionals. She offers genuine insights into the problems caused by diverse race and cultural backgrounds and the lack of teachers who share these same backgrounds or the presence of those who are ill-equipped to deal with these differences.

Landsman's introduction tells the reader that her purpose for writing is to help everyone impacted by the effects of being of a different race and cultural background from one's students *to understand*—to understand themselves, their students, and even the country as a whole. An overarching theme of her book is the concept of "White privilege" and its effects. To some this may be a shocking topic for Landsman to cover because of her race. However, she argues that understanding that White privilege is real and that it exists is important when one works with a student population of which the majority is not White. Landsman knows that the effect of White privilege are not going away any time soon, but rather is something that we need to teach our Black, Asian, Latino/A, and Native American students how to navigate. During one period of Landsman's teaching schedule, she and a group of students discuss articles that she posts as a "topic of the week." The

topic discussed with one group of her students is what to do during a job interview. Landsman writes:

> The students here, in front of me now, are smart. Although they do live in a White world, many of them are not *of* that world. Yet they have carefully observed it. They have had to observe it in order to survive in it. They know they have to learn to negotiate between their own homes and mine. They have to learn to lower their voices and raise their hands. Some may have to speak without dialect...They use their observation and knowledge of the White world of power, combined with what we can tell them of this world, in order to negotiate their way. (pg. 98)

Landsman's words are powerful because they capture the idea that White educators have explicit knowledge about living and being successful in a White world. Many students I work with do not have this advantage and so it is my responsibility to prepare them to be successful in a world that is not entirely their own. However, that preparation needs to be done carefully and responsibly. Landsman states she prepares her students "*without asking them to give up anything of their own culture, their own language*" (pg. 98). Following her example creates a very fine line to walk as a White teacher. We have to be able to explain to students that White privilege exists and, that to be successful in this predominantly White world, they need to know how to navigate it. At the same time, we cannot come off as condescending or dismissive or ask our students to abandon their own cultural identities. Landsman's emphasis is that we need to explicitly teach our students about this White power world and, further, we need to teach them what *we* know so that we help them assimilate more easily into White power configurations.

Landsman presents many examples of students with whom she has relationships built on trust. Her descriptions of those relationships are relatable. Students who are at risk encompass more than just those who may leave school because of academics. At-risk students include those who are teen parents or gang members, students who are homeless, in foster care, or who live with a single parent, and other various factors that can affect a student's performance in school. These students thrive when they have a relationship with an adult on whom they can depend, can trust, and

can look to as a role model. Landsman gives a multitude of examples of ways her students demonstrate their trust in her. In one example, she describes a situation with a student who does not at first feel safe going into a bookstore in an upper-class neighborhood because she knows what it is like to be followed by storeowners and employees because of her race. Landsman reassures the student that she would make sure to contact the store employees to let them know ahead of time that her students would be coming. Landsman also guarantees the student that she would be with her the whole time. At the end of the discussion, the group of students involved decide it would just be better if Landsman would go to the store and pick the books for them so they would not have to endure the prejudice involved in going to a business outside of their comfort zone. However, later in the day, Landsman meets the student in the school hallway. The student stops her and says, "I ain't scared of no bookstore, Landsman. We can go if you wanna go" (pg. 55). This student had shown tremendous trepidation about going to the bookstore in their prior conversation, and then completely changed her mind because of the trust she has in Landsman. Of the change, Landsman writes one of the most profound statements in her book:

> It is that exact smile, that sudden honesty and a willingness to risk a trip to the bookstore or a writing exercise that feels scary, that brings me hope…when they are really *with* me, with their words, working all alone on the computer, or when they are speaking honestly, reading out loud all they feel, I sense the power of public education to change this country. (pg. 56)

How do educators get their students to be *with* them? The way Landsman describes her interactions with her students in this book proves that the most effective way to get students to be with us as educators is through trustworthy relationships. Landsman follows through when she says she will do something. She offers her students advice, but backs off when they want to be left alone. If a student knows that a teacher is going to be there for them, in my experience, they are willing to take risks that they might not necessarily take otherwise.

Landsman's book is not for every educational professional. This book may not work for a reader who is easily offended when talking about race, and Landsman's opinions and beliefs might make some White readers feel like she is on the offensive. I do not believe being on the offensive was her intention. Landsman truly seems to care about the students in her book as well as all students who do not share her same race or cultural background. Her assessment of the state of our education system is accurately depicted, and while she does offer some ways we can reform the system, she is realistic in her thinking and knows that this change will not come about quickly. Change will not happen until policymakers in the White

power world realize the inequity in our educational system. On a final note, Landsman explains her belief in what the educational system should offer all students that serves as a succinct overview of the philosophy she incorporates into her classrooms. She states:

> I believe many students I teach deserve many chances. However, I feel more and more isolated in this belief. This isolation stems from the fact that I want eighteen- and twenty-one-year old young men and women I teach to have the chance to start over, despite prison and drug dealing, despite suspensions and expulsions from schools, despite bad language, despite mistakes. I want them to have more than three strikes. In many ways I want them to be able to start over every day they come in the door of our schools. (pg. 74)

Landsman is an idealist—one to whom I look up and wish to emulate in my educational practices. If we all held her beliefs for our own students, we could give them the chances they need for success.

Reviewer
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The Journal of At-Risk Issues

Call for Manuscripts

The Journal of At-Risk Issues (JARI) (ISSN1098-1608) is published by the National Dropout Prevention Center and the National Dropout Prevention Network. The combined missions of the Center and Network are to provide information and services to those engaged in helping young people in at-risk situations. The journal is nationally refereed, currently published twice per year, and abstracted in ERIC.

Focus

Manuscripts should be original works not previously published nor concurrently submitted for publication to other journals. Manuscripts should be written clearly and concisely for a diverse audience, especially educational professionals in K-12 and higher education. Topics appropriate for *The Journal of At-Risk Issues* include, but are not limited to, research and practice, dropout prevention strategies, school restructuring, social and cultural reform, family issues, tracking, youth in at-risk situations, literacy, school violence, alternative education, cooperative learning, learning styles, community involvement in education, and dropout recovery.

Research reports describe original studies that have applied applications. Group designs, single-subject designs, qualitative methods, mixed methods design, and other appropriate strategies are welcome. Review articles provide qualitative and/or quantitative syntheses of published and unpublished research and other information that yields important perspectives about at-risk populations. Such articles should stress applied implications.

Format

Manuscripts should follow the guidelines of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed.). Manuscripts should not exceed 25 typed, double-spaced, consecutively numbered pages, including all cited references and illustrative materials. Submitted manuscripts that do not follow APA referencing will be returned to the author without editorial review. Tables should be typed in APA format. Placement of any illustrative materials (tables, charts, figures, graphs, etc.) should be clearly indicated within the main document text. All such illustrative materials should be included in the submitted document, following the reference section. Charts, figures, graphs, etc., should also be sent as separate, clearly labeled jpeg or pdf documents, at least 300 dpi resolution.

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