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The Effects of Transitional Challenges on Ninth Grade School Dropouts

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

The Effects of Transitional Challenges on Ninth-Grade School Dropouts

by

Merlene Leona Jones

MA, University of the United States Virgin Islands, 2001

BA, University of the United States Virgin Islands, 1993

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

The high dropout rate of the United States Virgin Islands school district's ninth-grade students is a major educational problem and the catalyst for a myriad of social problems. Ninth grade academies and extended school day intervention programs have benefited only the academically prepared students. This qualitative case study examined educators' perceptions of the challenges that led to the increased dropout rate of the district's ninth-grade students. Bandura's self-efficacy theory and Atkinson's motivational achievement theory formed the foundational pillars for this study. The research questions were focused on challenges that led to the increased dropout rate of ninth-grade students and the programs implemented to support dropout prevention. The data collection methods consisted of questionnaires from 4 administrators, 4 counselors, and 16 core-subject teachers, and semi-structured group interviews with 2 administrators, 2 counselors, and 8 core subject teachers. Analysis of the data included coding and the identification of common themes. The findings showed that poor school attendance, academic unpreparedness, and disciplinary infractions were some of the challenges that resulted in premature school dropout. Interpretation of the data confirmed that the implementation of proactive and reactive approaches, modified instructional methods, and intervention strategies have proven ineffective. After 10 years, the ninth grade academies of the school district have had no significant effect on promotion or retention rates. The introduction of Ninth Grade Completion via Career Curriculum Academies, a combination of college preparatory and vocational skills classes, may transform education for ninth-graders, increase promotional rates, and benefit the larger community.

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Dedication

There is meaning in every journey that is unknown to the traveler.

—Dietrich Bonhoeffer

As the unknown traveler, I set out with a little faith, courage, dedication, and determination to find the answer to a series of questions. Sharim, an inquisitive, then twelve-year-old son would ask frequently, "Mommy, why did you discontinue your education? Why did you not obtain a doctorate? Do you know you will have to ask for Dr. Jones when you come to the office?" Sharim, you are an intelligent young man with a lot of potential and a purpose. This study is completed and dedicated to you, Sharim: do not stop before accomplishing your goals-- become the next Dr. Jones.

This project is a dedication to families and friends; more specifically, to a considerate and patient husband, Royden Jones: the project is finally over. To Mrs. Enid Huggins, an extraordinary woman and mother—the value you placed on education has never departed, but remained as a guide. To the world's most supportive sisters and brothers, the bar is now set for the nieces and nephews. To Karina Grant, a dedicated editor and friend, you have truly made a writer out of me.

To the dedicated Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School family, especially the eighth graders, the goal of this project is to discover some solutions to curtail or eliminate premature school departure. It is extremely heartbreaking to see many of you leave school prematurely. In agreement with Nelson Mandela, education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world. Middle Schoolers: go get that education.

Acknowledgments

It is very easy to overestimate the importance of our own achievement in comparison with what we owe others. We hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich (Dietrich Bonhoeffer).

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To a sincere and uplifting church family, especially Stevie Henry, your prayers were felt every step of the way. Special thanks to the Bertha C. Boschulte Middle School family—especially Mr. Farrow, Ms. Wilkinson, Ms. Lake, Mrs. Mulley, Ms. Patricia George, and Mr. Arandia: your encouragement, assistance and support meant a great deal during this time. Then, the expression of sincerest gratitude and appreciation go to Mrs. Karina Grant, editor, counselor, and best friend for her proofreading skills. You have truthfully developed and harnessed writing skills that were dormant or nonexistent. Special thanks to Ms. Tulip Fleming for the fresh pair of editing eyes. I take time to express gratitude to my dear friend, Ornette Herbert. Heartfelt gratitude goes out to the

principals, counselors, and teachers at the James Jarvis High School and the Mary Marcelle High School (pseudonyms for participating high schools). Completing this project would have been impossible without your help.

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Section 1: The Problem

Students who have repeated a previous grade and have been advanced through school via social promotion may become apathetic, disengage from the educational process, and perform unsuccessfully at educational tasks. They have a significantly increased probability of academic failure and dropping out of school (Alves, Guimaraes, Marques, & Cavaco, 2014). Ninth grade, the transitional grade from middle school to high school, consistently registers as the year in which students in the U.S. drop out at the highest percentage (Hoff, 2015). During the transitional phase, ninth-grade students who have encountered academic challenges and displayed poor school attendance are more likely to prematurely leave school (Hickman, Bartholomew, Mathwig, & Heinrich, 2008). In sum, academic challenges and poor school attendance are the primary predictors of incompletion or premature departure from school.

In a study on the factors that hampered the graduation rate, Allensworth and Easton (2005) found that a high percentage of ninth-grade students repeated ninth grade or dropped out of school due to their inability to achieve success in at least 25% of their ninth-grade coursework (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). A more recent study conducted by Burrus and Roberts (2012) on some inhibitors that affected promotion, produced similar conclusions. The researchers stated that 80% of ninth graders who earned less than two credits during ninth grade and, attended school less than 70% of the required time, were not promoted to tenth grade and became school dropouts. Others have found that a final grade of F in English and mathematics, attendance below 80% of the required school calendar, and unsatisfactory behavioral assessment provided specific predictors of school dropouts (Neild, Balfanz, & Hertzog, 2007; Burros & Roberts, 2012). Horwitz

and Snipes (2008) found that inadequate academic preparation in the earlier grades definitively predicted school dropout. For example, they found that 60% of students who repeated any grades from kindergarten to ninth grade became school dropouts at the ninth-grade level. In a more recent study, failing English 1 and scoring below an eighth-grade level on the state's standardized test bore a direct negative relationship to ninth-grade retention (Sparks, Johnson, & Akos, 2010). Further, studies conducted by Fitzpatrick, Archambault, Janosz, and Pagani (2015) validated the previous studies and showed that preschoolers who displayed poor working memory in kindergarten were already at risk of school dropout. These researchers hypothesized that preschool working memory was a contributing factor to school dropout (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015). The findings were substantiated by the results of a study conducted in Quebec on 1,824 randomly chosen 13-year-old at-risk students born between 1997 and 1998. The participants were examined at 29 months and 41 months. An analysis of the data using logistic regression confirmed that students who possessed less working memory were inadequately ready for the next grade. Furthermore, the students faced many challenges along the educational path that eventually resulted in school dropout (Fitzpatrick et al., 2015).

Students who exit school without a high school diploma are inadequately prepared to function in society. Equipped with deficient academic and marketable skills, these school dropouts can only gain employment in menial jobs with low paying wages. For example, a ninth-grade student from the school district that served as my study site who prematurely departed school without a diploma or skill, reduced or eliminated the probability for postsecondary education, increased the potential for dependence on

government assistance and aid, and risked enduring a lifetime of hardships (see Pancham, 2010).

Rationale

The consistent premature departure of some ninth-grade students from Fullcover high schools, a pseudonym I have assigned to my study site in the U.S. Virgin Islands, has retarded the path to academic advancement and eroded the educational fabric of high schools. Data acquired from the territory's No Child Left Behind Report Card for 2009–2010 reported only 60.1% of high school students graduated from high school within their 4-year expectancy. In 2010–2011, that percent increased slightly to 63.2%; however, it is still below the 80% target (U.S.V.I. Department of Education, 2012). In a school district of 15 public schools with a student population of about 15,000, the records from the office of Planning Research and Evaluation (P.R.E.) showed that a large number of students left school without a diploma (U. S. Virgin Islands Department of Education, 2010). Further, my analysis of the data covering the 2004–2005 to 2008–2009 school years revealed percentages of school departure ranging from 1.4% in the seventh grade to 6.7% in the ninth grade. Ninth grade has always recorded the highest school dropout percentage (Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, 2010).

Approximately 35% of ninth-grade students accumulated the lowest grade-point averages (GPA), the highest percentages of failed courses, the highest school-absenteeism rate, and the highest school-dropout rate (U. S. Virgin Islands Department of Education, 2010). An analysis of Fullcover's 2008–2009 graduation and dropout rate showed an accumulated percentage of 7.4% of high school students left school without a diploma, an increase from 5.4% in 2006–2007 (U. S. Virgin Islands Department of

Education, 2010). The Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands (2010) found similar results: when compared to the other grades, the highest recorded number of students leaving school without completing their education was in the ninth grade. During the 2008–2009 school years, the Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands found that 10.6% of all ninth-grade students abandoned school. From 2004–2005 through 2008–2009, the percentages of students leaving school prior to graduation steadily increased.

Extensive studies conducted in the United States have shown that factors such as poor academic performance, high absenteeism, and disengagement from school have contributed to this dilemma. For example, the Indiana Department of Education studied the effects of poor school attendance in public school and found that school attendance directly affected graduation (Spradlin & Chang, 2012). More conclusively, only 25% of students who displayed chronic absenteeism actually completed their education. Regardless of the family's economic status, students who displayed chronic absenteeism in middle school were definite candidates for premature school departure in high school (Spradlin & Chang, 2012).

On the local level, more recent or extensive studies are needed to ascertain the causes related to the high dropout rate of ninth-grade students in the Fullcover school district. The governor, senators, the commissioner of education, the superintendent of schools, and other school personnel have speculated that academic challenges such as poor reading skills and deficient problem-solving skills in the lower grades are among the factors that have contributed to the dropout rate of high school students in the U.S.

territory (Kossler, 2007). Therefore, my study was timely and necessary for discovering the factors hampering ninth-grade students.

The low-test scores, high course-failure rates, and large premature exodus of students from Fullcover high schools have inspired educators to galvanize and find solutions. They initiated extended-school-day programs, summer bridge programs, and individual and group counseling programs to assist these students (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Furthermore, in an effort to increase the high school graduation rate and curtail the dropout rate, Fullcover senators from the 25th Legislature enacted Bill 0236, called The Dropout Prevention Act of 2005 (Legislature of the Virgin Islands, 2006). This law authorized the legislature to appropriate funds to develop programs that directly addressed factors contributing to school dropout such as teenage pregnancy, at-risk students' behavior, and academic challenges in high school (Legislature of the Virgin Islands, 2006). Despite these programs, a large number of schools from the Fullcover School District continue to be plagued with high absenteeism rates, students with several course failures, and high dropout rates, especially in the ninth grade (U.S.V.I. Department of Education, 2007).

Adolescents who felt alienated from school are more likely to become school dropouts. Previous studies conducted by Hammond, Smink, and Drew (2007) and Niemann and Beckley (2008) showed that the quality of teachers contributed significantly to students leaving school before acquiring a high school diploma. Meeker, Edmonson, and Fischer (2008) echoed the same sentiment after conducting their study on school dropouts. Their data showed that 17% of students stated their schools and their teachers prevented them from acquiring a high school diploma (Meeker et al., 2008). In a

longitudinal study conducted on 11,827 French Canadian high school students, Archambault, Janosz, Fallu, and Pagani (2009) found that adolescents who experienced alienation in school became psychologically disengaged from school, leading to their attrition from school. Sakiz, Pape, and Woolfolk-Hoy (2011) conducted a similar study and examined the effects of teacher quality on the academic achievement of adolescents. The researchers hypothesized that teachers' emotional relationships with their students could have positive or negative effects on students' association with school and learning. For instance, the results of a survey conducted on 317 students and four principals showed that students who experienced a positive relationship with teachers developed a sense of belonging, academic enjoyment, and academic self-efficacy (Sakiz et al., 2011). In contrast, students who did not feel any emotion or affection from their teachers developed hopelessness and negative associations with their mathematics classes (Sakiz et al., 2011).

Rumberger and Lin (2008), who conducted many studies in the Caribbean and in the United States, concluded that school dropout was not a one-time process, but rather a process that took root as early as kindergarten. In an exploratory study conducted on the developmental pathway of students who graduated from high school compared to their colleagues who dropped out, researchers observed that academic differences were evident in students' reading scores, mathematics scores, and writing skills from kindergarten (Hickman et al., 2008). For instance, those students who eventually dropped out of school had much lower scores in academic classes than their classmates who continued their educational journey to graduation. Additionally, this pattern manifested itself from first grade to eighth grade, and even after promotion to ninth grade (Hickman et al.,

2008). Lee, Cornell, Gregory, and Fan (2011), who examined the characteristics of school dropouts, reasons for school dropout, and future progress of school dropouts, concluded that early literacy and school attendance were necessary for academic success because students who were unavailable to receive instruction were at a greater disadvantage for acquiring high academic performance.

Researchers have claimed that potential school dropouts are identifiable from as early as elementary school. Educators have access to records of attendance, grades, and failed courses of potential school dropouts, which are substantial tools educators may use to identify and address potential dropouts and make valuable and informed decisions regarding their educational needs (California Department of Education, 2013). Balfanz and Herzog (2006) conducted a study on 14,000 Philadelphian sixth-grade students to determine their potential for dropping out of school. As early as sixth grade, or even in lower grades, predictable factors such as failure in mathematics and English, less than 80% school attendance in a school year, and poor-behavior reports placed students at a 75% chance of leaving school without a diploma. Because most school dropouts followed identifiable paths, changes in the traditional school system and effective interventions are imperative to meet the demands of this at-risk population.

Teachers possess the ability to break or make a child's educational success (California Department of Education, 2013). In their capacity as classroom teachers, they fulfill the role of counselors, mentors, educational guides, motivators, and even parents. They have a clear view of the challenges causing these ninth-grade students to leave school prematurely. Bridgeland, Dibulio, and Balfanz (2009) noted that issues observed in the classrooms strongly influenced teachers' perceptions of students' performance.

Nurmi (2012) agreed with this conclusion, and found in a meta-analysis that teachers who had a closer relationship with their students cultivated students who were highly motivated and enthusiastically engaged in their education. Teachers are the brick and mortar of the students' educational foundation, and their role is of major importance to the success or failure of students.

Hattie (2009) claimed it might be impossible to change some of the negative experiences of students in the early elementary grades; however, warm and excellent educators in middle school and even high school can help students who are at risk of failing. To this end, Hattie launched a study to transform the patterns of underachieving and unmotivated students by using earlier interventions in the classroom. Hattie's investigation in 19 demographically diverse high schools cemented the findings of other researchers: a relationship exists between academic achievement and students' motivation toward learning, connections with peers and teachers, and ambitions (Hattie, 2009). Considering the results of previous studies, in this study I investigated the perceptions of educators about the challenges that led to the premature school departure of ninth-grade students in the Fullcover School District.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level, and a Proposed Solution

Many Fullcover middle school students never reach their goal of completing high school. Challenges such as poor academic skills, a high absenteeism rate, and the unprepared state of Fullcover students contributed to their early school departure (U.S.V.I. Department of Education, 2007). In this study, I examined the perceptions of teachers, counselors, and administrators of ninth-grade students in the Fullcover School District, mainly those working in the James Jarvis and Mary Marcelle high schools

(pseudonyms), regarding the challenges faced by these ninth-grade students that led to the students' premature departures from Fullcover schools. The findings from this study indicated specific factors such as school attendance, poor academic performance, low math and reading skills, and lack of motivation for school and school activities as some of the factors that contributed to this dilemma. Results from this study also showed that the district and participating schools introduced ninth grade academies over ten years ago whose objectives were to help ninth graders overcome some of their academic or behavioral challenges, progress in their course work, and acquire skills for promotion to the tenth grade. Unfortunately, only the academically inclined students showed improvement in their academics, attendance, and behavioral patterns. The participants in this study stated that only a fraction of the ninth grade population were acquiring success in ninth grade academies; thus it is imperative that an alternative curriculum be utilized to make success possible for the larger population.

Therefore, to assist ninth-grade students in completing their education and promotion to the next level, I propose creating career academies. I will present a whitepaper project to inform educational stakeholders regarding well-structured career ninth-grade academies. These academies will not only cater to the academic needs of students, but also develop a career technical path for those students who are unable to achieve academic success.

Styron and Peasant (2010) defined a ninth-grade academy as a school setting to house all freshmen ninth-grade students together in a common area. These academies function as a school within a school where (a) only common elective classes are shared with 10th- through 12th- grade students; (b) a personalized, engaging, and responsive

learning environment is created; and (c) the ninth-grade group has its own administrative team. Although this type of academy has been successful in helping some ninth-grade students succeed, only a fraction of the population has achieved that success.

The career academy has many traits that are similar to the ninth-grade academy. This school within a school provides opportunities for academic and vocational knowledge (Rojewski, Lee, & Gemici, 2010). In addition, this academy provides job training or real life, job shadowing experiences. Hussey and Smith (2010) noted that successful transitional programs need collaboration among educators to develop programs designed to help students acquire academic and behavioral success, strategies to address the challenges associated with the transition, well-structured intervention programs designed to target at-risk students, and ongoing communication among stakeholders.

The untimely school departure and the unprepared state of young adults have captivated the attention of every level of the Fullcover community. The executive director of the Fullcover School District Board of Education reiterated in her conference the importance of reinforcing The Dropout Prevention Act of 2005 (Pancham, 2006). The executive director acknowledged that students who struggled with reading in the fourth grade, and those students who did not receive the appropriate assistance, developed into a greater problem in middle school, and by high school became dropouts. The dropout rate in the islands rose at an astounding rate, with the male population suffering more severely. Therefore, it is imperative that the community takes the necessary steps to reinforce the provisions or guidelines of the bill. The alternative is that

the Fullcover School District will continue to lose these students at a very young age (Pancham, 2006).

In a symposium held at one of the branches of the University of the Virgin Islands, the governor expressed dissatisfaction with the large number of students who were leaving school bereft of the necessary qualifications to be productive citizens (Pancham, 2010). The governor stated emphatically that losing one child through school dropout was one child too many; therefore, the governor pledged to eliminate this problem (Pancham, 2010). The commissioner of education and the executive director of the local board of education also proclaimed their discontent (Pancham, 2010).

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Many challenges plague students as they transitioned from middle school to high school. The fear of leaving the nurturing environment of middle school where teachers provided rules and structure, to the larger and unfamiliar environment of high school, coupled with the anxiety of having to acquire passing grades in courses needed for graduation, contributes to a difficult transition for many students (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006; McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). According to data from the Alliance for Excellent Education (2010), in the United States' lowest performing high schools, 58% of African American students, 50% of Hispanic students, and 22% of Caucasian students left school because of the difficult transition from the eighth grade to the ninth grade. Schoeneberger (2012) concurred with previous researcher that the transition from middle school to high school is extremely challenging for many students. Schoeneberger found that, in ninth grade, too many adults gave students full autonomy in their education instead of the guidance, support, and supervision that are necessary. Thus, the students

fall behind in their studies, do not manage their time wisely, and do not complete their school assignments (Schoeneberger, 2012). Rosenkrager, de la Torre, Stevens, and Allensworth (2014) stated that many students fell off the academic track and became truant during the transitional ninth grade phase. These two factors, they contended, strongly contribute to school drop out. In a transitional study conducted at the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research (UCCSR), researchers found that during the transition, student's grades dropped more than 50% in all subject areas. Further, the course grade decline was consistent across races and gender (Rosenkrager et al., 2014). In addition, inadequate skill preparation for ninth grade, low attendance, and disengagement from school were some additional challenges impeding progress to the next level (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010).

School transition is disruptive and stressful for many middle school students. The academic challenges, departmentalized curriculum, and constant requirements for graduation that define high school life frighten many middle school students. Benner and Graham (2009) examined the transitional experiences of 1,979 California middle school students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and concurred with the results of previous studies on this issue. Results of their longitudinal study confirmed that high school transition resulted in the constant decline in academic performance of many students. Even students who were performing at acceptable standards experienced changes during the transition period that were evident in school attendance and behavior (Benner & Graham, 2009).

Warren, Fazekas, Rennie-Hill, Fancsali, and Jaffe-Walters (2011) echoed the same sentiment, claiming that the rapid adjustments and challenges during the transition

from eighth grade to ninth grade threw many students off the track of school completion. Furthermore, due to the over-crowded classrooms of incoming and repeating ninth-grade students, assistance from school personnel is limited. Cooper and Markoe-Hayes (2011) investigated this problem and concluded that transition from eighth grade to ninth grade was difficult for many students. Their analysis of a quantitative study of 115,000 Chicago students on the effects of the transition to ninth grade produced the same results as previous studies. Even students who scored at the top of their classes in eighth grade struggled academically during the transition. Specifically, 28% of the students from low socioeconomic backgrounds fell below the expected level in mathematics. Finally, 70% to 80% of those students who failed ninth grade did not graduate from high school (Cooper & Markoe-Hayes, 2011).

Similarly, Roderick, Kelley-Kempe, Johnson, and Beechum (2014) proclaimed that ninth-grade transition—the successful stepping-stone to graduation—has been marred with academic challenges, absenteeism problems, and disciplinary issues. However, Roderick et al. believed that schools that initiated transitional strategies have assisted students to move beyond that difficulty in their education. These researchers confirmed their belief in a study that they conducted in 20 Chicago high schools. They divided participants into two groups: primary movers (students who had an effective transition), and secondary movers (students whose transition was not as effective). Results showed that a 10% increase in the primary group ensued and they stayed on track for graduation. The secondary group showed only a 5% increase in their graduation rate. Four years later, an 8% to 20% increase in the graduation rate accrued for the primary group, and there was only a 5% increase for the secondary group. Despite other factors

that contributed or prohibited school completion, researchers confirmed that strategic and effective ninth-grade transitional strategies resulted in school completion (Roderick et al., 2014).

The support of teachers, parents, and peers made the transition bearable and productive for many students. Waters, Lester, and Cross (2013) verified that the connection of students with their teachers and the support of their parents and peers aided in mitigating transitional anxiety. In a study involving 20 Western Australia secondary Catholic schools, the researchers hypothesized that support from peers, parents, and family, and the relationship with teachers resulted in positive experiences and expectations for students. Results generated from the use of a multinomial regression model showed that students who received the support of peers and family during the transitional phase had positive experiences in high school. Further, where the students developed a relationship with teachers in a conducive environment, students had a stronger likelihood of success. In contrast, students who did not receive peer or parental support and who did not build a relationship with their teachers encountered a difficult transition and negative outcomes in high school (Waters et al., 2013). In a much later study conducted by Houtte and Demanet (2016), the researchers concluded that teachers' expectations and beliefs played a pivotal role in the academic advancement or attrition of students. Houtte and Demanet (2016) examined the educational assessment data for 11,844 high schoolers from 85 Flemish secondary schools on the proposition that teachers' expectations of their students had a direct relationship with graduation or school dropout. Analyses of the data confirmed that teachers who displayed high expectations for their students motivated their students to aspire to higher level; the reverse was also

true. Students who perceived that their teachers had low expectations of them were less motivated to achieve their goals (Houtte & Demanet, 2016). Irrefutably, teachers' attitudes towards teaching and students' learning contributed to the students' school completion or dropout (Houtte & Demanet, 2016).

Definition of Terms

In examining the challenges faced by students as they made the transition to ninth grade, I used the following definitions for this study:

Dropouts: Students who were enrolled in school any time during the previous school year, but who were not enrolled at the start of the following school year, and who did not successfully complete school (Stillwell & Sable, 2013; U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Education, 2005).

Ninth-Grade Academy: This school within a school houses all freshman ninth-grade students together in a common area. These students will only attend elective classes with 10th- through 12th-grade students. Teachers will share a common planning time to facilitate collaboration (Styron & Peasant, 2010).

Ninth-Grade Career Academy: A smaller learning community in a larger school setting exhibiting the following characteristics:

- Ninth-grade students are grouped together, take classes together, and are taught or serviced by the same group of educators in a common area.
- Students use an integrated curriculum that consists of college-preparatory classes and career coursework that focuses on a common theme (e.g., tourism or engineering).

- Development of partnerships with local businesses in the community, the local university, and other community members for services such as mentorship, career-based experiences, knowledge and skill development, and academic course preparation (Rojewski et al., 2010).

Social promotion: The advancement of students to the next grade level before mastering the skills in that grade level (Lynch, 2014).

Traditional school setting: The school setting that immerses all ninth-grade students into the general school population. The ninth-grade students share common courses with 10th- through 12th-grade students (Styron & Peasant, 2010).

Transition: The ongoing, important process that caused change in a student's life, self-concept, and learning as the student moved from one institution of learning, development, and maturity to another (Hussey & Smith, 2010).

Significance of the Study

The percentage of ninth-grade students departing the public school system prematurely is an issue in the United States and in the Fullcover School District which served as the local setting for this study. Dropping out of school is not a one-time process but an ongoing course of action that results in an academically unprepared group of students who are more likely to become dependent on the society for financial, emotional, and social support (Tyler & Lofstorm, 2009). Students who completed school and acquired a high school diploma have taken steps to avoid the risk of unemployment, poverty, and other challenges in this competitive and ever-advancing economy. A student who completes a formal education is more likely to secure stable employment

and an active role in society (Berggren, 2011). Students who depart schools without acquiring a diploma face many economic, social, and educational challenges.

School dropouts are more likely to acquire menial jobs that pay small salaries, contribute to higher unemployment rates, have fewer employed weeks in a year, and are less productive/lower contributing citizens (Department of Labor, 2010). Thus, they have a greater likelihood of becoming dependent on government assistance (Latif, Choudhary, & Hammayun, 2015). In 2008, school dropouts earned a median salary of $25,000. Statistically, their counterparts, who completed high school or acquired a General Educational Development certificate, earned upward of $42,000 yearly (Chapman, Laird, & Kerval-Ramani, 2010).

Extensive studies have also shown that school dropouts have more health issues than average, and often engage in criminal activities (Latif et al., 2015). In 2004, 20% of the juveniles in the U.S.V.I. detention centers were school dropouts (Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, 2010). In 2005, data showed a 5% decrease, but from 2006 to 2008, the percentage continued to increase, ranging from 21% to 28% (Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, 2010). In 2009–2010, 34% of juveniles in the detention center were school dropouts (Community Foundation of the Virgin Islands, 2010). In the United States, high school dropouts commit 75% of crimes (Asher, 2011).

Many researchers have investigated and provided reasons and solutions for this dilemma on an international level, but in the Fullcover School District, where similar problems exist, evaluations need to be more rigorous and earlier interventions are imperative. Studies on the "characteristics of school dropouts" and "school dropouts in public and private schools," were conducted more than two decades ago (Bliss, 1982;

King, 1980). However, these studies missed many factors. For instance, researchers failed to highlight the perceptions of educators, the impact of teachers' perceptions on the success or failure of students, and challenges encountered by students who transitioned from middle school. In addition, these studies did not offer any clear solutions to the dilemma students faced as they transitioned to ninth grade. Therefore, in this study I examined the perceptions of educators such as teachers, counselors, and administrators in two public schools in the Fullcover School District regarding the challenges that led to the dropout of ninth-grade students in those public schools.

Guiding/ Research Questions

A ninth-grade student in a Fullcover public school experiences more rigorous class schedules, more stringent rules, and increased graduation requirements, which contributes to a difficult transition from middle school for many ninth-grade students. Below-grade-level academic skills, unsatisfactory behavior, and sometimes immaturity make the transition to the new environment more academically challenging, emotionally, and socially difficult. Likewise, teenage pregnancies, drug abuse, retention in previous grades, being older than peers in a grade, and sometimes the teachers' attitudes have significantly affected the academic paths for young adolescent students.

In efforts to find potential school dropouts prior to ninth grade, local educators have conducted studies on the characteristics of school dropouts using a specific school or the data from public and private school dropouts in the U.S.V.I. (Bliss, 1982; King, 1980). My analysis of their findings confirmed that ninth grade is the troublesome grade for students who left school prematurely. Furthermore, retention in earlier grades, dislike for school, inability to get along with teachers, and failing too many classes were some

major reasons highlighted by these researchers (Bliss, 1982; King, 1980). Based on their data sources, these researchers confirmed that youths were in trouble and immediate changes in the traditional approaches to educating them were necessary (Bliss, 1982; King, 1980; REL Northeast & Islands, 2010).

I built this case study on research conducted previously, but I specifically examined the perspectives of educators who are the individuals who play significant roles in the classrooms and schools, and foster success or failure for students. Thus, the research questions that guided this study and provided insights for solutions were the following:

RQ 1: What are educators' perceptions of the challenges that lead to the dropout of ninth-grade students in Fullcover's schools?

RQ 2: What are these educators' understandings of potential school dropouts?

RQ 3: What are the roles of ninth-grade educators in preventing potential school dropouts from dropping out of high school in the ninth grade?

RQ 4: What programs are in place to address the needs of potential school dropouts?

The perceptions of ninth-grade educators were of paramount importance in finding solutions or obtaining answers to the research questions. In an extensive literature review, I found that the educator–pupil relationship is extremely important in a student's failure or success during the transitional phase to high school.

Review of the Literature

A careful review of studies that I retrieved via searches of academic databases such as ERIC and Education Complete produced pertinent information for this study. My

searches for keywords such as *school dropout, school transition, grade retention, school attendance,* and *delinquency* led me to evidence that validated distinct conclusions between this study and previous studies on school dropout. I found that factors such as academic unpreparedness, poor school attendance, and disciplinary referrals contributed to the school departure of students. The data showed that students who are deficient in reading or mathematics skills in middle school face difficult transitional challenges at the ninth-grade level. Further, I found that patterns of truancy displayed by students in earlier grades that are not modified by ninth grade make the educational process extremely difficult.

Relationships developed in schools can change the educational path and outcome for many students. Results from previous studies have shown that teachers who created a positive relationship with students built a bridge to school completion (Nurmi, 2012). Thys and Fleischmann (2015) concluded that teachers are instrumental in the academic growth of students. In their study of 803 ethnically diverse preadolescent students, they investigated the relationship between students' perception of their teachers towards them and their academic advancement. Multilevel assessment of the data that were gathered through questionnaires showed that students who perceived a close relationship with their teachers were motivated to accomplish their educational goals. On the other hand, students who encountered high levels of conflicts with their teachers were less motivated to learn or acquire new skills (Thys & Fleischmann, 2015). Teachers can develop a sense of belonging for students and encourage them to attend school. They directly and indirectly influence their students' behaviors.

According to Roybal and Thorton (2014), teachers can create positive school climates and effective programs to assist students as they maneuver their way into ninth grade. Ninth grade can be stressful for ninth grade students. However, if educators provide students with effective transitional programs, then the journey can be productive. After revisiting the findings from their research, Roybal and Thorton (2014) recommended that middle and high school educators convene collaboration meetings, develop innovative strategies to assist students, and create effective transitional programs.

Other researchers have found that relationships developed between students and their peers aided the smooth transitional journey, and have stressed that many students overcome transitional challenges because of the care and compassion shown by their colleagues. Finally, parental involvement is paramount to students' success. Carter and Healey (2012), for instance, confirmed that parental involvement in their child's education contributes to the likelihood of success.

A multiplicity of factors contributes to a ninth-grade dropout rate that exceeds other grades (Spradlin & Chang, 2012). In a study of public schools in the United States, the National Center for Education Statistics revealed that in 2006 the high school dropout rate in ninth grade was 9.3% (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). Inadequate academic preparation for high school, poor behavior, high absenteeism, and the new school environment were among the factors that contributed to ninth-grade school dropout (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Henry, Knight, and Thornberry (2012) claimed that the academic and behavioral performances of eighth graders in middle school had a direct impact on ninth grade advancement in high school. In addition, they found that lack of early school

engagement during adolescence has a direct relationship to problem behaviors in adulthood. These researchers conducted an extension study from a previous study to pry deeper into this situation. Data gathered from repeated interviews of 1,000 seventh and eighth graders produced the anticipated results. The findings cemented the previous results: students who became disengaged from school were destined to negative outcomes, displayed delinquent behaviors, and manifested substance abuse during adolescence. Finally, school disengagement correlated positively with school dropout (Henry et al., 2012). Wang and Frederick (2014) voiced the same sentiment—low school engagement coupled with problem behaviors is a catalyst for school dropout. In an investigation of 1, 272 ethnically and economically diverse seventh to eleventh graders from the East Coast, they found a strong correlation between school engagement, problem behaviors, and school dropout (Wang & Frederick 2014)

Internationally, researchers who conducted studies on predictors of early school departure drew similar conclusions. Markussen, Froseth, and Sandberg (2011) conducted a longitudinal study using 9,749 Norwegian students over a 5-year period. Gathering data through surveys and public registries, their goal was to determine which factors predicted early school leaving, lack of school completion, and school completion. The researchers divided the dependent variable into early school leaving, lack of school completion, and school completion. Similarly, the independent variables included areas such as demographics and background, student engagement with school in compulsory education, educational performance in compulsory education, and context (Markussen et al., 2011).

During the study, Markussen et al. (2011) closely examined the connection between the independent variable and each dependent variable. Findings showed that some Norwegian students had a strong probability of leaving school early or not completing their secondary education. Further, Markussen et al.'s analysis of the data showed that students who displayed a high-absenteeism rate during the last year of lower secondary education exhibited a high probability rate of leaving school early. In addition, students' behavior had a direct influence on school completion. For instance, those students who demonstrated extremely defiant behaviors had a higher likelihood of leaving school early. In contrast, students who demonstrated an interest in their education had a lower probability of leaving school early. Results were conclusive: students' background, school performance, and context variables were substantial prognosticators of a student's early departure from school (Markussen et al., 2011).

In 1993, secondary education became a compulsory endeavor in Mexico. However, this major step did not decrease the percentage of students who consistently dropped out of school prematurely. Education in the primary level started at the age of six and ended at 12; yet, reports from school-attendance records showed that 10% of students dropped out during primary school, and 28% dropped out by the end of primary school (Gibbs & Heaten, 2014). Similarly, secondary education encompassed students aged 12 to 18 years, a 6-year duration. Fifty-two percent of the students departed school during their first year in high school and 10% exited by the end of high school before completing high school (Gibbs & Heaton, 2014).

Results from this study that Gibbs and Heaton (2014) conducted using surveys and interviews to create a nationally representative data set showed that many factors

contributed to the school departure of students in Mexican schools. In 2002, the researchers surveyed 8,440 parents on the relationship between school dropout and family structure, parental educational status, and the employment of household members. Then in 2005, the researchers interviewed 3,791 students from the previously surveyed households who were enrolled in school during 2002 (Gibbs & Heaton, 2014). Analysis of the data confirmed that students who encountered academic struggles in schools and who repeated a previous grade in their primary education had a stronger probability of dropping out of school in a later grade. In addition, high school transition was an extremely problematic period for rural-area students and students who spoke an indigenous language. These problems have often resulted in the premature school departure of students. Additionally, 13% of school dropouts stated that school was uninteresting to them, and 58% claimed that poor attendance, uneducated parents, and the minimal importance placed on education in their home diminished their motivation toward education (Gibbs & Heaton, 2014).

Ninth grade appears to be the most troubling time where the highest percentage of students lose their focus and make their final exit. At this stage, positive and negative self-perceptions of peers and teachers are of major importance. For instance, Falls and Roberts (2012) found that although positive self-perceptions elevated the motivation of students to complete school, negative self-perceptions resulted in school dropouts. The researchers concluded that; peers, schools, and teachers can significantly affect academic achievement and assist students to accomplish success or failure. A student's social context (support of parents, teachers, and peers) and his or her self-system processes

(connection with school) positively or negatively influenced their self-perceptions and school engagement (Falls & Roberts, 2012).

Educators have always viewed relationships as a major factor in students' academic performance and school completion. Zabloski and Milacci (2012) highlighted the importance of relationships in schools to not only at-risk students, but also gifted students. In this qualitative phenomenological study, the researchers investigated reasons for premature school departure of gifted students. Surprisingly, the snowball sample of mixed participants unanimously agreed that negative relationships with school personnel, peers, and dysfunctional families resulted in social rejection and ultimate school departure (Zabloski & Milacci, 2012). In addition, the gifted school dropouts emphasized that relationships, especially with school personnel, were more important than any teacher's pedagogy, school curriculum, or other related factors.

Bieg, Rickelman, Jones, and Mittag (2013) also noted the importance of student–teacher relationships. The researchers investigated the influence of teachers' care on the motivation and learning of students. In an effort to prove their hypothesis, they compared two groups consisting of 425 eighth-grade students and teachers from the United States and Germany using data gathered through questionnaires. Noticeably, self-efficacy, independent motivation, and autonomy support had a different bearing on U.S. students than German students. However, observations of both localities revealed that the compassion shown by teachers positively correlated with students' motivational levels (Bieg et al., 2013). Students may achieve maximum learning outcomes based on the perception of their teachers (Bieg et al., 2013).

Conceptual Framework

I built the conceptual framework of this study on a combination of Bandura's (1989) self-efficacy theory, a theory whose foundation is in social-learning theory, and Atkinson's (Maehr & Sjogren, 1971) motivation theory. According to Bandura (1989), habits cultivated in previous grades create a powerful foundation for the direction of an individual's educational path, which could culminate in the student's success or failure. Additionally, students who display the characteristics outlined in the theory set attainable goals, worked hard, accepted challenges, and used feedback as the vehicle to improve themselves (Revelle & Michaels, 1976). Being successful in one's past performance is a strong predictor of one's future success (Lunenburg, 2011). The successful completion of a task builds a stronger sense of self-efficacy, whereas the failure to complete a task or challenge destabilized and weakenes self-efficacy. In other words, success breeds success whereas failure enervates an individual (Scheel, Madabhushi, & Backhus, 2009). Revelle and Michaels (1976) found that students who were motivated to achieve were inspired to attempt higher-levels concept and more complex problems. Further, they found that students who experienced success in their academic performance were highly motivated to work harder, whereas students who encountered failure were less motivated (Revelle & Michaels, 1976). Carrole et al. (2009) found that a combination of these two theories, used in the classrooms of 935 Australian high school students, resulted in considerably improved academic performance.

Many researchers pointed to the ninth grade as the point in a child's academic career where determination and effectiveness were guiding factors. Ninth grade is the point when performance and attendance are two of the most definitive predictors of

whether the child will drop out of school before graduation (Bandura, 1989; Shankland, 2010). What happens during that transitional period from middle school to high school determines the likelihood of the child's high school graduation (Hertzog, 2006). Whereas Bandura's theory of self-efficacy supports the development of strategies that can ease the transition for middle school students into high school, Atkinson stated that the need for achievement, power, and affiliation determine performance and completion. In so doing, students can move into the high school level with a history of self-efficacy and the desire for achievement that will aid the transition.

School transition can alter the self-efficacy of students negatively or positively (Bandura, 1982, 1989). For instance, support from family, peers, and school leadership can make the transition positive, whereas a lack of connection can foster negative behaviors (Sakiz et al., 2011). More, teachers with appropriate understanding and experiences can play a pivotal role in shaping these students (Bandura, 1982, 1989). For instance, they can enhance the intrinsic motivation that will encourage students to acquire knowledge and accept challenges that foster self-efficacy (Bandura 1982, 1989; Revelle & Michaels, 1976). Moreover, the type of goals, the level of expectations educators set for these students, and the varied learning styles used to accomplish them can result in either high self-efficacy or low self-efficacy (Bandura, 1982, 1989). In addition, students' and teachers' self-efficacy can result in an environment that fosters academic excellence (Bandura, 1993). Overwhelmingly, self-efficacy working with achievement motivation, will improve academic achievement (Yusuf, 2011). In an investigation on the effects of self-efficacy, achievement motivation, and self-regulated learning strategies on the academic performance of 300 college students, Yusuf (2011) concluded that a

direct and indirect relationship exists between the variables. For example, students who experienced the connection with their teachers were motivated to persevere to accomplish their goals and become better students; students who were unable to form that bond with their teachers lost interest in school (Yusuf, 2011).

Cavanagh and Fomby (2012) also viewed the relationship between children's school and their family structure as a major factor in students' academic growth. They maintained that at school, students developed relationships and gained access to resources and structured activities that transformed and directed their lives. Further, effective communication between children and their families can reinforce positive values and produce targeted outcomes. Results from a longitudinal study conducted in 1995 on 90,000 seventh- to 12th-grade students to explore the correlation between family instability and students' educational outcomes confirmed earlier beliefs. For instance, students in schools with low parent instability are more likely to complete school assignments in a timely manner; students in schools with high family instability were less likely to complete assignments (Cavanagh & Fomby, 2012). Irrefutably, instability in families affected students' academic performance.

Predictors of School Dropouts

Inadequate academic skills. The increase in the graduation requirements amalgamated with the challenging transition from middle school to high school have increased the probability of students struggling in school, failing in their coursework, and ultimately dropping out of school (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). Many educators and other stakeholders expressed concerns about students who are dropping out of school without the necessary skills to be effective in society. Continued academic failures

distorted the perceptions many students have of school (McIntosh, Flannery, Sugai, Braun, & Cochrane, 2008).

McIntosh et al. (2008) performed a quantitative study using school records and academic scores of 5,542 students. The main objective of this project was to ascertain the relationship between academic advancement and school discipline of students who received special services. Results revealed eighth-grade academic performance affected ninth-grade discipline (McIntosh et al., 2008). Statistically, a significant relationship existed between the two factors: students with behavioral problems in eighth grade experienced academic challenges in ninth grade and students with academic challenges in eighth grade displayed behavioral problems in ninth grade (McIntosh et al., 2008). The negative relationship between academics and problem behaviors reached the critical point in ninth grade.

In a mixed-method longitudinal study of a nationally representative sample of 24,599 students, Smith (2006) confirmed academic failures, school suspensions and expulsions, and school dropout were higher in ninth grade than any other grade. Neild and Balfanz (2006) in a study of 14,131 Philadelphian high school students concurred and echoed that ninth grade is the intersection when many students who were struggling with academic and behavioral issues made the final decision to leave school. Moreover, inadequate academic skill preparation and poor social skills in earlier grades resulted in low-performing students in higher grades, students who displayed at-risk behavior, and students who became disengaged and alienated from school (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). Thus, ninth grade has the highest recorded number of school dropouts (Neild, 2009). More recent studies have shown that graduation rate has improved; however, educators

are still highlighting ninth grade as the difficult challenging area for many students. In a study conducted in North Carolina, the researchers recorded that even after the implementation of different strategies, 162 students from 12th grade left school without a diploma, 168 students attrition from 11th grade, 182 tenth graders left school prematurely and 308 ninth graders left school without completing their studies (McMillen, Gilleland, & Muli, 2014).

Results of a study conducted on a group of Philadelphia public school students revealed that regardless of the intervention strategies adopted prior to the entrance to high school, many course failures and poor attendance of ninth-grade students remained the strong predictors of school dropout (McIntosh et al., 2008). Hernandez (2011) conducted a quantitative study of 3,975 students to determine the effects of reading proficiency in earlier grades on school success. The results from this study showed similarities to the findings from other researchers. Discussion of the results showed that poor reading skills in third grade could affect graduation rates in the higher grades. Specifically, 10% of those children who were not proficient readers by third grade did not graduate from high school. In addition, children who were living in poverty and who were below their grade level in reading expectations by third grade were 67% more likely to drop out of school than their counterparts who were from areas that are more affluent. Surprisingly, even students who were only one reading level below their grade level had a 26% chance of not graduating from high school (Hernandez, 2011).

Academic underachievement negatively affects the road to graduation for many U.S. students. An exploratory study conducted on 119 randomly chosen students from four schools during 2002–2005 found that children who were not reading by third grade

have the propensity to drop out of school (Hickman et al., 2008). Another study conducted by Buchinal, Robert, Zeisel, and Rowley (2008) cemented the findings of the previous study. Findings from the Buchinal et al. study showed that early literacy development has a strong impact on academic success. Moreover, children with poor reading skills in earlier grades have a high probability of grade retention, thereby setting the stage for school failure (Buchinal et al., 2008). The more striking news was the inability to provide intervention to remedy this academic shortfall: the road to school failure was already destined (Hickman et al., 2008). Research from Johns Hopkins University stated that the retention rate in ninth grade was 40% (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Only 10 to 15% of these repeaters continued the educational journey to graduation (Kennelly & Monrad, 2007). Another pair of researchers, Cooper and Liou (2007), confirmed that students who encountered difficulties, such as low reading skills and poor school attendance as they transitioned from middle school to high school were more likely to drop out of school in ninth grade.

Studies conducted years ago shew the same or similar conclusions of more recent studies; reading by third grade is a foundational pillar in a child's educational advancement. For example, Lesnick, George, Smithgall, and Gwynne (2010), who researched the relationship between reading by grade level in third grade, high school performance, and college enrollment, noted the same observation. These researchers tracked the pathways and scrutinized the administrative data of 26,000 Chicago public school students from third grade through high school completion and into college. Their findings fortified the discoveries of earlier researchers. The results of descriptive and inferential statistics publicized that the students' third-grade reading level strongly

correlated with eighth-grade reading achievement and ninth-grade academic performance. Furthermore, reading foundation constructed in third grade impacted eighth- and ninth-grade academic advancements, which paved the road to graduation and postsecondary education (Lesnick, et al., 2010).

Similarly, students' performance in middle school significantly influences high school completion. The Research Alliance of New York City Schools (Keiffer, Marinell, & Stephenson, 2011), in a longitudinal investigation of the relationship between middle school education and high school completion, drew the following conclusions. First, results from the fourth-grade attendance record and scores from mathematics and language-arts assessment predicted ninth-grade completion. Second, students' grade performance by the end of elementary school strongly correlated with graduation at the start of high school. Finally, changes in sixth- and eighth-grade reading and mathematics performance were strong suppositions of ninth-grade completion (Keiffer et al., 2011). The academic performance of students and school attendance in elementary school form the building blocks for high school success. Challenges were inevitable for those students who were not on grade level by the end of elementary, and high school life became very difficult.

The new challenges and unexpected anxieties encountered by eighth-grade students as they transitioned to ninth grade placed students at risk of lowered academic performance, grade retention, decreased school attendance, and premature school departure. Statistically, 20% of school-age students exited school prior to promotion from tenth grade (Neild & Balfanz, 2006). Surprisingly, this percentage does not include those students who departed school while they were still in ninth grade (Neild & Balfanz,

2006). Students who were not on-track by ninth grade have a 75% probability of leaving school prematurely (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). An analysis of the results from a study performed on students in Chicago schools, as they made the modification from eighth grade to ninth grade, showed similar results. For example, students who failed more than one of their core classes and had not accumulated enough credits in ninth grade were more likely to either repeat that grade level or left school (Neild, Stoner-Eby, & Furstenberg, 2008). Burrus and Roberts (2012) recorded the same findings. They reported that eighth grade students had a 75% chance of not completing their education if they missed school more than 80% of the required time. In addition, if the students failed eighth grade English or mathematics, then school dropout was inevitable. Pharris-Ciurej, Hirschman, and Willhoft (2012) drew similar conclusions in an investigation into the effects of poor academic performance of ninth-grade students in a west coast metropolitan school district. Results have shown that 7% of ninth-grade students disappeared from school in the first year (Pharris-Ciurej et al., 2012). In addition, 33% of the ninth-grade students who repeated that grade left school without completing their education (Pharris-Ciurej et al., 2012). Neild and Balfanz (2006) claimed that the deficient academic skills of students that placed them two or three levels below their required grade level were major contributors to the failure of these freshmen. Subsequently, recent studies labeled ninth grade as a defenseless period in the educational journey of many students as they progress toward graduation.

Similarly, investigations conducted globally on school dropouts confirmed problems similar to those in the United States. For instance, responses acquired from 19 school administrators and 19 counselors in Istanbul's secondary level of formal education

noted that 25% of the students left school without completing their education (Kirazoglu, 2009). Furthermore, academic failure, absenteeism, and disciplinary problems were the predominant factors that contributed directly to early school departure. According to Kirazoglu (2009), poor academic performance usually leads to disciplinary problems that may result in absenteeism. Bandura's (1989) self-efficacy theory confirmed this assumption: a lack of academic success with poor attendance places students on the path to school dropout. Lessard et al. (2010), in studying 4,312 students in four Canadian high schools, found that academic performance and not pupil–teacher relationship directly influenced school dropout (Lessard et al., 2010).

An analysis of accumulated data supported the conclusion that some students who started struggling in fifth-grade reading either repeated fifth grade or left school before graduation (U.S.V.I. Department of Education, 2010). For instance, in the 2004–2005 testing period, 4.4% of fifth-grade students were advanced readers whereas 25.5% were proficient, 56% basic, and 14.1% below basic. During the 2006–2007 testing period, 3.3% of the fifth-grade students who were now seventh-grade students were advanced in reading, 15.3% were proficient, 65.9% were basic, and 15.5% were below basic. Students from the fifth-grade class who were in the 11th grade during the 2010–2011 period revealed 4.10% of those students were advanced in reading, 34.1% were proficient, 48.60% were basic, and 13.10% were below basic (U.S.V.I. Department of Education, 2010). As the struggle continues, the graduation rate for those students was 60%, below the state required standard of 80%.

Poor school attendance. Researchers claimed that a solid foundation in elementary and middle school would fortify the long-term growth and academic progress

of students. Using the longitudinal attendance data from a diverse southeastern urban school confirmed that poor school attendance is an indicator of school dropout (Schoeneberger, 2012). An examination of the attendance records of students from first to 12th grade discovered the following: a change in attendance pattern in late elementary or middle school of students who were truant in earlier grades did not change their situation. Furthermore, the habit of truancy was prevalent in high school and disengagement from school resulted in eventual dropout at high rates. Additionally, students who had a reasonable school attendance record in elementary school, but were absent for more than 10% of the expected school year had a 25% dropout rate, whereas 21% of students who were truant from elementary school departed school early (Schoeneberger, 2012). Conclusively, low attendance is among the challenges that strongly predict school dropout.

School suspension, a form of disciplinary action, negatively affected academic performance and school attendance. A study conducted by Lee et al. (2011) on 289 Virginia public school 9 through 12-grade students, showed that suspension directly affected school dropout. Controlling the variables such as school demographics, students' aggressive behaviors, and students' ethnicity did not alter the results. Suspension took students away from instruction and a lack of instruction was more likely to result in poorer academic performance. More conclusively, the higher the suspension rates, the higher the dropout rates (Lee et al., 2011). Balfanz, Byrnes, and Fox (2012) agreed with Lee and colleagues in their claim that school suspension deprived students of school and classroom instruction, increased their absenteeism rate, and contributed to school failure. During a longitudinal study on a cohort of 181,897 Floridian high school

students, the authors hypothesized that suspension had a direct connection to lower academic performance and had short-term and long-term effects on attendance and graduation. An analysis of the data using multilevel methods revealed that ninth-grade suspensions increased high school dropouts, thereby decreasing the possibility of postsecondary education. Even one suspension had adverse effects on all students. For instance, suspensions affected the educational advancement and school completion for one-time offenders as well as habitual offenders. Finally, even after controlling other variables, students who missed school had a difficult time advancing educationally and lost interest in school (Balfanz et al., 2012).

In an earlier study executed on 40 purposely chosen schools in Kentucky, Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007) applied quantitative and qualitative methods and measures to acquire and analyze data. In the quantitative portion, Christle et al. compared 20 schools with a high dropout rate to 20 schools with a low dropout rate. Using the multivariate analysis of variance, the researchers ascertained a significant positive correlation between the dropout rate and school retention. Additionally, a negative correlation existed between academic achievement, school attendance rate, and the dropout rate. Likewise, in the qualitative portion of that study, interviews conducted with principals, surveys completed by teachers, and on-site observations resulted in the same finding. Results showed that poor academic achievement and school attendance negatively correlated with school dropout (Christle et al., 2007). Conclusively, students' disengagement from schools and their loss of interest in learning increased the statistics of school dropouts.

Neild et al. (2008) declared that school dropouts possess certain characteristics. In examining those characteristics, Neild et al. (2008) conducted a series of studies on Philadelphia parents and school-aged students during their promotion from eighth grade to ninth grade. They conducted these studies over a 6-year period. The objectives were to ascertain the interconnection among family background, demographic characteristics, educational levels, students' academic engagement, and school dropout. Despite all other factors that contributed to school dropout, academic failure in ninth grade was a significant predictor of early school departure (Neild et al., 2008).

Results of a qualitative study performed on 480 seventh-grade students in 13 randomly chosen high schools, examining students' perspectives on reasons for school dropout, concurred with the findings of other studies (Erktin, Okcabol, & Ural, 2010). Factors such as low economic status, underachievement, violence, discipline problems, and consistent academic failure aligned with school dropout (Erktin et al., 2010). Even when the students attended alternative school settings, they still exited school before completing their education. For example, when Tas, Bora, Selvitoper, and Demiskaya (2013) conducted research to ascertain some reasons for students' early departure from vocational schools, the reasons were the same as those for early school departure in general public schools. The researchers used a snowball sample of 19 vocational education school dropouts. An analysis of the results showed that even though factors such as economic status and teacher–pupil relationship affected school completion, absenteeism, a rigorous syllabus, and grade retention played a substantial role in early school departure (Tas et al., 2013).

Ninth-grade experiences, such as tougher class schedules, more stringent rules, and increased graduation requirements contribute to a difficult transition for many freshmen. These more rigorous demands and continued early school departures have strengthened the plea for better organization of high schools for these students (McIntosh & White, 2006). McCallumore and Sparapani (2005) proclaimed that a freshman academy could help ameliorate the problem of school dropout and increase the percentage of students who will successfully complete ninth grade. McIntosh and White (2006) concurred, claiming that a ninth-grade academy would reduce the absenteeism rate, provide teachers with greater control of that group of students, increase academic performance, and help in other ways. More conclusively, results of a quantitative study conducted on two groups of students—an experimental group (group treated to a freshman academy treatment) and a control group (group taught in the traditional school environment)—confirmed a decrease in suspension and attendance for the experimental group (McIntosh & White, 2006).

Retention in earlier grades. Retention in earlier grades is a strong predictor of high school dropout. According to Bornsheuer et al. (2011) the retention of students in earlier grades has deleterious effects on the on-time graduation of those students. Bornsheuer et al. (2011) conducted a quantitative investigation of 1,202 Southeast Texas High School students to confirm the effects of retention for on-time graduation. An examination of two variables—ninth-grade retention and on-time school completion—established a statistical correlation between retention and high school dropout. In addition, those students who remained in school had a higher percentage than their counterparts did of not graduating on time (Bornsheuer et al., 2011).

The preponderance of evidence has substantiated other assumptions that grade retention has more long-term effects than benefits. In 2013 and 2014, Taniguchi (2015) conducted comparative studies on the academic performance of 3,068 Malawi students (1,734 fifth-grade and 1,353 seventh-grade students) who were retained versus their classmates who were promoted. Results of the study showed that students who teachers retained to help acquire needed skills, demonstrated lower academic skills on performance tests than their classmates who were promoted to the next grade level. Further, as the researcher analyzed additional data collected from 30 principals and 58 teachers in the same school district, the author concluded that a lack of adequate resources, trained personnel, absenteeism, and retention in previous grade contributed to the academic deficiency of these students (Taniguchi, 2015). Conclusively, over-aged students for their grades became school dropouts.

An exploratory study conducted on 10 opportunistically chosen Portuguese prisoners noted that grade retention in an earlier grade strongly affected students' academic advancement (Saraiva, Pereira, & Cruz, 2011). According to the researchers, grade retentions have generated the movement of other detrimental factors such as lack of school attendance, problem behavior, and disengagement from school. In retrospect, despite other factors contributing to the decision to leave school early, being an over-aged sixth-grade student at the end of that grade caused students to lose interest in middle school and students either dropped out or exhibited a significant decline in their school attendance (Saraiva et al., 2011).

Sparks et al. (2010), in an investigation of 17,735 ninth-grade students in North Carolina school districts, concluded that grade retention directly influenced early school

departure. Researchers concluded that students who failed both mathematics and English, had disciplinary issues, and repeated a previous grade were prime candidates for school dropout (Sparks et al., 2010). Im, Hughes, Kwok, Puckett, and Cerda (2013) drew similar conclusions. They affirmed that grade retention negatively hampered later grade advancement, interfered with peer interaction that was very important at this age level, and resulted in slower academic achievement compared to their counterparts after the transition to middle school (Im et al., 2013).

Vandecandelaere, Vansteelandt, De Fraine, and Van Damme (2016) claimed that retention at any grade level above kindergarten has detrimental effects on students' self-esteem, problematic behavior, and poor academic performance. A longitudinal investigation of the effects of grade retention on the mathematics performance of 759 Belgium early grade children reinforced the findings of other researchers. The researchers divided the sample into two groups: teachers retained one group of students and promoted another group to the next grade level. Further labeling showed the division of the independent variable (grade retention at the different levels) and the dependent variable (achievement). An analysis of the results using linear regression models confirmed that grade retention did not adversely affect kindergarteners. However, after that grade level, retention affected a child's zone of proximal development and destroyed self-esteem. Then, low self-esteem destroyed self-motivation and the desire to persevere in challenging situations (Vandecandelaere et al., 2016).

Academic unpreparedness, poor school attendance, and earlier grade retention were only a few of the predictors of premature school departure without a diploma. Rather, a multiplicity of factors contributed to this ongoing process. An analysis of a

dropout research project conducted in California attributed dropping out of school to individual characteristics of students and institutional characteristics of parents (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). The manifestation of the old adage "your attitude determines your altitude" was evident in this study because the students' educational performance, behavior, attitude, and background directly affected their graduation goal or school dropout dilemma.

Additionally, the institutional characteristics of their families, such as family structures, family resources, and family practices increased or decreased the probability of school dropout rather than school completion for their children (Rumberger & Lim, 2008). Finally, in accordance with the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2011), retaining a student in a previous grade is not the solution to academic improvement, but is one of the factors that results in school dropout or educational failure. Quite often, many of those retained students who were too old for that grade lost interest in school or displayed inappropriate behaviors (NASP, 2011).

Ramifications of School Dropouts

Studies conducted on the preparation and advancement of students in the educationally competitive globally changing economy were numerous, but the most ubiquitous explored an association in the literature between dropping out of school and the lifelong consequences of that decision. Students who departed school without at least a high school diploma were more likely to face academic hardships, burdensome economic challenges, and social dilemmas. The growing amount of literature on school dropouts highlighted the academic, economic, and social dilemma of the students.

Academic. Academically, students who exited school without a high school diploma deprived themselves of educational dreams and goals, reduced the possibilities of postsecondary education, and opened the possibility for conflicts with the justice system. Reports from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (2009) revealed that nine of every 100 men in the United States encountered legal arrest annually. In certain areas, this ratio is even higher.

School dropouts have a higher percentage of encountering problems with the justice system and a lower percentage of getting back on the positive educational path. Kirk and Sampson (2013) claimed that the educational system and even society stigmatized these students, labeled them as problem students, and alienated and isolated them. Thus, they became disengaged from school and they ultimately dropped out. More disturbing, these students were unable to pursue higher education because of the permanent labels placed on their records. In addition, steady jobs were also very difficult if not impossible. Moreover, over 60% of colleges and universities rejected the applications of students whose records were marred with an arrest (Kirk & Sampson, 2013). Thus, upward mobility was unavailable to these students, due to the inability to acquire a college education.

Kirk and Sampson (2013) reinforced these ideas by conducting a study to investigate the ramifications of an arrest on school dropouts. These researchers hypothesized that an arrest affected school dropouts. They assumed the decline in educational expectations resulted in students leaving school prematurely, then getting involved in unlawful behaviors. In addition, based on their assumptions, the lack of school attachments and support connected with juvenile behaviors. Discussion on the

data revealed that juvenile arrest strongly hindered educational advancement in adulthood. Descriptively, 42% of students who graduated from high school who did not pursue postsecondary education had a 40% probability of becoming prison inmates or encountering difficulties finding jobs (Kirk & Sampson, 2013).

Students who left school prematurely were more likely to experience greater negative academic problems than their peers who graduated (Vaughn, Beaver, Wexier, Delisi, & Roberts, 2011). In an empirical study, researchers quantified the relationship between school dropouts and the verbal ability of young adults. Vaughn and colleagues (2011) hypothesized that early school departure significantly hampered students' verbal ability. Effective communication was imperative in academic and social arenas. Verbal ability played a significant role in the development of effective communication, and therefore, the lack of verbal skills significantly affected upward mobility of students (Vaughn et al., 2011).

Economic. Economically, reports from the National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) projected that, based on salary trends, a significant percentage of the population remained in poverty and that the U.S. work force was deficient when compared to that of other countries. In addition, students who dropped out of school were the offspring of parents who were school dropouts; thus, the cycle of poverty continued (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). In addition, due to the joblessness and employability status of high school dropouts, the United States will have more than a $3 million short fall by 2018. Further, when compared to high school graduates, dropouts were more likely to earn smaller salaries, experienced more health issues, and contributed less than $2,000 dollars annually to tax

revenues (Tyler & Lofstorm, 2009). In fact, school dropouts had a stronger probability of being dependent on state and federal governments for assistance. For instance, 50% of single mothers received temporary assistance and 68% of school dropouts who were prison inmates cost taxpayers over $27,000 for insurance and health care. School dropouts were financially unable to survive on their own in society. Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, and Palma (2009) claimed that 25% of these school dropouts still lived with their parents and cost taxpayers $292,000 in lowered tax revenue over the course of their lifetime. Unbelievably, even though educational opportunities are available for school dropouts, yet many school dropouts are not grabbing the opportunities. U.S. Department of Education (2015) area for education statistics has reported that from 2000 to 2013 the percentage of school dropouts who were employed dropped from 59% to 53%. In addition, when compared to school completers of the same age group, school dropouts earned a salary of $23,900 while school completers earned $48,500. De Ridder (2014) concluded after researching the health of dropouts that they are dependent on the government for a longer period of federal assistance in insurance than their high school completers.

Researchers who conducted studies much later drew the same conclusions: high school students departing school prematurely are more likely to face increased poverty life styles, high unemployment rates, and welfare dependency (Campbell, 2015). In a longitudinal comparison study between high school dropout siblings and high school completer siblings, results showed that high school dropouts were deficient in skills and competencies. Thus, job acquisition and salaries of dropouts were inferior to those of their siblings. School-dropout siblings faced economic hardships, limited income, and

worked fewer hours than their siblings who completed school. In addition, school dropouts were more likely to marry other school dropouts, thereby compounding difficulties in the labor market and welfare assistance, and limited the resources available for their children (Campbell, 2015).

Data from the U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) reported that the ongoing recession was a greater financial burden for school dropouts than their counterparts who obtained a high school diploma or its equivalent. Statistically, the national unemployment rate, as of January 2012, displayed a 13.1% unemployment rate for school dropouts, 8.4% unemployment rate for high school graduates, and 4.2% for college graduates (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).` Students who departed schools unprepared for college or a career faced many challenges.

Social. Socially, incarceration was more prevalent in school dropouts with very low academic skills, as they were less likely to be married and ranked high on the list of absent fathers (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2011). Sum and colleagues (2011) conducted a comparison study on the challenges encountered by school dropouts versus their counterparts who completed school. They concluded that school dropouts were nine times more likely to become single parents and dependent on government assistance. In addition, limited work experience decreased their likelihood of acquiring and maintaining jobs for an extended period of time (Sum et al., 2011). The American Psychological Association (2013) claimed that school dropouts possessed a limited probability of being qualified for the professional and political sectors, or even contributing to decision-making policies.

The social ramifications of school dropouts strongly influenced other facets of the community. An evaluation of the federal prison system showed that school dropouts were the highest percentage of prison inmates. Additionally, 0.7% of those with a bachelor's degree, 1.0% of high school graduates (without higher degrees), and 6.3% of high school dropouts were institutionalized (in correctional and other facilities) in the United States (Sum et al., 2011).

Research disclosed that the way students perceived their educators hampered or buoyed their educational achievement. Educators have direct contact with these students; thus, they play a pivotal role in shaping these students' lives. The quality of students' academic performance and interest in school were strongly affected by the way their educators perceived them (Whannell, Allen, & Lynch, 2010). Educators' perceptions of students either motivated students to achieve academic success or motivated them to become disengaged from school (Whannell & Allen, 2011). Results of a study conducted by Whannell and Allen (2011) on the influence of the teacher and family relationship with students who had originally dropped out of school showed many beliefs. First, poor teacher–pupil relationship had a negative impact on students' academic advancement. Second, teachers who exhibited a low-level relationship with their students produced students with a low level of school engagement and commitment. Third, the relationship of the teacher and students strongly influenced the completion of high school for those students. Finally, teachers who built supportive relationship in their classrooms produced students who were motivated to encounter academic endeavors (Whannell & Allen, 2011).

Bridgeland (2010) concluded that the expectations and beliefs demonstrated by teachers and administrators toward students dramatically affected their performance. Moreover, students who perceived their teachers had goals set for them overcame the odds to accomplish them. Alivernini and Lucidi (2011) believed that self-determined motivation affected individuals' behaviors, whereas teachers' perceptions motivated or deterred educational growth. In a longitudinal study conducted with 429 Italian ninth- to 12th-grade students, the researchers hypothesized that self-determined motivation, self-efficacy, and teachers' perceptions assisted a student's desire to drop out of school or remain in school. The researchers concluded that those students who perceived their teachers supported their education excelled academically, and that self-determined motivation and self-efficacy resulted in educational achievement (Alivernini & Lucidi, 2011). Teachers can be quite instrumental in the lives of students. They are the individuals in need of specific training and the exposure to particular programs to assist ninth-grade students to achieve academic and behavioral success. The present study diagnosed specific factors that led to school dropout of ninth-grade students. As the project director of the district, I will recommend that the district provide appropriate programs, necessary training, and intervention for students in earlier grades.

Implications

Based on research conducted on the dropout of ninth-grade students, many schools created academic ninth-grade academies. Moreover, many of those schools experienced a higher ninth-grade promotional rate and school-graduation rate. Similarly, in the Fullcover School District, the two participating high schools have functioning ninth-grade academies. They, too, experienced some academic advancement for a certain

percentage of the ninth-grade population. The educators at these learning facilities developed proactive and reactive approaches to narrow the skill-deficiency gap, mentoring and tutorials to ease the transition, and individual and group counseling to address behavioral issues. However, as I analyzed the findings from this study, a fragment of the ninth-grade population still repeated ninth grade and for some, multiple times. This outcome implies that academies that cater only to the academic advancement of ninth-grade students are not providing a complete solution to this dilemma. The Fullcover School District needed both academic and vocational academies. Therefore, it is now imperative to develop career academies—academies that will cater to both the academic and career-technical needs of all ninth-grade students. These types of academies are more likely to bring success to those students who are academically inclined, as well as those students who are vocationally inclined.

Summary

Inadequate academic skills, poor school attendance, and early grade retentions were some factors that contributed to the untimely school departure of many school-age students on the international level. Researchers confirmed that ninth grade has consistently been the grade level when the highest percentage of students departed school without completing their education. The academic, financial, and social burdens on society forced educators and lawmakers to convene sessions to address the issue. The issue of school dropout is a process that took root in students' early elementary years. Thus, it is imperative to address plans for early intervention for students who are at risk of becoming school dropouts. In addition, the quality and perceptions of classroom

teachers, counselors, and school administrators can help decrease the school-dropout dilemma and create college- and career-ready students.

As the researcher of this study, I separated the study into sections. This separation made it more comprehensive; however, each segment is an integral part of the whole. In Section 2, this study presents an overview of the type of design chosen to answer the research questions. Section 2 also presents the views of different researchers to support why a case-study design using a qualitative-inquiry method was the ideal design. This design helped me to examine information on school dropout of ninth-grade students. In addition, the information in section 2 provided an elaborate explanation of the methodology used to collect data, the participants chosen, and the method of analysis of the data.

Section 3 of this study highlights detailed explanations of the suggested project for the climax of this research. This section also features the goals, rationale for choosing this project, and guidelines on the investigation of the problem. Then, as in the previous sections, summaries from recent literature reviews substantiated the need for this type of research. Further, this section of the study discusses the resources needed to bring this project to reality.

Section 4, the reflection and conclusion sections of this study, contains a discussion of the strengths and limitations of this study. In this segment, I drew conclusions from the research conducted; shared knowledge acquired while designing and planning this project, and, as an agent of change, stated my leadership role in changing the school community for ninth-grade students. In conclusion, section 4 also

contains recommendations for further research and discussion pertaining to additional studies.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

A case-study design was the ideal method to collect on-site intensive data, and it provided the data I needed to conduct an in-depth examination of an existing phenomenon such as the school dropout problems at my study site (Creswell, 2012). An instrumental case-study design provides a qualitative-inquiry forum to accommodate in-depth interviewing, documenting, analyzing, and presenting of findings (Glesne, 2011). This specific design provides me the opportunity to explore a case extensively (Creswell, 2012). Further, this method also made it possible for me to gain clearer understanding and knowledge of the issues under examination. The chosen method aided my ability to gain insight into the truth of a phenomenon without distorting the information. I collected detailed information from the questionnaires and interviews of participants, and completed holistic, descriptive write-ups (see Creswell, 2012; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). In investigating an issue such as school dropouts from the perspectives of educators, it was imperative that I conduct the research in the school setting, rely on myself for data-collection, and present the data in a holistic and descriptive format (see Glesne, 2011). In an effort to maintain confidentiality, I changed the name of the schools in this study to the pseudonyms James Jarvis High School and Mary Marcelle High School. I also assigned the pseudonym Fullcover School District to the district in which these schools are located. I designed the following questions to guide this investigation and examine the dropout issue from the educators' perspectives:

RQ 1: What are educators' perceptions of the challenges that led to the dropout of ninth-grade students in U.S.V.I. schools?

RQ 2: What are these educators' understandings of potential school dropouts?

RQ 3: What are the roles of ninth-grade educators in preventing potential school dropouts from dropping out of high school in the ninth grade?

RQ 4: What programs are in place to address the needs of potential school dropouts?

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

Qualitative researchers discover and construct meaning from real-life problems (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Researchers use basic qualitative designs such as ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study to gather data. Researchers who use ethnographic design focus on a specific group, examining specific features such as culture, behavior, and livelihood. Researchers employing a phenomenological design concentrate on the point of view of each individual, giving extreme attention to intense human experiences. Grounded theory researchers use the gathered data to formulate their own theories. Finally, in the case-study design, researchers employ a variety of procedures to collect data in settings where they are unable to manipulate the participants' behavior (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). In this study, I used the case study design to focus on 'why' ninth graders are leaving school prematurely. The case study, often described as a type of ethnographic design, has many similarities to the other designs, yet yields a rich descriptive end-product (Creswell, 2012). In addition, the case-study design enables the researcher to focus more on the activities of an individual or small group, and on the programs and events that affect the group, rather than on the shared patterns of behavior or culture of a specific group (Creswell, 2012). Therefore, because the goal of this study was to investigate the

challenges that led to the premature school departure of ninth-grade students in the Fullcover School District, I determined that a qualitative case study design was the most appropriate for my needs.

This qualitative case-study design, provided an intensive and explorative avenue for me to examine the premature school departure of ninth-grade students in Fullcover public schools. The consistent, early school departure of these students, upon entering high schools, raised concerns in many facets of the community. Researchers have confirmed that many students who are unable to cope with the changes in school structure and, more stringent demands and deadlines, and were unable to acquire the required grades necessary for promotion, chose the path of early school departure. For instance, a study conducted with a group of Philadelphia's public school students showed that, regardless of the intervention strategies adopted prior to their entrance to high school, many course failures and poor attendance of ninth-grade students strongly predicted school dropout (McIntosh et al., 2008). In addition, Hickman et al. (2008) found that during the transitional phase, ninth-grade students who encountered academic challenges and poor school attendance left school.

Ultimately, my goal in this study was to discover the best solutions or programs to address the dropout of ninth graders in the Fullcover School District. I anticipate that the results can be used to increase the promotional rates and decrease the dropout rates of ninth-grade students (see Appendix A). Thus, I selected ninth-grade core-subject teachers, counselors, and administrators from two high schools in the Fullcover School District as the participants for this study (see Appendix B). I used questionnaires and semistructured interviews to collect the needed data. The questionnaires consisted of five

questions, whereas the interviews consisted of nine questions (see Appendices C, D, E, & F).

Participants

The Fullcover School District consists of many public, private, and parochial high schools. In an effort to bring educational changes to ninth graders in the public school system and have a larger group of participants, I chose participants from two of the three public high schools in this district. The process for choosing the participants and sample for this study took a number of steps. After initial meetings with principals from the two public schools, I requested a list of ninth grade educators who were: core subject teachers, counselors, and administrators who taught or serviced ninth graders from 2009. The list consisted of 60 individuals from different ethnic backgrounds, genders, educational statuses and age groups. I assigned a number to each individual, and randomly selected 40 individuals as the population. The group of candidates totaled 40 full-time secondary high school educators: 30 ninth-grade teachers, five counselors, and five administrators from the Fullcover School District. Candidates were either teachers of core subjects (mathematics, English, history, and science), or counselors and administrators who served these ninth-grade students in other capacities.

After acquiring additional information on the educators' years of service and experience with school dropout from the principals of both high schools, I purposely chose 24 candidates who had extensive experience with ninth grade school dropouts. The sample consisted of four administrators, four counselors, and 16 core subject teachers. Because of their years of service, these individuals possessed rich information, were knowledgeable of the challenges encountered by past and current ninth graders, and were

willing and experienced participants. Creswell (2012) has encouraged the idea of choosing knowledgeable and experienced participants who are willing to communicate their experiences and opinions because they possessed rich information on the topic under investigation. Palinkas et al. (2013) have similarly noted that participants who are chosen by a purposeful sampling method can be rich sources of information to substantiate the phenomenon under investigation. The group of 24 purposely chosen individuals provided useful data in their responses on the short questionnaires (12 from each high school). Further, in order to acquire data to corroborate the information from the questionnaires, I used a second conveniently chosen sample and different type of data collection instrument.

Specifically, I selected a smaller sample of 12 educators from the original group to conduct interviews with. This mixed group of 12 educators who were available (six from each school) consisted of individuals of different genders, educational roles, and years of service. This conveniently chosen group consisted of two administrators, two counselors, and eight teachers including: two English teachers, two math teachers, two science teachers, and two social studies teachers. The sampling method ensured gender balance, equal representation of the different educators, and individuals with experience since they were conveniently chosen. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2012) a convenient sampling method provides the opportunity for the researcher to collect data from individuals who are available and willing to participate in the study. The chosen sampling methods reduced human bias, provided samples that were highly represented the population under examination, included individuals who had rich, dense

knowledge of the problem under investigation, and guaranteed the equal opportunity of each participant (Creswell, 2012).

These educators served ninth-grade students from at least the 2009–2010 school year at their particular high school. They provided either instructional services, counseling guidance, or administrative services. The schools house more than 90% of the student population promoted from the middle or junior high schools in the Fullcover School District (U. S. Virgin Islands Department of Education, 2010). During my initial visit to each school, the principals identified the ninth-grade teachers, counselors, and ninth-grade principals who had served the ninth grade for at least 5 years. The principals gathered the participants, and then made the initial introductions. I spoke to each participant, discussed the reasons for the visit, and asked for their assistance in gathering the data. Further, I gave the participants a formal letter showing that I had permission to conduct this investigation, and requested their assistance.

Prior to entering the schools, I sought permission from the U.S.V.I. Department of Education and school principals. I also filed an Institutional Review Board (IRB) application with Walden University prior to collecting the data. The university granted permission prior to data collection (IRB approval # 07-16-15-0243975). The Fullcover Department of Education and the two participating schools granted me permission to collect data. I conducted individual meetings with each participant on the day of the initial visit. I reintroduced myself to each individual and shared the objectives for the meeting. Further, I explained to the educators the importance of their assistance in this study, requested their help since they were the experts in the ninth-grade classroom, and explained that their identity would be confidential and from that point, that they would be

assigned and identified only by a number (Educator—ED 001, ED 002, etc.). The participants were told that the data would be kept secured in a locked cabinet prior to electronic data entry, and that after I entered the data into the computer, I would secure it with a password that is known only to me. Further, I told them that I will keep the data secured for a specific amount of time as stipulated by the university guidelines. At the end of the discussion, the participants were given an opportunity to ask any questions, confirmed their willingness to take part in the study, and scheduled a time for the data collection. At the end of each meeting, I told the participants that their participation was voluntary and that there was no repercussion if they decided to change their minds. I notified the participants who consented to take part in this study that they were expected to sign two consent forms (one for me, and one for their files) prior to the start of the data collection process. Participants completed and signed the form labeled "for adults over 18 years" that was generated by Walden University.

I sought permission from participants and school principals and used two weeks during the semester to collect the data. Then, in an effort to establish researcher-participation relationship, I explained to each participant and group of participants that I was available to work during the time most convenient to them. Additionally, I shared contact information with the participants. Fortunately, the principals at each school assigned one week to me to collect data at the different schools. Based on the schools' daily schedules, participants for the study have a common 90-minute block of planning time. In both schools, I capitalized on that opportunity and administered the questionnaire to each individual during his/her plan time. Additionally, there are functional ninth grade academies at each school site thus, the teachers are in close proximity to each other, to

the ninth grade counselors, principals and resource room. Each teacher came to the resource room individually, completed the consent form and then, the questionnaire. I constructed an additional schedule and returned two days later to interview the teachers together as a group. The administrators and counselors accommodated me during their midmorning breaks on another day. Similar to the teachers, the counselor/administrator's group signed the consent form individually, then, completed the questionnaire. After the completion of the questionnaire, the principals and counselors came together in the resource room where I conducted a group interview.

Data Collection

I gathered data for this study on the perceptions of educators regarding the dropout of ninth-grade students using questionnaires and semistructured interviews. Because the effort to find instruments from reputable data banks proved futile, I created and piloted these instruments.

Pilot Study

During the piloting phase, the goals were to obtain clarity of the items, decrease the ambiguity of the statements, determine the time span to complete the instruments, and highlight any grammatical errors. By triangulating the responses from the questionnaires and information from the interviews, I was able to establish validity. On the other hand, credibility was established after reviewing and comparing the responses from the two groups. The results were believable and could be transferred to a larger population. Finally, I checked the items from the instruments with the responses provided to determine if participants answered the research questions.

I chose a group of 12 educators consisting of males and females of different age groups who taught or serviced ninth graders for five years or more to complete the piloted instruments. These educators worked in the same school district, but not at the participating schools utilized in the actual study. I also informed the participants of the importance of the study. I gave them reasons for seeking their assistance and told them that their participation was voluntary. These educators presented their perceptions of the challenges that led to the school dropout of ninth-grade students in Fullcover public schools. A smaller, conveniently chosen sample of educators who possessed similar characteristics to those in the actual sample, participants who were willing and available for the interview, completed the semistructured interviews. These educators were not part of the actual study.

The objectives for piloting these instruments were to check for clarity and appropriateness of the questions, easy comprehension of instructions and questions, and to record the time it took to complete the instruments. The participants wrote suggestions on an assigned sheet that was attached to each questionnaire. The instruments created for the actual study were utilized during the pilot. The choices from the questionnaires were examined and compared. The responses from the interviews were reviewed for similar themes. Analyses of the results from both the questionnaires and interviews revealed no major changes were needed to the questionnaires because the participants found the questions to be straightforward. The answers provided by participants were consistent with the type of responses I expected. In Question 3 on the counselors and administrators' questionnaire, some participants stated that the word *comfortable* needed to be omitted. They argued that the answer choices mainly addressed preparation.

Additionally, participants found one grammatical error. The word *comfortable* was removed from the counselors and administrators' survey and a final copy of the survey was cleaned up in preparation for use in the actual study. The participants in the pilot study took 5 to 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire, which was the timeframe anticipated. Responses provided by the participants in the piloted interview, generated questions that led to additional probing questions and the rewriting of Question 5 for clarity. I completed the suggested changes to the questionnaire, then, added probing questions to the interview

The actual interviews were conducted in groups. The first group consisted of educators-- the core subject teachers while the second group consisted of administrators and counselors. At each school site, teachers were interviewed together while the counselor and administrator made up the second group. The interview from each group took about 25 to 30 minutes to complete. In conclusion, the data collected followed the planned procedure and interview protocol.

Administering the Questionnaire and Conducting Interviews

Similarly, comparing the information garnered from the different groups of educators who served ninth-grade students made it possible to acquire credibility. For instance, while the information acquired from the questionnaires provided evidence of patterns among the answers chosen, the information provided during the interviews prompted more in-depth insights into the participants' thoughts and actions. The utilization of two types of instruments provided richer information, clarification of responses, and corroboration of data.

The information that I acquired from the review of the literature formed the basis for the questions. The group of 24 educators which consisted of a total of 16 teachers and eight counselors/ administrators (eight teachers and two counselors and two administrators from each school site) became the participants for this study. I divided the participants into two groups: group one consisting of 16 core subject teachers and group two consisting of a combination of four administrators and four counselors. Group one, the larger and purposely chosen group completed questionnaires that consisted of five questions and took about 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Then, a smaller conveniently chosen group from the larger group completed the semistructured interview. The interview consisted of nine questions and took about 25 to 30 minutes to complete. This group consisted of 12 participants: eight teachers and two counselors/ two administrators (four teachers and one counselor/one administrator from each school site). Throughout the data collection process, data were collected from both school sites and involved an equal number of participants. More specifically, I chose 12 educators from James Jarvis High School and 12 educators from Mary Marcelle High School.

Using a parallel construction, the eight counselors and administrators also completed two independent instruments. This group also completed questionnaires and semistructured interviews. Some questions on those instruments differed from the teachers' assessment primarily because of role differentiation. For instance, the educators in the classrooms answered specific questions that were directly related to classroom instructions. On the other hand, counselors and administrators answered questions that dealt more with policies, procedures and over all changes. The questionnaires for the eight counselors and administrators consisted of six questions and

took about 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Similar to the teachers, I interviewed a smaller sample of four counselors and administrators. The interviews consisted of nine questions and took about 25 to 30 minutes to complete. The division of the questionnaire into two parts made it easier to complete. In Questions 1–3, participants chose one answer, but in Questions 4–6, participants chose all the answers that applied to the questions.

During the semistructured interviews, I divided the participants on each campus into two small groups. The administrator and the counselor formed one group. These two individuals provide additional services to ninth-grade students but not direct classroom instructions. For example, this group is charged with finding solutions to the students' emotional or social problems. The four core-subject teachers formed the second group. These individuals provide direct classroom instructions and try to find solutions to students' academic needs. Both groups of individuals are very important to this study and provided rich sources of information. However, even though the instruments for collecting the data were similar, yet the setting and timing were different.

Data collection were conducted at each school campus. I utilized the teachers' resource room at each school site to conduct the interviews. However, even though the questionnaires and interviews were conducted at the school sites, I secured the responses from the questionnaires and information gathered from the interview at an off-campus location. The responses I obtained from the participants yielded the information needed to answer the research questions that guided this study. After I gave directions to each educator as he or she entered the room, I distributed the questionnaires and left the room. I monitored and conducted the administration of both instruments and audio recorded the interviews with the permission of participants.

My role in administering the questionnaire and conducting the interview was of utmost importance. During the interviews, I conducted purposive conversations with the participants to obtain the rich information needed to answer the research questions. In addition, I administered, collected, and secured the data at the end of the questionnaire distribution. Additionally, during the interview I created a positive relationship with the interviewees. Therefore, the purposefully and conveniently chosen samples provided the needed data from knowledgeable individuals.

Prior to this study, I had no relationship with the participants, but became acquainted with them after the principals presented the groups of ninth grade educators and made the initial introductions. I have no supervisory authority or direct interactions with any of the participants chosen. I am an educator in one of the public schools in the Fullcover School District. However, I made it clear that my role as an administrator is completely separate from my role as a doctoral student. Furthermore, participants will not suffer any consequences or loss if they refuse to take part and that taking part in this study was voluntary. Participants completed their questionnaires in privacy. Therefore, I was not in the room to manipulate or coerce the participants in choosing their answers.

Data Analysis

During the data analysis period, the examination and grouping of the acquired data became the initial steps. Prior to analyzing and completing the narrative, I cleared my mind of the different pieces of information that were not related to the study at hand. This was done to remove any biases, information that would have clouded the analysis process, and to help me to view the dropout transitional challenges that led to school dropout from the participants' perspectives. After collecting the data from the different

sources, I followed a number of stages before analyzing the data. During the first step, I reviewed the data several times, listened to recorded interviews repeatedly, read transcript, and transferred the information from the tape to paper. Further, I spent time reading and reviewing the data; thus, I became familiar with the data. Secondly, I placed the answers under broad themes using concept maps and then narrowed the themes. Thirdly, I color- coded the data with similar themes and put them together, then I tried to match the data with different ideas to the most similar headings. At this stage, I was able to see common reasons from the different participants for students leaving school prematurely. Following the sorting of the data, I grouped common themes together to begin the analysis stage. The data I gathered from the two instruments and two different groups revealed similar results to the professional literature reviewed on this topic. More specifically, factors such as poor school attendance, inadequate academic performance and disciplinary problems appeared as the dominant factors that led to school dropout.

As the author of this study, it was imperative that I adhere to the steps and guidelines at every step of the investigation. I synthesized and analyzed the data in an effort to produce accurate interpretations and rich, informative end- results (see Lodico et al., 2010). I transcribed the audiotaped interviews, created a reflective journal, reviewed, and stored the collected data in a locked cabinet off campus. I used this reflective journal to organize the information acquired during the interviews, kept record of work in progress during the data-collection phase, recorded important ideas as the study progressed, synthesized and analyzed information collected, and performed the final analysis. Additionally, I used the information to build a stronger study and utilized the information from the reflective journal, notes from the verbal transcripts, and the

transcribed information to compare data received during the interviews. Additionally, I utilized those pieces of information to ascertain credibility and dependability of the information.

After completing the rough draft of the data analysis, I returned the write-up to each group; then, members from each group assembled at their school sites to discuss and verify the interpretation of the answers that were given during the interviews. The group of teachers and the group of counselors/administrators verified the transcripts from their specific group. The member-checking system enabled participants to verify the information given and validate the interpretation of their answers. In this case, the information in the transcripts was accepted as presented. I used the information from the audio recording, reflective journal, and the validation of the member-checking system to complete a narrative write-up of this study's findings. This system had the advantages of providing organized and efficient feedback, restricting researcher bias, collecting additional data, and verifying that the researcher's interpretation and conclusions were in harmony with participants' data (see Lodico et al., 2010).

The final step in this study was the presentation of the results. This presentation was presented in a narrative format. Based on the works of Lodico and colleagues (2010) the narrative consisted of the different components of writing a qualitative report with an emphasis on directly quoted responses from the participants. This provided rich details to the narrative analysis. According to Lodico et al. (2010), this format consisted of an introduction, review of the literature, method, results, and a discussion of the findings. Finally, I structured the results and discussion for clarity and easy comprehension of the entire study. Additionally, this study followed the ethical guidelines from Walden

University IRB. Considering the importance of validity, as the author of this study, it was of utmost importance to minimize the threat to external validity while treating participants' information with strictest confidence.

Validity, the process of ensuring that the research measured what was intended was established in this study (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010). During the data collection process, I administered and collected the data. Data was collected from individuals who had rich information on the topic under investigation. Responses acquired from both groups of participants and design produced the same or similar responses. Credibility was also established for this study. The data received from the questionnaires and the interviews were triangulated to corroborate the conclusions that were drawn by the researcher.

Findings

In an effort to collect supportive data for this study on "the educators' perspectives on the transitional challenges after middle school," I used two different instruments. The 24 purposely chosen educators were administrators, counselors, and core-subject teachers who completed questionnaires; 12 conveniently chosen educators from the previous sample completed interviews. During the initial visit to each school, I received a list of ninth-grade educators from the principals. I purposely chose 24 educators who serviced ninth graders in different areas, serviced them for the greatest number of years from the list (12 from each school site) presented by the principals of both schools. The principals then formally introduced me to those educators. At that meeting, I spoke to the educators and discussed the purpose of my visit. I also arranged for a second visit to each school site.

The ninth-grade principals made it possible for me to utilize the teachers' plan time and the resource room to conduct the questionnaire on an individual basis. The administering of the questionnaire for the counselors and principals followed the same procedures. This made administering the survey very easy. After receiving each educator's consent, I had each educator sign two consent forms: one copy for me, and the other for the educator's file. Following that step, I distributed the questionnaire and exited the room while each respondent completed the questionnaire. The questionnaire process took about 5 minutes for each participant.

Similarly, I established interview protocols at both schools to assist me in collecting the second phase of the data. The two groups of interviewees at each site consisted of four core-subject teachers and a ninth-grade counselor and principal. I conducted interviews in the resource room at both schools and completed them over a one week period. The teachers in this study were numbered from 001 to 008, the counselors 009 to 010 and the administrators 011 to 012.

Research Question 1. Educators' perceptions of ninth grade challenges.

The sources used to obtain data for this question were Questionnaire Questions 3 and 4 and Interview Question 4. Responses acquired from the two groups of participants on the questionnaire revealed similar themes. Based on questionnaire responses from educators, the most predominant challenges that contributed to the premature departure of ninth-grade students in Fullcover schools were disciplinary problems, academic unpreparedness, lack of motivation for school, and low reading and low mathematics skills. However, attendance, retention in previous grades, adjustment to stringent rules

/regulations, and being over aged has also contributed to early departure of ninth-grade students.

Responses from the interviews, the second instrument utilized to collect data showed similar findings to the questionnaires. Based on the analyses of both instruments, the theme that dominated was *ninth grade transitional challenge*s. Educators from both groups claimed that some ninth graders encountered many challenges during the transitional phase that affected their academic performance and behavior. During the interview with educators in the classrooms, inadequate preparation in earlier grades, English and math skills deficiency were mentioned by the entire group as factors that are more likely to cause many ninth graders to become disengaged and uninterested in school.

Specifically,

ED 001 stated:

> As an experienced teacher, you can pick out those students who do not want to be in school from the first week of class. They show no interest in what is happening during class, they are the last to come to class and the first ones ready to leave. The class work is too difficult for them. They are unable to read and complete math problems. For some of them, higher order thinking and problem solving skills are nil.

ED 003 confirmed:

> If some of those students will have their ways, they will not come to class. Sometimes we have to go in search of them, even called parents because those students were absent more than two days. I gave up my lunch- time

to help them and quite often the students who showed up for help are those who are passing and doing what is expected. Acquiring an education is the last thing on the minds of these students. They complete little classroom assignments and no homework. I have made time available to help them prepare for their test or quizzes, but there is always some reasons for them not coming to study hall.

ED 007 shared:

I will see the same students in the hall during the start of the school day, but He or she is either late for class or does not attend. Then, on the next day, he or she has a reason for his or her absence. As teachers, we have tried many different strategies, but only benefitted the students who are making it academically. They are the ones who are interested in school, school activities and getting additional help. The other group who we are trying to reach by teaching subjects that demand a lot of reading is not interested. They will openly tell you that they need a trade or skill to make money for survival. Regular school and classroom settings are difficult for them.

Participant ED 008 stated:

Math, English and reading are often a struggle for in-coming students. Many of them cannot read, comprehend or analyze a simple paragraph. Because they cannot read, everything else is affected. Some of the students, especially the males are even too ashamed to try reading the passage or ask for help. Our students are too far below the expected skill level. These students who have no interest in classroom settings need, to be taught a skill or trade.

The counselors and administrators claimed that students who displayed a lack of motivation for school or school activities, low academic readiness and performance, poor attendance and repeated failure set themselves up for the challenges that push them out of school prematurely.

ED Counselors 009 revealed:

> I have conducted both individual and group counseling. I have provided strategies to assist them in coping with ninth grade challenges. However, the lack of social skills, conflict resolutions, along with their academic deficiencies have made the change extremely difficult. Some of the students were retained in previous grades and were too old for the current grade. Some of the students were ready to exit school even before the end of the first semester. For those students who are determine to leave, we discussed a trade school, taking the GED or even night classes. Maybe career academies or technical schools would help them to achieve success. Let us face it, not every child will attend college, what have we done to prepare the students who are not college bound?

ED Administrator 012.

> Poor school attendance, disciplinary issues and lack of academic skills are the major hindrances for the ninth graders. Parental support, unsafe home environment, financial hardships, peer pressure and bullying are major transitional challenges that some ninth graders succumbed to. We have students in ninth grade who are the breadwinners for their families. Thus, school and school activities are the last thing on their minds.

From the Administrator desk—ED 011 reiterated:

> Some of the students who are unable to complete their written assignments are very proficient with their hands. For example, one day when I experienced some problems with my car, it was one of my at-risk ninth graders who came to my rescue. He outlined systematically what was happening and what should be done to get the car moving. Even though I was a bit skeptical, I allowed him to work on my car. Much to my surprise, the car started to work. He may not have the academic skills but, he had technical skills. This is where a technical academy or trade school is more beneficial. Students who do not want to read the English text will learn to read the mechanic or carpentry instruction guide. It is time to create schools and careers that are interesting to all our students. Career or technical education is a great solution to our students who have no interest in the academic classroom setting.

Counselor 010 and Administrator 011 shared the same idea:

> These students need to be taught survival skills, skills that can help them to be employable after leaving or dropping out of school. Many of our ninth graders are interested in mechanic/fixing up cars or other vehicles. Also, this community needs more plumbers and electricians--- these students need a place to learn these skills and make some money. They need to be taught these skills very early in high school, maybe at the ninth grade level rather than from eleventh grade. During the 1980s, when schools offered mechanic, carpentry and other technical classes, we had higher school attendance and less disciplinary problems. Unfortunately, lack of funds and personnel gradually removed those classes from the campus. Our students are more interested and inclined to

complete work with their hands rather than having to use books. Completing technical jobs or anything that will keep them engaged may re-capture their interest for school.

Data acquired from the questionnaires and interviews showed the academic unpreparedness and inability to socialize in the new environment as major challenges that deterred the advancement of Fullcover ninth-grade students. Principals on both campuses wrote that a large percentage of students entering high school were two to three grade levels below in reading and mathematics skills. Additionally, many of those students displayed poor social skills or inappropriate behavior to hide their inability to complete class assignments. At both settings, the principal/counselor teams stated that additional academic assistance was in place to assist students who were over age or had already repeated ninth grade. Many students do not capitalize on the help; thus, many ninth-grade students repeated the grade multiple times, since the schools do not practice social promotion or moving unprepared children with their peers at that grade level (see Table 1 and Figure 1). In a study conducted on school dropout of international students, No, Taniguchi, and Hirakawa (2016) drew similar conclusions as the participants of this study. They confirmed that transitional challenges from middle school to high school have led many ninth graders to leave school prematurely.

In conclusion, previously conducted research confirmed that many ninth graders have failed school because of inadequate academic preparation. Results from this current study and the information from the different participating groups have shown that the students need an alternative to the academically inclined ninth grade academies; the students need some technical classes. Moreover, the Bandura's self-efficacy theory has

confirmed that the inability to obtain success in the academic areas of the school curriculum has resulted in students' disengagement and disinterest in school. Dewey and his progressivist theorist cemented the idea that educating students involved more than classroom teaching, but some connection to occupations or community life. Therefore, in order to rekindle students' interest in school and school settings, career academies are viable alternatives. Proponents of career academies confirmed that these academies have assisted students in completing school and becoming either college or career ready (Dixon, Cotner, Wilson, & Borman, 2011). The literature review has publicized successful stories of career academies, educators in Fullcover School District have provided evidence to show the need for career academies and as the researcher, I am proposing that career academies will change the educational paths for ninth graders.

Table 1

Challenges That Resulted in Ninth Grade School Dropouts in U.S. Virgin Islands High Schools

Interactions with capacity		Counselor		Administrator		Teacher		Total	
		Count	% of capacity	Count	% of capacity	Count	% of capacity	Count	% of capacity
Discipline problems	Not selected	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	5.60	1	0.04
	Selected	2	100.00	4	100.00	17	94.40	23	95.80
	Total	2	100.00	4	100.00	18	100.00	24	100.00
Academic unpreparedness	Not selected	1	50.00	0	0.00	2	11.10	3	12.50
	Selected	1	50.00	4	100.00	16	88.90	21	87.50
	Total	2	100.00	4	100.00	18	100.00	24	100.00
Low reading and math skills	Not selected	1	50.00	0	0.00	3	16.70	4	16.70
	Selected	1	50.00	4	100.00	15	83.30	20	83.30
	Total	2	100.00	4	100.00	18	100.00	24	100.00
Lack of motivation for school	Not selected	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	11.10	2	8.30
	Selected	2	100.00	4	100.00	16	88.90	22	91.70
	Total	2	100.00	4	100.00	18	100.00	24	100.00

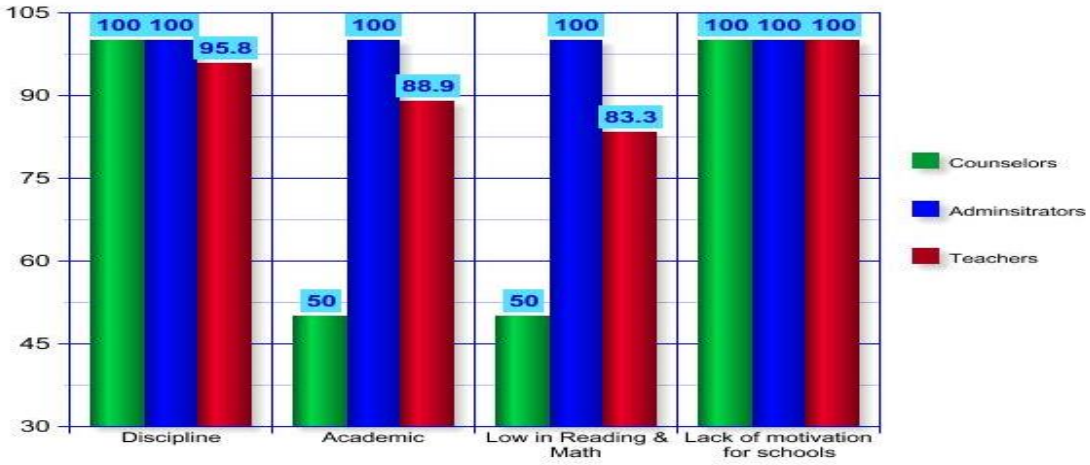

Figure 1. Challenges that resulted in ninth-grade school dropouts in U.S.V.I. high schools.

Research Question 2. Educators' understandings of potential school dropouts.

Early school departure of ninth-grade students from U.S.V.I. high schools is a major concern for many stakeholders. Educators who completed the questionnaire voiced similar themes to those who completed the interview (Research Question 2 on potential school dropouts). Participants stressed that report-card data after the first marking period usually disclosed accurate major projection of what will happen later. The first marking period was the easiest phase of ninth grade and students who started struggling at that point were likely to experience problems throughout ninth grade. Participants averred that if drastic changes were not made, these students will be lost along the way. The first marking period was a time span that involved reinforcement of skills from the previous grade; thus, the work in core subjects should have been familiar to the students. Some ninth-grade students struggled from the onset, thereby indicating they were not adequately prepared for ninth grade academics. In addition, other yardsticks such as results on local school assessments, poor attendance, behavioral logs

from previous schools, and local state assessments (Iowa Test of Basic Skills [ITBS]) were secondary measures educators used.

Data sought from an additional source provided comprehensive information on Research Question 2. Results from the interviews conducted with the two groups of educators divulged many commonalities. The educators emphasized that report cards from previous schools, reports from classroom teachers and grade counselors about students' poor attendance, inadequate academic performance, and consistent disruptive behaviors were major gauges educators used to identify potential school dropouts. Equally important were information from parents seeking assistance for their struggling children who had encountered difficulties with academic performance and demonstrated incongruous behavior from earlier in their education, and information from students who vocalized and displayed a lack of interest in school and education. Likewise, students' inappropriate and defiant behaviors from the start of ninth grade were precise indicators of students who were at risk of not completing high school.

During the interviews, counselors and administrators indicated that prior to the start of school, they conducted thorough examinations of students' academic records, behavior logs and attendance records in order to create customized educational plans. Further, these records provided first-hand information and early revelations of the students who were in need of early interventions (see Table 2 and Figure 2).

ED 011:

> Meetings were conducted with administrators, counselors and teachers from the feeder schools prior to students' transition to ninth grade. The meetings continue until the end of the first marking program. During this meeting, as colleagues we

share teaching strategies and ways to deal with potential ninth graders. We also gather information from the middle school educators on students who needed additional guidance and assistance.

ED 012:

This school has an open door policy and parents are welcomed to become partners with us. As a matter of fact, some parents visit the school prior to the beginning of school to discuss academic or behavioral issues of their children. We use the information to better prepare for incoming students. Parents have also expressed the need for their child to learn a skill because he or she has no interest in the books.

In contrast, teachers gathered evidence much later. However, the collaborations between the groups aided schools in identifying potential ninth-grade school dropouts and putting plans in place to help them achieve success. The teachers also shared that collaboration with other teachers has helped in the development of teaching strategies.

ED 004:

I have a great working relationship with the parents of my students. I have developed methods of communicating with them to share homework assignments and test information. The parents are free to visit my classes during plan time to discuss ways to assist their children. However, a larger percentage of parents do not maximize on this opportunity, but for those parents who partner with us—the results are great. Many of the parents visited my classroom to discuss their children's behavior or academic performance and to seek different educational opportunities for their children. As a matter of fact, some parents even visited us

before the start of the school year to inquire if there was any skill or trade school for their child to attend. They stated their son or daughter was already behind in his or her academic classes and has no interest in being in this type of school setting. The parents claimed that their son or daughter would be more successful and a contributing citizen if he or she was given a skill or trade.

ED 006:

Collaboration is the key to helping these students. I have also formed partnerships with different organizations in the community. For example, certain businesses donated computers.

As I compared the results from both instruments and both groups, I realized that the common theme of *group collaboration guided earlier intervention* was dominant**.** Previous studies conducted on the effects of school and parent's relationship in assisting at-risk students with aggressive-disciplinary behaviors produced similar result to support the educators' observations (Abenavoli, Greenberg & Bierman, 2015). The conclusion was collaboration between the school and home provided earlier intervention strategies to enhance school readiness and curtail inappropriate behaviors.

Table 2

Criteria Used to Identify Potential Ninth-Grade Dropouts

Integrations with capacity		Counselor Count	Counselor % of capacity	Administrator Count	Administrator % of capacity	Teacher Count	Teacher % of capacity	Total Count	Total % of capacity
ITBS	Not selected	2	100.00	2	50.00	9	100.00	13	54.20
	Selected	0	0.00	2	50.00	9	100.00	11	45.80
	Total	2	100.00	4	100.00	18	100.00	24	100.00
Report card grades from previous grade level	Not selected	1	50.00	1	25.00	13	72.20	15	62.50
	Selected	1	50.00	3	75.00	5	27.80	9	37.50
	Total	2	100.00	4	100.00	18	100.00	24	100.00
Attendance record from schools	Not selected	1	50.00	3	75.00	11	61.10	15	62.50
	Selected	1	50.00	1	25.00	7	38.90	9	37.50
	Total	2	100.00	4	100.00	18	100.00	24	100.00
Locally issued school assessment	Not selected	1	50.00	2	50.00	9	50.00	12	50.00
	Selected	1	50.00	2	50.00	9	50.00	12	50.00
	Total	2	100.00	4	100.00	18	100.00	24	100.00
Report card grades after first marking period	Not selected	0	0.00	0	0.00	9	50.00	9	37.50
	Selected	2	100.00	4	100.00	9	50.00	15	62.50
	Total	2	100.00	4	100.00	18	100.00	24	100.00

Note. ITBS = Iowa Test of Basic Skills.

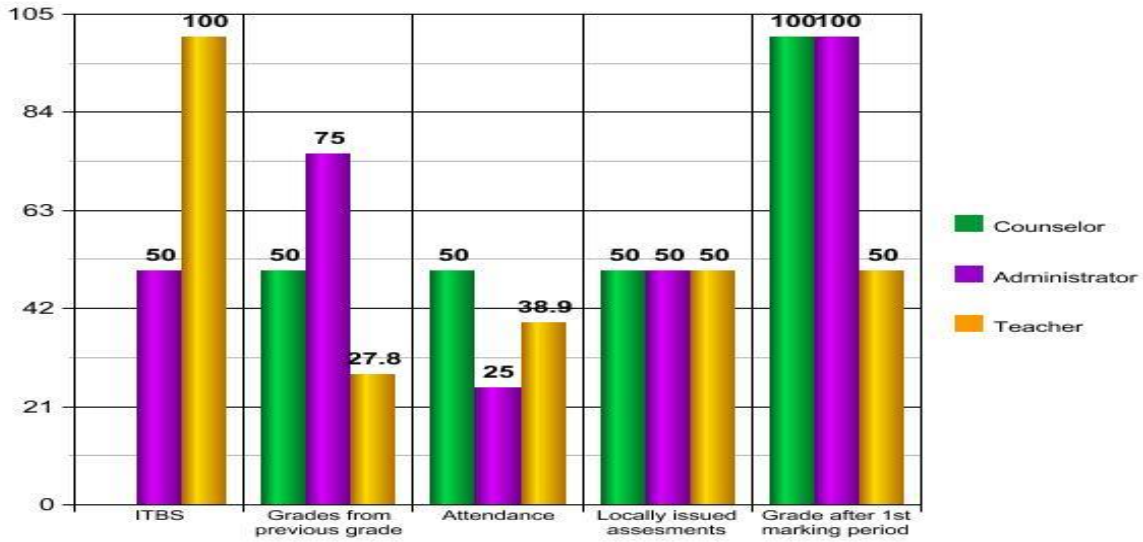

Figure 2. Criteria used to identify potential ninth-grade dropouts.

Research Question 3. Ninth-grade educators' roles in dropouts prevention.

Stakeholders of education, parents, and even government officials suggested solutions to solve the problem of early school dropouts. For instance, U.S.V.I. senators introduced and passed a School Dropout Bill in 2005 that provided financial assistance to end this dilemma. However, educators in U.S.V.I. high schools utilized tangible solutions.

In an effort to prevent potential school dropouts, I had eight administrators and counselors from two high schools in the Fullcover School District complete both questionnaires and semistructured interviews. The major themes apparent from both instruments were proactive approaches and intervention strategies.

Administrators and counselors:

ED 010:

> As early as the end of eighth grade, all potential ninth-grade students were tested. Based on the results, we grouped students and developed customized curricula. Further, during the early summer, we reviewed the cumulative folder of each child and paid special attention to major attendance problems, disciplinary referrals, low reading and mathematics skills, and over-age students. In addition, we administered early testing to incoming students using the Smart Start Program, a skill-building program. We utilized the results from this test to determine and place students. For instance, students needing skill-building assistance were enrolled in summer bridge programs and those who were on par in skills with different community partners for mentoring. The Islands National Guard troupe

has developed a program to help students with the transitional challenges after middle school.

ED 011

We introduced ninth grade academies into our school to assist these students. They are located in a specific area with a supportive staff trained for their age group. They are assigned a ninth grade principal, counselors and core subject teachers. Our ninth graders only have electives classes such as physical education, computer science and Spanish with other grades. Unfortunately, as stipulated by the Board of Education, the curriculum for these students is strictly academic classes-- classes that require a lot of reading. Our students are very poor readers, thus we have problems from the beginning. Lunch is served in their area; we have kept ninth graders in a designated area as much as possible. Students who are poor readers have lost interest in school from the start. The Board of Education and Department of Education need to introduce classes in the ninth grade curriculum that would help the academically prepared as well as those who are vocationally inclined. This could change the educational outlook for many students. The reading is important, but reading, math and other core subjects could be taught in the vocational classes.

I asked the administrators and counselors about the years of operation for the academies, the success rate and the types of curriculum.

ED 011

These academies have been in operation for over ten years. However, the promotional and grade retention rates have not changed significantly. We are still

recording too high a failure rate. The curriculum is academically based. Students are exposed to a limited number of technical classes such as auto-mechanics and cosmetology. The vocational education classes are two year programs and mostly populated by eleventh graders. I think that these programs should be extended all the way down to ninth grade. The exposure to career academies will expose or provide potential school dropouts with a trade or skill. Enrollment in vocational classes may even keep more students in school and encourage them to complete their education.

ED 010:

During individual and group counseling sessions, students have shared how difficult it is to survive in classes that demand all that reading. The students claimed that they will be more successful if their courses were training them for real life jobs or covering areas that they were interested in. Some of the students have questioned the lack of technical classes for ninth graders. The counselors stated that ninth graders should be in vocational classes from early, but by the time they reach eleventh grade where they can become fully involved in vocational courses, it is too late—the students who cannot read or do math have already dropped out by ninth grade. The way this education system is set up—we are failing our students. The students are asking for career education. There are extra classrooms on campus; why can't we develop career academies? Schools in Miami and other states have used career academies to curtail school dropout of ninth graders. We can utilize career academies too and compare the results to that of ninth grade academies.

ED 012

Ninth grade academies have not produced the results we were expecting for these students. There are still too many failures. I think they need more hands on approach and be taught a skill so that they can find some form of employment after leaving high school. Some of our students cannot make it with mere academic courses, therefore, a mixture of skills and academics may encourage them to come to school. In the earlier days, we had more technical classes at the high schools, then, when students dropped out they had a skill to rely on.

ED 011

High school educators introduced extended school programs, Saturday classes and flexible scheduling to assist potential ninth-graders to garner enough credits for promotion or to complete missing assignments. The counseling department has also offered individual and group counseling to ninth-grade students. In addition, the schools introduced other programs to curtail out-of-school suspensions and use in-school suspension. As educators, we firmly believed that students who were out of school were missing valuable instructions and were more likely to fail. Students placed in in-school suspension completed missing assignments, thereby accumulating grades. Both high schools have a functioning ninth-grade academy; however, only students who completed work academically were benefiting. None of our schools offered technical or career skills for ninth graders, the highest group of potential school dropouts who are unable to succeed academically. The time to restructure education for our students is now. It is

time to provide students with a curriculum that includes both academic and vocational opportunities.

Core-subject teachers also described their roles in preventing potential school dropouts from exiting school. The common themes highlighted for this group were alternative instructional teaching methods and assessments, partnership with parents, and student advocates. Teachers conducted biweekly meetings to discuss and develop different instructional methods to assist students. Moreover, teachers created peer-group tutoring in their classrooms, adhered to changes in the grading system, and made changes to instructional methods. Further, educators invited parents to join the team and work collaboratively to help students. Surprisingly, many parents reached out to educators for help prior to their child entering high school. The partnership was strong and more parents were involved than previously. Teachers indicated that quite often, they were the voices for these students. They claimed that many students needed only a listening ear and strong supporters.

Core-subject teachers from both schools claimed that many potential ninth-grade dropouts had many problems that schools were unable to remedy. However, certain types of lessons and demonstration awake their interest.

ED 003:

The teacher stated emphatically that schools needed to be equipped with social workers, psychologists, and sociologists to address the behavioral needs of students who appeared to be troubled. Further, schools had a great need for more trained personnel to assist students as well as adequate personnel to teach them. As a ninth grade teacher I work with a team of other teachers, counselors and

administrators chosen to work with this group of students. We conduct weekly meeting, have common plans and incorporate different teaching strategies to assist these students. Sometimes it seems that we are only teaching a few.

ED 005:

As a math teacher, my lessons are more hands on; we use manipulatives to build certain shapes /figures. During these types of lessons a higher percentage of the class is involved. Further, if the lesson demands some form of technology use, the percentage is even higher. Chalk and talk is no longer appealing to these students; they need to be working with their hands. A career or technical setting will provide students with the ideal place to work more with their hands. The social studies teachers can develop lessons around certain themes that could be developed in our academies. We have to work together and build more hands on lessons that will capture the interest of our children.

The theme that is most dominant in this question is that *proactive and reactive approaches yielded limited success***.** Both groups of educators extended their resources in improving the education of ninth-grade students. For instance, educators developed many proactive strategies and innovative ways of reaching these students. However, only students who could survive academically made advancement toward educational goals; struggling, low-reading- and low-mathematics-skilled ninth-grade students repeated ninth grade. Because the high schools no longer practiced social promotion, many students exited school at this point. The Administrators and counselors agreed that students needed more services because they were already facing challenges; the teachers concurred, agreeing that changes are needed in the curriculum for ninth graders. Both

groups of participants in their sessions claimed that career academies will prove more beneficial for that age group of students who need both vocational and academic preparation. Results from a study conducted to assist disadvantaged students during the high school transition displayed the noticeable theme from research question # 3. Similar to the educators in this study, Gorard, Siddiqui and See (2015) concluded that utilizing summer enrichment programs to improve English and math skills of disadvantaged students as they transitioned to high school satisfied less than 50% of the targeted population (Gorard et al., 2015).

Research Question 4. Potential school dropouts programs.

Prior to entering ninth grade, educators tested every potential ninth-grade student. Data collected from administrators, counselors and core-subject teachers during the interviews relayed that reports from previous schools, report-card grades, and results from the placement test aided in the creation of programs to help at-risk students. Common themes evident in answering this research question were school and community programs. At school, educators developed programs such as in-house suspension and Saturday academies to assist these students. Educators also introduced the use of more computerized programs such as Plato and Credit Recovery to address academic needs. Similarly, the teachers shared that they designed special tutorial programs to help potential ninth-grade students accomplish some success.

ED 005:

As a team, we have developed innovative ways to educate these ninth graders and often times the results are disappointing. We have developed a mentorship

program with different organizations or businesses in the community. Further, the male teachers have developed a 'Gentleman's Club' to teach different survival skills to the male section of our population. At one point, there was also the Big Sister and Big Brother's Club, but that is non-functional at this point. We have tried programs and strategies, however our students are interested in making money rather than acquiring an education. I am recommending creating a school where they will be taught a trade.

Finally, administrators and counselors divulged that they initiated and used an open-door policy to assist any student who needed help with homework, projects, or test preparation.

ED 011&012

As administrator 011 spoke, educator 012 stated that he shared the same sentiment. Some of the ninth graders who leave school prematurely displayed delinquent behaviors in the community. The court often mandated that they return to school, skill center or a reputable educational setting to complete school and acquire skills. Unfortunately, skill centers or alternative settings are limited in this district. Quite often, many of these students return to the court system because there is no skill center or career academy to accommodate them. Therefore, the schools that accommodate a large percentage of these at-risk students should introduce these skills in ninth grade, the most troublesome area. After the students have cleared ninth grade, the other grades are manageable. Career academies, the school within a school that expose students to both vocational and academic classes are viable solutions to help ninth graders learn

employable skills while still in school.

ED 012:

This educator stated that some potential ninth graders did not make it to the opening of the ninth grade school year; they dropped out of school after leaving eighth grade. Therefore, it is clear that this age group needs intervention from earlier. From my perspective, career technical classes should be introduced from middle school and get the students prepared for an advanced level in ninth grade. The remedial programs such as Credit Recovery, Plato and extended school day programs have strong reading components—the area in which our students are weakest. In addition, the only skill option for this age group is My Brothers' Workshop and the capacity is limited. In my opinion, I think that the high schools should create careers academies and meet the needs of a larger population.

In the community, the My Brother's Workshop is a safe haven for many potential ninth-grade dropouts and even some dropouts. This program provides on-site training for a limited number of teenagers. Students gain carpentry skills and culinary-art skills, and leaders encourage them to gain a high school diploma. Students also developed self-discipline, responsibility, and other survival skills; however, only a small number of students receive that service. The literature review supported the beliefs of this study's participants that high school practices to *involve the entire village in educating the students* as the dominant theme. In conclusion, uniting parents, schools, the community and other organizations in the education of students resulted in positive effects on school dropout reduction (Heers, Van Klaveren, Groot & Maassen van den Brink, 2014).

Conclusion

High school educators were the main source of data for this study on educators' perspectives on transitional challenges after middle school. The data gathered were secured in an off-campus location in a locked cabinet. I recorded the interviews and used transcribed information to verify answers to certain questions. Data acquired from questionnaires and interviews cemented answers to the research questions and presented a clearer picture of the transitional challenges that led to the early departure of ninth-grade students in Fullcover high schools. Educators developed and used programs to improve the academic advancement of ninth-grade students and to guide their educational path to the next level. Despite a functional ninth-grade academy in each high school, many ninth-grade students repeated ninth grade or exited school without completing their education.

Based on the analysis of the collected data, I was able to get a clearer picture of the dropout problems in Fullcover School District. Further reflection of the responses from each research question brought to the forefront of my mind the plans and initiatives that were introduced as solutions to the dropout problems. The educators stated that the ninth grade academies were not meeting the needs of a certain segment of the ninth grade population. Further, for those students who were constantly encountering failures because of inadequate academic skills—ninth grade academies were not the safe haven for them. Although educators attempted many strategies and proactive methods to assist students, the success rate fell far below the anticipated level. The educators clearly stated that career academies have a significant possibility to open up different pathways for ninth graders, change their promotional rate and provide reasons to attend school.

Therefore, I propose a project of a ninth-grade career academy. This type of academy will cater to the academic and career needs of ninth-grade students. This smaller learning community within the school will provide students with a combination of college-preparatory classes and career/technical skills. Historically, findings from previous studies confirmed that this type of academy increased the success rate for a large percentage of ninth-grade students (What Works Clearing House, 2015). This type of academy is different to the previous ninth grade academy. For instance, while ninth grade academies provide mostly academic based classes and electives that are either music, physical education or foreign languages, career academies offer classes that are both academic and vocational in nature. In the next section, I will present a clearer description of this ninth-grade career academy, outlining the objectives and rationale.

Outcome

The first portion of Section 2 of this study highlighted the findings and the analysis of the data collected from two different groups of educators who taught or serviced ninth graders in Fullcover School District. This group of educators consisted of administrators, counselors and core subject ninth grade teachers. Data collected from questionnaires and semistructured group interviews shone light on the investigation of the challenges that led to school dropout of ninth graders. The findings showed that academic unpreparedness, poor school attendance, delinquent behaviors, and disengagement from school and school activities robbed many ninth graders of ninth grade promotion. Further, insight into the educators' understanding of school dropouts and their roles to prevent this problem from happening revealed that earlier interventions and collaboration among different facets of the educational community and larger

community were in place, but required results were limited. In addition, because the ninth grade curriculum consisted of mostly academic classes, students who were not academically inclined lost interest in learning. Proactive and reactive approaches, Saturday academy, extended school day programs and ninth grade academies produced identical results—only the academically inclined advanced. Finally, in the Fullcover School District, programs are limited, thus ninth graders who are unable to make it academically repeated ninth grade or dropout of school before completing their education.

The participants of this study stated that ninth grade academies did not provide the skills to keep ninth graders interested in learning; therefore, an alternative educational curriculum was imperative. In fact, both groups of participants from the two school sites stated that they believed students will be more motivated to come to school and attend classes if they were interested in what was taught, more engaged in their learning, or they could relate the lessons taught to real life experiences or to career paths. Conclusions drawn from the data cemented my project of career academies to change the educational path for ninth grade. Studies from professional literature such as ERIC Journals, What Works Clearing House and many others showed that the exposure to career academies resulted in success for many failing students.

The work of theorists such as Bandura in his self-efficacy theory, Atkinson's motivational achievement theory and the group of progressivists with their progressive theory substantiate the implementation of career academies to help failing ninth graders acquire success. Bandura proclaimed that success in one's past experiences motivates the desire for future success, the reverse is also true—students who experience consistent

failure loose interest. Additionally, Atkinson declared that students who are successful at any task are more motivated to take on challenges, while students who constantly experience failure refuse to try. The progressivists declared that in order for students to accomplish success they must be actively engaged in learning, be able to think critically and be exposed to concrete experiences. As I review the results of this study, it can be concluded that the Fullcover school educators shared that same belief- students will accomplish success and advance in school when their curriculum is changed to expose them to more hands on education. Therefore, career academies is the ideal setting for ninth graders to accomplish academic and or vocational success.

Ninth graders need a more rigorous curriculum, a curriculum that is a combination of college preparatory skills and technical skills—college preparatory with career themes. Career academies can provide that rigorous curriculum. According to College Tools for Schools (2011) career academy can be described as a school within a school that has specific career themes, allows students to see the connections between their vocational or academic classes and future careers, involves employers, and prepares students for colleges, career or both. Unfortunately, even though the ninth grade academy possesses similar characteristics to the career academies, yet it did not produce the required results in the participating schools. Based on the definition of ninth grade academy, that school within a school improves the academic and social needs of ninth graders during the transition to high school (Legters, Parise, & Rappaport, 2013). According to the participants of this study, this smaller school setting brought success for a small portion of ninth graders in Fullcover School District. However, that is not enough because a large percentage of ninth graders fall short of needed requirements for

promotion to tenth grade, are retained in ninth grade or repeated ninth grade more than once. Considering the findings from this study, including the success of the ninth grade academies, career academy is a better change agent.

This project will prepare ninth graders for either college, career, or both. Extensive reviews of professional literature such as Journal for Students at Risk, Education Complete, What Works Clearinghouse and many others to displayed evidence that career academies have the proven records to meet the needs of high school dropouts. Career academies offered high school students the opportunity to explore careers pathways while exposing them to engaging and practical learning experiences (Page, 2012). In this career academy, parents and the community will be actively involved in assisting the students. Further, students will receive more frequent and active counseling to deal with their academic and vocational issues, social and behavioral inadequacies and constant monitoring.

Section 3 will outline a curriculum plan as the project to assist ninth graders in staying in school and completing their education. This section will provide a description and components of the project, NGCCCA (Ninth Grade Completion via Career Curriculum Academies).

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Ninth-grade academies have been in existence for many years. Many schools on the mainland, and even in the U.S.V.I., have used ninth-grade academies to assist students in completing ninth grade after the difficult transition from middle school to high school. This school within a school format has provided students with a sense of belonging, structure, support, and the hope of achieving success (Legters, Parise, & Rappaport, 2013). In the ninth-grade academies at the two participating schools in my study, students are exposed to the four core classes of English 9, Algebra 1, Physical Science, and V.I. History. In addition, the students are required to choose from elective classes including physical education, music, foreign language and digital literacy (U.S. Virgin Islands Board of Education, 2013). The Board of Education and the Department of Education have stipulated a curriculum that covers mainly academic classes as needed requirements for promotion to the next grade. The ninth grade curriculum is top heavy with academic-based classes, and deficient in vocational skills classes. Noting this imbalance, Butcher (2010) posted an article in the Source, one of the island's newspaper asking for an alternative method of educating the district's students. The author claimed that many students were leaving school unable to complete a job application. He also reiterated that not all our school leavers were college bound, thus the schools need to equip the students with a viable trade or marketable skills. Moreover, the students who were released in the community bereft of academic skills or vocational skills were more likely to become involved in criminal activities, jobless and dependent on government assistance (Butcher, 2010).

According to Kossler (2012), the Fullcover School District is still struggling with school dropouts. State Senator Williams asked the governor to pass a bill to establish a career and technical school in this school district. Similar to Butcher's (2010) observation, he stated that not every child leaving school may want to attend college or have the resources to do so. Therefore, it is incumbent upon this community to equip the students from earlier grades with a trade or skill (Kossler, 2012). During that senate session, the body mandated that a 90-day period be set aside for the proposal and approval of the bill. The senators, the local university, and the Department of Education accepted the idea of developing career and technical education in this school district (Kossler, 2012).

The data from this study showed that academic unpreparedness, lack of interest in learning, and deficiency in English and mathematics skills have significantly contributed to students' school failure. Participants reported using proactive and reactive methods to change the academic outlook of those students. However, results remained the same. Ninth-grade students were repeating ninth grade, and after repeated failures, many lost interest in learning and became disengaged from school.

Results from this and previous studies point to the need for redesigning and restructuring the school's curriculum. Therefore, it is imperative that the two participating schools and the Fullcover School District make changes to the curriculum for ninth-grade students. Thus, the project I am proposing is a change in the curriculum plan—a change from a curriculum dominated by academic courses to a curriculum combining college preparatory classes and vocational skills. The career academy I am proposing is different from ninth-grade academy currently used in the participating

schools. Students' field of study will be centered on specific themes such as tourism/ hospitality, construction management, and health care. In addition, students can relate their class assignments to real work experiences or future careers. These academies will provide students the opportunity for career skill training, communication skills development, intense counseling, parental and community involvement, and additional training for all the individuals involved in working with the ninth graders. Moreover, the community and its businesses will be involved, and students can accumulate credits for promotion to the next grade (see Stern, 2015). Stern (2015) maintained that career academies expand the world of opportunities for students. I have entitled this project "Ninth-Grade Completion via Career Curriculum Academies" (NGCCCA). These academies will produce college-bound and career-efficient individuals. They will be a little different to other career academies because the themes chosen focus on the areas of skills needed for businesses in the community. The objectives of this type of academy will increase the promotional rate while decreasing the dropout rate in the two participating schools. Further, they will expose students to vertical movement in their career development while getting ready for college.

In the subdivisions of this section, I provide the core components of this project including a description and goal, a rationale to support the choice of this project, a review of the literature to support the project, and an overview. In it, I also provide the guidelines for the curriculum plan which includes the purpose, level, learners, scope, and sequence. In the process, I also describe the materials needed, units, and lessons in detail.

Curriculum Plan

The purpose of career academies in the Fullcover School District is to reform education for ninth graders. These small learning communities within the larger school setting will create supportive, engaging, and personalized learning environments for ninth graders and their teachers. Components such as the community-business partnership will expose students to career paths and skills during their work-based experiences. The counseling and mentorship aspects will provide students with strategies to deal with those problems beyond academic that are pushing them towards school failure. Fullcover School District will provide students with a curriculum consisting of four core courses: English 9 (Students who pass the entrance exams are placed in honors English and the other in a semester of Developmental Reading Writing class), full year Algebra I, Physical Science, and V.I. History. In addition, students will choose vocational-technical skill programs such as construction management, hospitality and tourism, and health care. The aim of these academies is to increase the promotional rate of ninth-graders while decreasing the school dropout rate. Ultimately, exposure to the career academy curriculum will prepare students for college and/or career. I will divide the curriculum plan into different parts, namely grade level, learners, scope and sequence, description of materials to be used in each class, unit plan, and lesson plan (including objectives, activities, assessment, teachers' notes and evaluation plan).

Description and Goals of Proposed Project

The first step in any major project is goal setting. Setting goals helps authors to set directions for a project and decide on the final accomplishments at the end of that project. For the NGCCCA, I have the combined goals of decreasing failures while

increasing the promotional rate of ninth-grade students. Results from the study regarding educators' perceptions of the transitional challenges after middle school; motivated me to create the career academies (one at each high school) that will satisfy the academic and career/technical skills needs of ninth-grade students. According to Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, success breeds success. Likewise, Atkinson's (Maehr & Sjogren, 1971) motivational-achievement theory holds that students who acquire success at a certain task are more inclined to attempt additional and more challenging tasks. Conclusively, if students achieved some success in their ninth-grade education, whether academic or skills-related, they will be more motivated to attend school.

When reviewing the problem that led to this study, I found that many ninth-grade students in the Fullcover high schools exit schools. A certain percentage of ninth-grade students who were academically unprepared to overcome the transitional challenges after middle school departed school at this grade level. Currently, the ninth-grade curriculum used in the two participating high schools consists predominantly of academic-based classes. For instance, core classes such as English, mathematics, science, Virgin Islands history, and certain elective classes such as physical education or foreign languages comprise the ninth-grade curriculum. Although schools offer career classes such as auto-body repair, auto-mechanics, electronics, plumbing, and cosmetology, ninth-grade students may only sample some of those classes. Moreover, those classes are 2-year programs that start in 11th grade, and students pursuing career technical education dominate those classes.

Creating ninth grade academies did not solve the problem or meet the needs of the entire ninth-grade population. Designating a separate space on the school campus and

assigning faculty members to interdisciplinary teams with common collaboration time benefited only the students who attended school regularly and completed assignments. Results from my study showed that schools took a proactive approach and started the preparation or orientation process during the summer months. Orientation at this point is not as productive as expected. Therefore, to decrease the number of ninth-grade school dropouts and ensure all students graduate from high school prepared for either college or a career path, I am proposing career academies. These proposed career academies will follow specific guidelines and customized steps to help Fullcover ninth-grade students achieve a more successful ninth-grade experience. I will develop a curriculum plan that will identify the purpose, level, learners, scope, and sequence for a nine weeks curriculum. In addition, I will outline a nine weeks unit plan, lesson plans, needed resources as a part of this curriculum plan. Other components that will add to the success of the school-completion curriculum are individual and group counseling, community partnerships, and parental involvement.

Orientation/Preparation

Orientation for students will commence earlier in middle school and continue until the early months of ninth grade. In addition, administrators, counselors, and teachers will conduct ongoing collaborative meetings between the two levels while students are still attending middle school. During those meetings, teachers at the ninth-grade level will have opportunities to share with their eighth-grade counterparts their expectations and perceptions of the academic needs of potential ninth-grade students.

The high school environment has created adjustment problems for students coming from middle school. During early orientation, educators will create partnerships

between older high school students and potential ninth-grade students, developing mentor–mentee relationships. This strategy can help alleviate the misconceptions of a difficult high school life and make transitional challenges more bearable. Educators will assign cohorts to different student groups in the academy and arrange the groups so cohorts have classes together.

Educators will encourage all students to become actively involved in all school activities. In monthly assemblies, ninth-grade students will be in charge of leading the pledges, national anthems and other activities. Ongoing recognition for students will ensue, as they achieve some successes. This strategy has proven to improve academic performance, school attendance, and poor behavior (see Blaze & Olmi, 2014). All members of the school community will assist ninth-grade students in developing a sense of belonging, given that uninvolved, unwelcome, or ill-adjusted ninth-grade students may feel ostracized.

Curriculum

In career academies, educators expose students to curriculum that combines college-preparatory courses and career-technical courses. Education personnel will customize, personalize, and develop standards based curriculum to assist students in accomplishing success along their educational path. Educators will align the core academic classes of middle school children's classroom assignments and assessments to the format and standards of ninth-grade students, providing year-round 90-minute English, mathematics, science, and history classes. School personnel will restructure the school day to teach core classes during the morning portion of the school day; then, in the afternoons, students will take meaningful exploratory classes that will teach technical-

career skills. Classes such as carpentry, plumbing, tourism/hospitality, and health care will be available to ninth-grade students. Job shadowing or apprenticeships will be a part of the curriculum for ninth-grade students.

Educators will set high expectations for every student. This would mean introducing strategic intensive reading programs and creating literacy laboratories. The extended school day would be restructured to provide the additional assistance for struggling students who need more skill building, including redesigning the Saturday academy to accommodate habitually problematic students. Educators would inundate ninth-grade classrooms with technology, thereby expanding the walls of the classrooms and harnessing students' interests and skills. The ever-changing global economy requires students who are technologically savvy (see Dixon, Cotner, Wilson, & Borman, 2011). Career academies personnel will use results from different data sources to create efficient programs and make wise decisions. Educators will continuously monitor progress, distributing progress reports every 3 weeks instead of the 5 weeks presently practiced.

In accordance with the National Dropout Prevention Center (2011), many factors have prohibited the educational advancement of students. Students who encountered dysfunctional home situations, low self-esteem, changing and un-nurturing environments, and academic shortfalls are more likely to become disengaged from school. The professional literature showed school counseling as a significant service that can change that situation for students. School counselors play an integral role in the provision of intervention strategies to assist students in completing their education (Blount, 2012). School counselors guide students to implement effective intervention and prevention

strategies to help students cope with social issues, monitor school progress and attendance problems, and provide individual and group counseling. Therefore, having frequent individual and group counseling as a major practice in ninth-grade career academies would prove beneficial for all participants.

Counseling

Tutorials, counseling, and mentoring will be a joint venture for potential ninth-grade students. Educators at middle school and high school levels will discuss common themes and strategies. They will expose students to remedial classes and even earlier summer bridge programs that can help to improve the skills of at-risk students prior to entering ninth grade. School personnel will group students heterogeneously, rather than placing students labeled at-risk in the same group.

Tourism is a major source of income for the U.S.V.I. Educators will introduce ninth-grade students to career paths that will prepare them to fill tourism positions. From as early as ninth grade, school counselors will guide students to take the career inventory, create a career plan, and pursue a specific path. At this grade level, educators will restructure the semester courses to introduce students to different available caree. Counselors and students will discuss the prerequisites to attain those careers.

Parental involvement and community engagement are vital to students' academic advancement. King (2012) stated that a combination of factors influence a child's educational decisions, but the most dominant factor is parental influence. Results from a study conducted in the rural Appalachian areas of Mississippi on the factors that affected college attendance rate of young adults concurred with previous research. The results showed that parental involvement was the main influential factor in a student's college

decision. Further, parental involvement in school, increased students' motivation and engagement in school and school activities, encouraged school completion, and fostered stronger relationships among students, parents, and schools (King, 2012).

Although school experiences and educators' perceptions are determinants of students' academic advancement (Hutchins, Meece, Byun, & Farmer, 2012), numerous studies showed parental influence as a major factor in students' aspirations to complete school and seek post-secondary education or a career path. Hutchins et al. (2012) stated that family influence, community influence, school, and schooling experiences positively affected students' educational dreams into adulthood. Moreover, he claimed that each component affected students' decisions to participate in postsecondary education, but parental influence had the strongest effects. Statistically, due to the influence of parents, community, and school personnel, 56% of students in the Hutchins et al. (2012) study enrolled in college, 33% chose college or a career path, 4.6% chose a career path, and 5.6% were undecided. Thus, parental involvement in a ninth-grade academy would prove advantageous to children, the school, and the community.

Parental Partnership

Parents are important partners, vital to these academies and their child's success. Therefore, educators in these academies must provide parents with specific roles, encouraging them to become actively involved in every aspect of students' academic and career advancement. The leaders in these academies will provide educational training and parenting classes for parents who are deficient in particular areas. The government enacted laws in this community that allow every parent two hours monthly to attend their child (ren)'s school.

Community involvement and collaboration is the second influential factor in students' educational aspirations (King, 2012). According to Van Rockel (2012), it takes an entire village to raise a child. To this end, students made major gains when the community and parents were involved in children's education. Specifically, students acquire higher grades in school, attend school more regularly, stay in school longer, and enroll in postsecondary education.

Community Partnership

Ninth-grade career academies need to form partnership with different businesses in the community. These local business owners are vital to the success of these academies. Partnerships can take the form of career-mentorship programs, work-based or job shadowing opportunities, and volunteering opportunities to enlighten students on the different careers that are at their disposal. Further, the business sector can participate in school functions to speak to students, conduct demonstration lessons, and help students gain skills or develop a work ethic. As a boon to the community, career academies can prepare and provide employers with skilled workers who can help make their businesses more productive.

Educators would develop a relationship between ninth-grade students and the islands' university. The university will develop or create fields of studies to prepare students to become productive citizens in the island's industries such as tourism. Ninth-grade students who attend the university as a part of the job-to-work portion of their curriculum would accumulate credits toward their promotion to the next grade level. The academies would connect work-based experiences and experimental learning directly to classroom studies.

Rationale

I am a school administrator who is very disturbed and dissatisfied with the consistent drop out of students shortly after entering high school. I have noticed that even middle school honor students became disengaged from school and drop out. The consequences of these problems are more likely to result in delinquent behaviors, increase of crime committed by youths, arrest and even some untimely deaths in the Fullcover School District. The results of this study showed academic unpreparedness, very low mathematics and reading skills as the major culprits of school failures. The participants of the study expressed that poor school attendance and disciplinary behavior are linked to the inability to perform academically, thus truancy and disruptive behaviors are the students' way out. Academic advancement is almost impossible because reading and mathematics form the basis of all subjects in their scope of studies.

The findings from this study have shown some immediate needs that stakeholders of education must address to assist ninth graders. They also motivated me to create this project that would decrease school dropout rate and increase the promotional rate. This project will redesign or restructure the ninth-grade curriculum. This type of curriculum will expose the students to college preparatory courses, vocational skills and provide additional services such as intense counseling to assist students to deal with disciplinary and school attendance problems. School personnel will get students engaged in learning that is connected to real life situations or future careers. Revelle and Michaels (1976) stated that students who achieved success in school were more motivated to attend and less inclined to misbehave or be truant. Thus, creating career academies –that small learning community that has a career theme and shows the connection to academic has a

higher probability of producing college and career-bound students. This small learning community could decrease the problem of early school departure and increase the promotional rate.

Review of the Literature

Education reform is imperative in U.S.V.I. high schools. The adoption of Common Core State Standards by the U.S.V.I. education department has mandated that all students be college or career ready. Therefore, the time is appropriate for a change in the curriculum of ninth-grade students. Additionally, other stakeholders are appealing for assistance for students who are dropping out of school (Kossler, 2012). A careful review of studies that I retrieved via searches of academic databases such as ERIC, School Psychology Journals, High School that Works, and other journals produced pertinent information for this portion of the study. My search using descriptors such as *career academies* and *school success* led to evidence that supported the proposed project. I was able to capture information about career academies, history of career academies and the success of career academies.

History of Career Academies

Career academies, a school within a school, combine academic classes and career/technical classes. Academies took root in U.S. education more than 40 years ago and focused on a common theme such as engineering, tourism, finance and agriculture (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). This initiative incorporated best practices from vocational education, school-to-work, and other initiatives to develop a system that prepared students for college, careers, and ultimately, survival in the global and demanding economy. Additionally, the major objectives of this educational

transformational system are to develop customized educational environments that support students, create a customized curriculum that meets the academic and career needs of ninth- to 12th-grade students in a common setting, and develop a relationship with businesses in the community. Financially, this federally funded endeavor has specific stipulations (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). For instance, 85% of the monies spent must be on secondary and postsecondary education that catered to disadvantaged students. In addition, many academies focused on a specific theme (occupation or industry), and demonstrated an active relationship between the school and businesses in the community (Rojewski et al., 2010).

High schools in America are responsible for more than college preparation curriculum (Stone & Lewis, 2012). American students need more rigorous course work and vocational skills to prepare them for the advancing economy. According to Stone and Lewis (2012), career academies are effective alternatives for students who become disengaged from school due to a strictly academic diet. Based on their research, the researchers concluded that more than 50% of ninth graders in American schools will not complete a college education (Stone & Lewis, 2012). It is imperative to prepare students to become productive and contributing citizens. Stone and his co-researcher (2012) recommended career academies--the career paths where students will be provided a sense of belonging, a place to make preparations for post-secondary education and the labor market. Career academies will also provide students a purpose for attending school, add relevance to academic learning and many more options. The National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education (NASDCTec, 2013) alleged that career academies are crucial in preparing American students to survive the competitive global

economy. Since its inception over 40 years ago, career academies have expanded. These small learning communities focused on college preparation curriculum interlinked with career-technical skills, and have formed a strong partnership with businesses in the community (NASDCTec, 2013). Results of a study conducted on career academies showed that students who attended career academies experience an 11% to 17% increase in their earning. Ultimately, there is an increase in the number of independent citizens (NASDCTec, 2013). This group has also disclosed that the attendance to career academies has resulted in an improvement in students' school attendance, motivation for school and school activities, academic success, reduction in grade retention, and an increase in the promotional rate (NASDCTec, 2013).

Benefits of Career Academies

Since the inception of career academies in the U.S. education system, many school districts have introduced career academies into their school. For instance, since 2007, Florida has introduced 145 career academies in their high schools. These academies created better educational pathways for students while focusing on common themes such as tourism, hospitality, and engineering (Florida Department of Education, 2007). Results of a study conducted in that state on 12 school districts using data from the Education PK–20 data warehouse, showed that students who were enrolled in career academies acquired greater proficiency in mathematics and reading on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (Florida Department of Education, 2007).

According to the National Career Academy coalition, career academies are models for improving academic while preparing students for college or careers. Moreover, students' education should be engaging and extend beyond the four walls of

the classrooms (Evan, Burden, Gheen, & Smerdon, 2013). Although Dewey and other progressivist theorists operated prior to the introduction of career academies, their practices are evident in these academies. Progressivists proclaimed that learning should take place through critical thinking and experimentally focused activities. Additionally, learning should provide students the opportunity to self-discover, actively engage, develop purposeful projects centered on specific themes, and experiment with real-world experiences (Warde, 1960). As I reflect on the findings of this study and the anxiety to discover a solution, I realized that a combination of Dewey's progressivist theory, Atkinson Motivational Achievement Theory and Bandura's Self-efficacy theory (through social theory) have formed the foundation for this project. Many ninth graders in the Fullcover School District became disengaged from school, experienced little or no success and were unmotivated to achieve due to a variety of reasons. However, Dewey has proclaimed that if these students were actively engaged and exposed to learning that was connected to a career or real world experiences, then they will be more motivated to take on challenges and work for success. Career academies seem to be the realistic settings to rekindle the desire for learning and the craving for success.

Career academies have exemplified those same beliefs by preparing students for college or careers, engaging students outside the walls of the school, and building relationship with businesses in the community. Dewey and other progressivist theorists set the foundation for the present proposal. Career academies will provide students the opportunity to learn while doing. Furthermore, progressivist theory and review of studies that I retrieved via search engines such Google Search confirmed that career academies

are potential solutions to end school dropout and increase the promotion rate of ninth-grade students in the Fullcover high schools.

Based on positive results in other states, National Career Academy Coalition (2016) stated that these academies seek to raise, maintain and increase the level of students' motivation while in high school. Additionally, in these academies students are focused on programs of study that directly reflect their talents, aspirations and interests (National Career Academy Coalition, 2016). Further, these programs also provide the extra personal awareness and exploration, additional curriculum choices and guidance needed to assist at-risk students in acquiring success (National Career Academy Coalition, 2016). The Independent Advisory Panel of the National Assessment of Career and Technical Education (2014) recorded that career academies are fully equipped to prepare students to be college or career ready. Furthermore, after assessing the goals of career academies: utilizing different strategies to ease the transitional process to high school, involving the community in students' education, and creating new social impact with young people, the advisory panel drew specific conclusions. There is an urgency to change the educational outcome for students and the educational path of the past needed restructuring (National Career Academy of Career and Technical Education, 2014).

President Obama (2012) in his quest to improve the educational opportunities for American students echoed these changes. He pledged not only his financial support of one million dollars, but also stated that it is imperative for all students to leave school being college or career ready. The president claimed that career academies will expose students to more rigorous course work while learning technical skills such as mechanic, health care, business and finance (Obama, 2012). He further exclaimed that career

academies have proven beneficial to all. For example, students will receive academic knowledge and technical skills, mentoring and work based experiences while employers would receive skilled workers (Obama, 2012)

Career academies have positive effects on potential school dropouts. In a study conducted by What Works Clearing House (2015) on 1,454 students who attended an academy, the researchers drew similar conclusions. Career academies resulted in positive outcomes for students. These small schools within schools kept students actively engaged in learning, motivated them to progress in their schoolwork and helped students to focus on school completion. Finally, the results of this study showed that attendees of career academies had a higher probability of staying in school and progressing on towards school completion (What Works Clearing House, 2015).

After examining the results of a previous study to the results of this study, Stern, Sarroyan, and Hester (2013) drew the same conclusion. They claimed that career academies have proven records to change the educational pathways of at-risk students. These researchers conducted studies on two cohorts of Californian tenth graders in the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years. As the researchers examined the attendance records, academic performance and graduation rate of 13,822 and 18,812 students and compared them to two cohorts of eleventh non-academy attendees, they drew the following conclusions. In terms of the academic outcome, tenth graders from cohort 1 who attended the academy had 96.7% graduation rate while the first group of eleventh graders who did not attend the academy had an 82.9% graduation rate. A comparison of the second group showed comparable results. There were noticeable differences between the school attendance rates of the students who attended the academy versus the group

that did not attend. The researchers concluded that there was a 90% rate of graduation for students who attended and stayed in the program (Stern et al., 2013).

In a later mixed method study conducted by Castellano, Sundell, Overman, Richardson, and Stone (2014), they concluded that career academies reduced grade retention while increasing promotional rate. This study investigated 6,638 students from an urban school district to support the assumption that career academies increase academic achievement and graduation rate. The researchers gathered data from interviews, observations and senior exit survey. Both qualitative and quantitative designs confirmed the initial assumption. Then, as the researchers revealed more specific outcomes, the results showed that students accrued college credits while attending career academies, 1.3% increase of the graduation rate and overall increase in students' grade point averages (Castellano et al., 2014).

The US Department of Education (2014) in the areas of planning, evaluation and policy confirmed the finding of other researchers such as Stern. The Department's study showed that students who attended career academies had a higher graduation rate than their counterparts who did not. Further, the students also concentrated on careers that were directly related to a vocational skill such as transportation or computer programming. A longitudinal study of 7.000 eleventh and twelfth graders showed that upon graduation the students who attended a career academy concentrated more on vocational careers and chose career that were related to courses in school (The US Department of Education, 2014).

Another study conducted by Stern (2015) showed that career academies expanded the world of opportunities for students. For example, courses in the academies were

created around specific themes to prepare students for either the academic or the vocational aspects of education. Further, career academies equip students with skills that make them functional in either the world of work, post- secondary education, or both. The National Center for College and Career (2014) cemented the assumptions and findings of other researchers on the benefits of career academies. The researchers stated that career academies assist students to address challenges and community problems. The exposure to career academies has boosted students' graduation rates because they experience the connection between school and real world experiences. That small learning community in larger school settings has improved both the academic and classroom outcomes of students. Additionally, career academies have displayed noticeable improvement in student's professional and ethical work skills. Students attending career academies saw improvement in the completion of classroom assignments and presentation skills (The National Center for College and Career, 2014). Socially, the exposure to career academies has reduced students' affiliation to teen gang membership, improved school attendance and decreased disciplinary referrals. Economically, career academies improved the financial status for post- secondary attendees (The National Center for College and Career, 2014).

According to Brand, Valent and Browning (2013) career academies prepare students for post-secondary education and employability. Financially, students who attend career academies earned an 11% higher salaries that their counterparts who do not (Stern, 2015). Furthermore, these small schools within schools assist students in focusing on certain career paths such as engineering, mechanic or expose them to coursework that places them in a position to attend college (Brand et al., 2013). The levels of engagement

and relevance to high school teaching have changed the outlook for at-risk students attending high schools. However, results of many studies have shown career academies as the remedy to change the educational advancement for many students. The researchers confirmed that career academies expose students to higher thinking and problem solving skills, career readiness and emerging leadership (Brand et al., 2013).

Kempe (2012) described career academies as the transitional stepping- stone for school dropouts and the productive community. He maintained that career academies were used extensively to keep students in school and prepare them to graduate for college or career. In addition, these learning communities were extremely effective in improving labor market outcomes for students. In fact, students who attended career academies earned on average $30,000.00 more than their peers did (Kempe, 2012). Findings from a long-term ongoing assessment of the success of career academies showed that career academies produced students who were economically and academically successful regardless of their ethnic background. In addition, career academies decreased the probability of at-risk students dropping out of school and increased the likelihood of them remaining in school until twelfth grade (Kempe, 2012). Results of this study also confirmed that the exposure to career academies resulted in improvement in school attendance for students at risk of school dropout. Kempe (2012) stated that students who attended career academies were motivated to attack more challenging course work in school, more inclined to enroll in the technical and career courses and advance to post-secondary education. Finally, attendees of career academies stated that more positive and sustained impact was observed on their monthly income. Career academies produced

students who enjoyed their job because they were employed in fields of study that were directly connected to the themes or subjects chosen in high school (Kempe, 2012).

In a study conducted on school burnout based on gender and educational track, researchers hypothesized that students on the academic track faced school burnout (Salmela-Aro & Tynkkynen, 2012). More disturbingly, these students possessed no vocational skills. To this end, researchers investigated 770 Finnish students at the start of ninth grade and again at the end of ninth grade, examining factors such as exhaustion, cynicism, and inadequacy as major contributors to school burnout. The authors also analyzed and deciphered the results of the data collected through questionnaires, using mean and standard deviation to draw conclusions. Conclusively, educational tracks dominated primarily by academics ran the risk of producing school burnout among ninth-grade students and increased inadequate students. In contrast, students enrolled in career academies, involved in the academic and vocational tracks related to future careers, stayed in school (Salmela-Aro & Tynkkynen, 2012).

Career academies, combining academic rigor and practical experiences, encompass a common theme that changed the outlook of many ninth- through 12th-grade students. Academically, students' schoolwork improved dramatically, they acquired technical skills, and gained renewed interest in postsecondary education or a career pursuit (Castellano, Sundell, Overman, & Aliaga, 2012). A longitudinal study conducted in two school districts in the United States showed that career academies have reformed education for ninth-grade students. Researchers chose two samples of students from west and east school districts. Participants possessed similar characteristics such as receiving free or reduced-price lunch, having limited English proficiency, and performing poorly in

academics, among other issues. The treatment group was 1,957 students chosen through a lottery process; the control group was 509 students not chosen in the lottery. Castellano and colleagues (2012) investigated the academic improvement and technical outcomes of participants' exposure to career academies, versus their counterparts who did not attend. Additionally, they examined how students' life experiences at career academies differed from those of their counterparts who attended traditional school settings (Castellano et al., 2012).

Castellano et al. (2012) used data gathered through observations, interviews, and site visits to draw certain conclusions. By the end of ninth grade, treatment and control groups were on track to graduate on time. However, by the end of 10th grade, a higher percentage of the treatment group remained on that path. In addition, when researchers studied students' GPAs, the treatment group academically out-performed the control group. Results from state mandated tests showed the same results (Castellano et al., 2012). Conclusively, the exposure to career academies increased the outlook for many students.

Career academies also changed the future pathways for students living in the United Kingdom. England created career academies in high schools to gain autonomy and flexibility in governance over the school system, to restructure education and relinquish traditional methods of educating students. Machin and Vernoit (2011) stated that career academies influenced academic performance of students and increased students' enrollment in schools. These researchers conducted a study investigating two groups of participants. They exposed the treatment group to career academies while the control group attended the traditional school setting. Both groups of students started at

the same level, possessing similar characteristics. However, during the 2001–2002 and 2008–2009 school years changes became apparent. For instance, schools that received the treatment experienced significant academic improvement in students' performance and increased school enrollment in career academies at the end of the 7th year. Moreover, even in less affluent neighborhood schools, educators noticed a positive change in the attendance pattern, academic advancement, and behavior patterns of students enrolled in the academies (Machin & Vernoit, 2011). Data acquired from the Department of Education and National Pupil Database in that country substantiated other researchers' belief about the positive impact of career academies on students' educational advancement. Irrefutably, career academies have positively influenced education for students in England.

During the 2012–2013 school year, Cox, Hernandez-Gantes and Fletcher (2015) conducted a study on 17,934 Floridian students from 10 comprehensive public schools. The researchers' main objectives were to investigate if demographic characteristics influenced the academic performance of students enrolled in academies and if any correlation existed between the academic performances of students enrolled in career academies and academic advancement. The researchers posed three questions:

> Based on gender characteristics, ethnicity, and prior school performance; did any basis for comparison emerge between students who attended academies and their counterparts who did not attend? Based on performance in middle schools, what was the participation rate of career-academy students versus their nonacademic counterparts in coursework? Did any differences emerge in the academic performance of students attending career academies compared to students who did not attend career academies?

Data collected from different sources supported the findings of other researchers. Career academies change students' outlook on life (Cox et al., 2015). As researchers analyzed the data of two groups of students prior to entering career academies, records showed that both groups had accumulated GPAs of 1.93. Upon entering high school, they divided students into two groups. The group that attended the academy raised their GPA to 2.46 whereas the nonacademic attendants achieved GPAs of 2.19. Additionally, on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test, students who did not attend the academy had a mean score 315.86 in mathematics and 324.52 on reading whereas students who attended the academy received scores of 332.29 and 339.86 on mathematics and reading tests, respectively (Cox et al., 2015). Using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), researchers concluded decisively that students' demographic characteristics and ethnic background did not affect their academic performance in career academies.

Schools of the 21st century should equip students with academic and career/technical skills for the global economy. Lanehart, Rodriquez de Gil, Dixon, Kromrey, and Kersaint (2014) confirmed that career academies produced students who are motivated for college or career path. In a longitudinal study investigating the effects of career academies on special-educational programs in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields, the findings show positive reviews. Lanehart et al. surveyed 25,210 ninth-grade students from 994 schools from seven regional areas in the United States. As they analyzed the data using a propensity score method, they noted 75% of 10th-grade students took STEM classes after attendance in

the academy, whereas only 33.6% of students who chose not to enroll in the academy took STEM classes. STEM students were 4.9 times more likely to enroll in higher-level classes such as calculus after attending career academies (Lanehart et al., 2014).

Career academies can transform the lives of many individuals and are more likely to prepare their pathways for brighter future. Career academies will provide students with a vision of the relationship between their course content and real-world applications (Mosley & Flatt, 2014). Further, students will gain exposure to current technologies and skills needed for survival and upward mobility in the global economy (Mosley & Flatt, 2014). Career academies have a higher probability to produce academically advanced students who are more prepared to tackle the challenges of college or the demands of the work place (Lebow, Harris, & Smerdon, 2012). They have strong and positive impacts long after high school graduation and college (Visher et al., 2013). Furthermore, students possessed labor-market experiences and earned higher wages than their counterparts who did not attend career academies (Visher et al., 2013).

Prior to the introduction of career academies in many schools in America, more than 30% of ninth graders did not meet requirements for promotion to the next grade level (Foram, 2015). After the introduction of the small learning communities in schools, the school environments projected a different outlook. There were curriculum that focused more on rigor, relevance and relationship. The students knew that their teachers had expectations set for them and they rose to the demands. Every member of the school team provided all the necessary tools needed for success (Foram, 2015). The teachers and coaches developed strong relationship with their students and their parents. The genuine care and concern displayed by the educators resulted in even struggling students

accomplishing success (Foram, 2015). Career academy started multiplying in American schools and many schools have reported their success stories.

In an effort to increase academic achievement of high schoolers and decrease the grade retention rate, Nashville, Tennessee introduced career academies into their high schools (Mosley & Flatt, 2014). Initially, this change in the school's curriculum was met with strong criticism, but that behavior quickly changed to praises. Nashville experienced a drastic 42% increase in careers in 12 high schools with 270 businesses volunteer to participate. The students' graduation rates increased by 22% after students' enrollment in career academies. Secondly, students' school attendance reached the highest recorded results the school had ever experienced and the academy produced a high number of skilled workers (Mosley & Flatt, 2014). Arkansas is another state that introduced career academies and saw some success. In this state, 1,216 ninth to twelfth graders chose to enroll in career academies which focused on architecture, construction, manufacturing and engineering that were connected to their learning styles (High School that Works, 2012). This high school recorded academic advancement and vocational skills acquisition. Finally, Texas is another state that introduced career academies and received major success. According to Maxwell (2013), career academies changed the paths for school dropouts. Educators in Texas schools recorded that students were failing, the graduation rates were extremely low at the end of the school year, and 500 of the students' body had dropped out of school. In an effort to find a solution to this dilemma, the superintendent and other school personnel turned to career academies. The success rates were alarming. After the inception of career academies, more than 224 of the 500 school dropouts returned to school and completed their education (Maxwell,

2013). These extra -ordinary results encouraged other long time school dropouts to return to school. Because of career academies, 1,000 school dropouts returned to school and graduated (Maxwell, 2013). Career academies is a vital solution to change the educational path for students, especially those at risk of school drop out.

Financially, attending career academies yielded rewards even after completing school (Page, 2012). In a longitudinal study, Page (2012) investigated 1,306 ninth- through 12th-grade students from chosen host schools in the United States. The researcher compared a treatment group to a control group after students completed school. Page evaluated the financial status of students 4 years after high school completion and again 8 years after graduation. Those students who attended career academies from ninth through 12th grade and stayed enrolled had monthly earnings of $588 more than their counterparts who did not attend career academies. Students who enrolled in career academies during high school and prepared themselves for college or careers had 11% higher salaries than those who did not attend career academies (Page, 2012).

Evidence is clear that career academies positively influence student success. Academies motivate students academically, provide technical skills for job acquisition, and prepare them for advancement in the community. Considering the dismal outlook for some ninth-grade students in the U.S.V.I. school district, career academies can change the future for youngsters.

Project Description

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Introducing functional career academies in U.S.V.I. high school is vital. Creating different educational pathways such as vocational training, career training and post-secondary opportunities for ninth-grade students may curtail their premature school departure and change their dismal futures. Existing support and potential resources are necessary for success of the NGCCCA project (see Appendix A). I will need support from different sectors of the community. In an effort to have a successful and productive project, I will request financial assistance and mandate legislative measures from U.S.V.I. senators. These individuals must not only mandate the creation of academies in high schools, but must allocate monies needed for their function and success. Fortunately, many senators have voiced the same opinion.

The Board of Education and the Department of Education make decisions jointly to govern school affairs, policies, and curriculum. Their assistance is necessary to restructure the curriculum for ninth-grade students, hire personnel to work in the career academies, and make salaries compatible to workers in other states to attract the best teachers. As the change agent, I will request that businesses provide mentorship for students, provide job-shadowing opportunities, and teach skills. Parents will become active partners in this endeavor. School principals, teachers, and counselors will play a major role in the functioning of this academy. Finally, as the program director, I will choose an individual to help direct or implement this project, NGCCCA. This individual will be in charge of the daily running of the program and all documents related to the program.

To hire qualified and certified skilled individuals to teach various skills to the students, I will request financial resources. In addition, I will also request financial assistance for classrooms, materials, machinery, and other equipment to develop the technical section of the academy. In addition, ongoing professional development will be necessary for teachers teaching ninth-grade students. The youths are the future of tomorrow; therefore, it is imperative to invest in them.

Potential Barriers

Based on the current shortage of teaching personnel in the educational system, I anticipate that finding available personnel may be a barrier to getting career academies fully functional. Additionally, salaries provided by this school district are quite low and not compatible with other salaries in the continental United States. This disparity may create a problem in employing and maintaining highly qualified skilled workers. Therefore, senators and other stakeholders will have to raise the salary bar to attract workers. Considering that funding may be a major barrier to this project, I will conduct meetings and presentations with each group such as state senators, Board of Education, Department of Education, school personnel, community businesses and parents. During the presentations, I will share the findings of my study and the proposed project. In addition, I will discuss the plans, cost, resources needed, success stories from other school districts and the needed help to implement this project in this school district.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The desperate cry for assistance for students in the community has signaled the need for immediate change. Thus, the projected timetable is the start of the 2019–2020 school year (this process will be conducted for two consecutive years to determine

success). During the fall of 2017, I will present this project to the commissioner of education, superintendent of schools, Board of Education, and principals of the participating schools for review and approval. Starting in the summer of 2018, the Department of Education will post applications for job vacancies on the Department of Education websites, community news media, and other areas in the local community. The Human Resources Department of the U.S.V.I. Department of Education will interview potential employees in September and October of 2018. Applicants hired will receive orientation and training beginning in November of 2018. Simultaneously, classrooms to host the workstations, correspondence with businesses in the community, and local discussion with the universities in the area will be ongoing.

In January 2019, school administrators and other school personnel will add this topic to their agenda. While discussing scheduling for the 2019–2020 school year, they will choose a career-academy theme and add classes related to the chosen theme to the curriculum. During the pre-orientation session of incoming ninth-grade students, administrators and counselors will make students aware of the available career path at the academy. Counselors will guide students and each ninth-grade student will complete a career inventory. During the summer bridge program, educators will expose students to different parts of the careers academy's potential curriculum for the 2019–2020 school year. Finally, at the start of the 2019–2020 school year, school personnel will randomly chose ninth graders to enroll in the career academy. Fifty percent of the ninth-grade population will attend the regular ninth-grade academy while the other 50% will attend career academies.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

The proposal to create career academies in U.S.V.I. high schools will delegate responsibilities to certain individuals. As the change agent, I will work with other advocates for ninth graders and request that the legislative body enact bills and provide funding sources to create career academies in the public high school in the Fullcover School District. In addition, we will request the Board of Education and the Department of Education to restructure the ninth-grade curriculum to make career-academy classes available for ninth grade students. School principals, counselors, and teachers will provide students opportunities to enroll in career academies. Project organizers will welcome businesses in the community as mentors to students, providing them the opportunity to job shadow or acquire technical skills in the work place. This project will need local universities to offer career or technical skills in their curriculum and enable students to attend. Further, universities must put procedures in place to allow students to acquire credits toward promotion to the next level or even graduation.

Parental involvement is imperative and important to the success of this endeavor. Parents can motivate and encourage their children by their presence in school, completion of assignments, and reinforcement of appropriate behaviors. As the project director, I will supervise the overall functioning of the academy. The supervisor will supervise the day-to-day functioning of the academy: keep records, share the challenges and successes with me, other stakeholders, and provide immediate feedback on certain aspects of the academies. Finally, students play a crucial role in the success of career academies. After the exposure to the different available career paths, students will complete the career

inventory, choose an area of interest, and work toward completing their class assignments and projects.

Project Evaluation Plan

The goals of career academies will be to increase the promotion of ninth-grade students while decreasing school-dropout rates, increase the graduation rate, and ultimately prepare students to be college- and career ready. As the author of this study, I will initiate specific guidelines to assess the goal of these academies, evaluation procedures, and periodical steps. First, school personnel will place the freshman ninth-grade students into two separate groups. The randomized chosen group will become the treatment group, the group who will attend the career academy. They will enroll students in the four core classes: English 9, Algebra 1, Physical Science and V.I. History and vocational theme based classes of Health Care, Construction Management and Tourism. The control group, the second group of students who will attend the ninth grade academy will be enrolled in the four core classes, but elective classes will consist of Music, Foreign Language and Physical Education. In the U.S.V.I. education system, mid-semester reports, reports cards, and state test scores are distributed. Two counselors will be assigned to ninth graders during this project. One counselor will review the data from the career academy group while another counselor will review the non-academy group. Both counselors will come together to compare the academic performance at different checkpoints. Similarly, they will review attendance reports and disciplinary referral reports for both groups. School personnel will compare data from both groups: they will compare promotional or class retention rates, attendance patterns will be analyzed and disciplinary referrals will be examined. School personnel will conduct extended school

day classes for students who are falling behind academically and Saturday academies for students who are constantly displaying inappropriate behaviors. The stakeholders will analyze the three sets of data and provide suggestions for changes or modification if necessary. As a group, we will conduct on-going evaluations and provide suggestions for the revision, re-evaluation and the continuation of the program.

Counselors will conduct this process four times during the school year to coincide with report-card distribution. School counselors will also keep a behavior and attendance log for each student. They will share information with different shareholders at the different meetings. They will also conduct formative assessments at the end of every semester and provide feedback and guidance to both groups of students. In addition, at the end of the year, randomized controlled trial method (RCT) will be used to compare both groups of students. According to West and Spring (2007), this method will help the Fullcover School District to ascertain to what extent did the exposure to career academy alter the academic performance of ninth graders. In addition, were there any changes in disciplinary referrals and attendance pattern of students who attended the academy versus their classmates who attended the ninth grade academy? Finally, did the implementation of career academies in these two schools increase the overall promotional rate of ninth graders and reduce the grade retention or dropout rates. Participating schools will conduct this evaluation process over a period of two years. If schools achieve the goals of the career academies, further discussion will take place among stakeholders to determine introduction of the project on a larger scale. If outcomes are not satisfactory, a review or overhaul of the program may be necessary (See Appendix A for more detailed information).

Project Implications

Local Community

The purpose of this study was to investigate the premature departure of ninth-grade students from the Fullcover School District. After collecting, analyzing, and reflecting on data from the participants, I realized that all the participants stated that ninth-grade students needed more than ninth-grade academies. Therefore, the project chosen as the potential solution to this dilemma is career academies. Career academies have proven records of positively changing the education or career path of many students. Students enrolled in these academies will undertake college-preparatory or/and career based classes. This system will provide students with alternatives or combine educational paths. For instance, enrollment in career academies diminishes disengagement and disinterest in school due to academic failures and motivates students to attend school or apprenticeship training to acquire skills. Furthermore, some students will want to experience academic success and career or technical success. These academies will prepare them more effectively for the fast-changing economy.

Career academies will prove beneficial to all facets of the community. Financially, students will be employable and, thus, contribute to the economy. In addition, there are fewer students who are more likely to become involved in crimes and delinquent behaviors. Also, educators and parents will be happier to permeate the community with more productive citizens and qualified skilled workers to perform jobs. Finally, students will gain some independence and build self-esteem and pride in themselves.

Far-Reaching

This study was limited to two public high schools in the Fullcover School District. However, other schools in this school district and other school districts are experiencing the same dilemmas. Therefore, education stakeholders such as senators, commissioners of education, and superintendents of schools can use the results to mandate the creation of career academies in every public high school in the U.S.V.I.

Conclusion

The globally changing and competition-driven economy has motivated the restructuring of the U.S. education system for ninth- through 12th-grade students. Many states have tested career academies repeatedly and the end-results were consistent: career academies improved academic achievement, prepared students for college and career, and prevented school dropouts (see Dixon, Cotner, Wilson, & Borman, 2011). Reviews of the professional literature have cemented those assumptions and have confirmed that career academies are the projected solutions to the premature departure of ninth-grade students in U.S.V.I. high schools. The creation of career academies is beneficial to educational advancement. Section 4 will discuss the strengths and limitations of this study and will provide the opportunity for self-reflection and recommendations.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

This section provides me opportunity for reflection and introspection. In it, I outline this project's strengths and limitations, and discuss strategies and recommendations for remedying the limitations. Further, I consider the problem from an alternative angle to identify other potential strategies to bring the project to fruition, and I discuss my views of scholarship, the project's development and evaluation, and leadership and change. I also offer an analysis of myself as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer, and conclude with the final portion of this study.

Project Strengths and Limitations

School completion via career academies in the U.S.V.I. educational system is the proposed solution for educational changes for ninth graders. My analysis of the data and discussions with the study participants have confirmed that the existing ninth-grade academies are inadequate to address the deficiencies and challenges encountered by ninth-grade students. The participants expressed that ninth-grade students will benefit tremendously from academic and vocational educational classrooms. Therefore, the introduction of career academies will be both timely and beneficial to the different members involved and the larger community. This new curriculum plan with its additional components will provide an alternative for ninth graders who are unable to succeed in classes that are mainly academic base, but are more likely to achieve success in classes that have a combination of both academic and vocational skills. For example, the in-depth counseling will provide students with coping skills needed to deal with social issues, methods to improve disciplinary problems, and strategies to overcome

transitional challenges and changes in other areas of their lives. Teachers will also benefit from the on-going professional development that will be a major component to this program. Teachers will be able to increase their knowledge base, develop instructional approaches to engage students in the classroom, and identify and support the potential at-risk students. This project will also be valuable for parents who will observe their son or daughter's a renewed interest in school and learning, less involvement in juvenile crimes, and their development into contributing members of the community. Additionally, parents will receive parental training and guidance to assist their children.

Finally, considering the prospective transformation of the educational environment for ninth-grade students into, a source of skilled workers for community businesses, and a site for the preparation of college- or career-ready individuals, the community and businesses in the Fullcover School District will also benefit. According to Visher, Willard, and Safran (2013) career academies produce academically advanced, vocationally prepared students who possess work-based experiences. These academies can transform students from school dropouts to 5-year college-bound students (Visher et al., 2013). This project will create a partnership between the schools (career academies) and businesses in which the schools will use businesses for job-shadowing outlets and mentorship purposes, in turn producing skilled workers for community businesses and, yielding fewer unskilled, noncontributing members for the community.

Career academies are significant to the educational transformation and upward mobility of U.S.V.I. ninth-grade students. Equally important are credentialed personnel, timing, and financial resources. As I reviewed this project, I determined that financial constraints and time limitations are factors that can prevent implementation. The lack of

financial resources may prohibit the hiring of the best and most experienced teachers. Financial deficiency can result in larger class sizes that adversely affect academic advancement, limit extended instructional school days needed to assist students who are skills deficient, and impeded the district's ability to provide students with the appropriate skills needed to fill vacancies in the community. Inadequate funds affect teachers' salaries and classroom resources (Leachman & Mai, 2014). Further, inadequate funds diminish the recruiting power for better quality teachers, the retention of quality teachers, and the maintenance of small class size (Leachman & Mai, 2014). Inadequate financial support will adversely affect educators creating or adjusting the curriculum for ninth-grade students. However, career academies are still possible even if those problems become a reality. An alternative approach that the organizers of this project could utilize is the hiring of part time skilled workers from the community to teach the needed skills to the students. They will hire these individuals to work three days per week for two hours per day, and pay them as part-time workers, thus lessen the cost to the financial department.

Timing was another limitation to this study. Initially, I wanted to conduct a mixed-method study and use attendance data, behavioral records, and academic reports to investigate certain patterns of school dropout, and, then, use the data to substantiate the qualitative results. However, this process would have taken a much longer period. Therefore, I resorted to using a qualitative case-study design, and gathered the data through interviews and questionnaires. I believe that using different types of data would have added more credence to this study since the findings from the different groups and different types of designs could have been triangulated to increase the validity of the

study. Timing also affected the completion of this study. For example, the university research reviewer did not return the documents until the summer months, after the closing of schools in my school district. Unfortunately, even though the school registered me for class, I was unable to collect the data. This unforeseen situation pushed my graduation further back. The final limitation to this study is the availability of businessses to accommodate the number of students for job shadowing or apprenticeship. This small community has limited businesses to accommodate the ninth-grade school population. Therefore, full exposure to job shadowing may be limited.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

As the project developer, I will recommend that the Board of Education and the Department of Education adopt the ninth-grade career academy curriculum plan as an alternative curriculum for ninth-grade students. This curriculum will keep the core subjects such as math, English, science, and social studies. However, the elective classes will comprise courses such as career skills, a course to teach students strategies for writing resumes, completing job applications, and interviewing rather than the foreign languages and other electives. The technical portion of the curriculum will offer construction skills, skills needed in the tourism industry, and skills needed in the field of health. Based on the professional literature, career academies are federally funded (U.S. Department of Education, 2011), thus the V.I. Department of Education can likely secure federal funding to partially finance these academies. Second, using internship-rotation schedules or local universities to conduct onsite practical classes will remedy the problem of too large a population. These two solutions will enable the director of the program to accommodate more students.

Another alternative to addressing the problems of financial shortfall and too large a population for job shadowing is the use of onsite skill training. For instance, instead of having the entire treatment group job shadow in community businesses, educators can subdivide the treatment group and encourage community workers to visit the schools to teach the same skills while another section goes out into the community. Further, career-academy teachers will need ongoing professional development or current skill training to ensure students are provided current technological skills.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

This study introduced and exposed me to knowledge and experiences that were not in my repertoire. It cemented previous beliefs and whetted my thirst for further investigation. As I reflected on my growth, I developed and mastered research skills, honed and perfected writing abilities, and acquired extensive and elevating knowledge. Extensive research exposed me to significant researchers who had investigated this issue and drew conclusions. Further, I was able to analyze the diverse research designs that notable researchers have used in the fields of research. In addition, I matured significantly as a critical and analytical thinker. Moreover, I was in a better position to choose data that strengthened the study. Finally, due to steady growth during this research project, I was better able to remove personal biases, used facts, and drew sound, informed decisions from articles read and research conducted.

As I reviewed the professional literature, I concluded that ninth grade is the most challenging transitional point in a student's education. I realized that, similar to kindergarten support, ninth-grade parents need to support their students at this level. The information I acquired during the data-collection process cemented my deep-rooted fears

that too many adults have allowed students to venture out on their own at this level. Likewise, students at this grade level, even those who pretend to be independent, need guidance, added assistance, real-life opportunities to enhance their learning experiences, and individuals who genuinely care about them. The quality of teachers is of paramount importance to the completion of ninth-grade students' education (Yusuf, 2011). Additionally, with all the other environmental changes, maturational changes, and demands of high school life, students at this pivotal point in their education need educational, social, and emotional support. Students who do not experience these supports fall off track in ninth grade.

At the ninth-grade transitional point, students have a three to five times higher possibility of failing classes (Ellerbrock & Keifer, 2014). During this study, I noted that students performed more effectively when they had a genuine and healthy relationship with their teachers. The results of qualitative studies on this issue have shown that the relationships developed between teachers and their students cultivate positive results (Ellerbrock & Keifer, 2013). Moreover, results have shown that even after high school, students were happier and healthier individuals because they had a genuine sense of family and unity in high school (Ellerbrock & Keifer, 2013). Conclusively, as educators, we need to support and teach ninth-grade students differently than students in other grade-levels.

Additional knowledge acquired during this study settled my belief that grade retention at any grade level negatively affected school advancement and aided school dropout. For too long, educators have assumed that grade retention helps students catch up on deficient skills. However, study results have shown that the benefits derived from

grade retention of students because of class failure or inadequate skills are only short term (NASP, 2011). During this study, I found that different groups of educators had differing views on the benefits or effects of grade retention. For instance, although some participants retained ninth-grade students to accumulate credits or improve deficient skills, others claimed that ninth-grade retention resulted in early school departure for those students. Opponents of grade retention stated that grade retention has contributed to students' low self-esteem, poor social and personal adjustment, and increased discipline problems (NASP, 2011). After investigating the challenges that led to the school dropout of U.S.V.I. ninth-grade students, I have acquired pertinent information that I can use to change the educational path for these students.

Project Development and Evaluation

Being in a leadership position as an administrator has strategically positioned me to develop and evaluate certain educational strategies and programs. The application of those strategies have assisted me in the development of this project and provided guidelines for its evaluation. After analyzing the data, I realized that a well-structured project was inevitable and that ongoing assessment was of paramount importance. As the researcher, I will employ an evaluation as the vehicle to determine improvement, advancement, and restructuring of the different sections of the project. Most importantly, having a genuine concern for the educational plights of Fullcover ninth-grade students, I developed this project with the objectives of creating changes in the educational advancement and ultimate life experiences of these students.

Leadership and Change

Changes are usually difficult to accept; however, as leaders, changes are necessary and imperative for the growth and advancement of any organization. Further, I realized that one set of changes ushered in another and sometimes-uncovered issues that were not obvious to the naked eye. For instance, Fullcover ninth-grade students faced academic challenges that resulted in grade retention or school dropout. As a result, visionary leaders implemented ninth-grade academies, but only a fraction of the ninth-grade population benefited. This dilemma was the roadmap for this project. Personally, changes should benefit large percentages of the population. As visionary leaders, if this is not achieved, then leadership needs to revisit and reevaluate the changes.

The two participating schools in this study exhibited the need for change because only a fraction of ninth-grade students benefited from the academic changes while using ninth-grade academies. Therefore, it is now imperative for the leaders of those two schools to initiate changes that will affect a larger percentage of the ninth-grade population. Teachers and other educators have to commit to this projected change from ninth-grade academies to career academies to assist students. This may involve additional planning and extra time; thus, educators may display some opposition. Leaders of these institutions will have to lead the changes in their schools, set high expectations for those students, and believe that each child will experience success from that change.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

Analysis of Self as Scholar

An introspective analysis of self revealed that as a scholar, I am tenacious, courageous, self-disciplined, and persistent. The search for knowledge and strategies to assist Fullcover ninth-grade students in the completion and advancement of their education brought these qualities to the forefront. During this doctorial journey, I expanded my knowledge exponentially, sharpened my research skills, and grew significantly as a professional. In addition, I acquired rich information from various researchers and individuals who possessed extensive expertise on the topic I investigated. Involvement in continuous research exposed me to different types of research and research techniques. Furthermore, during this study I strengthened my self-discipline, which helped me resubmit revised documents in a timely manner. As a blossoming scholar, I became an analytical and critical thinker. I reviewed each version of the corrected document, rephrased or removed portions as needed and continued working while waiting for delayed documents. Delays taught me, as a scholar, that perfection is synonymous with time management and a worthwhile product. Because of this entire process, I am better prepared to create changes in my school and school district.

As I reflected on my experiences at the different stages of this study, I realized that each obstacle made me a more analytical and critical thinker. The challenges prepared me for the next difficult step, built my courage to handle the unexpected challenges, and made me more determined to accomplish the goal of creating a different pathway to educating ninth-grade students in Fullcover schools. Moreover, being an educator in the lower grades that promotes students to the high schools has confirmed the

obligations I have to these students. As I analyze myself as a scholar, I can confirm that throughout this study, the knowledge I acquired is priceless. Additionally, this acquired knowledge has placed me in a more effective position as a scholar and leader of change.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

Being an educator for over 30 years and a leader for the past 10 years has reinforced my determination to make educational changes to benefit all students, especially those in the forgotten middle. While completing my master of education degree, I was eager to discover if at-risk students who were educated in alternative settings outperformed or displayed more appropriate behaviors than at-risk students educated in traditional school setting. I used the results of that study as a motivator to target appropriate resources to educate these students and as the stepping-stone to investigate educational challenges of students in the middle. Thus, the yearning to change education for ninth-grade students impregnated my educational career with the seed of an investigation to discover the transitional challenges that led to their early school departure. Throughout this research, I acquired extensive knowledge on this issue but realized that there was still more knowledge available for me to acquire. As I analyzed myself as a practitioner in the field of education, I noted that I have advocated for this group of students and that I needed to work more diligently to create a change in their educational outlook and ultimately, their lives.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

An analysis of myself as the project developer has brought back to memory the plethora of activities that have led to this study. The brainstorming for the topic to express my inner interest and the extensive literature review to find peer-reviewed

articles to support the study took countless hours. Similarly, as I summarized each article, paraphrased and expounded on the information, then produced an acceptable prospectus, I convinced myself that progress was foreseeable. During each step, I realized the paramount importance of critical and analytical thinking. For instance, I was able to suppress my own biases and make sound judgments. I noted that this produced more substantive data to support my study.

Further, the early acceptance of the prospectus propelled me to accelerate to the next step. As the project developer, I created schedules and allotted time daily to work on this study. Rewardingly, I began work on the actual proposal, followed the stipulated guidelines and worked on Section 1 of the study. After repeated reassessments and corrections, it was now a worthwhile product. The acceptance and approval of one section gave birth to the other section. Following the committee's approval of Sections 1, 2, and the passing of the oral defense, I was more motivated to sprint to the final document. Unfortunately, during the data-collection period, an untimely response from the university research reviewer slowed me down tremendously; but I picked up the pieces and continued to work.

As I reviewed the results of this study, I concluded that Fullcover high schools needed more than ninth-grade academies to eradicate or curtail the ninth-grade school-dropout problem. Therefore, after I examined the wide range of expertise and success stories on career academies, I decided this was a viable solution. After completing the project, my thirst for knowledge and research of studies about ninth-grade students were satisfied greatly.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

Nelson Mandela claimed that education is the vehicle to change the life of an individual. As I considered this message, I am more determined to change the educational path for ninth-grade students and help them change their lives. However, I realized that to transform these students' lives socially, changes must start within the individual. However, at this grade level, due to the plethora of changes, students need assistance from different educational stakeholders to accomplish this goal. For instance, it is imperative that teachers develop relationships with their students and have an understanding of their culture. Additionally, U.S.V.I. educators need to restructure the ninth-grade curriculum, revamp the traditional method of educating these students, and develop a college- and career-bound curriculum. As I reflected on the potential impact of this project, I noted that career academies will create these educational changes. As I analyzed Bandura's (1977) theory, I confirmed that success breeds success and extrinsic changes can motivate intrinsic changes. This project has the potential to create social changes in the lives of ninth-grade students; however, it will also create changes in the community. For example, students who complete their ninth-grade education, and graduate from high school, college or technical school, will become contributing members of that community and productive citizens in the changing and progressive global economy.

Directions for Future Research

As I reviewed the purpose of this study and the goals of its final project, I realized that ninth-grade students required a more engaging and hands-on approach to learning.

Further, proactive and reactive approaches used in ninth grade can only create minimal changes. The implication of this study is that earlier diagnoses and interventions to the problems that placed students at risk of not completing school are crucial to high school completion. Based on a preponderance of evidence, the introduction of earlier intervention strategies changed the educational pathways for some students who displayed noticeable characteristics from as early as elementary school (Finnan & Kombe, 2011). Grade retention destroys self-esteem (Finnan & Kombe, 2011). However, schools that initiated earlier intervention strategies saw renewed self-motivation, sense of purpose, and the restoration of students' self-identity. Further, the acquisition of the needed skills and the assistance rendered, created a positive outlook for students (Finnan & Kombe, 2011).

Norton (2011) drew similar conclusions after conducting a study on potential at-risk students. This researcher exposed a group of at-risk students to the same programs and course work as academically and intellectually talented students, prearranged their schedules, rearranged learning strategies, and provided earlier interventions. As a result, a higher percentage of at-risk students was promoted to the next grade level (Finnan & Kombe, 2011). The earlier students' deficiencies are addressed, the higher the probability of positive results (Vandecandelaere, Schmitt, Vanlaar, De Fraine, & Van Damme, 2014).

Students who are not reading by third grade and who do not receive intervention have a stronger possibility to become school dropouts (Hernandez, 2011). Similarly, students who display truancy in elementary school and who do not change that pattern by

middle school, are more likely to leave school before completing high school (Schoeneberger, 2012). Earlier interventions in schools are imperative.

The potential application for this project is that educational stakeholders of this community can apply this project to every ninth-grade class in the U.S.V.I. school community. This should not incur additional expense because each high school has a vocational center. Unfortunately, the ninth-grade population is not benefiting from those centers. As I reflected on the importance of this project, I concurred with other notable researchers on this issue that educators need to teach ninth-grade students differently. The curriculum for these students should prepare them intellectually and vocationally. Finally, this project can change the educational path for all ninth-grade students.

This qualitative case study research investigated the challenges that led to ninth-grade school dropout in two Fullcover high schools. As I reflected on the results of this study, I concluded that future research is imperative. First, educational stakeholders need to extend this study to all high school administrators, counselors, and core-subject teachers and to all high schools in the U.S.V.I. Researchers should increase the number of participants to obtain a more reliable representation of the population. Second, this qualitative study examined the perspectives of ninth-grade educators and used data from questionnaires and interviews; however, future research using a mixed-method research would provide more substantive data. During this method, data will be collected from both quantitative (school attendance records and grades) and qualitative (interviews and surveys) sources. The findings from the different sources will be triangulated to support the study. Finally, the Department of Education and the Board of Education need to enact policies that will assess career academies on a regular basis, then make the

necessary adjustments to improve education for all ninth-grade students in high school and beyond high school graduation.

Conclusion

Educational transition is more challenging for ninth-grade students than for any other grade level. Data from this study and the professional literature established that emotional, physical, social, and environmental changes, coupled with intellectual deficiencies, have contributed to these transitional challenges. In an effort to ease the transition, many educators have used proactive approaches and introduced ninth-grade academies; district leaders have initiated extended-school-day programs and Saturday academies; and classroom teachers have used different teaching styles and varying strategies. Yet only a percentage of the ninth-grade population was reached. This project has the potential to create educational changes for this group of students and ultimately, the larger school population. Career academies have proven to transform educational outcomes for students. Although similar to ninth-grade academies, career academies possess added components that will expose students to college-preparatory curriculum and build careers around a common theme. In conclusion, considering the fate and hopelessness of ninth-grade school dropouts, this project is timely and relevant.

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Appendix A: The Project

Ninth-Grade Completion via Career Curriculum Academies (NGCCCA)

Section 1: Project Background and Presentation

Section 2: District Review and Approval

Section 3: Implementation

Section 4: The Evaluation Process

Section 1: Project Background and Presentation

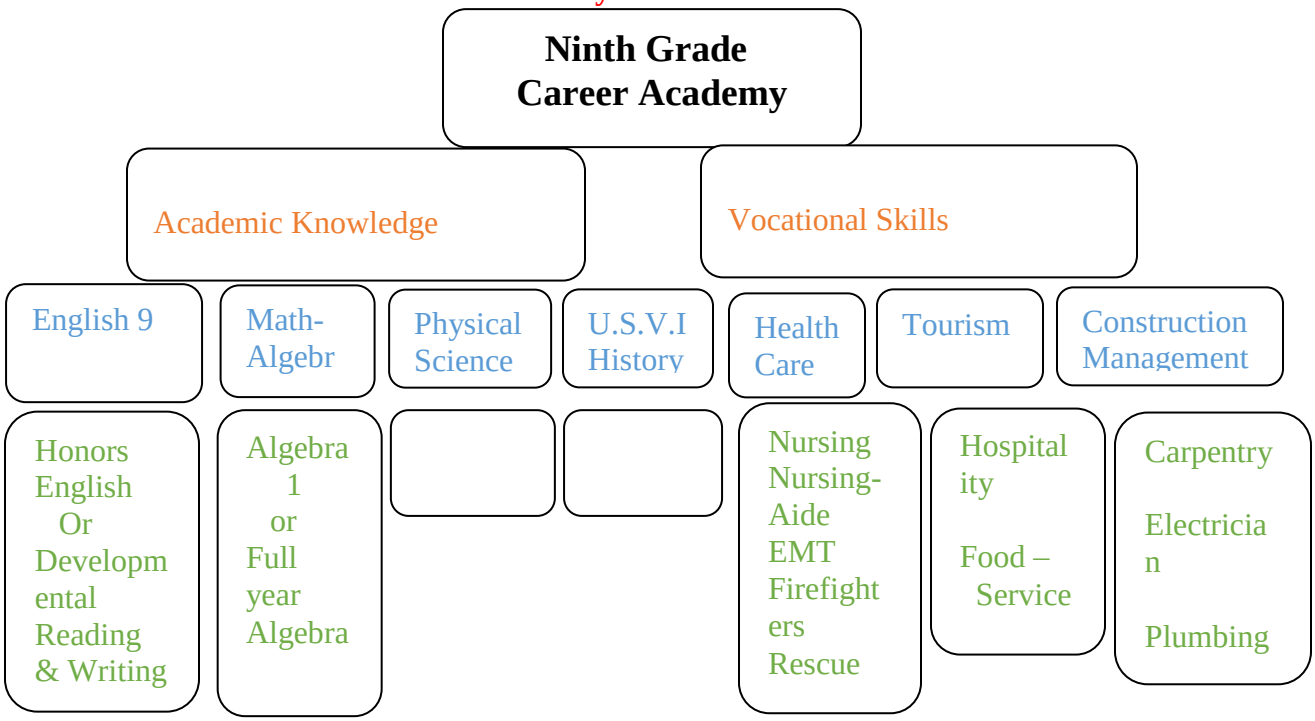
Introduction

The on-going discussions and the desperate needs for assistance to change the gloomy pathways for ninth graders leaving school prematurely have prompted this project, NGCCCA (Ninth Grade Completion via Career Curriculum Academies). I will provide specific guidelines for the restructuring of the ninth grade curriculum, individual and group counseling & mentoring, community involvement, and parental partnership. As the developer of NGCCCA, I will conduct meetings with the different stakeholders of education to present a background of this study and the proposed project as a solution. I will share results of research from both the local level and the professional literature, the personnel and other resources needed to bring this project to fruition.

The participating schools in this study have utilized a variety of proactive and reactive approaches, teachers have modified their instructional practices and the school district has initiated ninth grade academies. Based on the local data collected, a certain percentage of ninth graders are still leaving school without a high school diploma. The introduction of NGCCCA in U.S.V.I. high schools will create a different pathway for

educating ninth graders. Research has shown that students at the ninth grade level need to be more actively engaged in their learning. NGCCCA, the project attached to this study will provide students with both college preparatory courses and vocational courses. In addition, trained counselors will provide the ninth graders with both individual and group counseling. During these sessions, students will be equipped with strategies and skills to deal with the different challenging issues. Further, I will create a partnership with different businesses in the community as well as the local university. The businesses will provide the outlet for our students to complete the vocational aspect of the program as well as mentorship. The local university will develop career-centered classes built around specific themes as specified by the Board of Education and the Department of Education. Students would be able to accumulate credits towards promotion. Parents will become active partners in this project. The introduction of this project will assist school personnel in decreasing ninth grade school dropout while increasing the promotional rate. Finally, the percentage of students who will be college and career ready will increase. In an effort to acquire maximum success, I will highlight and discuss the different components in this project. The areas in the first section are curriculum changes & teacher training, counseling component, parental partnership and community involvement.

Curriculum Plan: Career Academy



Career Academy Class Schedule: **Ninth Grade Class Schedule**

8:00 to 9:00 English 9	8:10 to 9:45 Period 1
9:05 to 10:05 Algebra 1	9:50 to 11:20 Period 2
10:10 to 11:00 Physical Science	11:20 to 12:05 Lunch
11:05 to 12:00 V.I. History	12:05 to 1:30 Period 3
12:00 to 12:45 Lunch	1:40 to 3:10 Lunch
12:50 to 2:20 Vocational classes	12:50 to 3:10 Period 4
2:25 to 3:10 Career Skills/Counseling	

(Career skills include lessons on completing job application, writing resume interview skills & strategies**)**

Vocational classes will consist of off campus experiences, job shadowing & on-campus classes**.**

Description of Courses/Careers in Career Academies

English & Mathematics: All in-coming ninth graders are pretested prior to placement in English and mathematics classes. Students who pass the English and math entrance exams are placed in honors classes, given honors English 9 and algebra 1. Those students who fail these classes are placed in skill classes. The students failing English 9 are placed in developmental reading and writing classes. The students failing the math test are placed in a full year of algebra—the regular algebra 9 curriculum is stretched out for the entire year. At the end of these classes, students should be able to master the different concepts laid out in the scope and sequence for that course.

Science: Ninth graders take physical education in ninth grade.

Social Studies: This is mainly V.I. History and has geography embedded in the course. In addition, students are also exposed to civics.

Construction Management: The course of construction management will consist of carpentry, plumbing and electrical skills. In these industries, students will be introduced to designing, planning, proper usage and maintenance of both hand held and power tools. They will measure, construct and restore models. Students will acquire both theoretical and practical knowledge.

Cross Discipline:

English--students will complete reading and writing assignments while learning construction skills.

Mathematics: Students will complete estimation and accurate measurements, draw shapes and use scale drawing etc.

Tourism: In this industry, students will focus on skills, strategies and etiquette needed in the hospitality industry. Students will be trained in communication, customer service and other careers in the hotel industry. Management, food service and beverage skills will also be taught under this career theme.

Cross Discipline:

English: Students will be taught communication skills, reading and creation of menus, taking orders using those writing and spelling skills acquired in English classes.

Math: Measurement and estimation are needed in every area of food and beverage making, etc.

Social studies**:** Culture and V.I. practices will be evident during this career classes

Health Services: Students enrolled in this career path will acquire skills to prepare them for careers such as nursing, nursing aide, firefighters, emergency Management technicians (EMT) and many others.

Cross Discipline: English, math, science and V.I. history will be evident in these career classes.

Purpose: The purpose of career academies in the Fullcover School District is to reform education for ninth graders. These small learning communities within the larger school setting will create supportive, engaging and personalized learning environments for ninth graders and their teachers. Components such as the community-business partnership will

expose students to career paths and skills during their work based experiences. The counseling and mentorship aspects will provide students with strategies to deal with those problems beyond academic that are pushing them towards school failure. Fullcover School District will provide students with a curriculum consisting of four core courses: English 9 (Students who pass the entrance exams are placed in honors English and the other in a developmental reading and writing class), Full Year Algebra, Physical Science and V.I. History. In addition, students will choose vocational-technical skill programs such as Construction Management, Hospitality & Tourism and Health Care. The aim of these academies is to increase the promotional rate of ninth grade while decreasing the retention and school dropout rate. Ultimately, the exposure to the career academy curriculum will prepare students for college and/or career.

Level: Ninth graders in two high schools in the Fullcover School District**.**

Learners: Ninth grade honor students, regular students and at-risk students who are less likely to do well in regular classes.

Scope & Sequence: Taken Verbatim from Guides4learning.com (Websites for U.S.V.I. English, math, science & social studies content standards, scope &sequence--2009).

Scope & Sequence (9 Weeks—each class is 60-90 minutes)

English

Description	**Unit 1**	**Standards**
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking	Week 1 & 2 Command of the English Language in speaking and writing	• Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking. • Use parallel structure • Use various types of phrases and clauses to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentation. • Write routinely over extended periods and shorter periods for a range of tasks, purposes and audiences. • Demonstrate command of the conventions of standards English grammar and usage when writing or speaking
	Weeks 3 & 4 Command of the English Language in speaking and writing	• Demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing. • Develop and strengthen writing as needed in

		planning, revising, editing, rewriting or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. • Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate. • Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
Description:	**Unit 2:** Week 5 & 6	**Standards**
Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation and spelling when writing.	Command of conventions of standard English	• Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing. • Use a semicolon to link two or more closely related independent clauses. • Use a colon to introduce a list or quotation. • Spell correctly • Write routinely over extended time and shorter time frames for a

		range of tasks, purposes and audiences. • Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking. • Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. • Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing. •
Description	**Unit 3:** **Weeks 7 & 8**	**Standards**
Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.	Using comprehension and applying language in various context	• Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. • Interpret figures of speech in context and analyze their role in the text. • Analyze nuances in the meaning of words with similar denotations. • Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more

		fully when reading or listening.
	Week 9	• Use context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase • Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech.
	Scope & Sequence-- Mathematics: Algebra 1	
Description	**Unit 1A: Weeks 1 & 2**	**Standards**
Apply number concepts to solve problems arising in everyday life, society, and the workplace. Identify important quantifiable relationships in practical situations. Analyze if and how the use of numbers can lead to resolutions of both simple and complex situations.	Relationships between quantities and reasoning with equations	• Relationship between quantities and reasoning with equations. • Use units as a way to understand problems and to guide the solution to multi-step problems; choose and interpret units consistency in formulas; choose and interpret the scale and the origin in graphs and data displays. • Define appropriate quantities for the purpose of descriptive modeling. • Quantities—determine the meaning of symbols, key terms, and other domain-specific words and phrases as they are used in a specific scientific or technical context relevant to grades 9-10 texts and topics
	Units 1B: Weeks 3 & 4	
Utilize algebraic expressions, equations, and concepts to generate reasonable plans and reach solutions to problems in everyday life, business, and community situations.	Relationship between quantities and reasoning with equations	• Interpret the structure of expressions. • Interpret expressions that represent a quantity in terms of its contexts.

Demonstrate the grasp of algebra by utilizing a variety of paths to the solution of everyday problem situations.		• Interpret parts of an expression ,such as terms, factors, and coefficients • Create equations that describe numbers or relationships • Create equations and inequalities in one variable and use them to solve problems. Include equations arising from linear and quadratic functions, and simple rational and exponential functions.
	Unit 1C: Weeks 5 & 6	
Utilize algebraic expressions, equations and concepts to generate reasonable plans and reach solutions to problems in everyday life, business and community situations. Demonstrate the grasp of algebra by utilizing a variety of paths to the solution of everyday problem solutions	Relationship Between Quantities and Reasoning with Equations	• Understanding solving equations as a process of reasoning and explain the reasoning. • Explain each step in solving a simple equation as following from the equality of numbers asserted at the previous step, starting from the assumption that the original equation has a solution. Construct a viable argument to justify a solution method. • Solve equations and inequalities in one variable. • Reasoning with equations and inequalities
	Unit 2A: Weeks 7 & 8	
Utilize algebraic expressions, equations and concepts to generate reasonable plans and reach solutions to problems in everyday life, business, and community situations. Demonstrate the grasp of	Linear and Exponential Relationships	• Extend the properties of exponents to rational exponents. • Understand the concept of a function and use function notation

algebra by utilizing a variety of paths to the solution of everyday problem solutions		• Write information/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/experiments or technical processes
	Unit 2B: Week 9	
Utilize algebraic expressions, equations and concepts to generate reasonable plans and reach solutions to problems in everyday life, business, and community situations. Demonstrate the grasp of algebra by utilizing a variety of paths to the solution of everyday problem solutions.	Linear and Exponential Relationships.	• Represent and solve equations and inequalities graphically
	Virgin Islands & Caribbean History—Scope & Sequence	
Description	Unit 1: Weeks1 & 2	**Standards**
The V. I. Social Studies Standards	Culture and related Virgin Islands History	• Trace the social, political and economic development of the United States Virgin islands. • Know the origin and influences of the natives of the Virgin Islands. • Critique the governance of the islands under Danish West Indian Company. • Explain slavery and the resistance movement. • Debate colonialism
	Weeks 3 & 4	• Discuss the formation of a colonial society. • Discuss the American presence and the struggle for local autonomy. • Recognize the geographic features of the Caribbean and its outlying areas.

		• Debate and explain the exploration and settlement of the Caribbean. • Debate, analyze and discuss Post-Emancipation period in the Caribbean.
	Weeks 5 & 6	• Identify Caribbean leaders and debate their focus. • Examine Virgin Islands culture • Define Virgin Islands culture • Examine changes in Virgin Islands culture. • Analyze the effects of movement on Virgin Islands culture. • Relate social studies to your life • View life from other perspectives and others' point of view.
	Weeks 7 & 8	• Explain key forces, which have shaped the world. • Explain the causes and effects key forces have on you, the present, and the future. • Utilize information from the past and present to solve problems, make decisions and predict the future. • Relate current events to your life • Cite textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

	Week 9	Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
	Science Scope & Sequence	
Description	**Unit 1: Weeks 1 & 2**	**Standards**
Explain the structure, properties and interactions of matter. How do particles combine to form the variety of matter?	Matter and it's Interactions: Structure and Properties of Matter.	• Each atom has a charged substructure consisting of a nucleus, which is made of protons and neutrons, surrounded by electrons. • Use the periodic table as a model to predict the relative properties of elements based on the patterns of electrons in the outermost energy level of atoms.
.	**Weeks 3 & 4**	
The structure and interactions of matter at the bulk scale are determined by electrical forces between particles	Matter and it's Interactions: Structure and Properties of Matter	• Use model to predict the relationships between systems or between components of a system. • Plan and conduct an investigation to gather evidence to compare the structure of substances at the bulk scale to infer the strength of electrical forces between particles.
	Weeks 5 & 6	
	Matter and it's Interactions: Chemical Reaction	• Chemical processes, their rates and whether or not energy is stored or released can be understood in terms of the collisions of molecules and the rearrangements of atoms into new molecules, with

		consequent changes in the sum of all bond energies in the set of molecules that are matched by changes in kinetic energy. • Apply scientific principles and evidence to provide an explanation about the effects of changing the temperature or concentration of the reacting particles on the rate reaction occurs.
	Weeks 7 & 8	
	Matter and it's Interactions: Structure and Properties of Matter	• .Refine the design of a chemical system by specifying a change in conditions that would produce increased amounts of products at equilibrium. • Refine a solution to a complex real-world problem; based on scientific knowledge, student generated sources of evidence, prioritized criteria, and tradeoff consideration.
	Week 9	
	Matter and it's Interactions: Structure and Properties of Matter	• Refine a solution to a complex real-world problem, based on scientific knowledge, student generated sources of evidence, prioritized criteria, and tradeoff consideration
	Scope & Sequence for vocational education was taken from Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Office for career/vocational technical education (2014)	

	Modified Scope & Sequence for Vocational/Technical	
Description: Successfully complete safety training on all related equipment and materials**.**	**Unit 1:** **Weeks 1 & 2** Carpentry safety and health knowledge and skills**.**	**Standards** • Demonstrate use, storage, and maintenance of all related hand and power tools according to current industry and OSHA standards**.** • Identify and describe scaffold safety practices and procedures. • Use and maintain ladders, scaffolding and fall protection according to current industry and OSHA standards.
	Unit 2 **Weeks 3 & 4** Carpentry safety and health knowledge and skills**.**	• Identify the safety hazards associated with the use of ladder brackets and suggest alternatives. • Identify and apply OSHA and other health and safety regulations that apply to specific tasks and jobs in carpentry.
	Unit 3 **Weeks 5 & 6** Identify, explain and use specifications for a construction project	• Describe the importance of project specifications and their use. • Define the divisions that are related to the carpentry field.
	Unit 4 **Weeks 7 & 8** Demonstrate the fundamentals of carpentry**.**	• Recognize and describe the use of building materials. • Apply carpentry math principles • Describe layout procedure

	Week 9 **H**and tools & power tools	• Describe and demonstrate the use and care of hand tools. • Demonstrate the use, storage and maintenance of sawing tools
	Tourism/Hospitality & Health Care (Taken from Massachusetts Department of Education, 2014)	
Description: Hospitality & tourism occupational cluster and Health services Occupational Cluster	**Unit1: Weeks 1 & 2** Safety and Health Knowledge and skills	**Standards:** • Describe and apply health and safety regulations. • Demonstrate appropriate health and safety practices based on the specific occupational area.
	Weeks 3 & 4	• Demonstrate appropriate responses to situations that may threaten health and safety. • Safety in the hospitality and tourism industry
	Weeks 5 & 6	• Fundamentals of the hospitality and tourism industry.
	Weeks 7 & 8	• Fundamental of customer/guest service. • Fundamentals of the hospitality and tourism industry on the economy.
	Week 9	• Fundamentals of food and beverage management.

Lesson Plan: Construction Management

Course Title: Carpentry –this introductory lesson will be done in the classroom. Students will be familiarized with different carpentry tools and their usage.

Unit 1A: Successfully complete training on all related carpentry tools and their functions.

Topic: The different carpentry tools and their usage

Grade Level: 9th Grade

Lesson Duration: 90 minutes

Learners: Mixture of ninth grade honor students and at-risk ninth graders

Content Standards:

Demonstrate use, storage, and maintenance of all related hand and power tools, according to current industry and OSHA standards.

Performance Objectives: After viewing power point presentation, viewing simulation and real tools, students will be able to:

(a) Draw and label different carpentry tools

(b) Discuss and explain of the function of each tool

(c) Differentiate between hand -held tools and power tools

(d) Discuss, using their own words the safety rules when using carpentry tools. with an 85% accuracy.

Introduction of lesson:

Lesson will be introduced by playing, finding the certain tools around the classroom that are used by carpenters. (hammer, power saw etc.).

Build-up of Lesson: Slide show presentation will be used to teach lesson on the different types of tools and their usage. Simulation tools will be used to assist students in the identification and labeling of tools. Students will read short passage on the safety rules/procedures associated with the different tools. The reading will generate discussion on safety rules when working with tools. Demonstration lesson will be done showing the differences between hand held tools and power tools. Reviews will be conducted at different points in the lesson.

Summary: Students will explain using their own words: the uses of the different carpentry tools, what safety practices must be adhered to when working with these tools.

Evaluation: Worksheets:

1. Simulation tools and their functions--students will identify which tool does what job

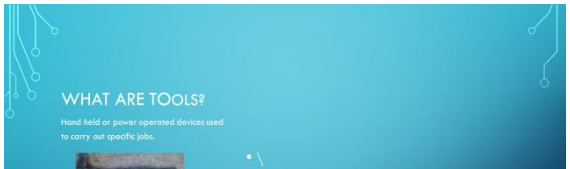
2. Using your own initiative—draw/construct and label 8 of the 12 carpentry tools discussed during today's lesson.

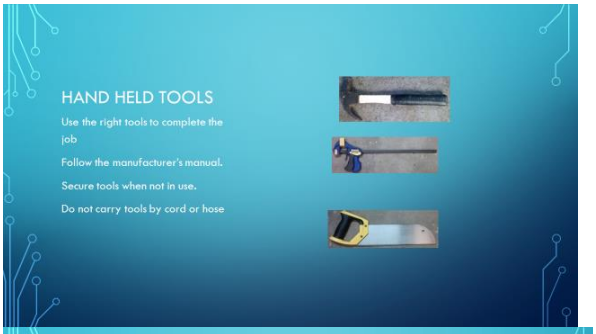
3. Summarize using your own words why hand held tools should be cared for/handled differently to power tools.

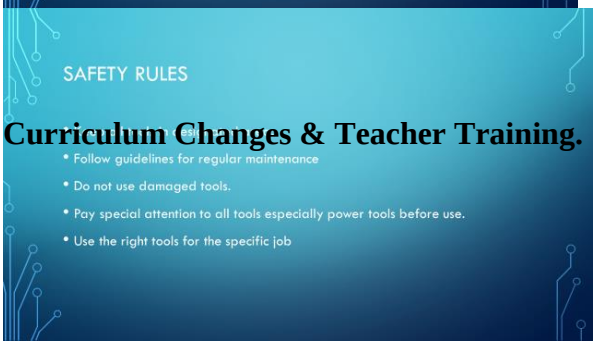
Suggested Materials: different power tools and hand held tools, worksheets, textbooks on carpentry, projector/promethean board, and construction paper.

Homework: Research and find 4 additional handheld and power tools that were introduced today. Name those tools and give their use.

PowerPoint slide show:







Curriculum Changes & Teacher Training.

Academic classes dominate the current curriculum that the joint boards of Department of Education and Board of Education have created for ninth graders. Unfortunately, even though vocational classes are available at the school campuses, they are limited to ninth graders. Further, the vocational courses are two- year programs and students who are entering the vocational field dominate the classes. Restructuring the curriculum to create college preparatory classes and vocational classes will motivate more ninth graders to attend school and achieve some success. Bandura's success breathe success theory will be applicable in this situation. This project is proposing

college preparatory curriculum for the ninth graders. This curriculum will be a combination of college preparatory classes and vocational education classes. Research has confirmed that students who are exposed to career academies-combination of college preparatory classes and vocational courses have shown academic improvement and are highly motivated to pursue post- secondary education (Dalton, Lauff, Henke, Alt & Li, 2013). In the transformed classroom of the NGCCCA, the instructors will teach the academic classes during the morning period of the school day and the school personnel will reserve the afternoon portion for the vocational education portion. The school personnel will divide the p.m. portion of the day into different activities. The activities will involve students job shadowing with different businesses in the community, university classes centered on career academy themes and students in skill/trade work areas on campus. In addition, the educators will prepare students for college and career. Furthermore, the counselors will guide students who encounter problems with academic, behavioral or social issues.

Teacher professional development and preparation is vital to the success of this program. According to Seebrick (2015), the quality and preparation of teachers are of major importance to producing positive outcome for students. In a study conducted on 951 California high school students, the results confirmed that qualified and certified teachers positively affected mathematics proficiency and academic growth in students. Therefore, teachers involved in this academy will receive professional development to prepare them to teach and work with all ninth grades e.g. the gifted and talented as well as the at-risk and slow learners. The director of this project will also convene discussions and presentations to guide teachers on the importance of teacher-pupil relationship in

students' academic success and school completion. The director will plan social events to encourage teachers and parents to meet-greet and form working partnerships.

Counseling

Due to the large percentage of ninth grades with academic, behavioral and social challenges, individual and group counseling forms an integral part of this program. Counselors will be available to provide academic guidance to students as they make that transitional change from eighth grade course work to ninth grade course work and career choices. The counselors will also provide guidance to students about career paths. Counselors will also provide counseling and GED guidance for those students who have decided that they will drop out of school regardless of what is done. Further, the counselors will also help those students who want to learn a skill or trade rather than attend classes. They will also be the trusted individuals and advocates for students who are facing emotional and social challenges. Dockery (2012) claimed that the role of the school counselors has extended beyond their offices. School counselors are assigned the added roles of assisting students with their academic concerns and vocational preparation, collection, interpretation and analysis of test data, the identification of potential school dropouts and the development of intervention strategies to assist students. Therefore, counselors will be prepared to ensure equitable opportunities for the ninth graders and thus, curtail the school dropout rate.

Parental & Community Partnership

Research has confirmed that parental involvement and community interactions are excellent tools that can curtail or decrease the school dropout rate (King, 2012). Schools that collaborate with parents as they develop a positive education and career path for their

students have experienced major benefits. The director of this project will provide ninth grade parents with on-going training in an effort to maximize their motivational skills and parental influence to assist their students. Carter and Healey (2012) supported this notion as they outlined the benefits that students obtained when the school trained parents to assist their students in their educational pursuits. Therefore, they suggested that schools conduct on-going training, build effective communication and positive relationships with parents. This strategy will fortify the force students need to keep them on the right path and monitor their progress. This project will provide academic skills and assistance to parents who may lack the knowledge to help their children. According to Carter and Healey (2012), parents who are actively involved in their child's education build stronger influence for post-high school experiences.

The community collaboration and involvement in school will increase the number of individuals supporting and advocating for the students. The school will conduct monthly meetings to invite members of the community to the school campus to mentor students and provide job skills. Further, through collaboration and discussion, the school will make the community aware of their needs and vice versa. The businesses will collaborate with the school and become hosts for students during their job shadowing section of the school day. Porowski and Passa (2011) confirmed that a partnership with school and community reduced school dropout rate and increased academic performance. The researchers substantiated their hypothesis with the results of a quasi- experiment that they conducted across seven states involving 3,325 students. As the Community in School evaluated their programs (CIS), they realized that there was 6.2% graduation rate

in the first year and 8.6% graduate rate from one year to another (Porowski & Passa, 2011). This study confirmed that community involvement in schools has major benefits.

Section 2. District Review and Approval

Based on protocol, the implementation of any program or project in the U.S.V.I. public high schools must follow certain rules and gain approval from certain boards and individuals. Therefore, I will present this project—the NGCCCA to the Board of Education, Commissioner of Education, Superintendent of schools and principals of the participating schools. During this initial presentation, I will discuss with the education stakeholders the reasons for conducting a study on the dropout of ninth graders, the participants, data collection methods and the findings.

Following the discussion on school dropout of ninth graders, I will share with the stakeholders the proposed project to curtail or decrease the ninth grade school dropout dilemma. Data from the professional literature will substantiate why this project will be a viable solution. In addition, as the director, I will make a brief presentation outlining the introduction of career academies into American schools, the growth and success of these academies, and reasons for career academies versus the ninth grade academies. It is anticipated, that the project on career academies for ninth grades will generate major discussions because the issues of ninth grade school dropout and juvenile crimes have been dominating the local news. At this point, I will record suggestions for modifying or adjusting the previous plan and any other concerns. The suggested changes will be made and revisions to the program will be presented again to the group. I will make changes and modifications to this project until it meets the standards of the stakeholders. I will

also address the needed resources and personnel needed to make this project a success. After the Board of Education and Department of Education have approve this program, I will meet with other personnel, parents and community partners to discuss the benefits and implementation of the program. The participating schools will implement this project two years after approval.

Section 3. Implementation

The introduction of career academies for ninth graders in two U.S.V.I. public high schools is the proposed project. This project has the combined goals of decreasing premature school departure of ninth graders while increasing the promotional rate and preparing students to be college and career ready. After the presentation and approval of this project, the provision of the needed resources and personnel and preparation of the buildings, the director will start the process of implementing this project into the selected schools. The projected starting date for this project is the 2019-2020 school year.

During the final semester of the 2017 school year, the Board of Education and the Department of Education will convene meetings to choose common themes for the career academies. January 2018-2019, the director will introduce the school personnel, participating businesses, local university and parents to the project.

Summer 2018-2019, Human Resources Department of Education will place applications on the local websites and offices. By October, education personnel will interview possible applicants. The program director and department personnel will choose teachers and begin the training process to help prepare them to work effectively in the academies. Simultaneously, the university will create classes centered on the

career academies themes in preparation for ninth graders. In addition, participating businesses in the community will also put plans in place to fulfill their partnership role.

January 2019, the school personnel who deal with scheduling classes will discuss the project. Then, following curriculum requirements outlined by the joint boards, administration and other personnel will create classes that focus on specific themes, then, add the classes to the schedules for the up-coming school year.

During the pre-orientation period for the next school year, the schools' administrators and counselors will make incoming ninth graders aware of the different career paths that will be available for 2019-2020 school year. The counselor will guide the students into completing a career inventory. Summer Bridge Program 2019-2020, school personnel will expose students to different chunks of the available careers that will be included in the curriculum for the up-coming school year. September, the start of the 2019-2020 school year, school personnel will assign 50% of ninth graders to classes in the career academies (students will choose to attend the career academies). The other 50% of the ninth graders will be educated in the traditional ninth grade academies. During this period, the counselors will also keep records and logs of students' performance, attendance and disciplinary referrals. The school personnel will create and send home progress reports every three weeks and report cards every ten weeks. Students' attendance report and disciplinary report will be a part of the reports.

Monthly, the different stakeholders involved in this project will convene a meeting. The director of the program will present information pertaining to the functioning of the academy; members from the participating businesses will provide

their input. Personnel from the local university will also provide information on students' academic performance, attendance and behavioral issues.

At the end of the first year, the school's administrators, counselors and teachers will convene a meeting to discuss the overall progress and success of the academies. The counselors will share information from their log on the students. The different areas of the academy will be discussed. The stakeholders of education (The Joint Boards, school personnel, participating business & local university) will discuss needed changes or tweaking of the project if necessary.

Section 4. The Evaluation Process

Based on the perceptions of school educators, ninth graders in U.S.V.I. high schools encountered transitional challenges upon entering high school. The challenges have resulted in the premature departure of many ninth grade students. School administration and teachers have implemented and utilized varied instructional methods and intervention strategies. Unfortunately, only a fraction of the ninth grade population has benefited. Therefore, following the district's approval and guidelines, the schools will implement a program called Ninth Grade Completion via Career Curriculum Academies (NGCCCA). Career academies have the proven record of increasing academic performance, decreasing disciplinary referral and poor attendance rate and getting students ready for college and career.

In an effort to determine the success of any project or program, it is imperative that the director conduct on-going evaluations. The evaluations for this project will be both formative and summative. The participating schools will implement this program during the 2019-2020 school year. The different components will be in place to assist the

director in assessing the project's objectives and goals. The director will be open for constructive criticism, concerns and suggestions to improve the project and making it into a viable project that the two school districts can utilize. During the school year, the counselors and other school personnel will conduct formative assessments of the project.

Formative Evaluation

School counselor assigned to the career academies will create and keep behavior and attendance log for each student. Counselor assigned to the ninth grade academy will create a similar log to record the inappropriate behavior patterns and attendance of ninth graders. The ninth grade students will be divided into two groups: treatment group and control group. The control group will attend ninth grade academy while the treatment group will attend the career academy. Students attending career academy will be enrolled in four core classes namely, English 9, Algebra 1, Physical Science and V.I. History. In addition, they will be enrolled in vocational theme based classes related to Health Care, Construction Management and Tourism. Students attending the ninth grade academy will have the four core classes and elective classes such as music, physical education etc.

Both groups of ninth graders will receive both individual and group counseling from the assigned counselors. At the end of the third and the sixth week periods, both groups of students will receive progress reports indicating academic performance, attendance patterns and disciplinary issues. The counselors will record, analyze and interpret the data, then provide guidance where necessary.

The counselor assigned to career academies will also communicate with the participating businesses to check on students' performance and work ethics. The

counselor will also communicate with local university to check on students' performance.

At the end of the first marking period (ten weeks), school personnel will issue a report card to all students. At this point, school administrators will request that parents collect student's report cards and meet with their teachers for brief conferences. This process will continue through- out the school year.

School personnel will conduct extended school day classes for students who are falling behind academically and Saturday academies for students who are constantly displaying inappropriate behaviors.

At the end of the first marking period, the principals, teachers and counselors assigned to the career academy will meet to conduct an in-house evaluation to ascertain if they accomplished the instructional goals of the academy. The director and counselor will provide feedback. This process will continue until the end of the school year. There will be on-going parental and community visits and monthly group meetings to discuss the progress or other concerns of the academy.

Summative Evaluation

The stakeholders of education involved in this project will come together at the end of the school year to conduct a summative evaluation. The RCT method will be used to compare the data from the two groups to determine if the goals of the project were accomplished in decreasing school dropout rate while increasing the promotional rate.

The counselors from both groups of ninth graders will make presentations of the data collected. The counselors will present information on students' attendance pattern.

The group will utilize that data to make a comparison of the students who attended career academies versus their team- mates who attended the ninth grade academies. The individuals present will compare the disciplinary referrals of the two groups of students.

The counselors will also present information on the promotional rate and failure rates of both groups of students. The school personnel will compare the data to determine if there were differences in the academic performance, attendance pattern and disciplinary referrals of the two groups. The stakeholders will analyze the three sets of data. They will also provide suggestions for changes or modification.

The school administration will convene meetings with the parents, community partners, local university and teachers to discuss the results of the data. This project will continue for a second year and then, re-evaluated. The school will keep that group of students together in tenth grade. They will apply the same treatment to that group and then re-evaluate at the end. Based on the findings of the two- year project, the district will decide on the next step for career academies

Ninth Grade Completion via Career Curriculum Academy NGCCA

NGCCCA
Ensuring the success of all students.
Fullcover School District Formative Assessment

Fullcover School District Formative Assessment Form

Student's Name:_____

Course Title & Period:_____

Name/Title:_____

School:_____

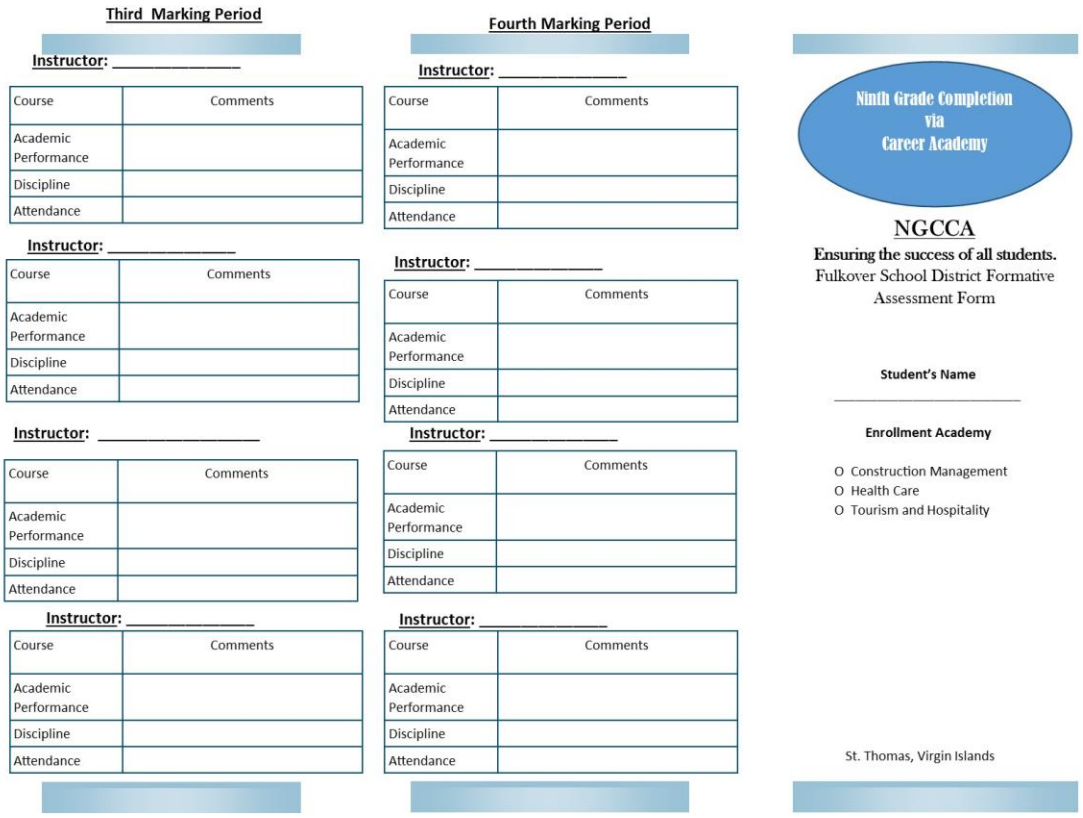
Assessing:
☐ Academic Goals: ☐ Attendance Goals ☐ Behavioral Goals ☐ All

Student's Progress Toward Academic Goals

Student's Progress Toward Behavioral Goals

Counselor's Comments:
Counselor's Signature:

Fullcover School District Report Card



Third Marking Period

Instructor: _____

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Instructor: _____

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Instructor: _____

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Instructor: _____

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Fourth Marking Period

Instructor: _____

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Instructor: _____

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Instructor: _____

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Instructor: _____

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Ninth Grade Completion via Career Academy

NGCCA

Ensuring the success of all students.

Fulkover School District Formative Assessment Form

Student's Name

_____

Enrollment Academy

O Construction Management
O Health Care
O Tourism and Hospitality

St. Thomas, Virgin Islands

First Marking Period

Instructor: ________________

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Instructor: ________________

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Instructor: ________________

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Instructor: ________________

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Instructor: ________________

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Second Marking Period

Instructor: ________________

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Instructor: ________________

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Instructor: ________________

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Instructor: ________________

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Instructor: ________________

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Instructor:____________________

Course	Comments
Academic Performance	
Discipline	
Attendance	

Ninth Grade Completion
Via
Career Curriculum
Academy

NGCCCA

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Fullcover School District Formative Assessment Form

Progress Report

First Second Third Fourth

Instructor: _____ Course: _____	Comments
Academic Performance:	
Discipline:	
Attendance:	

Instructor: _____

Course: _____

Academic Performance:

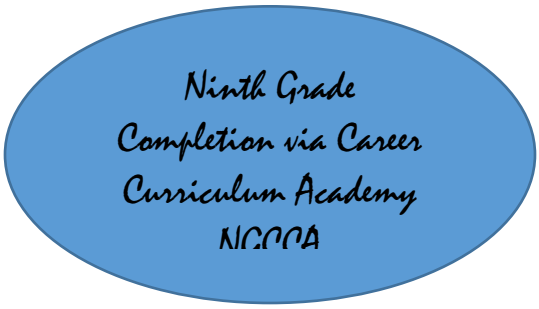
Discipline:

Attendance:

Comments

Ninth Grade Completion via
Career Curriculum Academy

NGCCCA



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Formative Assessment Form

Individual Counseling Session Summary

Student's Name:_____

Referring Teacher:_____

Class Session:_____

Date:_____**Time:**_____

Infraction/Reason for Referral:_____

Summary Notes from Session:_____

_____

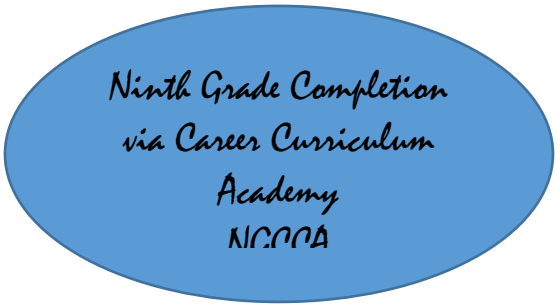
_____

_____

Length of Session:_____

Session Number:_____

Counselor's Signature:_____



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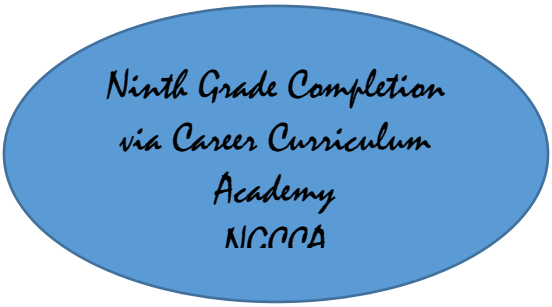
Fullcover School District
Formative Assessment Form

School Counseling Log

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
7:30					
8:00					
8:30					
9:00					
9:30					
10:00					
10:30					
11:00					
11:30					
12:00					
12: 30					
1:00					
1:30					
2:00					
2:30					
3:00					



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Counselor's Referral Form

The monitoring of student's academic progress, attendance pattern and disciplinary referrals is important to his/her growth. All stakeholders, please monitor and document student's behavior then, make referrals to the counselor. Contact student's counselor if there are further questions.

Student's Name: _____

Student's Team: _____

Date: _____

Behavior Requires Immediate Attention: Yes ____ No_____

Referring Person/Educator: _____

Please circle the inappropriate behavior (s) noticed over an extended period of time:

Academic	Behavioral	Attendance	Physical
Incomplete assignments	Impulsive	Truant	Poor hygiene
Cheating	Short attention span	Consistently Tardy	Sleeps in class
Struggles with reading	Defiant	Absent often	Appears sad/depressed
Struggles with math	Uses obscene Language	Leaves classes frequently	Lacks confidence
Poorly completed Assignments	Talks incessantly		Withdrawn
Declining academic Performance	Argumentative		

What strategies did you try? _____

Other Concerns: _____

Appendix B: Cover Letter for Interview on Ninth-Grade School Dropouts

Dear---------,

My name is Merlene L. Jones and I am a doctoral student attending Walden University. I am conducting research on the educator's perception of ninth grade school dropouts as a part of my studies. This research seeks to obtain your perspectives as teachers, counselors or administrators on the challenges that have led to, or are leading to the dropout of ninth graders. In an effort to acquire the information, I am seeking your assistance in participating in a short interview.

The interview consists of nine questions. Based on the piloted instrument, I have estimated that it would take about 25-30 minutes to complete this interview. I will treat the information gathered with strictest confidentiality, and the report will not contain any personally identifiable characteristics. I will use the information acquired for this study specifically for the purpose reported.

Thank you for your assistance.

Merlene L. Jones

Walden University

Final Year Ed.D. Student

Appendix C: Teachers' Questionnaire.

This five-question survey explores the educators' perceptions of the challenges leading to students' attrition in the ninth grade. The data collected will be used to explore a transitional ninth grade academy to help our ninth graders stay in school. I need your help in completing this task.

School: ----------

Please answer the questions in this section by circling the appropriate response

1. What is the academic performance level of your students? (Select one response)

a. Academically talented performance level

b. Average academic performance level

c. Low academic performance level

d. Widely differing academic performance level

2. How prepared do you believe you are to provide instructions for the subject matter covered in your academic course? (Select one response)

a. Very well prepared b. Well prepared

c. Adequately prepared d. Unprepared

3. Based on my experiences, the challenges that have led to the premature departure of ninth graders from this school are: (select all responses that apply).

b. Discipline Problem ---------

c. Academic unpreparedness---------

d. Over age ---------

e. Adjustment to stringent rules/schedules ----------

4. What is your perception of some reasons ninth graders drop out of school: (select all responses that apply).

a. Low reading skill

b. Low math skills

c. Both low reading skills and low math skills

d. Lack of motivation for school.

e. Lack of motivation for school activities.

f. Retained in previous grade (s)

5. What methods/factors does your school utilize to identify potential school dropouts from the in-coming ninth graders? (Select all responses that apply).

a. ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Test) test results

b. Report Card grades from previous grade level

c. Attendance records from previous schools

d. Locally issued school assessment

e. Report card grades after first marking period

Appendix D: Questions for Semiscripted Interview

This nine-question interview explores the educators' perceptions of the challenges leading to students' attrition in the ninth grade. The data collected will be used to explore a transitional ninth grade academy to help our ninth graders stay in school. I need your help in completing this task.

Time of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Place:

Interviewee:

Focus Group Interview Questions on their Perceptions of why Ninth Graders Drop out of School

1. As a ninth grade teacher(s) of the core subjects, how are you made aware of potential ninth grade school dropouts?
2. What assessment/measures are utilized in your school to identify potential school drop outs after 9th grade?
3. What are your role(s) in preventing these students from dropping out of high school at ninth grade?

b. As an educator, how can you be better prepared to meet the educational needs of potential school dropouts?

4. Based on your perception, what are the challenges that have led to the drop out of ninth grade students in your school throughout the years?

b. Based on your experiences have you seen any changes in the challenges that have led or are leading to the dropout of ninth graders?

c. Have you made any changes in your instructional strategies or deliveries after observing these challenges?

5. Are you aware of any successful programs or intervention strategies utilized by other school districts to help ninth graders stay in school?

b. Has your school tried any of those programs?

6. If interventions were in place, what percentage of the potential school dropouts would you estimate might complete ninth grade having had the intervention?

b. How has your school used this data to plan for the incoming ninth graders?

c. Do you think that all potential dropouts should be exposed to this intervention?

7. What do you think your school can do to curtail or decrease the number of ninth graders who leave your school prematurely every year?

8. What can your school district do to curtail or decrease ninth grade school dropout rate?

9. Is there anything I have not asked you about that you believe would be helpful to share with me?

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer these questions.

Appendix E: Counselors' & Administrators' Questionnaire

This six-question survey explores the educators' perceptions of the challenges leading to students' attrition in the ninth grade. The data collected will be used to explore a transitional ninth grade academy to help our ninth graders stay in school. I need your help in completing this task.

Multiple Choice

Please answer the questions in this section by circling the appropriate response. (Circle one answer only).

1. In what capacity do you serve ninth graders?

a. Counselor b. Nurse

c. Librarian d. Administrator

2. What is the academic performance level of your students?

a. Academically talented performance level

b. Average academic performance level

c. Low academic performance level

d. Widely differing academic performance level

3. How prepared are you to provide services for the ninth graders?

a. Very well prepared b. Well prepared

c. Adequately prepared d. Unprepared

Circle All That Apply. (Circle all the answers that apply).

4. Based on experiences, the challenges that have led to the premature departure of ninth graders from this school are:

a. Attendance ------

b. Discipline Problem ---------

c. Academic unpreparedness---------

d. Overage ---------

e. Adjustment to stringent rules/schedules ----------

5. Based on your perception what are some reasons ninth graders drop out of school:

a. Low reading skill

b. Low math skills

c. Both low reading skills and low math skills

d. Lack of motivation for school.

e. Lack of motivation for school activities

f. Retained in previous grade (s)

6. What methods/factors do your school utilize to identify potential school dropouts from the in-coming ninth graders?

a. ITBS (Iowa Test of Basic Test) test results

b. Report Card grades from previous schools

c. Attendance records from previous schools

d. Locally issued school assessment

e. Report grades and attendance record after first marking period

Appendix F: Questions for Semiscripted Interview of Teachers

This nine-question interview explores the educators' perceptions of the challenges leading to students' attrition in the ninth grade. The data collected will be used to explore a transitional ninth grade academy to help our ninth graders stay in school. I need your help in completing this task.

Time of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Place:

Interviewee:

Counselors' & Administrators' Interview Questions on their Perceptions of why Ninth Graders Drop out of School

1. As a ninth grade counselor/administrator, how are you made aware of potential ninth grade school dropouts?
2. What assessment/measures are utilized in your school to identify potential school dropouts?
3. What are your role(s) in preventing these students from dropping out of high school at ninth grade?

b. As an educator, how can you be better prepared to meet the educational needs of potential school dropouts?

4. Based on your perception, what are the challenges that have led to the dropout of ninth grade students in your school throughout the years?
5. Are you aware of any successful programs or intervention strategies that are utilized in other school districts to help ninth graders stay in school?

b. Has your school tried any of those programs?

6. If interventions are in place, what percentage of the potential school dropouts might complete ninth grade having had the intervention?

b. Based on your data, how has your school used this data to plan for incoming at risk ninth graders?

c. Do you think that all potential dropouts should be exposed to this intervention?

7. What do you think your school can do to curtail or decrease the number of ninth graders who leave your school prematurely every year?

8. What can your school district do to curtail or decrease ninth grade school dropout?

9. Is there any other additional information on this topic that you would like to share with us?

Thank you very much for taking the time to answer these questions. Is there any other information you would like to share with me.