

Freshman Year Programming and Its Impact on High School Graduation Rate

by

Janis L. Ulicny

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Janis L. Ulicny

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Signature:

Janis L. Ulicny, Student

Date

Approvals:

Dr. Karen Larwin, Dissertation Advisor

Date

Dr. Sherri Harper Woods, Committee Member

Date

Dr. Jake Protivnak, Committee Member

Date

Dr. Patrick Spearman, Committee Member

Date

Dr. Salvatore A. Sanders, Dean of Graduate Studies

Date

Abstract

Much research has been conducted to indicate that the freshman year of high school has an impact on a student's potential graduation from high school. Existing literature reveals that through the evolution of education in the United States, schools have been forced to place a strong emphasis on graduation. Many factors, including academic success, socioeconomic status, race, and gender, can impact a student's likelihood of graduating on time. This study looks at the importance of the freshman year of high school programming – specifically two programs at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio – and their influence on the graduation rate for three cohorts of students. Using a mixed-methods design, the researcher investigated the classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021. Through an examination of school data, survey results from 58 former students, and interviews with nine graduates, the quantitative and qualitative data indicated that the voluntary summer Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) program and year-long required Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course do have an impact on student success. For school districts looking to aid with the transition to high school, the results of this research can provide some ideas and suggestions for successful programming.

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“When you’ve got so much to say it’s called gratitude, and that’s right...”

Beastie Boys

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Keywords: high school freshmen, high school freshman programming, high school graduation

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Chapter 1

Introduction

For the past century, high school graduation has been considered a rite of passage for teenagers across the United States. With the advent of the school accountability movement, high school graduation, and most specifically high school graduation rates, have been scrutinized. Schools' graduation rates can have an impact on school funding and the overall perception of a school. At a more individual level, high school graduation can have an impact on future success and income, which in turn can have an impact on communities. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, in the third quarter of 2019, workers without a high school diploma had median weekly earnings of \$606, while workers with a high school diploma had median weekly earnings of \$749 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). A yearly salary for high school dropouts could be \$7500 less than someone who graduated from high school, indicating that high school graduation rates can influence schools, communities, and families. Students who do not graduate from high school are more likely to have grim financial and social outlooks and are more likely to experience poor health (Rumburger, 2011).

Warren, Ohio is a city in the northeastern part of Ohio, which is a region often referred to as the “rust belt” because of the area’s propensity toward manufacturing, steel, and labor. With the loss of many of the manufacturing jobs over the past forty years, Warren’s drastic population decline – from over 60,000 in 1970 to 39,201 documented in the 2020 Census – has had an impact on many facets of the city, including the Warren City School District (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). The Ohio Department of Education (n.d.) categorizes Warren City School District as urban – high student poverty and

average student population in its typology coding. Like many other urban districts across the state, Warren has been consistently assigned low grades on the Ohio Report Cards (Ohio Department of Education, n.d.). The yearly graduation rates at the district's only high school have been under much scrutiny. Over the past seven years, Warren G. Harding High School has worked to increase the graduation rates, while improving the educational attainment of its students.

Two of the programs implemented at Warren G. Harding High School are examined in this study. Using a mixed-methods approach, the researcher investigates the impact that Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) have had on the school's graduation rates for the classes of 2019-2021. Data that reveals these programs are having a positive effect on graduation rates has the potential to be replicated in other districts. After twelve years of teaching at Warren G. Harding High School, and nine years serving as an administrator at Warren G. Harding High School, it has become evident that the freshman year is vital for students to experience success in high school. Observing positive student responses to Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) supported that a systematic inquiry of these programs' impact was needed. Therefore, it is relevant to determine if the programs implemented to support the freshman experience are having a positive impact on the graduation rates at Warren G. Harding High School.

Statement of the Problem

From 2003 to 2010, the high school graduation rates increased for males, females, and all ethnicities (Ritter, 2015). Ritter also shared that in 2012, the graduation rates in

the United States reached 80%, which was approximately 10% higher than at the start of the 21st century. In 2019, the U.S. Department of Education indicated that high school graduation rates had reached an all-time high, with 84.6% of students from the class of 2017 having received four-year diplomas (Gewertz, 2019). Gewertz (2018) and Ritter (2015) also contended that minority students, students from a low socio-economic status, students who have stress within the family, and students coming from one-parent homes more likely represent the students who drop out or transfer and do not successfully graduate with the cohort of students with whom they entered ninth grade. For more students to earn their diplomas, high schools must adapt and develop plans to decrease the gaps between racial and economic groups. To be proactive, schools may need to create innovative programs and intervention opportunities for students in danger of not graduating on time with their cohorts. Same et al. (2018) looked at interventions that showed improvement in academic achievement with Black students. Using the evidence tiers from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), this report provided information about some of the interventions that were deemed successful. Their research showed that in the class of 2015, the graduation rates of Black students were 13% lower than their White peers (Same et al., 2018).

Purpose Statement

This study is important because a person's high school graduation impacts his or her financial and occupational future. High school graduation also impacts a community's growth. The main beneficiaries of this study are urban high schools who struggle with attaining high graduation rates. Additionally, students enrolled in high school, as well as urban communities, benefit from the results of this study. This study is

important to the researcher because the success and the funding of these programs could have an impact on future graduation cohorts at Warren G. Harding High School. The results of this study could also influence future researchers who may replicate similar programs at other high schools. Roybal et al. (2014) note that “educators cannot wait for students to fail; proactive interventions at multiple levels are necessary” (p. 480).

Research Questions

1. What impact does the freshman year have on the graduation rates at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio?
2. What impact do freshman transition programs (Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program)) at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio have on students who graduate from this high school?
3. How do former students recall their experiences and apply their knowledge from either Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) or Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio?

Research Design

This study was completed between September 2021 - April of 2022. The researcher collected pre-existing data from the school’s data management system to find demographic details about the cohorts for the classes of 2019-2021. The researcher also conducted a survey with a voluntary group of students who graduated on time from Warren G. Harding High School, as well as students who did not graduate on time or dropped out. The researcher conducted interviews with a small group of these graduates and non-graduates who participated in one or two of the programs.

Scope and Limitation

One limitation of this study was the focus on only one school. While it would have been beneficial to study multiple schools, because of the specific nature of the programming involved at Warren G. Harding High School, that was the only population studied. Another limitation was the ability to reach past graduates and non-graduates for the survey portion of the study. A third limitation was that due to the anonymity of the survey, it was not possible to determine if the demographics of the survey participants mirrored the demographic make-up of the school and community. An additional limitation was the difficulty in finding some of the desired demographic information of the graduates or students who had been transferred after their freshman year.

Definition of Terms

ACE's: Adverse Childhood Experiences (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020)

Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program): a one-day voluntary program prior to freshman year where students are provided an introduction to the school, the processes, and some of the freshmen teachers. Students can attend both Freshman Academy and participate in Freshman Advisory (J. Ulicny, personal communication, February 6, 2022).

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course): a year-long course where students are educated in social-emotional learning skills and are monitored for academic checkpoints. All freshmen are enrolled in this course, and some of the students in this course will have participated in Freshman Academy during the

summer prior to beginning high school (D. Capers, personal communication, February 6, 2022).

Four-Year Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate: the number of students who complete high school and graduate within four years divided by the total of students in the “adjusted cohort” for the graduating class; the cohort is adjusted when students who move in are added, and students who transfer are deducted (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

Methods

This mixed-methods study utilized existing data, a survey, and interviews to determine whether the two transition programs had an impact on graduation rates.

Participants

Students who participated in either one or both programs being studied, and who also entered their freshman year at WGH in 2015, 2016 and 2017 (who graduated or were projected to graduate in 2019, 2020, or 2021), were eligible to participate. Participants were reached through social media and word of mouth to ask for their contributions to the survey and interview.

Organization of the Study

The researcher organized this study into chapters to provide information about the aspects of the study. The first chapter includes an Introduction, Statement of the Problem, Purpose Statement, Research Questions, Research Design, Scope and Limitation, Definition of Terms, Methods, and the Participants.

The second chapter includes an overview of the literature that details the advent of public schooling and the developing importance of graduation rates. Also in the second

chapter is research that explains the impact of grades, credits, and standardized testing on graduation rates. The connections of race, gender, socio-economic status, and childhood trauma to graduation rates are also explored, as well as the importance of the high school freshman year. The research cited indicates that the freshman year of high school is integral in determining a student's likelihood of graduating within four years. The literature review led to the research questions about specific programming at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio.

The third chapter indicates the methods that were used to investigate the research questions and purpose of the study. Procedures and methods are outlined. The fourth chapter explores the results of the data analysis from the school, as well as the results of the survey and the interviews. The fifth chapter summarizes the findings, as well as makes connections from the research process. The findings are followed by the conclusions reached, discussion, and ideas for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The Advent of Public Education in the United States

From the early twentieth century, when less than half of the school age children were enrolled in school, to today's mandate that all children from ages 5 to 18 must attend school, the expectations, rules, and guidelines of public schooling in America have undergone numerous changes (Bernard et al., 2001). In the early 1900's, the "lure of education" and the "tremendous pressure ... to get an education" were part of many immigrant families' expectations to live the American Dream (Bernard et al., 2001, p. 73). Despite this dream, in 1910, there were still approximately two million children who worked in factories, and many of the students who had been enrolled in school were only there for an average of five years (Bernard et al., 2001). John Dewey and his progressive ideas began to impact some parts of the country, and there was an increase in the amount of money communities contributed toward education (Bernard et al., 2001). Additionally, because of the 1896 "separate but equal" law determined from *Plessy v. Ferguson*, the Louisiana law for segregation in public facilities was upheld, meaning that not only students working in factories were excluded from equal educational opportunities, but so were Black students (Perry et al., 2020). In their 2001 book, Bernard et al. explained that during this time, student learning began to move past the traditional three R's and into education that could have an impact on individuals' lives and future employment. In 1920, the graduation rates for 17-year-old students had grown to 17 percent (Bernard et al., 2001). While unemployment increased during the Great Depression, child labor laws

were passed at the federal level, and states began compulsory attendance at schools until the age of 16 (Bernard et al., 2001).

Baby Boomers, Desegregation, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Following World War II, the number of children attending school increased immensely with the baby boom (Bernard et al., 2001). At this time, the purpose of schooling expanded to include societal functions, “it was up to the schools to inoculate these children against disease – and to prepare them for a nuclear attack” (Bernard et al., 2001, p. 132). In 1950, the graduation rates had increased again, to 60%, and half of the graduates went on to college (Bernard et al., 2001, p. 132). According to law and school reform expert Jay Heubert, the idea of “common schooling ... all students were entitled to a quality education and to be educated together” was thought to be true, but racial segregation and gender discrimination limited many young peoples’ full or comprehensive access to schools across the U.S. (Bernard et al., 2001, p. 132). At the time when minority families felt that “public schooling affected their children’s chances for active participation in American life,” and it was how people “could rally to promote achievement, equality, and the promise of American dream,” there remained people whose lives and livelihoods were impacted as they fought for these rights (Bernard et al., 2001, p. 124). Bernard et al. shared a story of a South Carolina teacher who sued the district in the case *Briggs v. Elliott* as he sought bussing for his children. The man and his extended family lost their jobs, and they faced violence at their homes and church. In 1954, the landmark Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* provided the mandate for schools to become more inclusive. Chief Justice Earl Warren provided this declaration in his writing of the Court’s opinion:

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments. Compulsory school attendance laws and the great expenditures for education both demonstrate our recognition of the importance of education to our democratic society. It is required in the performance of our most basic public responsibilities, even service in the armed forces. It is the very foundation of good citizenship. Today, it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment. In these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms. (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954, p. 1025)

Following the Brown vs. Board of Education decision came more

During the era known as the baby boom, the population increased drastically. The fertility rates in the United States were between 18 to 19 births per 1,000 population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). Following World War II, the fertility rates saw a dramatic increase of 24 births for every 1,000 population in 1946 and reached a peak of 26.5 in 1947. They continued at these elevated levels until 1964 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The number of baby boomers reached almost 72.5 million at the end of this era in 1964, which had a drastic impact on the number of students enrolled in America's schools (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). As those students graduated and went to work, many economic conditions across the United States flourished (Heckman & LaFontaine, p. 244, 2010).

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration took a massive step by becoming the first presidential administration to become involved in the management of school systems, which had traditionally been managed by states and local school boards (Anderson, 2015). As part of the administration's War on Poverty, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 established Title I (Anderson, 2015).

Anderson explained that the goal of ESEA was to provide financial support from federal funding to improve the education of children in impoverished urban and rural parts of the country. Over a decade after the enactment of ESEA, the Department of Education asserted more and more control over the Title I program. Special interest groups often worked in tandem to ensure the funding worked to support poor students, as it had been intended (Anderson, 2015).

A Nation at Risk and Stricter Requirements

The 1970's saw a negative economic change. "The decline of U.S. workplace productivity, rising unemployment, losses in market share to Japan and Germany, and swift changes in technologies" were the reasons politicians and corporations started to look at what had caused these changes in society (Bernard et al., 2001, p. 176). In the early 1980's, the graduation rates had increased to 71 percent, and more than half of these graduates moved to college, but the economic decline prompted many to look for who and what could be to blame. Schools were the target. Complaints about the lack of preparedness of graduates, the low scores on standardized tests, and urban violence led Ronald Regan's commission of business leaders, educators, and politicians to write their 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education (Bernard et al., 2001).

Some parents, families, and school advocacy groups perceived that a better education was available or deserved, and interest groups prompted finding a solution, which led to school choice. *A Nation at Risk* provided the fear and the impulsion that many policy-makers used to take quick action. The report detailed the shortcomings of American education, saying:

We define "excellence" to mean several related things. At the level of the individual learner, it means performing on the boundary of individual ability in ways that test and push back personal limits, in school and in the workplace. Excellence characterizes a school or college that sets high expectations and goals for all learners, then tries in every way possible to help students reach them. Excellence characterizes a society that has adopted these policies, for it will then be prepared through the education and skill of its people to respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing world. Our Nation's people and its schools and colleges must be committed to achieving excellence in all these senses. (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 14)

Seven years after the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, two political scientists, John Chubb and Terry Moe published their controversial book *Politics, Markets and America's Schools*. Their research of hundreds of schools across the United States pointed to what they saw as the major issues in America's schools, bureaucracy and control. Chubb and Moe's ideas advocated for schools to make their own decisions about curriculum, programs, employment of staff, and the students who would attend (Olson, 1990). Research pointed to their assessment that "effective schools in both the public and private sectors are characterized by strong leadership, clear goals, ambitious academic

programs, teamwork, and teacher professionalism” (Olson, 1990, para 16). Chubb and Moe also advocated for parents’ rights to choose which school would fit their children’s needs, and the funding then followed the students from the public to the private schools.

Many states responded to the publication of this report by making drastic changes to education, including the advent of more standardized tests, a longer school year, and more stringent requirements for graduation (Bernard et al., 2001). In 1989, President George H.W. Bush and the country’s governors convened for a discussion about education. This group developed priorities for students in the United States to move past the poor math and science data from the 1983 report and set goals for the students to become the leaders on international tests by 2000 (Bernard et al., 2001).

Accountability for students and educators increased during the 1990’s, with a goal of “tougher academic courses and higher test scores on national and international tests for all students, not just those going on to college” (Bernard et al., 2001, p. 177). Educational practices began to mimic the business world, and student success was measured equally from school to school, despite any economic or demographic differences within the school populations. With the inclusion of businesses into schools, privatization and school choice moved to the forefront, and public schools faced major competition for the first time.

21st Century Skills

Along with these changes came additions to the expected learning outcomes of students. Educators were now expected to help students demonstrate ways they could use and apply their knowledge, instead of how to gain knowledge (Lapek, 2017). Known as “21st Century Skills,” these were added to traditional academic curriculum to impact

students' abilities to demonstrate success with "soft skills" and "life and career skills" (Smith et al., 2017, p. 84). Smith et al. described soft skills as the ability to communicate, collaborate, create, and think critically, whereas life and career skills refer to being flexible, learning to lead, taking the initiative to direct oneself, and being responsible. Lapek indicated that if students gain these skills, they are more likely to adapt to challenges and changing environments.

No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Acts

President George W. Bush revealed his 2001 education plans days after being inaugurated for his first term (Sack, 2001). Following the trends of the 1990's for higher accountability, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) provided mandates that individual states and schools had to follow to receive federal funding. The overarching goals of this act were for schools to be more accountable, for families to have more choice, and for the government to be more flexible with funding (No Child Left Behind, 2002). Through NCLB, graduation rates became one of the factors that determined Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for high schools and impacted whether schools would qualify for governmental intervention or the reduction in federal funding (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010). As a result, graduation rates, which had continued to increase over the past century, were monitored at a higher level. NCLB's incorporation of accountability, choice, and funding flexibility paved the way for the next administration's desire for high academic standards and more state control with mandated components (Lee, 2021).

In 2015, Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). This act expanded some of the requirements that had been part of NCLB and provided more

leeway for the state departments of education (Lee, 2021). ESSA declared that states needed to create a plan that incorporated six major areas. States needed to:

1. choose their own general education standards that provide students the opportunity to be college and career ready, especially in reading, math, and science.
2. choose the numbers and types of tests but reading and math tests must occur at least one time per year for students in grades 3-8 and at least once in high school, limits were established for the number of students who could be assessed using alternate assessments.
3. measure school performance on academic achievement, academic progress, English language proficiency, high school graduation rates, and a fifth indicator of the state's choice.
4. determine achievement goals that indicated if students were showing improvement; goals for at-risk students should be "ambitious," and goals could be long-term with short-term goals built in to help close achievement gaps.
5. identify schools that need improvement with two categories – "Comprehensive Support and Improvement" or "Targeted Support and Improvement;" these schools would be placed on plans using "evidence-based teaching and approaches" to "get the school back on track;"
6. publish annual report cards that include test scores, high school graduation rates, school funding, and teacher qualifications; identification of

subgroups must be included, and students' families from the struggling subgroups must be notified. (Lee, 2021, paras. 1-23)

Graduation Rates

Throughout the 20th century, the number of American students who attended high school and received a high school diploma gradually increased. This increase was one of many across the United States during the same time period, as there were also increases in population, income, the amount of time people spent working, the economy, and formal education (Goldin, 1998, p. 345). Goldin explained this growth by saying “human capital accumulation and technological change were to the twentieth century what physical capital accumulation was to the nineteenth century – the engine of growth” (p. 346).

With the primary inception occurring prior to World War I, the American high school system was developed before the systems in many other industrialized countries, as they did not develop their comparable systems until following World War II (Goldin, 1998). Goldin noted that “the ‘high school movement’ in the United States was a unique educational advancement for the period” (p. 349). Formed primarily from the needs of the university systems in each state, the creation of high schools as they are now known was localized, and there were more high school students in the Northern states than Southern states (Goldin, 1998, p. 350, 353). As seen in Figure 1 below, as high school enrollment increased, so did the graduation rates (Goldin, 1998). Goldin indicated that in the early 20th century, approximately half of the students who graduated from high school had plans to attend college. By the time of the Great Depression in the 1930’s, that number had slipped to approximately one quarter of graduates with plans to attend

college; however, because the number of students enrolled in high schools was higher than ever, the number of students in colleges had increased (Goldin, 1998, pp. 350-351). Not only did the numbers of students enrolled in high schools and graduating from high school change, so did the curriculum and purpose of high school. Goldin said the economy had begun producing large numbers of white-collar jobs that demanded formal education beyond that provided by the common school but less than that furnished by college. Even some blue-collar occupations demanded the cognitive skills furnished by a high school education, such as the ability to read manuals, interpret blueprints, use complex formulas, and understand the fundamentals of geometry, chemistry, and electricity (Goldin, 1998, p. 352).

Figure 1

Secondary School Enrollment and Graduation Rates for United States

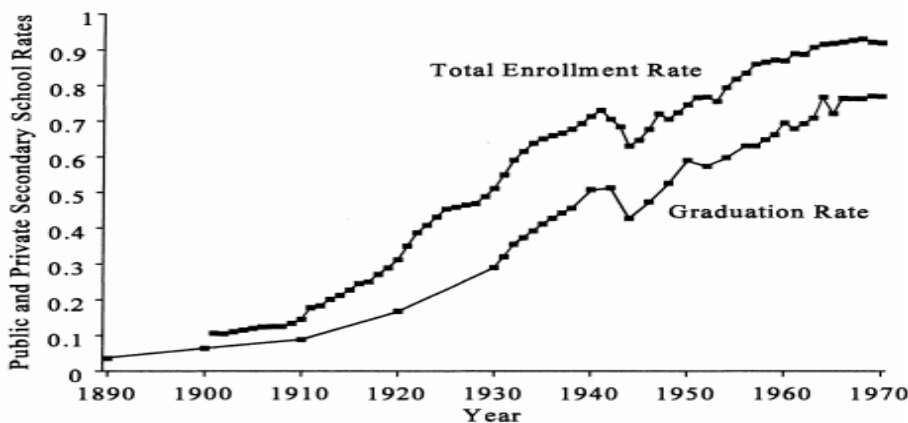


FIGURE 1
SECONDARY SCHOOL ENROLLMENT AND GRADUATION RATES:
ENTIRE UNITED STATES

Notes: Enrollment figures are divided by the number of 14 to 17-year olds; graduation figures are divided by the number of 17-year olds. The total includes both males and females in public and private schools.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, *120 Years*, tables 9 and 19.

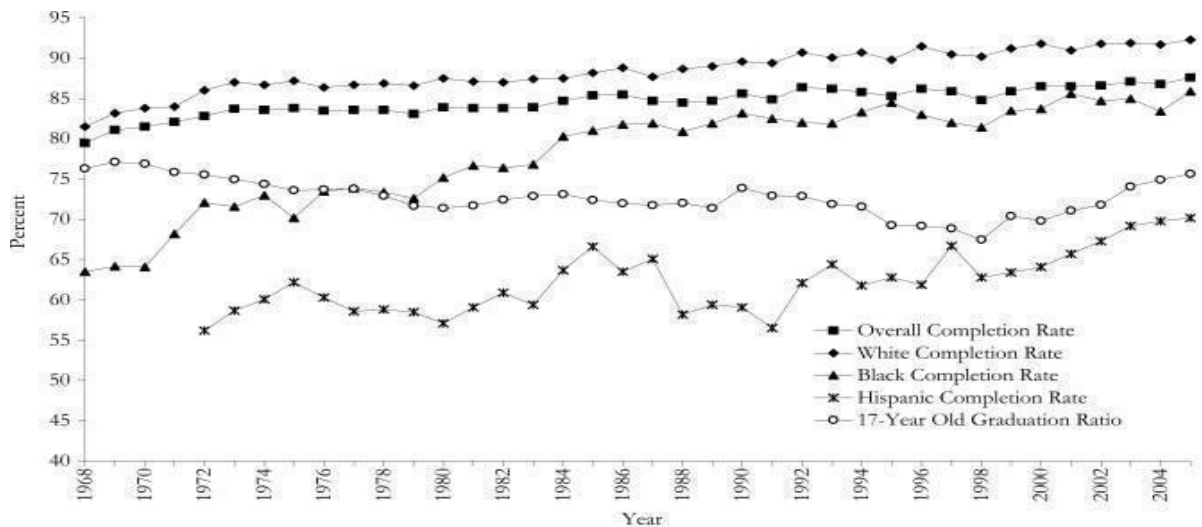
With the increase of high school graduates in the United States, there was an increase in the country's economic conditions, as well as the productivity of the country's

employees (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010, p. 244). By the turn of the 21st century and the enactment of No Child Left Behind, there were some who declared that the United States was in the midst of a “dropout crisis” (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010, p. 246). Those who received a Graduate Equivalency Degree (GED) and had previously been counted as high school graduates were no longer considered to have completed high school since their diplomas were not connected to the academic standards in place for the states (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010, p. 246). Studies declared that the true graduation rates were close to 70%, but for minority students, the rates were possibly as low as 50% (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010, p. 246).

By 2019, the data provided by the U.S. Department of Education said that the graduation rates had reached an all-time high, with 84.6% of students from the class of 2017 having received four year diplomas (Gewertz, 2019). In her 2018 and 2019 articles, Gewertz asked if the increase in graduation rate was due to the success of schools in graduating students through traditional methods, or if the schools used credit recovery or the withdrawal of off-track students from the public school. Gewertz (2018) contended that minority students and those with low socio-economic status were impacted the most by not graduating with their cohort from the school where they attended in ninth grade. Figure 2 below shows how the graduation rates differed by race, with more White students graduating than other races or ethnicities (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010).

Figure 2

Graduation Rates by Race



Source: Reproduced from NCES publication "Dropout Rates in the United States: 2005" (Laird et. al., June 2007). Rates prior to 1972 are based on authors' calculations using CPS data. The status completion rate is the percentage of 18- through 24-year-olds not enrolled in secondary school who have a high school credential. High school credentials include regular diplomas and alternative credentials such as GED certificates. Hispanic ethnicity is not available before 1972. The 17-year old graduation ratio is from the Digest of Education Statistics. HS graduates for the graduation ratio include both public and private school diplomas and exclude GED recipients and other certificates. October 17-year-old population estimates are obtained from Census Bureau P-20 reports.

Theoretical Framework

In the world of education, theories of intelligence have an impact on student performance. Theories of intelligence can also have an impact on teacher interactions with students. Two of those impactful theories are a fixed theory of intelligence, also known as entity theory, and a malleable theory of intelligence.

Carol Dweck defined each of these in her book *Self-Theories*. Dweck (2000) said that “students with an entity theory will readily pass up valuable learning opportunities if these opportunities might reveal inadequacies or entail errors – and they readily disengage from tasks that post obstacles” (p. 3). This theory of fixed intelligence is potentially one issue that could have an impact on graduation rates. Students who begin to experience failure of any type, or who feel inadequate in school, may be more prone to drop out. This could also be present in teacher-student relationships. Dweck referenced

her 1998 work with Freitas and Levy stating that “those holding entity theories exhibit higher levels of stereotyping” (p. 89). If teachers do not feel that students are capable of growth, or if teachers hold negative stereotypes of different demographics, teachers with a fixed mindset could have a negative impact on students who are struggling.

Malleable intelligence, also known as incremental theory, is an opposing theory that shares “students with this view will readily sacrifice opportunities to look smart in favor of opportunities to learn something new ... students with an incremental theory and low confidence in their intelligence thrive on challenge” (Dweck, 2000, p. 3). For high school students facing the challenges toward graduation, this theory provides them with the strength to reach their goals, despite any obstacles along the way.

The Impact of Other Factors on Graduation Rates

Grades

Schools have evolved over the past century to provide many services for students and families with counseling, health, and job training being a few of the additions.

However, the main goal of schooling is to provide students with knowledge.

Documentation of the following indicate that students have gained the necessary knowledge: the use of grades to quantify how the students have done in their learning; the use of credits to verify the number of courses the students have completed; and the use of standardized tests – local, state, and national – to create data. The acquisition of grades and credits, as well as performance on standardized tests, impact students’ progress toward graduation, and in turn, toward the schools’ graduation rates.

Gomperts and Nagaoka (2017) identified six factors that can help schools to improve graduation. They said that students were considered “on track” if they earned no

more than one F in a core course, and if they earned sufficient credits to be promoted to 10th grade. The authors also discussed that students with a C average have a 72% less likely chance to graduate from high school. A 2008 study shared that 80% of Philadelphia freshmen who did not acquire credits to move to sophomore status did not graduate (Gomperts & Nagoaka, 2017; Neild et al., 2008).

Researchers from the University of Chicago looked at some of the Chicago Public Schools' emphasis on the freshman year of high school, as well as some of the policies that the district used. They discovered that 81% of students who reached on-track status at the end of their freshman year went on to graduate on time (Allensworth & Easton, 2005). Students who successfully passed five freshman year core courses were considered on-track (Easton et al., 2017; Gomperts & Nagoaka, 2017). Heppen et al. (2012) said that only 13% of students who fail Algebra One as freshmen will graduate in four years. In their 2017 research, Easton et al. learned that "students who earn five full-year credits and do not receive more than one semester F in a core subject are deemed to be on-track to graduate from high school, whereas students with more than one core-subject semester F are not on-track" (p. 2). Freeman and Simonsen (2015) noted that consistent failing grades are a strong predictor of students who will not graduate from high school, and Iachini et al. (2016) discovered that student retention during their freshman year makes it less likely for the student to graduate on time. Emmett and McGee (2012) refer to this phenomenon as a "'bottleneck' as students who fail to earn credits do not get promoted to 10th grade and thus demonstrate a risk of dropping out of school" (p. 74).

Multiple researchers discovered that grade point average (GPA) was an indicator of future success and graduation within four years (Easton et al., 2017; Hickman et al., 2017; Roybal et al., 2014). Freshman GPA was also discovered to be a strong indicator of junior year GPA, which has an impact on college admission. Easton et al. share that the ninth grade GPA,

...predicts high school graduation, college enrollment, and one-year college retention, and, in fact, is a much better predictor of these important milestones than test scores suggesting that students who have strong freshman grades are likely to do well academically in the future. (p.19)

Freshman year has a solid influence on whether the students are successful or experience challenges later in life (Easton et al., 2017). A GPA lower than 2.0 during freshman year indicates a higher risk of students dropping out of high school (Heppen & Therriault, 2009).

Race and Gender

In her 2017 book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria*, Beverly Tatum referenced a study from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District in North Carolina. This study looked at Black and White high school students with similar scores from a national standardized test. A majority of the White students in the 90-99th percentile were placed in advanced placement or international baccalaureate courses compared to only 20% of the Black students from the same percentile (Tatum, 2017, p. 136). Tatum further shared that 35% of White students compared to 9% of Black students with scores below the 70th percentile were enrolled in these higher level courses (Tatum, 2017, p. 136). Bavis (2016) shared information from a school in Evanston, Illinois where

their freshman curriculum was more rigorous for all students. Bavis found that students who took an AP course and scored at least a two were more likely to graduate from high school on time. Bavis indicated that students at this school who were enrolled in AP and honors classes discussed some of their challenges, often being the only students of color in those courses.

Achievement gaps have been discussed by many scholars and legislators since the passage of federal mandates such as NCLB and ESSA. Over the past ten years, there have been articles and studies written that investigate the achievement gaps based on race and gender. In their article “A Farewell to Freshmen,” Emmett and McGee (2012) indicated that “a substantial number of minority students do not earn a high school diploma at the same rate as their White counterparts” (p. 74). Research from Gasper and DeLuca (2012) indicated that almost half of Latino and Black students do not graduate from high school, while the number of White students who do not graduate is around 24%. A 2020 report from America’s Promise Alliance (n.d.) indicated that along with the gains of graduation rates toward the end of the second decade of the 21st century, many of the gains were made in Black and Hispanic racial subgroups.

Same et al. (2018) looked at interventions that showed improvement in academic achievement with Black students. Using the evidence tiers from the ESSA, this report provided information about some of the interventions that were deemed successful. Some of the interventions included parental involvement, mentorship, hiring practices, and intervention teams (pp. 8-11). Their research showed that in the class of 2015, the graduation rates of Black students were 13% lower than their White peers. Transition programs were also proven effective for students to feel connected, and students of color

had higher success in high school when they felt a sense of connection (Roybal et al., 2014, p. 476). Research was also provided by a California school that created a Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) program focusing on students who did not demonstrate preparedness for high school (Emmett & McGee, 2012). They found that engaged and effective teachers were integral to the success of the program.

Pileggi et al. (2020) studied Philadelphia high schools. In their research, they looked at the success of freshmen who were labeled off-track and whether those students graduated on time. The group delineated between varying levels of off-track, including marginally, moderately, and very. They found that gender had an impact on graduation rates for students who were off-track. Males who were off track had just over a 50% graduation rate, while females who were off-track graduated at a rate of 62% (Pileggi et al., p. iii).

Socio-Economic Status (SES) and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

Freeman and Simonsen (2015) looked at policy and interventions, summarized research, and reviewed commonalities of interventions regarding high school dropout rates. They discovered that while many interventions were needed for dropout prevention, most schools only focused on minimal interventions. They learned that the dropout rate was 13.8% of students in the bottom quartile of income level, but only 2.5% of students in the top quartile of income (Freeman & Simonsen, 2015, p. 206). DeLamar and Brown (2016) researched a transition program called On the Block, where they learned that students from low SES families with one of the at-risk indicators listed below have a 25% chance of receiving their high school diplomas (p. 32). The Texas Education Agency provided 13 criteria for a student to be considered at-risk:

1. Student was retained one or more years.
2. Student maintains grades below a C in two or more core content areas.
3. Student received less than satisfactory performance on a state assessment.
4. Student had poor performance on a pre-k, kindergarten, or 1st, 2nd, 3rd grade assessment.
5. Student was or is a parent.
6. Student was enrolled in an alternative program in current or previous year.
7. Student was expelled in current or previous year.
8. Student faced legal charges.
9. Student was previously identified as a dropout.
10. Student is an English language learner.
11. Student has been referred to the Department of Protective and Regulatory Services.
12. Student is homeless.
13. Student has been a resident of a residential facility. (DeLamar & Brown, 2016, p. 34)

Parr and Bonitz (2015) and Kotok et al. (2016) both discovered similar findings, indicating that family SES is connected to student high school graduation. Students from higher SES families are less likely to drop out of school (Parr & Bonitz, 2015). In their study using students from low SES families, Dixson et al. (2018) found that SES often predicted academic achievement. Ritter (2015) referenced a 2017 study by Rumberger when stating that low SES and poverty within families has a connection to transiency, homelessness, food insecurity, incarcerated parents, abuse, and addiction – identified by

the authors as “toxic stressors” because of the severity, continuity, and lack of positive relationships (p. 5). Ritter also referenced Shonkoff and Garner’s 2012 study that tied advances in science fields, indicating that “toxic stress in early childhood leads to lasting impacts on learning (linguistic, cognitive and social-emotional skills), behavior, and health” (p. 5). The study demonstrated that students who have experienced “toxic stress” have indicators which can “likely lead to dropping out, low achievement, chronic absenteeism and misbehavior, and poor behaviors and attitudes” (p. 5). When looking at effective high school transition programs, Roybal et al. (2014) learned that “while most students benefit from feelings of connectedness, those who are economically disadvantaged have stronger academic gains than other students if their belongingness needs are met at school” (p. 476). Students who experience transiency because of either poverty or unstable living conditions can have serious repercussions due to the loss of achievement in the transitions between schools (Costain, 2017).

High school graduation can also have an impact on future SES. In their research of an intervention program, Iachini et al. (2016) studied thirteen students who participated in the Aspire program after failing freshman year. This program used a curriculum to develop students' skills and was facilitated by social workers. The researchers shared information from America’s Promise Alliance and Child Trends from 2015 that indicated “individuals who do not earn a high school diploma are at greater risk for poor health outcomes and unemployment” (Iachini et al., 2016, p. 209). In their study of three groups of students, including recent dropouts, at-risk students still enrolled, and average students still enrolled, Dupéré et al. (2018) discovered that there is a cyclical

nature of high school dropouts because many have health and economic issues, which can impede the families' opportunities to improve their SES.

Over the past 25 years, there has been research on the number of experiences that may have impacted children throughout their lives, which are known as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). The first study of ACEs was done through Kaiser Permanente and 17,000 members of the Health Maintenance Organization in Southern California who confidentially responded to questions about their childhoods, health, and behavior (CDC, 2020). For children ages 0-17, ACEs are events that may have caused trauma during childhood, including events or experiences in the home, community, or environment (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020). ACEs have also been connected to physical and mental health issues, addiction, job stability, and education (CDC, 2020).

In their article "Building Trauma-Informed Schools and Communities," Walkley and Cox (2013) shared that "significant adversity in childhood is also linked to impaired cognitive and physical development ... it is important for school support staff to understand that trauma-affected children are often mislabeled" (p. 123). Research of juvenile justice offenders discovered that children with high ACE scores have higher odds of being incarcerated, becoming pregnant as teenagers, being involved in violence, and/or having negative outcomes in education and in careers (Baglivio et al., 2014, p. 13). Smith et al. (2017) discovered that the results of the National Survey of Children's Health showed that nearly 50% of the students in American schools have had at least one serious trauma, and approximately 33% of the students in grades 12-17 have had two or more serious traumatic events (p. 51).

Multiple studies identified that family, community, and connected trauma had an impact on dropout rates. Researchers from Canada looked at "recent disruptive events" and whether high school graduation was impacted by those events, concluding that the type of school (i.e., rural or urban) had an impact, as well as the students' school networks (Dupéré et al., 2019, p.1). A different study by Dupéré et al. (2018) investigated three groups of at-risk students to determine if stress or stressful events impacted students' decisions to drop out of high school. In this study, the researchers learned that many of the dropouts did not have behavior or academic issues in their younger years, but trauma or other events during teenage years did have an impact on dropout rates. Similarly, Freeman et al. (2015) identified what they called "quiet dropouts" who seemed to be on track but did not have the family support to persevere through challenging life events (p. 293).

For students who have experienced ACEs throughout childhood, there is research that indicates how educational settings and curriculum can help them. In their work, Chin et al. (2020) investigated at-risk students who participated in a mentorship program. The researchers discovered that by helping students to learn resilience strategies, students demonstrated higher rates of graduation and more success in schools.

Research Connections to Freshman Transition Programs

Transitions in life can bring joy, fear, success, and turmoil. The transition from middle school to high school can impact students' successes in high school, and with a positive environment, even students who did not have success in previous school years can make positive changes that can lead to high school graduation (Easton et al., 2017).

Ritter (2015) referenced Neild's 2009 research which provided four potential reasons why the transition to high school can be difficult:

1. major life changes including less parental involvement and higher peer pressure;
2. a new environment including new faces in the classrooms and hallways;
3. lack of academic and social preparedness; and
4. the set-up of high schools, including the schedule and movement within the building. (p. 5)

Creating programs and supports for this transition has become a focus of recent research. Costain (2017) referenced many ideas for improving the transition to high school and the eventual impact on graduation rates. One idea is for schools to provide opportunities for the students and their families to have tours of the new school, meetings with high school counselors, and small numbers of students for orientation activities.

Other researchers have discovered the importance of social-emotional learning, mental health, and strong relationships in the transition process. Students will have a better transition and potentially a more successful freshman year when there are supportive programs to help students with managing their time and adjusting to the academic and social demands of high school (Costain, 2017). Combining “academic and social-emotional skill development helps students remain engaged in their coursework while also planning for challenges and practicing how to persevere in the face of those challenges” (p. 13). Costain shared that the teaching of social-emotional skills should be intentional. Beland (2007) explained that social-emotional skills include managing emotions, developing strong relationships, making good choices, and demonstrating

motivation. Employers are looking for social-emotional skills to be at a high level, sometimes higher than the job-specific skills (Beland, 2007). The transition programs should also provide students with opportunities to look at rigorous and relevant issues (Costain, 2017). Schools also have the ability to help students who demonstrate mental health issues during this transitional period, and they can provide intervention or prevention (Suldo et al., 2019).

There should also be strong connections between the freshmen and the school faculty members for students in this transitional period. Demond (2008) indicated that the teachers of freshman transition programs should have “desire and passion to want to help students navigate through a course like this...teachers should be innovators and team players” (p. 17). Strong teachers willing to provide high levels of support to freshmen students should be given these assignments (Costain, 2017).

Details of the Freshman Year Programming

In 2011, the Warren City Schools became a partner district with the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL). CASEL’s focus is to develop “children and adults as self-aware, caring, responsible, engaged, and lifelong learners who work together to achieve their goals and create a more inclusive, just world” (CASEL, 2022, para.1). By incorporating five focus areas in social and emotional competence: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, CASEL and its twenty collaborating districts use a defined framework (*see Figure 3*) to assist with creating environments with “social and emotional learning (SEL) part of a high-quality and equitable education for all” (CASEL, 2022, para.2).

Figure 3

CASEL's Framework



For the first few years, the district focused on the development of these skills with staff and students in the elementary grades. When looking at how to implement the skills into the high school, consultants and administrators began to look at creating courses. During the 2013-2014 school year, all students in grades 9-12 at Warren G. Harding High School were enrolled in an advisory course, and almost every content area and elective teacher in the building had a roster of students. The course met daily, and the goal of the course was to implement academic support or intervention and SEL skills. Placements were determined by student data. The building administration discovered that there was not adequate content to support the need for the course at all four grade levels, and there had not been adequate staff training to ensure that all students received the desired skills.

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course)

During the 2015-2016 school year, the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course was implemented for all students enrolled as first-year freshmen. Two teachers were provided training in a curriculum, *School Connect*, with the support of

CASEL. One of those teachers remains in her position as a Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher, and the other original teacher left the district, so he was replaced by a veteran teacher from within the building. Each teaches a full course load of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course), which consists of six or seven sections, depending on the structure of the school day. Four additional staff members – Intervention Specialists – are annually assigned a small group of students from their caseload, and they each teach one section of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course). The students in the special education sections are often also on that teacher’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) caseload, so they can address the student’s IEP goals and monitor the students’ progress. Their course is structured somewhat differently than the course for the general education teachers, with some SEL instruction, career and graduation planning, and a strong focus on individual IEP goals and academic progress.

During the inaugural year of the course, the teachers structured the week with two days studying the SEL curriculum, one day of support in mathematics, one day of support in English, and one day for academic progress check-ins. The teachers rotated between the classrooms once a week for the mathematics and English support days because each teacher had training in one of those content areas.

Following that first year, the teacher rotations ceased, and from year two on, each teacher now remains in his/her own classroom. The current focus areas of the course are:

- an extension of the middle to high school transition experience
- direct SEL instruction using *School Connect*
- mindfulness/stress reduction
- visits from outside agencies

- study skills
- grade monitoring
- graduation/high school journey planning (D. Capers, personal communication, March 15, 2022)

To meet the evolving graduation requirements in Ohio, in 2021-2022, the Student Leadership Excellence Industrial Credential was added as a part of the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) curriculum. Teachers received training to provide students with this curriculum, which after successful completion, awards students industrial credentials that can be used towards their graduation requirement if needed.

Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program)

In the summer of 2015, Warren G. Harding High School presented the first Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) for students transitioning to ninth grade. Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) was held during August in 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 and 2021 summer sessions were condensed to information provided to students as they started the school year during their Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course.

The program is conducted four days in the summer, and the students are assigned to attend on one of the four days alphabetically according to their last name. Incoming freshmen from the four PK-8 buildings in the district, as well as freshman students who enroll during the summer, are provided registration details at the close of their 8th grade year or upon enrollment over the summer. During the first year, students attended one of two two-day sessions. The alphabetical assignment is used to help reduce the familiarity of previous classmates and to introduce the new students to a new environment with

many new faces. Six teachers present the same lesson six times each day as the students rotate from 40 minute classes, while becoming familiar with the bells, hallways, and classrooms where many of their freshman classes will be held. Students can use their lockers, tour the building, eat lunch in the cafeteria, and learn about the transition to high school. During the most recent two years of Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), current high school seniors assisted the teachers with the instruction of the lessons.

The content of the classes typically follows the W.A.R.R.E.N. Acronym which is used for a variety of purposes throughout the district:

- Session 1: Work Ethic – credits, grading guidelines, state testing, organization, graduation requirements
- Session 2: Accountability – attendance, bell schedule, dress code, lockers, timeliness
- Session 3: Respect – Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), social-emotional learning, peer relationships
- Session 4: Responsibility – understanding how to read the schedules, computer log-ins (Progress Book, Naviance)
- Session 5: Effective Behaviors – building expectations, behavior expectations, technology at school (social media), interactions
- Session 6: No Excuses – extracurricular activities, school spirit, tours of WGH (J. Ulicny, personal communication, April 2019)

Summary

A century of educational advancement, changes, and innovation led to questioning, regulation, and mandates throughout the United States. The impact of

education on the economy and the American workforce became the prime target of some of the regulations and mandates that were created. From those mandates came the determination that schools should document and track how successful their facilities were at ensuring that students graduated from high school with a diploma based on rigorous standards. Tracking graduation rates has not always been a smooth process. Research shows that student demographics, SES, and experiences in and out of school have an impact on how successful they are at reaching the pinnacle of high school graduation.

As indicated in the review of literature, public education in the United States has changed drastically over the past century. Wars, economics, government, and politicians have contributed to the evolution of education. In more recent history, the involvement of the government and politicians has created added layers of accountability, which has put an emphasis on graduation rates within high schools.

The review of literature also demonstrated that students' freshman year in high school has a major impact on their potential to graduate on time within four years. Grades, credits, standardized testing, and demographics can all contribute to the students' successes as freshmen, and their likelihood of graduating on time.

There is also research indicating that freshman transition programs and the inclusion of social-emotional skills with freshmen can positively impact graduation rates. This research will serve as the basis for the programming that is in place at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio.

An explanation of the two programs being studied indicates that Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) is a year-long course for incoming freshmen students. It focuses on social-emotional learning and academic progress. Freshman

Academy (a one-day voluntary program) is a one-day voluntary program in the summer for incoming freshmen. The program provides students with an opportunity to become familiar with many aspects of the high school.

Chapter 3

Methodology

There is an abundance of research about the freshman year of high school. Scholars have conducted research about this time of transition and its importance on the remaining years of high school, high school graduation, post-secondary success, and even the achievement of goals later in life. While there is research available about the freshman year and some programming, this mixed-methods research study investigated programming that one small urban high school has implemented to attempt to make a positive impact on the students' freshman years, as well as on their eventual on-time graduation from high school.

This study incorporated data collected from the researcher over the past seven years, including: data gleaned from the school's data management software Data and Analysis for School Leadership (DASL), the results of a questionnaire, and answers to interviews with students who participated in the programming. The researcher determined whether the programming in place for freshmen students at this high school had a positive impact on the school's graduation rates. The research questions for this study were:

1. What impact does the freshman year have on the graduation rates at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio?
2. What impact do freshman transition programs (Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program)) at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio have on students who graduate from this high school?

- How do former students recall their experiences and apply their knowledge from either Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) or Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio?

Participants

The participants in this study included students who either graduated or were projected to graduate from Warren G. Harding between 2019-2021. These former students participated in either one or both Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) or Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). The participants were all from Warren City Schools but may not have solely attended Warren City Schools from K-12, nor may have graduated within four or five years. The gender, racial, and socio-economic status composition of the participants varied, and the researcher attempted to align the composition with that of the WGH population demographics. Table 1 includes the demographic breakdown of the students at WGH over the past six school years.

Table 1

Student Demographics

School Year	Total	Black	Hispanic	Multi-Racial	White	SWD	Gifted	Econ Disadv
2015-2016	1307	42.6%	2.3%	10.6%	44.0%	17.7%	n/a	99.6%
2016-2017	1326	41.5%	2.6%	11.8%	43.9%	17.3%	8.7%	99.7%
2017-2018	1333	42.1%	2.3%	13.0%	42.4%	19.5%	8.7%	99.7%
2018-2019	1229	42.2%	2.5%	13.4%	41.5%	19.5%	6.0%	99.9%
2019-2020	1172	41.2%	2.5%	13.6%	42.2%	18.5%	5.6%	99.8%
2020-2021	1171	42.7%	3.1%	13.7%	40.1%	18.0%	4.8%	99.5%

Note. Data retrieved from the Ohio Department of Education Report Card archives.

Table 2 provides the graduation rates for Warren G. Harding High School for the past five school years.

Table 2

Graduation Rates

School Year	4-Year Grad Rate	5-Year Grad Rate
Class of 2016	86.3 %	91.1%
Class of 2017	80.2%	84.7%
Class of 2018	87.8%	89.3%
Class of 2019	87.3%	90%
Class of 2020	89.8%	n/a

Note. Data retrieved from the Ohio Department of Education 2020-2021 Report Card.

Instrumentation

The data for this study included information gathered from Data Analysis for School Leadership (DASL) database as well as data that the researcher has compiled while serving as an assistant principal since 2015. Data included details about the students who entered WGH as freshmen in the fall of 2015 (Class of 2019 cohort), 2016 (Class of 2020 cohort), and 2017 (Class of 2021 cohort). The details included the students' participation in at least one of the two programs being studied, the students' status as four- or five-year graduates, and some demographic information about the groups of students.

A survey was administered that asked about Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) experiences.

The survey items that were completed by the graduates are provided in Appendix A and were based on a 1 = not at all, 2 = somewhat, and 3 = very much response scale to the questions about their experiences in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). The reading level of the survey questions was computed as Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level = 5.1. The estimated reliability of the items is provided in Chapter 4. Interview questions were developed from survey responses about Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). These questions are provided in Appendix G.

Procedures

The research for the current investigation was initiated once the Youngstown State University IRB approved the proposal protocol. The researcher used a mixed-methods research design with elements of data analysis, interviews, and surveys. Data was collected from the data system DASL, which was used to access the students' records. Participants for the interviews and surveys were students from the Four-Year Adjusted Cohort who graduated from, or were projected to graduate from, this high school between 2019-2021. The students participated in one or two of the following programs: Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) or Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program).

The problems and the purpose of the study were to investigate the impacts of the freshman year of high school and freshman transition programs on the graduation rates at a small urban school in Northeast Ohio. The freshman transition programs being investigated include:

- *Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course)*: a full-year course for each freshman focusing on social- emotional learning, career exploration, and academic support.
- *Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program)*: a one-day voluntary program in the summer prior to freshman year.

Data Analyses

Basic descriptive statistics were analyzed. The frequency distribution for each survey question was computed. The survey items were aggregated to develop a score for each group of survey items. These scores were analyzed for their means, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis. A Fisher's exact test was conducted on the graduation data. All qualitative data was reviewed for themes based on the responses.

Summary

The researcher received IRB approval for this study to investigate the impact of two freshman transition programs. Participants were sought from the population of students who graduated in either 2019, 2020, or 2021 from Warren G. Harding High School. A Mixed-Methods study was conducted using data analysis from the school's data management system, the results of a survey, and the responses to interviews.

Chapter Four

Results

This research looked to identify the impact that students' participation in freshman transition programming, specifically Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), had on their on-time graduation from high school. The researcher used Fisher's exact test to investigate the graduation rate of students who participated in the programs and to learn what impact students believed this programming had on their success in high school.

Research questions:

1. What impact does the freshman year have on the graduation rates at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio?
2. What impact do freshman transition programs (Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program)) at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio have on students who graduate from this high school?
3. How do former students recall their experiences and apply their knowledge from either Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) or Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio?

This chapter presents a discussion of the quantitative data that was investigated from the district's data management system. Qualitative data was gleaned from participation in a survey and details from participants who participated in an interview.

Graduation Details

Research Question 1

What impact does the freshman year have on the graduation rates at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio?

A total sample of three graduation cohorts from a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio was examined. The researcher looked at the details of the students who entered the school as freshmen, and whether they participated in either Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and/or Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). Next, the researcher looked at the results of the cohort's graduation and examined which of the students graduated on time from that high school. Table 3 provides the details of the number of students who graduated with the cohort, and how many of those students were enrolled in the school from grades 9-12.

Table 3

Graduation Details for the Classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021

Year	May Grads	May Grads enrolled 9-12
2019	279	248
2020	260	217
2021	254	224
TOTALS	793	689

Tables 4 and 5 include the demographic breakdown of the graduates and non-graduates from each cohort.

Table 4*Demographics for the Classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021*

Year	May	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Multi-Racial	White	SWD	Male	Female
2019	279	43.0%	2.2%	0.7%	9.3%	44.8%	20.1%	54.1%	45.9%
2020	260	41.2%	2.4%	0.4%	8.8%	47.3%	17.3%	43.1%	56.9%
2021	254	44.9%	2.4%	-	14.2%	38.6%	16.1%	46.5%	53.3%

Table 5*Demographics for the Classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021 – Non-Grads*

Year	Non-Grad	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Multi-Racial	White	SWD	Male	Female
2019	40	55.0%	-	-	7.5%	40.0%	25.0%	72.5%	27.5%
2020	27	51.9%	-	-	7.4%	40.8%	29.6%	70.4%	29.6%
2021	23	30.4%	4.3%	-	21.7%	43.5%	8.7%	43.5%	56.5%

Tables 6 and 7 include the demographic breakdown of the graduates and non-graduates from each cohort who were enrolled at the high school as freshmen and were counted accountable as part of the final graduation rate during their fourth year.

Table 6*Demographics for the Classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021 – Enrolled 9-12*

Year	Grads	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Multi-Racial	White	SWD	Male	Female
2019	248	42.3%	1.6%	0.8%	10.1%	45.2%	19.8%	53.2%	46.8%
2020	217	40.6%	2.8%	0.5%	10.1%	46.1%	15.2%	42.4%	57.6%
2021	224	45.1%	2.7%		14.7%	37.5%	16.5%	48.7%	51.3%

Table 7*Demographics for the Classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021 Non-Grads Enrolled 9-12*

Year	Non-Grad	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Multi-Racial	White	SWD	Male	Female
2019	31	48.4%	-	-	6.5%	45.2%	22.6%	77.4%	22.6%
2020	20	50.0%	-	-	10.0%	40.0%	25.0%	70.0%	30.0%
2021	20	30.0%	5.0%	-	20.0%	45.0%	10.0%	45.0%	55.0%

A Fisher's exact test was conducted on the data in Table 8 regarding the students from all three cohorts based on enrollment in the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course, as well as whether they graduated on time with their cohort.

Table 8*Students Enrolled all Four Years*

	Fresh Adv	No Fresh Adv	Total
Grads	687	2	689
Non-Grads	71	0	71
Total	758	2	760

The results indicate no significant differences in the graduation rate of those who participated in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and those who did not.

Table 9 includes the number and percentage of students from each cohort who were enrolled in the year-long Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course. In 2019, one student who enrolled mid-year was not placed in a Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course, and in 2021, one student with a severe medical issue was on a half-day schedule and was not enrolled in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) to accommodate the required content area courses.

Table 9

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) Enrollment of the Classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021

Year	May Grads enrolled 9-12	Fresh Adv	Percentage
2019	248	247	99.5%
2020	217	217	100.0%
2021	224	223	99.5%

Table 10 provides the breakdown of students who participated in Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) and whether or not they graduated.

Table 10

Students Enrolled all Four Years

	Fresh Acad	No Fresh Acad	Total
Grads	436	228	664
Non- Grads	27	44	71
Total	463	272	735

The results of a Fisher's Exact test indicates that the graduation rates are significantly different ($p < .001$) for those who participated when compared with those who did not participate in Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), with Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) students graduating at a great rate.

Table 11 includes the number and percentage of students from each cohort who were enrolled in the summer Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) program. Each year, some students enrolled at WGH after Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) was held. This impacted 10 students in the class of 2019, seven in the class of 2020, and eight in the class of 2021.

These students were not available to participate in the program, and they have been subtracted from the total of the first column.

Table 11

Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) Participation of the Classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021

Year	May Grads Eligible for Fresh Acad	Fresh Acad Partic	Fresh Acad Percentage
2019	238	106	44.50%
2020	210	158	75.20%
2021	216	172	79.60%

Table 12 includes the number and percentage of students from each cohort who were enrolled at the high school from grades 9-12 who were identified in the EMIS report as “ACNTBL LEA IRN (Accountability LEA IRN)” and were held accountable to this high school but did not graduate with their cohort (Ohio Department of Education, 2019).

Table 12

Non-Graduates Enrolled Grades 9-12 in the Classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021

Year	May Non-Grads
2019	31
2020	20
2021	20

Table 13 includes the number and percentage of May non-graduating students from each cohort who were enrolled at the high school from grades 9-12 and were enrolled in the year-long Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course.

Table 13

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) Enrollment of Non-Graduates in the Classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021

Year	May Non-Grads Enr 9-12	Fresh Adv Participants	Fresh Adv Percentage
2019	31	31	100%
2020	20	20	100%
2021	20	20	100%

Table 14 includes the number of May non-graduates from each cohort who were enrolled in the summer Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) program.

Table 14

Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) Participation of the Classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021

Year	May Non-Grads Enr 9-12 Elig for Fresh Acad	Fresh Acad Participants	Fresh Acad Percentage
2019	31	6	19.4%
2020	20	12	60.0%
2021	20	9	45.0%

Table 15 provides the number of students who were enrolled at the high school during their freshman year and withdrew after their freshman year.

Table 15

Students from the Classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021 who withdrew after Freshman Year

Year	Withdrew after 9th
2019	131
2020	103
2021	90

Table 16 includes the number and percentage of students from each cohort who withdrew following their freshman year and were enrolled in the yearlong Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course.

Table 16

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) Enrollment of the Classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021 Who Withdrew After Their Freshman Year

Year	Students w/d after 9th	Fresh Adv Participants	Fresh Adv Percentage
2019	131	131	100%
2020	103	103	100%
2021	90	90	100%

Table 17 includes the number and percentage of students from each cohort who withdrew following their freshman year and were enrolled in the summer Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) program. Some students enrolled at WGH after Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) was held. This impacted four students in the class of 2019, two in the class of 2020, and four in the class of 2021. These students were not available to participate in the program and they have been subtracted from the total of the first column.

Table 17

Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) Participation of the Classes of 2019, 2020, and 2021 Who Withdrew After Their Freshman Year

Year	Students w/d after 9th	Fresh Acad Participants	Fresh Acad Percentage
2019	127	41	32.2%
2020	101	58	57.4%
2021	86	51	59.3%

Survey Results

Research Question 2

What impact do freshman transition programs (Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program)) at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio have on students who graduate from this high school?

A total sample of 58 former students participated in the survey about their experiences in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). The survey was distributed through social media using Facebook and Snapchat. Participants had an option to remain anonymous or to list their names if they wanted to volunteer for an interview. All participants were provided the questions regarding Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course), and if they indicated that they attended Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), they were provided with additional questions. Three participants indicated that they did

not graduate from the high school, and one student indicated that he/she graduated in 2017, which was prior to when Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) was in place. It is not known if this participant inadvertently listed the year he/she began high school, or if the respondent actually did not participate in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course), but the answers are included in the data.

Table 18 provides a breakdown of the four areas of questions. Three questions regarding the impact of the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher were grouped together, and three questions regarding the impact of the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course were grouped together. Twelve questions were grouped regarding the skills and content learned in the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) Course, and seven questions were grouped together regarding Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program).

Table 18

Reliability Estimates

Area of Impact	# of Items	α
Teacher Impact	3	0.832
Course Impact	3	0.828
Skills / Content Impact	12	0.954
Academy	7	0.922

As indicated in Table 18, all the reliability estimates for each of the factors are within an acceptable level (Field, 2013). The lowest reliability estimate for the factor involving the course impact is an acceptable level ($>.70$ (Field, 2013). for the number of former students completing the survey.

The survey questions and the responses from the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) section of the survey are included in the Appendix B. In these questions respondents were asked to rank their belief about each question using a Likert scale from 1 to 3. A selection of 1 indicated not at all, a selection of 2 indicated somewhat, and a selection of 3 indicated very much.

For the next data analysis portion, the survey questions were divided into three categories: impact of the teacher, impact of the course, and impact of the specific skills and content areas taught within the course. This information was analyzed and is detailed in Table 19.

Table 19

Descriptive Statistics of Impact based on Teacher, Course, Skills/Content, Academy

Factor	N	Mean	Sd	Skewness	Kurtosis
Teacher Impact	58	2.76	0.45	-2.25	5.05
Course Impact	58	2.40	0.63	-0.71	-0.79
Skills / Content Impact	58	2.45	0.62	-1.08	-0.07
Academy	27	2.49	0.60	-0.80	-0.81

As indicated in Table 19, the factors demonstrate good levels of skewness and kurtosis, ($|2.0|$ and $|5.0|$) as indicated by Field (2013). The kurtosis in the factor related to the teacher impact is the highest value. The highest mean was also in the impact of the teacher. The lowest mean was on the overall impact of the course.

Table 20 includes the impacts divided by the teacher identified by the survey participants.

Table 20*Impact Based on Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) Teacher*

	Teacher Impact	Course Impact	Skills / Content Impact
Teacher 1	2.76	2.33	2.43
Teacher 2	2.79	2.47	2.48
No Teacher	2.44	1.78	2.04

An Independent Sample *t* test was conducted to assess if there were differences in student responses based on their reported teacher. Results indicated that there were no statistically significant differences between the responses associated with any of the three Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) factors across the two different teachers, $p > .05$. Additional data is provided in Appendix C.

Survey participants had the opportunity to provide comments about their experiences in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course). Identifying names and pronouns have been changed. Respondents provided some comments about how their specific teacher had an impact on their school experience, saying that the teacher made the participant feel “comfortable with the feel of high school,” that the teacher “really helped with emotional learning and managing emotions,” and was “willing to help with my struggles throughout other classes I had.” One person indicated that they “still use a lot of what he/she taught me outside of school.” Another said that the teacher “made me such a better person and a better student.” Two respondents provided suggestions, saying that the course should have “stricter/better lesson plans” or that the “class could’ve been structured better.” All the responses to this question are provided in Appendix D.

Survey participants who attended Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), the summer program prior to the students' freshman year, were directed to questions about that experience. Of the 58 respondents to the survey, 27 indicated that they had attended Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) and answered those questions. In these questions respondents were asked to rank their belief about each question using a Likert scale from 1 to 3. A selection of 1 indicates not at all, a selection of 2 indicates somewhat, and a selection of 3 indicates very much.

As indicated above, the responses to these items were aggregated into an overall score. There is no statistical or practical difference in the students' average responses to the questions based on the aggregated scores, $p < .05$. Overall, students responded "somewhat" with most responding "very much" to the various items that made up this factor. The mean for the 27 responses was 2.49 with a standard deviation of 0.60. There was a skewness of $-.799$ with a kurtosis of $-.813$. This demonstrates good levels of skewness and kurtosis ($|2.0|$ and $|5.0|$) as indicated by Field (2013).

Survey participants had the opportunity to provide comments about their experiences in Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). Respondents' impressions of the program were varied, with some positive and some negative recollections. Positive comments included the fact that "Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) helped me become much more confident and comfortable," and "It was helpful as a freshman to get the feel of high school." Negative reactions reflected the fact that students were not shown their actual classes, and one person mentioned "we basically only went over the dress codes ... we were shown the freshman floor and that was about it." All the responses to this question are found in Appendix F.

Interview Results

Research Question 3

How do former students recall their experiences and apply their knowledge from either Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) or Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio?

Survey respondents had an opportunity to volunteer for interviews regarding their experiences in either Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course), Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), or both. Eighteen students expressed interest in the interview process, and nine of them participated in the interview. Seven of the interview participants were present in both Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), and two of the participants were enrolled in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) only. A copy of the interview questions and all of the responses are included in Appendixes F and G. The Class of 2019 had one interview participant, there were six participants from the Class of 2020, and two from the Class of 2021. The participants included one Black male, four Black females, two White males, and two White females. Table 21 includes the graduation year and some demographic information about the students who were interviewed.

Table 21

Breakdown of Interview Participants

Identifier	Gender and Race	Graduating Class
A.	Black Male	Class of 2020
B.	Black Female	Class of 2020
C.	White Female	Class of 2021
D.	Black Female	Class of 2020
E.	White Male	Class of 2020
F.	White Male	Class of 2020
G.	Black Female	Class of 2020
H.	White Female	Class of 2021
I.	Black Female	Class of 2019

Interviews were conducted by a second reader. A qualitative data analysis process was done with the interview results, and the responses were coded by common themes to each question. Questions 1-5 referenced Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course), and questions 6-8 asked for the students to reflect on Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program).

Question 1 asked whether there were specific lessons or experiences that the participants recalled from their Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course. Six of the nine respondents mentioned the SEL curriculum as a specific lesson that they remembered. Four said that the lessons in the course helped them with organization skills, with one student reflecting, "...weekly planner ... I still use the planner today." Three respondents noted that the course helped with their academics, and three students referenced the speakers and presentations as meaningful. Two students appreciated that the instructors were non-judgmental, and one acknowledged that the course "helped me stay out of trouble." One student recalled interacting with a computer

platform that helps students with planning for the future. The respondent said, “I remember one specific experience that made an impact on me - it was logging into WGH Naviance. Naviance exposed me to options that have helped me make decisions about my future.” Table 22 provides a breakdown of the responses to Interview Question 1.

Table 22

Interview Question 1 Specific Lessons or Experiences from Advisory

Topic	#
SEL	6
Organization	4
Presentations	3
Academics	3
Non-Judgmental	2
Naviance	1
Out of Trouble	1

Question 2 also referenced content and skills but asked the respondents to reflect on how those skills have had an impact on them. Again, most of the students acknowledged that the SEL curriculum and the focus on organizational skills were important, with four participants listing each of them as impactful. Three students referenced learning communication skills, and three noted that they learned about team building. One student specifically referenced Carol Dweck’s work that is taught during Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) using the *School Connect* curriculum, stating that she recalls “being taught about the growth mindset versus fixed mindset. This lesson helped me to do my best at school and to overcome obstacles.” Another student

said that this course “helped me learn how to deal with my little brother’s behaviors in a positive way.” Interview Question 2 responses are broken down in Table 23.

Table 23

Interview Question 2 Advisory Lessons or Experiences – Impact on Life

Topic	#
SEL	4
Organization	4
Communication	3
Team Building	3
High School Success	1
Growth Mindset	1

An article written by Costain (2017) was referenced in Question 3, noting that “strong teachers willing to provide high levels of support to freshmen students should be given these assignments.” Students were asked how they felt about the instructor from their Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course. Five respondents said that they are either still in communication with their teacher, or they were throughout their time in high school. Five respondents indicated that their instructor was caring. One participant remembered that the teacher “made me feel like he/she was always accessible. He/She had an open-door policy to talk about anything. Always there for me. Still in contact with him/her.” Another participant said “...teacher #2 was the greatest. Met him/her in 9th grade and he/she had us set goals. He/She followed up with me. I remember telling him/her in 9th grade I would be the top of my class and I was.” Table 24 provides the responses to this question.

Table 24

Interview Question 3 Advisory Teacher Impact

Topic	#
Still Communicating	5
Caring	5
Accessible	1

Participants were asked to reflect on whether their Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course had an impact on their eventual on-time graduation from high school. Five students referenced that the lessons on organization and planning had an impact. One student said, "...time management, getting work done. When you get assignments, organize, plan your day," and another said "...definitely. Helped me sort out my schedule for the next four years. Helped me plan and stay organized in my honors classes." One student referenced the values that were taught, and another said the course had a "huge impact." Table 25 includes the responses from Interview Question 4.

Table 25

Interview Question 4 Advisory Impact on On-Time Graduation

Topic	#
Organization	5
Values	1
Action	1
"Huge Impact"	1

The final question asked for ideas that could have a positive impact on the course. Three students suggested having alumni serve as guest speakers, and two of the students volunteered. One said, “current alumni and even upper classmen because they know the ins and outs and how to build a network of relationships.” Two participants said that having current students as speakers would be a benefit, and two said that people who had experienced poverty and had gone on to see success could be impactful. One of the students specifically referenced the ages of potential visitors, saying, “do not have old people come in to talk. Use presenters that are younger.” Suggestions were provided for specific organizations, and one student suggested having different types of jobs represented. These are provided in Table 26.

Table 26

Interview Question 5 Suggestions for the Advisory Course

Topic	#
Alumni	3
Current Students	2
People from poverty	2
Specific programs	2
Relatable speakers	2
Career exploration	1

Three questions were asked about the students’ recollection of Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) from the summer prior to their freshman year. The first question asked if there were any specific lessons or experiences, and if they had an impact on their high school experience. Five respondents noted the impact of meeting

building staff including teachers and administrators. Three responses referenced learning the building layout, one student remembered meeting students from other schools, and another referenced learning about the expectations. Two students who were new to the district noted that the program helped them feel more comfortable. One said, “I was a transfer student. Helped take away my anxiety. Made me feel comfortable. Got to meet the administrators and some teachers.” Table 27 includes the responses to Interview Question 6.

Table 27

Interview Question 6 Specific Lessons or Experiences from Academy

Topic	#
Meeting staff	5
Building layout	3
Transfers comfortable	2
Meeting students	1
Expectations	1

The next question asked students if they felt that Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) had an impact on their eventual on-time graduation. One student said, “I don't believe that Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) made such a big impact; it only helped to ease my anxiety by getting familiar with the building.” Three respondents referenced meeting teachers and students. Two mentioned the academic discussions as impactful and one student said that the program helped with maturity. Interview Question 7 responses are defined in Table 28.

Table 28

Interview Question 7 Academy Impact on Graduation

Topic	#
Meeting new people	3
Academic discussion	2
Maturity	1
No impact	1

Finally, participants were asked to provide suggestions for programs or lessons that they wish they had experienced at Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). Three respondents said that the program is good as it is. One person suggested bringing in alumni, one mentioned bringing in speakers to talk about high school, and another said that real-life explanations would be helpful. One person said that group activities would be beneficial, and another said:

I feel like Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) should show different clubs that Warren G. Harding high school has to offer, like extracurricular sports, clubs, and even opportunities like being able to take courses during the summer in order to free up some periods during the school year.

Suggestions to improve Freshman Academy are included in Table 29.

Table 29

Interview Question 8 Academy Suggestions

Topic	#
Program is good	3
Speakers	3
Group activities	1

Summary

Data analysis was conducted using data from the district’s data management system and the researcher’s files. The investigation looked at the numbers of students who entered the high school as freshmen, whether they graduated on time, and if they were enrolled in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) or attended Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). No statistical significance was found in the data of graduates who were enrolled in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course), but statistical significance was found in the data of graduates who attended Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). The results of a survey were also analyzed using descriptive statistics from the 58 responses to the survey. Questions were divided into four sections to look at the impact of the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher, the impact of the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course, the impact of the skills and content taught in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course), as well as the participation in Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). Interviews were conducted with nine volunteers regarding the impact of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). Chapter 5 will include the results of this research and how it

connects to research on the connection of freshman transition programming to graduation from high school.

Chapter 5

Discussion

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to investigate the importance of the freshman year of high school, its impact on a student's eventual on-time graduation from high school, and the effect two freshman transition programs have on graduation. In this chapter, the researcher provides a discussion of the findings of this research as related to the literature on the importance of the freshman year of high school, as well as what implications the programming may have on graduation rates at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio. The conclusion of the chapter includes a discussion of the limitations of the study, ideas for future research, and a summary.

Over the past century, the look, feel, and expected outcomes of public education have evolved greatly. The accountability movement that began in the late 20th century developed into federal mandates in the 21st century. A high school's graduation rate became one of the most important points of data by which schools were measured for success. Schools whose graduation rates did not meet the state's thresholds were seen as ineffective. Across the country many of the schools with low graduation rates were from urban settings, and data shows that minority students graduate at a lower rate than their white counterparts (Heckman & LaFontaine, 2010). Additionally, Gewertz (2018) said that students from minority groups and low socio-economic status were most often less likely to graduate with their cohort from the school where they attended ninth grade.

Much research has been done on the importance of a student's freshman year of high school. Along with physical and emotional changes, the movement to a new school with different expectations, stronger academic expectations, and more independence can

make this transition challenging for some students (Ritter, 2015). Costain's (2017) research suggests that creating opportunities for school tours, meeting school staff members, and gaining a basic understanding of the school can assist with the transition to ninth grade. The implicit instruction of social-emotional and real-life skills as students move to high school is important, and students should have connections with the school staff members who are involved in their transition to high school (Beland, 2017; Costain, 2017; Suldo et al., 2019).

The freshman transition programs studied in this research are Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course), a full-year course required for all freshmen, and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), a one-day summer program for students to learn about the high school. Both programs were established in their current form in 2015 at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio. Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) focuses on instructing social-emotional skills using the *School Connect* curriculum partnered with academic supports. Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) provides incoming students with exposure to the school's programs, structure, and expectations. By offering students these aids in their transition to high school, the school desires to see students reach the pinnacle of graduating from high school with their four-year cohort, despite any obstacles or barriers. Easton (2017) said that students who may have been unsuccessful in the past could make positive changes toward graduating on time, and Carol Dweck's growth mindset theory of malleable intelligence indicates that with a focus on strengths, students can overcome past obstacles to graduate on time (Dweck, 2000).

The researcher chose to conduct a mixed-methods study to investigate the impact of the freshman year on students who graduate from a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio. Mixed-methods research was used to discover the quantitative data associated with the graduation rate and freshman programming, along with the qualitative data of participants' perspectives on the programs. The qualitative data was collected using a survey and "episodic interviewing," which uses the past tense to collect information from a "specific time and place" (Maxwell, 2013). Interviews were then read and coded to determine common themes between the responses.

The first research question asks what impact the freshman year has on the graduation rates at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio. The researcher investigated the graduation rates of the high school for the students who entered in 2015-2017, and who were in the graduation cohorts of 2019-2021. There were 883 students accountable in the graduating classes for the three years, and 793 (90.0%) of those students graduated on time. The majority of the non-graduates from the classes of 2019 and 2020 were primarily male, 72.5%, and 70.4%, and Black, 55% and 51.9%. In 2021, 56.6% of the non-graduates were female. Also, in 2021, the White students accounted for the highest number of non-graduates with 43.5%, and the Multiracial subgroup saw a drastic increase with 21.7% of the non-graduates. Of those three classes, 760 students were enrolled at the high school from their freshman year through their senior year. Of the 760 students, 689 (90.7%) graduated on time with their cohort. For students who were enrolled at the school all four years, the demographics and graduation rate are comparable with the overall results, indicating that there is not a significant difference between students who enrolled following their freshman year. A Fisher's Exact test

determined that there was no significance in the graduation rate based on the student's participation in this course.

Data for participation in the Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) program was studied for students who were enrolled all four years. There were 735 students who were enrolled all four years who were eligible for Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), and 463 students participated in Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). Of the non-graduates, 27 did attend Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), and 44 did not. A Fisher's Exact test indicates that there is statistical significance connecting attendance at Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) with graduation rate.

The second and third research questions investigated the impact that Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) have on graduation rate, along with students' recollections of their experiences in either one or both programs. A survey was conducted with 58 participants providing their thoughts using a scale of 1-3 with 1 indicating "not at all," 2 indicating "somewhat," and 3 indicating "very much." The survey included three questions that provided information about the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher's impact, three questions about the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course's impact, twelve questions about the impact of the skills/content taught in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course), and seven questions about Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). The responses all had a mean over 2, and the highest mean of 2.76 was in reference to the impact of the teachers in the course. This indicates that most of the respondents to the survey responded with an answer of "very

much” or “somewhat” when thinking of the impact of the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher, Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course, skills/content of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course), and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). The researcher broke down the responses based on the participants’ teachers, either Teacher #1 or Teacher #2. Teacher #2 had a very slight indication of higher impact than Teacher #1 in reference to the teacher, course, and skills/content. The lowest responses were from the three participants who did not list a teacher. Twenty-seven of the survey participants indicated that they attended Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) and were directed to answer questions about their experiences with that program. Most of the respondents provided answers of “very much” or “somewhat” to these questions, and the mean was 2.49.

Participants in the survey were invited to answer two open-ended questions about their recollection of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). Most responses were positive with details of the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher’s impact on the student’s high school experience. Two respondents provided suggestions about the structure of the course. Regarding Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), the participants provided mostly positive responses with two expressing negative memories of the lack of impact the program had on their freshman year.

The concluding aspect of this research was conducting interviews. Eighteen of the survey respondents volunteered for interviews, and nine interviews were conducted. Five interview questions asked about Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course). Participants indicated that biggest impacts from the course included the social-emotional

learning skills that they learned and the work they did on becoming more organized/using a weekly planner. When asked about the teacher's impact, most of the respondents indicated that the teacher's caring nature and the connections with the teacher lasted beyond their freshman year. The participants were asked to provide ideas to improve the course, and most suggested the inclusion of guest speakers.

The final three interview questions asked about the students' experiences at Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), if they attended. The biggest takeaway was the fact that the students were able to meet staff members and other students prior to the first day of school. Two students who were interviewed were new to the district and indicated a higher level of comfort when entering the building at the start of the year due to participation in Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). When asked for suggestions to improve Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), the participants again suggested having guest speakers for the new students.

Interpretations of Findings

Based on the quantitative data, Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) was not revealed to have an impact on the students' on-time graduation from high school. Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) is a required freshman course, and in the three years studied, only two students were not enrolled in the course (one due to a scheduling conflict when the student enrolled mid-year and the other due to an abbreviated schedule due to medical necessity). Because of this, it would be difficult for a statistical test to find that there was a difference across the participants and non-participants with the small number of non-participants. Therefore, the qualitative responses provide more meaningful information about the impact of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course).

When looking at the results of the qualitative data, however, the impact of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) was felt by many of the participants in the survey and the interviews. Survey respondents ranked the impact of the teacher, the course, and the skills/concepts learned in the course mostly with a 3 - “very much” or a 2 - “somewhat.” The open-ended question regarding Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) on the survey and the five interview questions also provide insights into how the course had an impact on the participants’ high school experience and eventual on-time graduation from high school. The most revealing aspect of the qualitative portion are the overwhelming positive comments about the teachers. In looking at the positive responses about the teachers, it is important to understand the teachers’ temperaments and experiences. Teacher #1 had 10+ years of experience. His / her experiences included work at the local Juvenile Justice Center and in the high school. Teacher #1 was slightly less structured with lesson planning and classroom management. Teacher #2 had 20+ years of experience. His / her experiences included work in the middle school setting, as well as at the high school. Teacher #2 was trained as an Intervention Specialist and began to incorporate many of the aspects of SEL prior to the creation of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course). Teacher #2 has made a practice of displaying transparency in the classroom, especially by describing his / her own life experiences.

Alternatively, the quantitative data from students who attended Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) did indicate a significance. Of the students who were enrolled at the high school for four years, 60% of the non-graduates did not attend Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), which indicates that attendance does

have an impact on graduation. Unfortunately, the researcher was not able to discover the graduation rate of students who attended Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) and withdrew following their freshman year. There are 150 Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) attendees from the three years with unknown graduation statuses. The participation in Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) also increased over the three years studied, with 153 students attending in 2015, 228 in 2016, and 232 in 2017.

The survey and interview also asked for qualitative data about Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). From the survey, 27 participants provided survey responses about Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), with some answering the open-ended question, and seven of the interview participants who attended reflected on the program. Results indicate that Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) had a positive impact on the transition to high school because the majority of the responses demonstrated that the transition was eased due to the introductory nature of the program. This might suggest that it is not Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) on its own that impacts students. Possibly, it is the combination of the Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) and the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) that ultimately impacts the student's persistence to graduation. While the Academy provides students with a foundation, the Advisory may provide the students with the ongoing support that helps to keep them on-track and engaged.

Context of Findings

Research about the transition to high school and the importance of the freshman year of high school on graduation rates, as well as Dweck's work on the growth mindset, demonstrate that the findings of this study are in agreement with much of the literature

about these topics. First, Roybal et al. (2014) said that students of color and economically-disadvantaged students demonstrate more success when they feel a sense of connection. Emmett and McGee (2012) learned that having teachers who are engaged and effective have a positive impact on students who had not demonstrated preparedness for high school. Both of these studies connect to the results of the research. Survey results and qualitative interview responses indicate the connection to the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher has a huge impact on the students' high school experience. Results regarding Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) also indicate that meeting staff members is a key point of the program. Demond (2008) said the teachers of freshman transition programs should want to help students work through the transition course and should be innovative. Based on the results of the survey and interviews, the teachers served this purpose.

While there is no definitive data on the participants' at-risk factors, the researcher has direct knowledge that many of the students had some of the at-risk factors identified by the Texas Education Agency or had experienced adverse childhood experiences. Research conducted by Chin (2014) discovered that students who learn resilience strategies have a higher likelihood of graduating on time. Dweck's (2000) growth mindset model of malleable intelligence versus fixed intelligence says that students who feel inadequate or like failures are less likely to accept challenges. Students interviewed about their experiences in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) acknowledged that they learned something new with the social-emotional learning, organization, and communication skills. One student specifically referenced learning about the growth mindset and reflected on its impact on his/her high school success.

Survey and interview respondents cited the aspects of the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course that taught social-emotional learning skills and organizational skills as having the highest impact. This connects to Costain's (2017) research that says students will have a better transition and potentially more success during the freshman year with programs to help with managing their time and adjusting to the academic and social demands of high school. This research emphasizes that teaching social-emotional learning skills should be intentional, which is how the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course operates, which connects to the participants' responses about their experiences in the course (Costain, 2017). Additionally, Beland (2007) explained that social-emotional skills include managing emotions, developing strong relationships, making good choices, and demonstrating motivation are important in the workforce, so the participants' recognition of what they learned in the course will provide them with lifelong skills.

Two topics that were given as suggestions for improvement for the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course include the discussion of relevant issues with guest speakers, and an increased focus on mental health. Costain (2017) said that transition programs should give students the opportunity to look at rigorous and relevant issues. Suldo et al. (2019) indicated that schools should help students who demonstrate mental health needs during the transition so intervention or prevention can be provided.

Implications of Findings

The results of this study suggest that the two freshman transition programs being studied, Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), do have an impact on the students. Freshman Advisory (a

full-year mandatory course) was not found to have a quantitative impact, but the qualitative data suggests that the instructor and course content do impact the student's on-time graduation from school. Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) was demonstrated as having a positive effect on graduation rate in the quantitative data. When looking at the qualitative data, an impact on graduation was not evident, but participants recalled a positive impact on their freshman year after participating in the program. The findings are consistent with current theories that indicate the importance of a student's freshman year, as it impacts their eventual on-time graduation. Theories and research studied say that connections, staff, and familiarity are helpful for students transitioning to high school. However, as indicated above, the impact of Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) on graduation may only be realized because of the ongoing engagement with students through Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course).

This research echoes much of the previous research that was done on this topic. One area that could help advance further research is the importance of teachers during the freshman year. In this study, the focus was on the teachers of the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course, but for schools without this type of course, the results could impact teacher training. The participants' resounding positive recollections of a particular staff member and the qualities that were described could help schools who wish to provide training to staff members who will be working with freshmen, especially freshmen who are considered at-risk, minority students, or students from low socioeconomic backgrounds.

Another result of the research that could help to advance further research could be the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the graduation rates of the classes of

2020, 2021, and beyond. While the researcher did not investigate any variables that could have been present due to the shutdown of the schools or on-line learning, there were some points of data that may have been impacted by the pandemic. The overall graduation rate for the two classes did not seem to be affected greatly, and the number of students who withdrew from the high school during their senior year in 2020-2021 was lower than in previous years, but the researcher is unsure how many of those students withdrew due to lack of success during their junior or senior year as a result of non-traditional schooling.

One data point that was most out of the ordinary was from the non-graduates in the class of 2021. Out of the 23 non-graduates from the Class of 2021, thirteen were female, and ten were male. In the previous two cohorts studied, nearly three-quarters of the non-graduates were male. The researcher's knowledge of the 23 non-graduates in the Class of 2021, particularly the thirteen females, is that many of these females experienced increased mental health and socioeconomic challenges due to the pandemic which may have led to failure during their senior year. During this year, the number of Multiracial students who did not graduate was also considerably higher than previous years.

Professionals who are involved in the transition of students to high school, including the small urban high school in Northeast Ohio that was investigated, may be interested in the findings from this research. The reflections of the survey and interview participants indicate that the design of the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course has many strengths and could be replicated by other districts. The suggestions provided can aid in the evolution of the course and how it can have a stronger impact on the students in the future. The results of the data from the participation in

Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), as well as the thoughts of the survey and interview participants, provide ideas for improvement of the program.

Schools who wish to enhance their transition programming, or who wish to create transition programming, should look at the research in the literature review, as well as the qualitative data to work on their design. Incorporating Dweck's theory of growth mindset, the recognition of at-risk factors in students, the need for structure, the significance of social-emotional learning, and the importance of connections of staff members to students, should lead to strong programming. Schools should also look at the open-ended questions of the survey and the interview results to gain an understanding of the students' perceptions of the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course and Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program).

Limitations of Study

Anticipated limitations of this study included the focus of only one school, the inability to contact past graduates and non-graduates, and the inability to determine the demographic data of the survey participants. These limitations were indeed demonstrated in this research. Due to the fact that no other schools are known to have these two programs, only one school was studied. This means that some of the graduation rate data could be drastically different, or could look the same, if more schools had been studied.

The positive significant results regarding Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) on graduation were not based on random assignment, but rather self-selection. Students were invited to attend, but there was no requirement that they attend. Therefore, it is possible that other factors were at play that impacted the significantly higher graduation rate. Because these students self-selected, they may have been more motivated or had more family encouragement to participate in Freshman Academy (a

one-day voluntary program). As suggested above, results may possibly suggest that Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) followed by Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) is the recipe for increased student success.

Social media and personal communication were used to ask for participation in the survey. There were 58 responses, which the researcher had hoped would be higher based on the number of students who had attended and graduated from the school over the past three years. Of the 58 respondents to the survey, none were identified as students with disabilities based on the names of the teachers who were listed. As described in the literature review, students with disabilities were assigned to Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) courses based on the teacher who wrote and monitored their IEPs. Since none of those teachers were identified in the survey, it is assumed that the participants were all general education students and not students with disabilities. This raises the question of the impact the course has on all students, not just students in the general education sections of the course.

Another anticipated limitation was the inability to determine the demographics of the survey participants. There were more demographics that were unable to be determined throughout the research. Since the survey was anonymous with the participants only providing their name if they volunteered for the interview, there was no way to verify that the survey participants mirrored the demographics of the school. Another aspect of the research where the demographics were not able to be determined was of the non-graduates. Students who attended the school all four years had demographic details available to the researcher. Students who were listed as “accountable in this LEA” but who may have been removed from the school’s database did not have

demographic information available such as economic disadvantage, homelessness, or academic information (i.e., grades, credits, or test scores). This impeded the researcher's goal of determining if the students' demographics and academic records impacted their graduation.

An additional limitation that was discovered during this research was the inability to track data for students who withdrew. The researcher was unable to determine if the students who withdrew from the school did graduate on time from their new school. This included the 324 students who were enrolled in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course), and the 150 students who participated in Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program). By looking at the Ohio District Data Exchange (ODDEX), a database of students enrolled in Ohio schools, the researcher could have determined the outcomes for any students who remained in Ohio, but the outcomes of students who left the state would not be available.

Recommendations for Future Research

Many aspects of this research can provide ideas for future research for understanding the demographics and trends of students who do not graduate from high school, the implementation of programming for transitions of students to high school, as well as programs that can impact high school graduation rates. As graduation requirements and societal expectations continue to evolve, so do the needs of schools and students. It will be important to understand what schools have done in order to plan for what schools should do. The Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) curriculum at the small urban school in Northeast Ohio was adapted to reflect the new graduation requirement for students to have industrial credentials with the implementation of the Student Leadership Excellence program. It is imperative that

schools monitor changes at the state or federal level to make programmatic changes as needed.

Looking at other demographics concerning graduates and non-graduates would be beneficial. Some areas that could impact graduation rates are transiency and the movement of students between districts, attendance rate, and specific details of student academic records. While looking at student records for this study, the researcher noticed a number of students who had been enrolled in multiple schools throughout their years of education. The movement between schools with differing curriculums, pacing, and expectations could have an impact on student success. The researcher also identified many students for whom truancy was a major issue.

Gomperts and Nagaoka (2017) identified six factors that can help schools improve graduation. They detailed that a student's lack of failures during their freshman year, as well as the number of credits that they earn can predict on-time graduation. Future research could be done to look specifically at students who fail core content courses during their freshman year and whether they go on to graduate with their cohort. The district that the researcher looked at had an alternative school for students who were credit deficient following their freshman year. Future research in this area could benefit the district, as well as other districts, when looking for programming to have a positive impact on graduation rate.

Another potential area of research is to look at the graduation rates of students with disabilities at this school. Students who participate in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) with the support of an intervention specialist receive different supports than their general education peers due to the goals of their IEPs. While there is

still a focus on SEL and academic support, the pacing and overall feel of the course is different, so the reflections of the students would most likely be different than what was learned in this study.

Given the impact that Freshman Academy has on graduates, an expansion of the program could benefit students. One idea would be to add one or two days throughout the year to revisit and reinforce what was discussed in the summer program. This could also impact the students who did not attend over the summer. An additional idea would be to incorporate the academy idea for students entering their sophomore, junior and senior years. Each year could focus on the expectations for the upcoming year, provide an introduction to staff members, and explain the goals of that year including testing or post-secondary planning.

Finally, the world of education was changed drastically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Further research could be done to determine if the pandemic, changes in how education was delivered, or mental health struggles of students have an impact on graduation rates. As noted in this study, the Class of 2021 non-graduates consisted of more females than males, which is contrary to the data from the previous two years. The researcher's personal knowledge indicated that some of these female non-graduates suffered from mental health crises and socioeconomic struggles during and following the pandemic. Looking at other districts' graduation rates or more years of data for the district studied could benefit decision-makers when looking for areas of support.

Conclusion

Based on the qualitative results of a survey and interviews, the research suggests that two freshman transition programs at a small urban high school in Northeast Ohio

have an impact on students during their freshman year, and potentially on some of the students' graduation rates. The results of the survey and interviews provide reflections that schools can use while planning programs as well as training staff who work with freshmen students. The researcher also notes that the combination of the two programs and the connections between them – SEL skills, academic support, and some staff members – may be a recipe for success. The study connects with prior research and emphasizes areas that have been tied to academic success including SEL skills, organizational skills, connections to staff members, and harnessing the growth mindset of students. School districts across the country, especially in urban settings, can learn from this study. The results of the investigation challenge school districts to create transition programs or to reflect on transition programs currently in place, and to look at how to improve those programs.

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Appendix A

FRESHMAN ADVISORY (A FULL-YEAR MANDATORY COURSE) AND FRESHMAN ACADEMY (A ONE-DAY VOLUNTARY PROGRAM) SURVEY

<https://forms.office.com/r/QkNPSzLuRp>

I graduated from WGH in ...

2019 2020 2021 I did not graduate from WGH Other

1 = Not at all 2 = Somewhat 3 = Very much

My Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher made me feel ...

1 2 3 Safe and supported in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course).

1 2 3 Important as a student and as an individual.

1 2 3 Like I was part of a community.

Because of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) I ...

1 2 3 Felt ready to move on to 10th grade.

1 2 3 Used some of the skills I learned to help me until I graduated.

1 2 3 Continue to use some of the skills I learned after I graduated.

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) helped ...

1 2 3 Prepare me for high school success.

1 2 3 Plan for college and career futures.

1 2 3 Build or improve my academic skills.

1 2 3 Build or improve my social emotional learning skills.

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) helped me to improve my ...

1 2 3 Study habits.

1 2 3 Organization.

1 2 3 Asking for help.

1 2 3 Goal-setting.

1 2 3 Working with others.

1 2 3 Working independently.

1 2 3 Conflict resolution.

1 2 3 Managing my emotions.

What was the name of your Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher?

Please provide any comments or thoughts about your Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course (optional).

Did you attend Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) the summer prior to 9th grade?

Yes No

1 = Not at all 2 = Somewhat 3 = Very much

Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) helped me ...

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | Learn about the rules and expectations for WGH. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | Meet some of the teachers who I would have during my freshman year. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | Understand the credits and graduation requirements. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | Learn about extra-curricular activities at WGH. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | Learn the basic layout of the building. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | Gain a basic understanding of the social-emotional learning curriculum. |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | Feel more prepared to enter my freshman year. |

Please provide any comments or thoughts about your experience at Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) (optional).

Would you be willing to participate in a brief interview regarding your experiences in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) or Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program)?

Yes No

What is your name and the best way to contact you? (phone number or email)

Appendix B

My Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher made me feel ... Safe and supported in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	1.7	1.7	1.7
	2	6	10.3	10.3	12.1
	3	51	87.9	87.9	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

My Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher made me feel ... Important as a student and as an individual

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2	3.4	3.4	3.4
	2	7	12.1	12.1	15.5
	3	49	84.5	84.5	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

My Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher made me feel ... Like I was part of a community

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	5	8.6	8.6	8.6
	2	12	20.7	20.7	29.3
	3	41	70.7	70.7	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Because of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) I ... Felt ready to move on to 10th grade

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	2	3.4	3.4	3.4
	2	18	31.0	31.0	34.5
	3	38	65.5	65.5	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Because of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) I ... Used some of the skills I learned to help me until I graduated

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	10	17.2	17.2	17.2
	2	15	25.9	25.9	43.1

	3	33	56.9	56.9	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Because of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) I ... Continue to use some of the skills I learned after I graduated

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	16	27.6	27.6	27.6
	2	16	27.6	27.6	55.2
	3	26	44.8	44.8	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) helped ... Prepare me for high school success.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	10	17.2	17.2	17.2
	2	15	25.9	25.9	43.1
	3	33	56.9	56.9	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) helped ... Plan for college and career futures.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	1.7	1.7	1.7
	1	14	24.1	24.1	25.9
	2	15	25.9	25.9	51.7
	3	28	48.3	48.3	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) helped ... Build or improve my academic skills.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	1.7	1.7	1.7
	1	8	13.8	13.8	15.5
	2	12	20.7	20.7	36.2
	3	37	63.8	63.8	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) helped ... Build or improve my social emotional learning skills.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	1.7	1.7	1.7
	1	8	13.8	13.8	15.5
	2	10	17.2	17.2	32.8
	3	39	67.2	67.2	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) helped me to improve my ... Study habits.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	13	22.4	22.4	22.4
	2	14	24.1	24.1	46.6
	3	31	53.4	53.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) helped me to improve my ... Organization.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	12	20.7	20.7	20.7
	2	13	22.4	22.4	43.1
	3	33	56.9	56.9	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) helped me to improve ... Asking for help.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		1	1.7	1.7	1.7
	1	9	15.5	15.5	17.2
	2	13	22.4	22.4	39.7
	3	35	60.3	60.3	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) helped me to improve ... Goal-setting.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	7	12.1	12.1	12.1
	2	12	20.7	20.7	32.8
	3	39	67.2	67.2	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) helped me to improve ... Working with others.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	6	10.3	10.3	10.3
	2	16	27.6	27.6	37.9
	3	36	62.1	62.1	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) helped me to improve ... Working independently.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	3	5.2	5.2	5.2
	2	15	25.9	25.9	31.0
	3	40	69.0	69.0	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) helped me to improve ... Conflict resolution.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	1.7	1.7	1.7
	1	10	17.2	17.2	19.0
	2	12	20.7	20.7	39.7
	3	35	60.3	60.3	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) helped me to improve ... Managing my emotions.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	1.7	1.7	1.7
	1	12	20.7	20.7	22.4
	2	10	17.2	17.2	39.7
	3	35	60.3	60.3	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Appendix C

Teacher Impact

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	1	1.7	1.7	1.7
	1.33	1	1.7	1.7	3.4
	1.67	1	1.7	1.7	5.2
	2.00	3	5.2	5.2	10.3
	2.33	5	8.6	8.6	19.0
	2.67	7	12.1	12.1	31.0
	3.00	40	69.0	69.0	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Course Impact

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	2	3.4	3.4	3.4
	1.33	6	10.3	10.3	13.8
	1.67	4	6.9	6.9	20.7
	2.00	9	15.5	15.5	36.2
	2.33	4	6.9	6.9	43.1
	2.67	12	20.7	20.7	63.8
	3.00	21	36.2	36.2	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Content / Skills Impact

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	1	1.7	1.7	1.7
	1.08	2	3.4	3.4	5.2
	1.17	1	1.7	1.7	6.9
	1.25	2	3.4	3.4	10.3
	1.42	2	3.4	3.4	13.8
	1.58	1	1.7	1.7	15.5
	1.67	1	1.7	1.7	17.2
	1.75	1	1.7	1.7	19.0
	1.83	1	1.7	1.7	20.7
	2.00	1	1.7	1.7	22.4
	2.17	1	1.7	1.7	24.1
	2.20	1	1.7	1.7	25.9
	2.25	1	1.7	1.7	27.6
	2.33	3	5.2	5.2	32.8
	2.42	3	5.2	5.2	37.9

2.45	1	1.7	1.7	39.7
2.50	2	3.4	3.4	43.1
2.58	2	3.4	3.4	46.6
2.67	3	5.2	5.2	51.7
2.75	4	6.9	6.9	58.6
2.83	4	6.9	6.9	65.5
2.92	5	8.6	8.6	74.1
3.00	15	25.9	25.9	100.0
Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Graduation Year

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2017	1	1.7	1.8	1.8
	2019	7	12.1	12.7	14.5
	2020	29	50.0	52.7	67.3
	2021	18	31.0	32.7	100.0
	Total	55	94.8	100.0	
Missing	System	3	5.2		
Total		58	100.0		

What was the name of your Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid		3	5.2	5.2	5.2
	#1	15	25.9	25.9	31.0
	#2	40	69.0	69.0	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

What was the name of your Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher?

		Frequency		Percent	Valid Percent
Valid		2.00	1	33.3	33.3
		2.33	1	33.3	33.3
		3.00	1	33.3	33.3
		Total	3	100.0	100.0
#1	Valid	1.00	1	6.7	6.7
		2.00	1	6.7	6.7
		2.33	1	6.7	6.7
		3.00	12	80.0	80.0
		Total	15	100.0	100.0
#2	Valid	1.33	1	2.5	2.5
		1.67	1	2.5	2.5
		2.00	1	2.5	2.5

2.33	3	7.5	7.5
2.67	7	17.5	17.5
3.00	27	67.5	67.5
Total	40	100.0	100.0

Teacher Impact separated by which teacher the participant had

		Cumulative Percent	
	Valid	2.00	33.3
		2.33	66.7
		3.00	100.0
		Total	
#1	Valid	1.00	6.7
		2.00	13.3
		2.33	20.0
		3.00	100.0
		Total	
#2	Valid	1.33	2.5
		1.67	5.0
		2.00	7.5
		2.33	15.0
		2.67	32.5
		3.00	100.0
		Total	

Course Impact separated by which teacher the participant had

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	
	Valid	1.00	1	33.3	33.3
		2.00	1	33.3	33.3
		2.33	1	33.3	33.3
		Total	3	100.0	100.0
#1	Valid	1.33	4	26.7	26.7
		2.00	2	13.3	13.3
		2.67	4	26.7	26.7
		3.00	5	33.3	33.3
		Total	15	100.0	100.0
#2	Valid	1.00	1	2.5	2.5
		1.33	2	5.0	5.0
		1.67	4	10.0	10.0
		2.00	6	15.0	15.0
		2.33	3	7.5	7.5
		2.67	8	20.0	20.0
		3.00	16	40.0	40.0
		Total	40	100.0	100.0

Course Impact What was the name of your Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher?

			Cumulative Percent	
	Valid	1.00		33.3
		2.00		66.7
		2.33		100.0
		Total		
#1	Valid	1.33		26.7
		2.00		40.0
		2.67		66.7
		3.00		100.0
		Total		
#2	Valid	1.00		2.5
		1.33		7.5
		1.67		17.5
		2.00		32.5
		2.33		40.0
		2.67		60.0
		3.00		100.0
		Total		

Skills / Content Impact based on which teacher the participant had

			Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Valid	1.08	1	33.3	33.3	33.3
		2.45	1	33.3	33.3	66.7
		2.58	1	33.3	33.3	100.0
		Total	3	100.0	100.0	
#1	Valid	1.00	1	6.7	6.7	6.7
		1.17	1	6.7	6.7	13.3
		1.58	1	6.7	6.7	20.0
		1.67	1	6.7	6.7	26.7
		2.20	1	6.7	6.7	33.3
		2.58	1	6.7	6.7	40.0
		2.75	2	13.3	13.3	53.3
		2.83	1	6.7	6.7	60.0
		2.92	1	6.7	6.7	66.7
		3.00	5	33.3	33.3	100.0
		Total	15	100.0	100.0	
#2	Valid	1.08	1	2.5	2.5	2.5
		1.25	2	5.0	5.0	7.5
		1.42	2	5.0	5.0	12.5
		1.75	1	2.5	2.5	15.0
		1.83	1	2.5	2.5	17.5
		2.00	1	2.5	2.5	20.0

2.17	1	2.5	2.5	22.5
2.25	1	2.5	2.5	25.0
2.33	3	7.5	7.5	32.5
2.42	3	7.5	7.5	40.0
2.50	2	5.0	5.0	45.0
2.67	3	7.5	7.5	52.5
2.75	2	5.0	5.0	57.5
2.83	3	7.5	7.5	65.0
2.92	4	10.0	10.0	75.0
3.00	10	25.0	25.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Appendix D

Results of the optional open-ended Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) question, "Please provide any comments or thoughts about your Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course (optional)."

- I loved teacher #2, and he / she was an amazing teacher but personally I feel like Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) should focus a lot more on aspects such as learning about majors or jobs that students may be interested in and how to get these jobs and what's required from them. Also advising if possible scholarship/shadowing/ internship opportunities for their interests.
- I really liked this class it helped make me comfortable with the feel of high school and teacher #1 was really nice. it helped me stay focused and taught me proper study habits. i think this class impacts the kids more by who the teacher is and if they take the class seriously! Teacher #1 being so involved really helped and made me feel like i had someone my freshman year !
- I loved my freshman advisor class! My teacher #2 was always happy and always willing to help with my struggles throughout other classes i had. He / she made me feel like i was in a safe environment and that i can talk to him / her about any problems i had or i was going through.
- I'll be absolutely honest, I hated Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) I loved teacher #2 but hated the class. I felt it was a study hall with counseling inetgrated in. I felt I would've liked it better if it were only a study hall because I felt like the SEL was a huge waste of time.
- Teacher #2 and Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) was one of the classes that made my four years at WGH a success! I also was introduced to many of programs in that class including Academic Achievers which gave me a scholarship to YSU.
- Teach is the best at the school helped me prepare for the next three years
- It was just really a great experience. Freshman year was the hardest for me with just dealing with my health and drama from friends to boys and I never once felt like I couldn't talk to teacher #2 about it. He's / she's the reason I'm here today and thriving still.
- Best teacher ever, i will never forget teacher #2, he / she taught me a lot about myself as well as how to manage my emotions. I still use a lot of what he / she taught me outside of school. I will forever be grateful i had him / her as my teacher
- Teacher #2 was the best thing to happen to me at Warren G Harding. I knew I could always go to him / her even when I was no longer in his / her class. He / She continues to be there for me to this day and it has been 5 years since I was in his / her class. He / She made me such a better person and a better student!!
- It helped me a lot honestly it help me prepare for high school with studying and asking for help. Even after 9th grade I would still go to teacher #2's room and ask for help and he / she would help me shoutout to him / her, he / she the mvp
- Teacher #2 was a lovely teacher. He / She really helped with emotional learning and managing emotions. But it did not help me with the rest of my high school experience besides managing emotions.

- Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) definitely gave me the extra time I needed to catch myself up and refocus on what I needed to do.
- Teacher #2 was a phenomenal teacher to have to Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course). He / She made me feel seen and helped me through a lot throughout my entire time in high school.
- Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) was a huge part in my WGH success. If it wasn't for being with teacher #2 my 9th grade year I wouldn't have graduated high school. He / She played a huge part in my role of success at the high school level. Even after freshman year he / she still continued to help me with classes that I couldn't understand. Overall, such an amazing class to take as a freshman.
- I think the Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) course is a good idea however just talks about the wrong things. We touched very little on mental health and self image. I feel this course needs more stricter/better lesson plans. Most kids called it a free period and it should be a period to where we talk about mental health and self image. My high school career was mainly terrible because I had no one to talk to about the things going through my head until my senior year. I had self image issues and etc. Point is this class should help transition from middle school into a high school it can be scary and frustrating for kids. Then as the quarters go on it should ease into mental health and making sure the freshman are ok and handling everything well. Making sure no ones getting bullied (or attempt to) make sure everyone feels safe where they are instead of "it's just another free period".
- Teacher #2 always made me feel welcomed and was one of the most influential people in my high school career. The class provided me with most of the skills I needed to succeed.
- It was fun & a learning environment
- I feel like advisory was very helpful especially with teacher #2 it made high school less scary and helped figure out a plan on how to manage on how to get work done on time
- It was a big help and it taught me many skills that I didn't think I needed
- Teacher #1 was cool
- When I went into Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) as a freshman in Warren G. Harding, I thought that Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) was an excellent start for oncoming Freshmans to build different skills, work with other students and helps students to plan for their own college or career futures.
- Teacher #1 was a great teacher, I just think the class could've been structured better. We should've learned more valuable things like we did in senior transition possibly. I say this because it could give kids an idea of how highschool will be.
- I really liked the grade checks through out the week it gave me time to do missing work
- Teacher #1 helped us to understand our feelings and thought us to be patient before reacting. I feel the course is needed before moving on grades
- Teacher #2 helped me improve in not only school but in life. I am very grateful for my Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) teacher and class.
- Teacher #2 will always be someone I remember from high school to be honest I wish I could've had his / her help throughout my whole high school years. He / She was a

- big help even though I lost myself during this last year of high school with his / her encouraging words it helped me stick through and finish strong thank you so much.
- I had a very positive experience in my Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) class. I had teacher #2 and he / she was such an amazing teacher !
 - Teacher #2 made me feel very welcome and comfortable in his / her class. He / She is an amazing teacher and one of my favorite teachers of all time. I was able to go to him / her and talk to her about issues that I was having and he / she would talk me through it and help in every way that he / she could. He / She was very engaging and I enjoyed his / her class very much. He / She once bought me a sketchbook and pencils and told me that he / she loved my art and told me how good I was at it and said that he / she wanted me to pursue art for the rest of my life. That stuck with me a lot and now I am a graphic design major in college and continue pursuing art to this day. That act of kindness will stick with me for the rest of my life.

Appendix E

Statistics

		Academy2
N	Valid	27
	Missing	31
Mean		2.4868
Std. Deviation		.60383
Skewness		-.799
Std. Error of Skewness		.448
Kurtosis		-.813
Std. Error of Kurtosis		.872

Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) helped me ... Meet some of the teachers I who I would have during my freshman year

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	5	8.6	18.5	18.5
	2	5	8.6	18.5	37.0
	3	17	29.3	63.0	100.0
	Total	27	46.6	100.0	
Missing	999	31	53.4		
Total		58	100.0		

Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) helped me ... Learn about the rules and expectations for WGH

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	4	6.9	6.9	6.9
	2	9	15.5	15.5	22.4
	3	14	24.1	24.1	46.6
	999	31	53.4	53.4	100.0
Total		58	100.0	100.0	

Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) helped me ... Understand the credits and graduation requirements

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	3	5.2	5.2	5.2
	2	3	5.2	5.2	10.3
	3	21	36.2	36.2	46.6
	999	31	53.4	53.4	100.0
	Total		58	100.0	100.0

Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) helped me ... Learn about extra-curricular activities at WGH

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	4	6.9	7.0	7.0
	2	4	6.9	7.0	14.0
	3	18	31.0	31.6	45.6
	999	31	53.4	54.4	100.0
	Total	57	98.3	100.0	
Missing System		1	1.7		
Total		58	100.0		

Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) helped me ... Learn the basic layout of the building

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	1	1.7	1.7	1.7
	2	9	15.5	15.5	17.2
	3	17	29.3	29.3	46.6
	999	31	53.4	53.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) helped me ... Gain a basic understanding of the social-emotional learning curriculum

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	5	8.6	8.6	8.6
	2	9	15.5	15.5	24.1
	3	13	22.4	22.4	46.6
	999	31	53.4	53.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) helped me ... Feel more prepared to enter my freshman year

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	4	6.9	6.9	6.9
	2	6	10.3	10.3	17.2
	3	17	29.3	29.3	46.6
	999	31	53.4	53.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Appendix F

Results of the optional open-ended Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) question, “Please provide any comments or thoughts about your Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) (optional).”

- Barley remember but it was ok
- Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) helped me become much more confident and comfortable.
- Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) is a day dedicated to not even showing the students their classes and they don't even get to be in their assisted teachers classes they have them mixed up.
- I loved Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program), I was able to get a tour of the school and meet some of my teachers prior to the start of term.
- It was helpful as a freshman to get the feel of high school
- My experience is i didn't meet a single teacher that I actually had for Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course). We basically only went over the dress codes. We were shown the freshman floor and that was about it.
- The Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) experience was a great start for new freshman students to be familiar with the place and know what to expect when you are going to high school as a freshman.

Appendix G

Interview Questions

FRESHMAN ADVISORY (A FULL-YEAR MANDATORY COURSE)

1. When thinking of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) (the year-long course), are there any specific lessons or experiences that you recall? If so, which ones, and what impact did they have on your high school experience?
2. When thinking of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and the content / skills you learned, can you remember any specific lessons or experiences that have had an impact on you as a person?
3. In an article written by Costain discussing freshman transition courses, he said that “strong teachers willing to provide high levels of support to freshmen students should be given these assignments” (2017). When thinking of your experience, how do you feel about your instructor?
4. What impact, if any, do you think Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) had on your eventual on-time graduation from WGH?
5. Can you suggest any programs, guest speakers, or lessons that you wish you had experienced while in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course)?

FRESHMAN ACADEMY (A ONE-DAY VOLUNTARY PROGRAM)

6. When thinking of Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) (the one or two day introduction to WGH), are there any specific lessons or experiences that you recall? If so, which ones, and what impact did they have on your high school experience?
7. What impact, if any, do you think Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) had on your eventual on-time graduation from WGH?
8. Can you suggest any programs or lessons that you wish you had experienced while at Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program)?

Appendix H

Interview Responses

FRESHMAN ADVISORY (A FULL-YEAR MANDATORY COURSE)

When thinking of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) (the year-long course), are there any specific lessons or experiences that you recall? If so, which ones, and what impact did they have on your high school experience?

- A. Mental process, learning how to get organized, information on drugs.
- B. The speakers and presentations, as a result of the Academic Achievers program, I received a full ride to YSU.
- C. Helped deepen emotions, how things made you feel. Really helped dealing with stress and staying calm when stressed. Helped to get me organized.
- D. Helped me stay out of trouble. Related to people on their level, non-judgmental.
- E. Was in Honors classes. Summarized what would happen in your classes, what to expect. Helped when you were struggling with a class.
- F. SEL. Guest speakers. How to be organized, weekly planners.
- G. SEL Understand emotions and cope with surroundings.
- H. I remember one specific experience that made an impact on me. It was logging into WGH Naviance. Naviance exposed me to options that have helped me make decisions about my future.
- I. Weekly planner. I was disorganized and it helped me to organize myself and become a better student. I still use the planner today.

When thinking of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) and the content / skills you learned, can you remember any specific lessons or experiences that have had an impact on you as a person?

- A. Teacher #1, let you express yourself.
- B. Helped me learn how to deal with my little brother's behaviors in a positive way.
- C. Mindfulness, calming. Team bonding
- D. How to be organized, keep up with lessons. Basically, individual planning because everyone is different.
- E. Key was learning how to communicate with students you had never met. How to talk to your teachers. How to get through high school.
- F. SEL Organization, communications, time management
- G. Leadership and team building
- H. Being taught about the growth mindset versus fixed mindset. This lesson helped me to do my best at school and to overcome obstacles.
- I. Definitely the planner.

In an article written by Costain discussing freshman transition courses, he said that "strong teachers willing to provide high levels of support to freshmen students should be given these assignments" (2017). When thinking of your experience, how do you feel about your instructor?

- A. Teacher #1. Whenever I run into him / her, he / she still talks to me and checks on what I am doing.

- B. Teacher #2, loved him / her. Still communicate with him / her.
- C. Teacher #2. Made me feel like he / she was always accessible. He / She had an open door policy to talk about anything. Always there for me. Still in contact with him / her.
- D. Teacher #2, loved him / her. Made school feel like home. Like a grandpa / grandma. Reached out when you were feeling bad. Got to know you.
- E. Teacher #2, loved him / her. He / She was amazing even after Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course).
- F. Teacher #2, he / she was the greatest. Met him / her in 9th grade and he / she had us set goals and followed up with me. I remember telling him / her in 9th grade I would be the top of my class and I was.
- G. Teacher #2. Love, patient and understanding.
- H. I felt like my instructors only wanted me to do my best on all of the assignments they had given me, and they wanted me to be able to graduate high school successfully.
- I. Teacher #2 cared about the students, their personal development and getting the students motivated. I also was helped by Teacher #1. He / She was easy to talk to.

What impact, if any, do you think Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) had on your eventual on-time graduation from WGH?

- A. Helped me prepare, especially during COVID
- B. Explained the need to graduate, to have a plan
- C. Time management, getting work done. When you get assignments, organize, plan your day.
- D. Yes. Helped me learn how to control my actions, stay out of trouble.
- E. Huge impact
- F. Definitely. Helped me sort out my schedule for the next four years. Helped me plan and stay organized in my honors classes.
- G. How to use time better. Planner helped me to stay organized and focused.
- H. I don't believe that Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) made a huge impact on the on-time graduation, but it did help me to grow and have confidence in my academic achievements.
- I. The seriousness of it all. Focused on core values.

Can you suggest any programs, guest speakers, or lessons that you wish you had experienced while in Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course)?

- A. Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Anyone that can help get people on track. "Anonymous Teacher" was a great mentor.
- B. Inspiring Minds
- C. Not sure
- D. Do not have old people come in to talk. Use presenters that are younger and went to Harding. Use people who got into trouble and how they got out of trouble.
- E. Use alumni who can talk about their experiences (the participant would love to do it).
- F. Current alumni (the participant volunteered) and even upper classmen because they know the ins and outs and how to build a network of relationships.
- G. Student leaders, like president of student council.

- H. Students should be exposed to what type of jobs are out there and how much they make versus how much it costs to live.
- I. Speakers should be ones that can relate to the students and their lives. People who have come from poverty and have become successful

FRESHMAN ACADEMY (A ONE-DAY VOLUNTARY PROGRAM)

When thinking of Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) (the one or two day introduction to WGH), are there any specific lessons or experiences that you recall? If so, which ones, and what impact did they have on your high school experience?

- A. Did not attend
- B. Planning, getting to meet the administrators
- C. I had attended Howland Schools and freshman year was my first year in Warren. Helped to learn the layout of the building.
- D. Did not attend.
- E. Meeting students from the other schools. Meeting the teachers.
- F. Loved it. Open and honest. Learned about graduation requirements. Met some of the teachers.
- G. Learned the way around the school and what the expectations were. Got to see some of the teachers and students.
- H. Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) helps incoming students get to know the building and facilities better.
- I. I was a transfer student from Niles. Helped take away my anxiety. Made me feel comfortable. Got to meet the administrators and some teachers.

What impact, if any, do you think Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) had on your eventual on-time graduation from WGH?

- A. Not applicable
- B. Yes, it had an impact. Learned how important it was to take academics seriously. Real life experiences.
- C. Got to meet some of my fellow students and spend time with them. It helped transition to have some friendly faces.
- D. Not applicable
- E. Good impact. Grades you needed to graduate; credits needed.
- F. Showed me the ropes. Don't slack off or you will end up in summer school. Tour of the school.
- G. Gave me a sense of maturity.
- H. I don't believe that Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) made such a big impact, it only helped to ease my anxiety by getting familiar with the building.
- I. It was a nice overview. Made me feel comfortable.

Can you suggest any programs or lessons that you wish you had experienced while at Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program)?

- A. Not applicable
- B. More real life experiences, like were later taught in Financial Literacy.
- C. Not sure. Maybe more group activities.

- D. Not applicable
- E. Have speakers come in to talk about what to expect by grade level.
- F. Not really. Program is good enough. Add current alumni.
- G. I would not change it.
- H. I feel like Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) should show different clubs that the school has to offer, like extracurricular sports, clubs, and even opportunities like being able to take courses during the summer in order to free up some periods during the school year.
- I. No. I think they did a good job.

APPENDIX I

Freshman Academy (a one-day voluntary program) Session Outlines

<p>W Work Ethic</p>	<p>A Accountability</p>	<p>R Responsibility</p>	<p>R Respect</p>	<p>E Effective Behaviors</p>	<p>N No Excuses</p>
<p><i>Credits</i> <i>Grading Guidelines</i> <i>State Testing</i> <i>Organization</i> <i>Graduation Requirements</i></p> <p>This session will open with a discussion about high school credits and being accountable to obtaining them throughout their four years of high school, along with the requirements for graduation.</p> <p>Students will also learn about the grading guidelines at WGH, including the summative and formative types of grades.</p> <p>Students will receive school supplies and will discuss the importance of organization in high school.</p>	<p><i>Attendance</i> <i>Bell Schedule</i> <i>Timeliness</i> <i>Dress Code</i> <i>Lockers</i></p> <p>Students will learn about the high school bell schedule.</p> <p>Students will also discuss the importance of attendance to school and how NOT to be tardy.</p> <p>Students will learn about the dress code and students who pre-register will learn their locker combinations and be able to get into their lockers.</p>	<p><i>Look at Schedules</i> <i>Computer Log-Ins</i> <i>Progress Book</i> <i>Plagiarism</i> <i>Naviance</i></p> <p>This session will be held in the first floor computer lab, where students who pre-registered will review their schedules and their computer and Progress Book log-ins.</p> <p>Students will learn about their student drives and the Acceptable Use of Technology Guidelines.</p> <p>Students will also complete a learning styles inventory on Naviance that will be shared with all ninth grade staff members.</p>	<p><i>PBIS</i> <i>SEL</i> <i>Peer Relationships</i></p> <p>Focusing on the social emotional learning components of self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making and relationship skills, students will learn a number of soft skills that will benefit them throughout high school and life.</p> <p>Students will also learn about PBIS and SEL in place at WGH.</p>	<p><i>Building Expectations</i> <i>Behavior Expectations</i> <i>Social Media</i> <i>Technology at School</i> <i>Interactions</i></p> <p>This session will provide students with an outline of the behavioral expectations relating to the building and the learning community.</p> <p>Students will also be taught to seek out available opportunities for extra help and support throughout the year.</p> <p>Students will discuss the use of technology at WGH as well as responsible decision-making with social media.</p>	<p><i>Clubs / Activities</i> <i>Athletics</i> <i>School Spirit</i> <i>Tours of WGH</i></p> <p>Extra-curricular activities and school spirit will be the focus of this session.</p> <p>Students will learn about the various clubs and athletic activities available at Warren G. Harding.</p> <p>Students will receive copies of the WGH Alma Mater and Fight Song.</p> <p>This session will conclude with a tour of the school, focusing on the areas outside of the first floor.</p>

APPENDIX J

Lesson Plan for one week of Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course) 2021-2022 school year.

WARREN CITY SCHOOLS LESSON PLAN TEMPLATE

Teacher #2 - 9th grade Freshman Advisory (a full-year mandatory course)


Time	Standard	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1-7 th period	Self management B.1. Utilize self-management strategies to regulate thoughts, emotions and behaviors within the context of the situation	Date 1/3	Date 1/4	Date 1/5	Date 1/6	Date 1/7
1-7 th period		Target: I can recognize what escalates my emotions	Target: I can Recognize what escalates my emotions	Target: I can use strategies to succeed in school	Target: I can recognize what escalates my emotions	Target: I can recognize what escalates my emotions
1-7 th period		Lesson Overview I do: Notes on emotional thermometer We do: Video on Flip your lid review You do: Partners assign de-escalation strategy	Lesson Overview I do: Notes on Negativity bias We do : Discuss why we have this bias You do: Partners read article on negativity bias and reflect on questions	Lesson Overview I do: Weekly conference – set goals and discuss plan moving forward You do: Grade check , Journal We do: Greeting	Lesson Overview Leadership Practicum intro Brainstorm pt 1 ideas	Lesson Overview I do: Discuss stress We do: Video on Chronic Stress You do Partners Assign physiological reason to de-escalation strategies

1-7 th period		Assessment of learning: Observation and handout	Assessment of learning: Observation and handout	Assessment of learning	Assessment of learning: Observation and handout	Assessment of learning: Observation and handout
1-7 th period		Resources: Handout Video	Resources: Handout Article	Resources: Grade check paper, Journal prompt	Resources: Practicum Packet on TEAMS	Resources: Handout Video
1-7 th period		Differentiation: Students can choose to journal on paper or on TEAMS ADHD student-allowed to operate the power point. Instructions chunked in 10 min segments. Talk to a partner/work in a group for auditory learners Video /Notes for visual students. Highlighters as needed. Breaks after lecture. Students grouped for stations	Differentiation: Students can choose to journal on paper or on TEAMS ADHD student-allowed to operate the power point. Instructions chunked in 10 min segments. Talk to a partner/work in a group for auditory learners Video /Notes for visual students. Highlighters as needed. Breaks after lecture. Students grouped for stations	Differentiation: Students can choose to journal on paper or on TEAMS ADHD student-allowed to operate the power point. Instructions chunked in 10 min segments. Talk to a partner/work in a group for auditory learners Video /Notes for visual students. Highlighters as needed. Breaks after lecture. Students grouped for stations	Differentiation: Students can choose to journal on paper or on TEAMS ADHD student-allowed to operate the power point. Instructions chunked in 10 min segments. Talk to a partner/work in a group for auditory learners Video /Notes for visual students. Highlighters as needed. Breaks after lecture. Students grouped for stations	Differentiation: Students can choose to journal on paper or on TEAMS ADHD student-allowed to operate the power point. Instructions chunked in 10 min segments. Talk to a partner/work in a group for auditory learners Video /Notes for visual students. Highlighters as needed. Breaks after lecture. Students grouped for stations

APPENDIX K

 do-not-reply@cayuse.com
Mon 3/21/2022 9:58 AM
To: Janis L Ulicny; Karen H Larwin





Mar 21, 2022 9:58:08 AM EDT

Karen Larwin
Teacher Ed and Leadership St

Re: Exempt - Initial - 2022-135 Freshman Year Programming and Its Impact on High School Graduation Rate

Dear Dr. Karen Larwin:

Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board has rendered the decision below for Freshman Year Programming and Its Impact on High School Graduation Rate

Decision: Exempt

Selected Category: Category 2.(j). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording).
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Any changes in your research activity should be promptly reported to the Institutional Review Board and may not be initiated without IRB approval except where necessary to eliminate hazard to human subjects. Any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects should also be promptly reported to the IRB.

The IRB would like to extend its best wishes to you in the conduct of this study.

Sincerely,
Youngstown State University Human Subjects Review Board