

2009

A Case Study of the Impact of a High School Advisory Program on Student Behaviors and Relationships

Matthew W. Stover
Gardner-Webb University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education_etd



Part of the [Educational Methods Commons](#), [Educational Psychology Commons](#), and the [Secondary Education and Teaching Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Stover, Matthew W., "A Case Study of the Impact of a High School Advisory Program on Student Behaviors and Relationships" (2009). *Education Dissertations and Projects*. 113.
https://digitalcommons.gardner-webb.edu/education_etd/113

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Education at Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education Dissertations and Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Gardner-Webb University. For more information, please see [Copyright and Publishing Info](#).

A Case Study of the Impact of a High School Advisory Program on Student Behaviors
and Relationships

by
Matthew W. Stover

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2009

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Matthew W. Stover under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

A. Doug Eury, EdD Committee Chair	Date
Victoria Ratchford, EdD Committee Member	Date
Sherry Hoyle, EdD Committee Member	Date
Jackson Rainer, PhD Dean of Graduate School	Date

Abstract

A Case Study of the Impact of a High School Advisory Program on Student Behaviors and Relationships. Stover, Matthew, 2008: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University, School of Education, Databases/Internet/Advisory Programs/High Schools/Student Behaviors

This case study dissertation was conducted to determine the perceptions of teachers and students about the school's advisory program. From 2003 to 2008, the high school had 279 student dropouts out of an average student population of 950. As a result of the student dropouts, the school adopted an advisory program. The studied school created the advisory program to change student behaviors and build student and staff relationships.

The research questions that guided the study were: 1. What was the impact of Check and Connect on student and staff relationships; 2. What was the impact of Check and Connect on monitoring student performance; and 3. What was the impact of Check and Connect on the social skills and behaviors of students. The researcher conducted student and staff surveys and focus groups with teachers to determine their perceptions of the program that was in place for the school years 2006-2008. Data from the three instruments was triangulated to answer the research questions and determine ways to improve the program.

An analysis of the data revealed three different levels of student and teacher perceptions of the advisory program being studied. Both teachers and students perceived that the advisory program had a strong impact on their relationships with one another. However, the teachers and students perceived a moderate impact of the advisory program on monitoring student performance. Finally, the teachers and students perceived that the advisory program had a weak impact on social skills and behaviors.

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter1: Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem.....	1
History of the Advisor/Advisee Program	8
Purpose of the Study and Research Questions.....	13
Definition of Terms.....	13
Summary	14
Chapter 2: Review of Literature	16
Introduction.....	16
High School Reform	19
Small Learning Communities	19
Benefits of Being Small	21
Advisory Programs	23
Success of Advisory.....	29
Relationships.....	33
Summary	36
Chapter 3: Methodology	38
Research Design and Questions.....	38
Research Design and Rationale	39
Answering the Research Questions	39
Participants.....	44
Instruments.....	45
Procedures.....	45
Limitations	47
Summary	48
Chapter 4: Analysis of Findings	49
Student and Teacher Surveys.....	49
Student Survey Results	51
Student Comments	59
Teacher Survey Results.....	63
Teacher Comments	69
Chi-Square Analysis	72
Focus Group Data	73
Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Data.....	75
Triangulation.....	76
Summary of Findings.....	81
Chapter 5: Summary, Findings, Discussion, and Recommendations	82
Findings.....	82
Findings from Chi-Square Analysis.....	86
Discussion	87
Recommendations for Improvement.....	88
Recommendations for Further Studies.....	89
References.....	91
Appendixes	
A Mentor/Mentee Contact Log.....	96

B	Mentor Evaluation Sheet	98
C	Freshman Survey Spring 2007	100
D	Freshman Survey Results Spring 2007	103
E	Check and Connect Student Survey	106
F	Check and Connect Teacher Survey.....	112
G	Focus Group Prompt	118
Tables		
1	High School and LEA Dropout Date	6
2	Frequency of Student Responses to Questions About Student and Staff Relationships (1 and 17).....	51
3	Frequency of Student Responses to Questions Relating to Monitoring Student Performance (2, 15, and 16)	53
4	Frequency of Student Responses to Specific Questions that Relate to Social Skills and Behaviors (3, 18, and 20-22)	56
5	10 th Grade Student Rated Comments from the Survey Questions.....	60
6	11 th Grade Student Rated Comments from the Survey Questions	61
7	12 th Grade Student Rated Comments from the Survey Questions	62
8	Frequency of Teacher Responses to Questions Relating To Student and Staff Relationships (1 and 17)	64
9	Frequency of Teacher Responses to Questions Relating to Monitoring Student Performance (2, 15, and 16)	65
10	Frequency of Teacher Responses to Specific Questions that Relate to Social Skills and Behaviors (3, 18, and 20-22).....	66
11	Rated Teacher Comments from the Survey	69
12	Chi-Square Analysis of Combined Survey Results by Question.....	72
13	Frequency of Themes by Relationships from Teacher Interviews	74
14	Frequency of Themes by Student Performance from Teacher Interviews	74
15	Frequency of Themes by Student Social Skills and Behavior from Teacher Interviews	75
16	What was the Impact of Check and Connect on Student and Staff Relationships?	77
17	What was the Impact of Check and Connect on Monitoring Student Performance?	79
18	What was the Impact of Check and Connect on Social Skills and Behavior?	80

Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

“The alarm has sounded!” (Balfanz, Neild, & Herzog, 2007, p. 28) Leading researchers, Balfanz et al. from Johns Hopkins University, specialists on high school dropout prevention, used these few words to emphasize the fact that, “The United States has a high school graduation crisis” (Balfanz et al., p. 28). Remarkably, this crisis comes when graduation rates are about as high as they have ever been (Balfanz et al.). The reason that the high school dropout rate has gained such significance for high schools stems from the federal government’s involvement in proposing and passing legislation to lower the dropout rate or penalize the schools. In 1994, President Clinton passed Goals 2000. According to that document, 90% of high school students were expected to obtain a high school diploma (United States Department of Education, 2000). However, in 2006, NAEP reported that 11% of students annually were still dropping out of school. Balfanz et al. argued that the pressure from the federal government to decrease dropouts stems from the changing economy of the United States (Balfanz et al.). The loss of jobs for unskilled laborers makes “it practically impossible for individuals lacking a high school diploma to earn a living or participate meaningfully in civic life” (Balfanz et al, p. 28).

Changes in the economy and job market have left high schools with new challenges in readying a work force for the 21st Century. Consequently, there has been a flurry of state and national reports calling for educational reform initiatives to raise academic standards and upgrade the quality of our schools (Ellis, 1990). The question for educators is how do we squelch the epidemic of students dropping out of high school (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morrison, 2006). There is no easy answer. “Policy makers and educators tend to view the mitigating factors in contradictory ways” (Balfanz et al., 2007,

p. 28). While policymakers believe that the revised standards will prevent students from dropping out, educators believe that these policies, while well intended, actually tend to push students to drop out (Balfanz et al.). Balfanz et al.'s research examined the characteristic warning signs of the high school dropout and concluded that policies, or the lack thereof, may be the upshot of the dropout rate. "These students are metaphorically waving their hands and asking for help" (Balfanz et al., p. 28).

Several educational researchers have tried to figure out how high schools can begin to tackle the enormous task of keeping students in school and preparing them for a global economy. Fulk (2003, p. 9) cited a study by Zigmond (1990) involving ninth grade students with learning disabilities. Student responses showed that the freshman year is crucial to the success of the student's high school career. As Fulk theorized, this is true with all students, not just students with learning disabilities. A myriad of reasons explain this phenomenon; yet perhaps the most significant detriment is when a ninth grader is retained and falls behind his other classmates (Fulk).

Reinhard (1997) explained that ninth grade is the "make or break" year in terms of high school success or failure (p. 7). Fulk (2003) made three generalizations about students who fail their classes, "explaining that they are likely to begin questioning their ability to meet graduation requirements, lose interest in school, and consequently drop out of high school" (p. 9). In addition, Catterall (1998) identified the three most common reasons students drop out of school as a dislike for school, an inability to get along with teachers, and, most importantly, failing.

Fulk (2003) explained in his work that the federal government is concerned about the dropout rate primarily due to the effect on unemployment rates. Fulk explained that students who do not complete high school "have twice the unemployment rate of

graduates, in addition to diminished opportunities for post-secondary school or continued training” (p. 9). These statistics explain the reason No Child Left Behind included mandates regarding graduation cohort numbers (United States Department of Education, 2004).

The decision to dropout is a dangerous one for students (Bridgeland et al., 2006). In a 2006 report, entitled “A Silent Epidemic,” it was reiterated that dropouts are much more likely to be unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, in prison, on death row, unhealthy, divorced, and single parents with children who dropout themselves (Bridgeland et al.). The Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which became law in 1994 and was amended in 1996, represented a vast approach for the betterment of “student learning through a long-term, broad based effort to promote coherent and coordinated improvements in the system of education throughout the Nation at the State and local levels” (United States Department of Education, 2000, para. 1). The goals of Goals 2000 were expanded into No Child Left Behind, a bi-partisan legislation that was signed into law by George W. Bush in January 2001. This law addressed dropouts in section 1802 as follows:

1. Challenge all children to attain their highest academic potential; and
2. Ensure that all students have substantial and ongoing opportunities to attain their highest academic potential through school wide programs proven effective in school dropout prevention and reentry. (United States Department of Education, 2004, Section 1802).

Under the guidelines from the No Child Left Behind legislation, it is required by law that high schools institute a program that will help students who are underachieving and the federal government recommends a mentor program under section 1114 B (iii) (aa) of the

law.

In 2004, the federal government requested a study to determine the success of advisor/advisee and their impact on student dropouts. The United States General Accounting Office (GAO), created a guide for implementing advisor/advisee programs. The GAO found four criteria necessary for a successful program (United States General Accounting Office, 2004):

1. Plan programs carefully prior to implementation
2. Develop policies and procedures to effectively manage its programs, including mentor screening and training
3. Ensure program sustainability through marketing
4. Evaluate program outcomes and disseminate their evaluation findings. (p. 1)

The four criteria that were cited by the GAO were used to create advisor/advisee programs across the nation. One such high school in Western North Carolina used these guidelines to develop and implement an advisory program to lower the amount of dropouts from its rural school with a large population of blue collar workers. The studied school lacks intense diversification; in fact 98% of the student population is Caucasian. The school population consisted of 966 students and 69 certified teachers.

A recent survey of 2008 graduates found that every student surveyed felt safe at the school. This school had 10 reportable offenses to the state of North Carolina between 2005 and 2008. D-trak, the school's program for recording disciplinary action, showed that none of those offenses were malicious. The records stated that those reported offenses were the result of students who had brought pocketknives to school, and only forgot to take them out of their pants' pockets. All other acts of discipline between 2005 and 2008 involved tardies, classroom disruptions, tobacco violations and student

altercations. Over 60% of those violations were committed by freshmen. In the 2005-2006 school year, the school had 76 dropouts, a total of 7.9% of their school population, which was 4% higher than North Carolina's dropout rate for that year, and 3% higher than the LEA dropout rate.

As the prior data indicate, the school studied had more dropouts than both the state and LEA. Changing the behaviors of students at the school to keep them from dropping out is a difficult task. This case study examined teachers' and students' perceptions about the advisor/advisee program that was implemented to change student behaviors and lower the dropout rate. In order to change student behaviors, teachers were utilized to mentor/counsel students in both academics and in their social situations. According to Ellis' study in 1990, teachers are qualified to be counselors because they are trained to provide direction, empathize with students, and model excellent interpersonal skills. Furthermore, teachers should sustain positive interaction with their mentees, where in many cases a counselor cannot (Ellis, 1990). In this case, the student population exceeded the limit for the counselors to have a significant impact on changing student behaviors.

The intent of the advisor/advisee program was to reduce the student dropout rate by changing the behaviors of both students and teachers at the high school studied. In the GAO report to the federal government, Tierney and Grossman, who studied a mentoring program in Philadelphia, PA in 1995, found that children who have mentors are more likely to earn higher grades in school and develop healthier social relationships and mentored students are less likely to miss school and initiate the use of drugs and alcohol compared with similar children who do not have mentors (United States General Accounting Office, 2004). The studied high school applied this philosophy to change

student behaviors.

To determine whether or not this advisor/advisee program lowered the amount of dropouts and fulfilled the findings from Tierney and Grossman as reported in the 2004 GAO report, the researcher analyzed the perceptions of teachers and students at this high school. The researcher also evaluated their suggestions to improve the existing program.

The high school in rural Western North Carolina that was studied created an advisor/advisee program to help lower the dropout rate. The program was implemented in the 2006-2007 school year. The problem at this high school, similar to what Balfanz et al. (2007) reported was happening all over the United States, is that too many students are dropping out of high school. The dropout data being examined in this case study go back to the 2000-2001 school year. The data from the table below were published by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

Table 1
High School and LEA Dropout Data

Year	School Dropout Rate	LEA Dropout Rate	NC Dropout Rate
2000-01	34/ 4.9%	178/ 5.44%	22,365/ 3.86%
2001-02	48/ 5.8%	180/ 5.29%	21,046/ 3.52%
2002-03	64/ 6.7%	177/ 4.99%	19,834/ 3.23%
2003-04	62/ 6.3%	177/ 4.77%	20,817/ 3.29%
2004-05	44/ 4.5%	166/ 4.31%	20,944/ 3.23%
2005-06	76/ 7.9%	237/ 4.03%	22,943/ 3.46%

Note. The LEA being studied had a total of three high schools and one alternative school until the 2005-2006 school year. In 2004-2005 a new high school was built and it had its first graduating class in the 2005-2006 school year.

The findings from the data provided by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction show that while the state and local LEA have shown a slow decline in the dropout rate since 2000, the school being studied has shown an increased rate of dropouts. In the 2005-2006 school year, the state of North Carolina published a dropout report for the people and the federal government, in accordance with NCLB. The report data proved that the dropout rate was improving in the state of North Carolina. Out of the 146 LEA's and Charter Schools only 47 of them reported a decline in the number of dropouts from the 2004-05 school year. The high school studied was not one of the high schools in the state that showed a decline in dropouts.

The total number of students dropping out of high school from the school being studied in six school years totaled 328 students. The total number of students that dropped out of the entire LEA amounted to 1,115 total students. The school being studied in this case study accounted for almost 30% of the total number of students who dropped out of the LEA from 2000 to 2006.

As the data indicate, the number of students dropping out of this high school is a significant problem. The research by Balfanz et al. (2007) indicated that "the best thing a high school can do to keep students on track to graduation is to develop a comprehensive set of strategies that include attention to climate, curriculum, and credit accumulation" (p. 31). As indicated in the findings above, the program at this high school was based upon the researched methods according to the GAO. The researcher used teacher/student surveys accompanied with teacher focus groups to measure the success of this program.

The study utilized a mixed method case study design to determine if the advisor/advisee program adopted by this high school had created stronger relationships between students and teachers. Suggestions on improving the program have been

included in Chapter 5 from the qualitative and quantitative data. The qualitative research of the study was conducted through focus groups in which the responses were then narrowed down into themes. The quantitative research part of the study was completed through surveys which were given to both teachers and students. The researcher analyzed the data for common themes in an effort to determine the perceptions of the students and teachers to better the program for the future.

History of the Advisor/Advisee Program

The original ninth grade mentor program started at this high school in the spring of the 2006 school year. The school wanted to lower the number of dropouts and increase student achievement by monitoring student achievement with progress reports. In the summer of 2006, the assistant principal of instruction and a lead teacher began to create a mentoring program for this high school. The program was founded on research that proved that students drop out in the ninth grade. The first program created and implemented was simply called “The Ninth Grade Mentoring Program.”

A notebook was created for the teachers who were chosen to be mentors. The entire certified staff was involved except the principal, one assistant principal, athletic director, and yearbook director. Each teacher was assigned five to eight students and met monthly with their students. Students were selected in alphabetical order and their names were placed on a mentoring sheet in the teacher’s notebook.

The creators of the original ninth grade mentor program offered training to the mentors before implementation. Before the school year started, mentoring training took place with all the teachers who would be mentors. The training was conducted by the assistant principal of instruction. The training consisted of going over the mentoring book that was created for each teacher and explaining the purpose of the program, which was

to monitor ninth grade students, and establish a relationship with them to keep them involved and in school. The research used to create the program came from a high school reform movement led by the Gates foundation, conducted by lead researcher, Linda Darling-Hammond. She completed research on forming relationships in school to create a stronger student-teacher bond. All of her research proved that a small and nurturing environment would help solve the low achievement of high school students and lower the amount of students dropping out of school (Darling-Hammond, 1997).

The process was set up so that one time per month teachers would pull students out of class to meet with them individually, in the hallway, to monitor grades, attendance, discipline, and to discuss pertinent information or upcoming events. Each month had different themes for the teachers, but the same process was supposed to take place. The only difference in each monthly meeting was what the teacher would discuss with the student. The mentor/mentee contact log (Appendix A) listed suggested topics of discussion. For example, in the month of December, the teacher was to discuss the process of studying for final exams and the exam schedule. The purpose of individual teacher discussions with the mentees was to keep the student aware of what was going on in school and to provide an outlet to discuss problems or any anxiety experienced in the first year of high school.

To monitor the program, lead teachers from each department checked the notebooks each month to ensure that the teacher/mentors were completing the task. A total of seven lead teachers were in place to check notebooks.

At the end of the 2006-2007 school year, the team created a mentor evaluation sheet (Appendix B) and a student survey (Appendix C) to measure the perceptions of the mentors and students from the first year of the mentor program. The surveys were

distributed to the mentors in their mailboxes, and the students completed their surveys in homeroom.

Based upon the results of both the mentor and student surveys, a new program was created. Below are the findings and reasons for the change to the Ninth Grade Mentoring Program.

1. Mentors did not like the way the program was set up. They felt that they were pulling students out of classes they were failing, to talk to them about why they were failing that class.

2. Mentors did not feel comfortable interrupting classes to pull students into the hall.

3. Three out of sixty mentors did not complete the mentoring tasks on a regular basis.

4. Over 55% of the freshmen that took the survey did not feel that the program held them accountable for their grades (Appendix D). (Mentors had to communicate between teachers to find out the grades of their mentees.)

5. Over 40% of the freshmen who took the survey did not feel that they had built a relationship with their mentor.

As a result of the findings, and with an increased push by the central office to lower the number of dropouts from the 2005-2006 school year (76), the program was overhauled and developed into something different. The new program that was replicated after the “Check and Connect” research-based model from the University of Minnesota was carried out by the new assistant principal of instruction in the summer of 2007. The assistant principal felt that in order for the program to be successful, teachers needed to see that the program was modeled after a research-based program that was already

implemented in other schools.

The Check and Connect program was written and published in 1996 (Evelo, Sinclair, Hurley, Christenson, & Thurlow, 1996) and was supported by the United States Department of Education. The purpose as stated in the Check and Connect manual by Evelo et al. is as follows:

Check: The purpose for this component is to systematically assess the extent to which students are engaged in school, or, conversely, are exhibiting signs of school withdrawal.

Connect: The purpose of this component is to respond on a regular basis to students educational needs according to their type and level of risk for disengagement from school. Students showing high-risk behaviors receive additional intensive interventions. (p. 31)

The data collected in the Check and Connect schools were compared to other schools that did not use the Check and Connect program. Three funded groups for Check and Connect are located in Los Angeles, Minneapolis, and Seattle. After 3 years of data, the report found that “students who were in the Check and Connect monitoring and school engagement procedure were twice as likely to be on-track for graduation as their peers in comparison groups” (Evelo et al., p. 24).

The Check and Connect program was adapted to fit the needs of the high school studied. In the 2007-2008 school year, all teachers and administrators served as mentors. Also, every student in the building was randomly assigned a mentor. The Check and Connect program met twice a month in a classroom setting for 20-minute sessions. Each certified staff member was assigned to 10-15 students. Each bi-monthly meeting was either a “Check” meeting or a “Connect” meeting.

The “Check” meeting was implemented by the assistant principal of instruction. Each month, every teacher in the school sent a “D/F” grade report to the assistant principal of instruction (API). The API then compiled the information and sent it back out to the staff. This ensured that all teachers had the grades of each of their mentees. The student information manager operator created an attendance report that the API collated and distributed to the teachers. Finally, the API ran a report from D-trak, which listed the students who were seen in the office, the problem that they had, and the consequence given. During the “Check” time, the advisor counseled and discussed the grades, attendance, and discipline of their mentees.

The “Connect” part was strictly a relationship building piece. The Check and Connect model provided several activities that could be used to develop a relationship between advisees and advisors. For example, “ice breakers,” and lessons on decision making and communication skills were distributed to mentors to use during “Connect” sessions. Research indicates that Check and Connect will help relationships and keep students engaged in school (Evelo et al., 1996).

Mathematica, Policy Research Inc. (1999) policy brief concurred with the aforementioned authors, and explained dropout prevention programs in two ways: the frustration-self-esteem model and participation-identification model. The frustration-self-esteem model showed that students who have low academic performance have a higher self-perception problem, which in turn increased their absence rates. The “Connect” part of the new advisory model provided students at least one person in the school with whom they can build a strong relationship. The other model is the participation-identification model. The model showed that students who participate in school activities were more likely to value the school’s mission and vision. The participation-identification model

also showed that students who do not participate in school activities begin to feel alienated. Fulk (2003) referenced the explanation of Mathematica, Policy Research Inc. (1999) that taken together, these models predict that students were less likely to drop out if they began to experience academic success and/or became connected to adults and peers within the school. The goal of Check and Connect is to build relationships and to decrease student dropouts.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this mixed method case study was to determine if the advisory program currently in place builds stronger student/teacher relationships and changes student behaviors. In addition, the researcher was able to compile the data found and offer suggestions based on the perceptions of both the teachers and the students on how to create an even stronger advisor/advisee program. The following questions guided this study:

1. What was the impact of Check and Connect on student and staff relationships?
2. What was the impact of Check and Connect on monitoring student performance?
3. What was the impact of Check and Connect on social skills and behaviors?

Definition of Terms

No Child Left Behind (NCLB). A program developed by the federal government to guarantee the success of all students. It was signed into law in 2001.

Check and Connect. Research based program funded by the Department of Education conducted through the University of Minnesota. The program was designed and implemented in 1996.

Dropout. Term used for a student who does not complete high school and does

not earn a high school diploma.

Dropout Rate. Number of students not completing school out of a particular school, LEA, or state, in a given year. The rate is calculated by dividing the number of dropouts into the number of students that began the school year in the school or LEA.

LEA. Local Education Association. This can be a county or school district.

Advisor. A teacher or administrator who looks after the well-being of a student in regards to academics, attendance, discipline, and social education.

Case Study. Yin (1984) defined a case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.

D-trak. A computer software program that tracks a student's discipline history each year. The state of North Carolina recognizes this program for yearly discipline gathering.

Summary

Chapter 1 included the background of the problem, which included discussions and research from educational specialists that proved that the United States has a high school dropout problem. The problems that are occurring across the nation are the same problems occurring at the high school that was studied. In addition, Chapter 1 includes the history of the program that was put into place, Check and Connect, and how the program was implemented. The purpose of the study and the research questions were identified. Finally, definitions have been included to benefit the reader.

Chapter 2, the review of literature, will include relationships to this study's problem, purpose, interventions, and proposed research methods which will conclude the chapter. The review of literature was presented with six different sections: high school reform, small learning communities, benefits of being small, advisory programs,

successful advisory programs, and relationships.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

“High School reform has moved to the top of the education policy agenda, which commands the attention of the federal government, governors, superintendents, philanthropists, and the general public,” stated Janet Quint who has put together lessons from research on high school reform (Quint, 2006, p. 1). Quint goes on to state that all of the professionals mentioned above are alarmed by stubbornly high dropout rates by disadvantaged young people who attend urban and rural high schools in the South (Quint). The high school in this study falls into this alarming category.

The need for comprehensive high school reform is apparent: Too many students leave school without developing the proficiencies required for success and the dropout rate remains unacceptably high (Lachet, 2001). Mary Lachet, the author of “Data-Driven High School Reform: The Breaking Ranks Model,” pointed out that the inadequacy of high schools is unsettling, especially given that it is an institution that touches almost every adolescent in the United States.

Linda Darling-Hammond, a researcher for the Bill Gates Foundation, wrote that the most effective schools have close, sustained relationships among teachers and students (Darling-Hammond, 2002). Although unfortunate, Hammond explains that most high schools in the United States have between 2,000 and 4,000 students. Hammond says this is the reason that Bill and Melinda Gates began a foundation that supports the effort of creating smaller, more personalized schools. Furthermore, Hammond says that the foundation has already invested more than \$250 million dollars in grants across the United States for creating small schools and transforming large high schools to a schools-within-a-school model. The high school studied has tried to create a smaller environment

with their advisor/advisee program.

The United States Department of Education reported from 2001 to 2005 that over 10% of students 16 to 24 years old dropped out of high school each year (United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). One reason so many students may be dropping out of high school is because our high schools were developed over a 100 years ago for the purpose of an industrialized society, where the emphasis was placed on time served rather than rigor, relevance, and relationships (Lachet, 2001). According to Tony Wagner, a director of the Change Leadership Group at Harvard Graduate School of Education, another reason an overwhelming amount of students may be dropping out of high school is because students have no personal relationship with their teachers. Wagner is also the senior advisor to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and he stated that most teachers see over 150 students a day. He argued that teachers and students become anonymous and get lost in an ocean of bodies; most teachers do not even know their colleagues' names (Wagner, 2003). According to Richard Owens, a superintendent in California, students need to have personalization because 21st century students no longer have extended family to relate to or even follow. In schools as large as 4,000 students, one might ask how personalization can take place (Darling-Hammond, 2002). Owens, as cited in Wagner (2003), implied that the number one item essential to reforming high schools is a small, caring, and personalized community.

Bridgeland et al. (2006), who wrote "The Silent Epidemic," argued that the dropout data are actually lower than reported. The authors' data came from surveys taken by high school dropouts combined with dropout data from the Bureau of Census surveys. The authors also used research data that was conducted by Peter D. Hart, which consisted

of four focus groups of ethnically and racially diverse 16-24 year olds. The groups were held in Philadelphia and Baltimore in August 2005. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with 467 students who had dropped out of high schools in 25 different large cities, suburbs, and small towns.

Bridgeland et al. (2006) stated that the national graduation rate is between 68-71%, which means that over one-third of the high school population fails to graduate in the United States. Unfortunately, the consequences for dropouts are high according to Bridgeland et al.:

High school dropouts, on average, earn \$9,200 less per year than high school graduates, and about \$1 million less over a lifetime than college graduates.

Students who drop out of high school are often unable to support themselves; high school dropouts were over three times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed in 2004. They were twice as likely to slip into poverty from one year to the next. And there even seems to be a correlation with education and good health: at every age range, the more education, the healthier the individual.

Among Americans over 45, college graduates are twice as likely as dropouts to report being in excellent health. (p. 2)

There is no single reason why students drop out of high school according to Bridgeland et al. (2006), but they do say that there were several recurring themes in their surveys from dropouts across the nation. “The respondents of the survey reported different reasons such as a lack of connection to the school environment, a perception that school is boring, feeling unmotivated, academic challenges, and the weight of real world events” (Bridgeland et al., p. iii).

High School Reform

As the “Silent Epidemic” study stated (Bridgeland et al., 2006), there is no one reason why students drop out of high school. A report issued from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation entitled “High Schools for the New Millennium” stated that American high schools must change the way they look and create high quality and dynamic education (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2006). The Foundation reported that the new three R’s of rigor, relevance and relationships are most often found in smaller schools, which are producing better test scores and more college-ready students. The National Conference of State Legislatures (2008) defined high school reform as the following: “high school redesign is specifically designed to emphasize rigor, relevance, and relationships, that can reduce the achievement gap, increase graduation rates, improve access to post-secondary education, and ultimately help students succeed as economically secure adults” (p. 4). The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation awards schools across the country grants to improve the rigor, relationships, and relevance at the high school level (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation). In 1996, the National Association of Secondary School Principals created a document called “Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution.” The document was created to change American high schools into 21st Century high schools. If one theme could be extracted that is overarching and paramount, it is a message that high schools of the 21st Century must be much more student-centered and above all much more personalized in programs, support services, and intellectual rigor (NASSP, 1996).

Small Learning Communities

Owen, Cooper, and Brown (2002) argued that small learning communities are a powerful innovation in reforming large, comprehensive high schools, which have become

impersonal and unresponsive to the changing needs of their students. One way that students can become engaged in the curriculum and lower the number of dropouts from the traditional high school is to create small high schools and small learning communities (Cohen, 2001). Cohen stated there are five C's found in effective learning communities:

1. Caring relationships
2. Cognitive challenges
3. Culture of support
4. Community membership
5. Connections to high-quality postsecondary learning.

McAndrews and Anderson (2002) concurred with the five C's, stating that as a result of such large secondary schools, growing numbers of educators, parents, and others in the field are becoming attracted to the idea of downsizing the mega high schools and making them more personal with small learning communities.

A growing number of researchers continue to suggest that there is evidence that arranging a large high school into small parts boosts student academic scores and their sense of wellbeing (Oxley, 2001). Additionally, Oxley (2005) stated that the small size makes the school interdependent with site-based management, interdisciplinary teacher teams, as well as collaborative planning. The desired effect is strong individual identity for students as well as a developed sense of belonging.

Students are stating over and over that the most important part of their education is relationships (Poplin & Weeres, 1992). Poplin and Weeres explained that students' largest complaint was being ignored by teachers; they felt their best when teachers showed them care and attention. Oxley (2005) stated that small learning communities put teachers in positions to build a more authentic relationship with their students.

Consequently, without the autonomy and flexibility of teachers in small learning communities, it becomes difficult to create assignments and relationships with students that are meaningful (Oxley).

Wasley and Lear (2001) argued that size alone does not make small schools work, rather it is the infrastructure that is put into place. One of the advantages of being small is the relationships that are built between teachers and students (Wasley & Lear). Wasley and Lear stated:

All students deserve schools where they can be free from worry about personal safety and where they can be confident that their teachers and administrators know them well and can guide their development of skills and knowledge. (p. 21)

Benefits of Being Small

Parents, teachers, and administrators have seen how small schools better engage students and improve students' academic performances according to Wasley and Lear (2001). A student who was forced to begin attending a small school said the following:

When my teachers asked me to go to a smaller school within my high school, I thought they were trying to ruin my social life. If I went to school for three years with the same kids, especially a bunch of puny boys all my own age, how was I ever going to get a date? But I agreed to do it because I liked the teachers. We had the same four teachers for our core subjects for three years, and we got to know the other kids really well. The teachers started telling me that I was a good writer. Then the kids did, too. And the teachers pushed me-hard- and eventually I started helping other kids. Before long I also began to believe I could be a good writer, and now I am going to the University of Arkansas on a journalism scholarship. (Wasley & Lear, p. 21)

Quint, a researcher for the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC), found that small learning communities and faculty advisory systems can increase students' feelings of connectedness to their teachers as well as improve student achievement (Quint, 2006). Quint's study of small learning communities across the United States led to the following findings:

1. Student survey data suggest that small learning communities make students feel known and cared for by their teachers.
2. Small learning communities that were studied showed an increase in student attendance and a reduction in the dropout rate.
3. Freshman academies (a small learning community) played a key role in helping more ninth-graders succeed.
4. Faculty advisory systems can give students a sense that there is an adult in the school looking out for their well-being.
5. Implementing small learning communities is likely to improve the climate of the schools. (pp. 3-4)

McAndrews and Anderson (2002) stated that few studies have been conducted in a school-within-a-school framework; however, several parallel studies have been conducted in small schools research and the benefits parallel both studies. Additionally, McAndrews and Anderson cited the following benefits of schools within schools:

1. Test scores of students in small schools (400 or less) are consistently higher than those in larger schools.
2. There is a greater sense of belonging in small schools and they foster more of a caring and interpersonal environment.
3. Small schools foster a more aware and involved faculty, which promotes

positive student attitudes.

4. Small schools dropout rate is almost 3% lower than the national average.
 5. Small schools generally have fewer discipline problems than larger schools.
 6. Large schools spend more money per student, as compared to small schools.
- (pp. 2-3)

Vander Ark (2002) stated that small schools tend to have less-invasive security measures, which has shown a decrease in drug sweeps and metal detectors. Metal detectors in small schools can now be replaced with teachers who know every student's name (Vander Ark). Cotton (1996) preceded Vander Ark's findings, stating that research linking school size to social behavior, including classroom disruptions, vandalism, aggressive behavior, theft, and gang activity, is much lower compared to larger schools.

Cohen (2001) listed several attributes of effective learning environments, one of which includes caring, personalized environments where students are well known by at least one faculty member. Additionally, Quint (2006), concurred with Cohen. Quint found that faculty advisories help students feel more connected to school and in turn found that the students' attendance improved in small learning communities.

Advisory Programs

"Breaking Ranks: Changing an American Institution" (NASSP, 1996), directly stated in Chapter 3 the importance of student advisory in every high school. In Chapter 2 of "Breaking Ranks," the authors stated that every teacher will care for their students in the future of education.

Forte and Schurr (1993) defined an advisory group by the following:

An advisor/advisee program is: an effective educational program designed to focus on the social, emotional, physical, intellectual, psychological, and ethical

development of students; a program providing a structured time during which special activities are designed and implemented to help adolescents find ways to fulfill their identified needs; intended to provide consistent, caring, and continuous adult guidance at school through the organization of a supportive and stable peer group that meets regularly under the guidance of a teacher serving as an advisory. (p. 117)

Hyslop (2006), following Forte and Schurr's (1993) definition of advisory programs, stated that high schools need to begin to use advisory groups because in many communities traditional social bonds are weakening, resulting in fewer positive role models for adolescents. Additionally, Hyslop made note of a study by the Big Brothers and Big Sisters organization that said there are fewer families today, more than one in four children are born into a single parent home, and half of the current generation of children will live in a single-parent household for some or part of their childhood (Hyslop).

In most high schools, there are far from enough counselors or other specialists to provide a comprehensive program for a developmental guidance program according to Ellis (1990). Ellis stated that counselors have to spend most of their time with high risk students who have special emotional needs. The problem, Ellis said, is that all students need an adult who they can confide in and who cares about them personally. Myrick and Myrick (1990) stated that the counselor to student ratio was 1:500. Presently most schools have moved to 1:200, but according to Ellis there are still not enough counselors for the students.

One of the most innovative ways, according to Myrick and Myrick (1990), to reach students and put into practice guidance education approaches is to use a teacher

advisory program (TAP). Additionally, Myrick and Myrick offered the following statement:

The future of our nation depends on educational excellence. We need to have more teachers involved in guidance and advisement. TAP is a valid developmental guidance approach which can help young people realize more of their potential as well as strengthen our nation's human resources. (p. 11)

“What would a teacher advisor program involve” (Ellis, 1990, p. 3)? Ellis mentioned several pieces of TAP:

1. Incorporate TAP in the regular curriculum
2. Assign 15-20 students to a teacher
3. Allot 25-30 minutes daily for the groups to meet
4. Devote two sessions a week to developmental guidance
5. Devote sessions to parent and teacher conferences
6. Recommend students for extra support within the school. (p. 3)

Myrick and Myrick's (1990) philosophy is similar philosophy to Ellis'. They added that teachers must have a strong awareness of TAP and must be able to directly relate to students and their problems. The following are suggestions about TAP by Myrick and Myrick:

1. TAP works best when it is scheduled every school day, but cannot meet less than two times a week.
2. Provide a developmental guidance curriculum
3. Prepare teachers in guidance and interpersonal skills
4. Provide Visible administrative support
5. All stakeholders evaluate and assess the TAP. (p. 35)

Sinner (2004) was a proponent of advisory programs; he argued that the success of every school day depends on personal relationships. Consequently, he felt that a dysfunctional relationship will diminish the capacity for learning and teaching (Sinner). He also stated that advisories address important, basic needs that are required for each student to be successful--conditions that lead to effective relationships.

Ellis (1990) offers key points of the curriculum that need to be offered during the advisory period:

1. Study skills
2. Self-assessment
3. Communication Skills
4. Decision-Making and Problem Solving Skills
5. Peer relationships
6. Motivation
7. Conflict Resolution
8. Personal Hygiene
9. Career Awareness and Development
10. Educational Planning
11. Community Involvement. (p. 4)

Sinner (2004) shared some of the same ideas with Ellis. The following are key dimensions for creating and sustaining advisories at the high school level according to Sinner:

1. Purpose: relationship building, career building, and community service
2. Organization: 30 minutes of meeting time a week with 12-15 advisees in each group

3. Content: an advisory curricula that is flexible
4. Assessment: Stakeholders have input on creation and the revising process
5. Leadership: Administrative, teachers, student and parents. (pp. 37-40)

Sinner reiterated that if schools have the prior five key dimensions in place that the school will demonstrate greater respect, joy, and civility; superior student performance; and the many aspects of true community learning.

The United States government requested data on mentoring programs across the United States that received grants. The purpose of the study was to discover if the mandates from No Child Left Behind were working and if the federal government utilized the 50 million dollars assigned to mentoring programs across the nation appropriately. The money was given to different schools based on a grant program. The team from the GAO (2004) used the grant applications and face-to-face interviews to determine the success of the mentoring programs across the United States. The interviews covered the following issues:

1. Mentoring recruitment
2. Mentor training
3. Mentor screening
4. Mentoring approach
5. Goals for the youth
6. Plans for evaluation
7. Spoke with Mentors about their mentoring experience
8. Observed the Mentoring, which included the activities that were conducted. (p. 3)

After the team met with the different school officials from California, Delaware, Florida,

Georgia, Idaho, Illinois, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, and Wisconsin they reported the following characteristics on advisory programs that had success (GAO):

1. Programs were planned carefully prior to implementation
2. Policies and procedures were developed to manage the program
3. Program sustainability was ensured through marketing
4. Program outcomes were evaluated and evaluation findings were disseminated.

(p. 1)

Tierney, Grossman and Resch's (1995) study entitled, "Making a Difference, An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters," was cited in the GAO (2004) report, which added that "every child who has a mentor is more likely to earn higher grades in school, develop healthier social relationships, and are less likely to miss school and initiate the use of drugs and alcohol compared with similar children who do not have mentors" (GAO, p. 1).

Another study of advisory programs and their successes was completed by Sardo-Brown and Shetlar (1994). They found that advisor/advisee programs can be the same in rural and urban areas, but suggested they mold and personalize the program that would fit their clientele the best (Sardo-Brown & Shetlar). The case study of the rural advisor program consisted of 35-minute advisor sessions daily. Activities were planned for each day of the week, the average advisory size was 18, and teachers kept their students for 3 consecutive years. Sardo-Brown and Shetlar's purpose was to obtain the views of the teachers and students about the advisory program. In order to complete their study, they conducted surveys for both teachers and students. Teachers returned 26 surveys out of a possible 30, and the students turned in 438 surveys out of a possible 505. After the case study was complete, Sardo-Brown and Shetlar stated that when instituting an advisor

program, the following steps should be put in place:

1. Advisor-advisee groups should meet at-least three times a week
2. Groups should remain intact throughout the grade levels
3. All teacher should participate as teacher advisors
4. Continuous in-service training should be provided to teacher advisors
5. Teacher advisors should be integrally involved in the planning and revision of the advisor-advisee program. (p. 23)

Success of Advisory

Myrick and Myrick (1990) reported positive outcomes from implemented TAP's in the state of Florida. The case study of the high schools in Florida was set up in the following fashion: of the 59 schools that applied for the 2.5 million dollars by the state of Florida to implement a mentoring program, 39 high schools were awarded money. The provisions of the grant listed the following:

1. Meeting the needs of disadvantaged and minority students.
2. Not exceeding a ratio of 30 students per one teacher advisor.
3. Having advisors meet a minimum 30 minutes per advisee every six weeks.
4. Having advisors contact parents or guardians of students, especially those struggling academically. (pp. 92-93)

Myrick and Myrick used surveys of the 54 schools that ended up participating in the advisor-advisee program from 1983 to 1988. Results were also tabulated by face-to-face interviews with administrators and teachers from the pilot schools. Myrick and Myrick found that schools that assessed their advisor programs with surveys to parents, students, and teachers to gain input on the program, were more successful than schools that did not. They also found that parent contact, completion of measurable goals (grades,

attendance, and discipline referrals), input from team leaders/steering committees, and administrative interventions with ineffective advisors, led to pilot schools' advisory success.

Myrick and Myrick (1990) cited that credit was given from the TAP schools that the program had a positive impact on student's academic achievement, a reduction in failing grades, and an increase in higher test scores. The report went on to include that TAP was given credit for improving PSAT, SAT, and ACT scores in the pilot schools (Myrick and Myrick). The report also stated that more students took college entrance examinations than prior to TAP being in their pilot schools. Attendance in all the participating schools also was improved. Finally, students who were surveyed in the pilot schools in the Myrick and Myrick report stated an 87% increase in their attitude and the dropout rate was reduced by 13% (p. 97).

The Florida Department of Education became convinced that the pilot schools were showing success according to Myrick and Myrick (1990). Furthermore, they released the following statements about TAP from a pilot school in Florida:

TAP provides an organized vehicle through which to accomplish what great, caring teachers have always been trying to accomplish. At our school, TAP has allowed all of our students to be known. It has allowed our teachers to get to know our students on an individual basis. Advisors maintain close contact with home which might not otherwise occur in most situations. (p. 97)

Sinner (2004) stated that the purpose of advisories is to increase student achievement and progress, decrease student isolation and alienation, and personalize learning in the school environment. Osofsky, Sinner, Wolk, and Miles (2003) conducted a seminar of how to effectively institute advisory groups in schools; they went on to list

that effective advisory programs include more than academic progress:

1. Academic achievement was improved, failing grades was reduced, and there was a rise in high test scores
2. Increase in the amount of students taking college entrance exams
3. Teachers felt they positively influenced students
4. Student attitudes improved
5. Student-teacher relations improved
6. A reduction in the amount of dropouts
7. Communication between parents/guardians improved. (pp. 1-12)

In 2005, a dissertation written by Phyllis C. Meloro, entitled “Do High School Advisory Programs Promote Personalization? Correlates of School Belonging,” examined the relationships between an advisory program and students’ senses of belonging. The high school had approximately 1,114 students and 112 teachers. Students and teachers were given surveys based on a 6-point Likert scale. The data were collected and sorted into frequency tables, mean scores, and descriptive statistics. Two instruments were used to collect the data, the Psychological Sense of School Membership scale, and the School Connection Scale.

Several conclusions were drawn from Meloro’s (2005) study. One of the conclusions was that 81% of advisory teachers reported that they liked leading an advisory group, although 59% also felt the advisory groups were sometimes a waste of time. Furthermore, 92% of advisory teachers reported their students participate in the advisory activities. The majority of teachers felt that they had a good relationship with their students. Finally, Meloro reported a high correlation between teacher’s perception of a good relationship with the student and the student’s belongingness to the school.

In 2007, a dissertation was written by Thomas Wallis entitled “Advisory Programs: A Case Study of Parental Perceptions of a High School Advisory Program.”

The study was conducted by the principal at a high school in Southwest Texas. The author used a qualitative method of research, to interview 12 parents about their perceptions of that high school’s advisory program. The interview consisted of 11 questions, which were open-ended in nature. Wallis’s (2007) study found the following:

1. The advisory program did have an impact on students’ academic progress. The data examined included the parental perceptions and failure data from the 2004-2005 school year. State testing data were also examined and showed an increase from years prior to the implementation of the advisory programs.
2. Healthier relationships were fostered and constructed between the school and home based on the improved communication during the 2005-2006 school year. The parental participants claimed they felt more connected to the school because of the advisory program.
3. It was discovered that the social component of the advisory program implemented was not communicated to parents, and therefore, parents knew little about the goals and objectives of this piece of the program. Using discipline data from the 2005-2006 year did show a decrease in students’ inappropriate behavior. (pp. 112-113)

Wallis acknowledged in his study that the advisory program could only be some of the reason for increased student achievement, a decrease in discipline, and an increase in student attendance.

Many changes need to take place to increase graduation rates and bring American high schools into the modern era according to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Furthermore, the “High Schools for the New Millennium” report by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation suggested small schools and advisory programs will “help create the new dynamic high schools of the new millennium” (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2006).

Relationships

“Teachers don’t care about me” is cited in Scott’s (2005) article as being one of the reasons students drop out of school. Scott questioned educators and asked them if they wanted to lower the dropout rate of their school. She then said “the solution can be found in improving relationships between at-risk students and school staff members. Creating an environment where students experience caring, respectful, and encouraging relationships with all students can make a difference for students at-risk of dropping out” (Scott, p. 38). In this section of the review of literature, the reader can expect to read literature that has been researched on building relationships and how that can improve school climate and decrease student dropouts.

Chaney and Degennaro (2005) cited Mill High School in Maryland as being a leader in building relationships with students. This high school was built in 2004 and was created to lower discipline referrals, decrease student dropouts, increase SAT scores and AP enrollment, and increase the amount of students that could be remediated in math and reading to prepare them for college (Chaney & Degannaro). Mill High School built its advisory program around three themes: rigor, relevance, and relationships. Sinner (2004) stated that “the success of every school, and arguably, all other human organizational settings, depends on personal relationships” (p. 37). Chaney and Degennaro recognized the relationship part of the school as one of its major success stories.

Manning (2007) argued that self-concept and self-esteem can boost academic

performance for many students. Additionally, she reports that teachers can promote self-concept by fostering supportive relationships among students. Students' perceptions of the classroom as a caring community are positively related to their academic, social, and global self-esteem (Manning).

Wagner (2001) argued that bad relationships are the first problems that have to be tackled in high school reform. The ultimate solution is creating a collaborative relationship between adults and students (Wagner). Fullan (2001) concurred with Wagner, stating that the single most important factor in a successful change is improving relationships. Additionally, if the relationship remains the same or gets worse, ground is being lost (Fullan).

“Making the Grade: Reinventing America’s Schools,” written by Wagner (2003), has seven factors of influencing student motivation and three of them deal with building relationships:

1. Teachers must know their students well: When high school students were asked to name a way to improve high school, the number one response was getting teachers to know and care about me.
2. Students have an emotional support system: Advisory groups should be set up where students have no more than 15 peers with them and at-least an hour a day to build relationships and have a support system.
3. The school should provide a safe and respectful environment: Advisory groups will help alleviate school discipline and all life’s most important lessons to be taught. (pp. 88-96)

Darling-Hammond (2002) added to Wagner’s philosophy that the most effective schools are those schools that enable close and sustained relationships. Additionally, Darling-

Hammond argued that the more personalized the structure is, the more teachers know their students and the school will see an increase in student achievement, and will have a stronger school climate.

A study by Anfara and Brown (1998) reported that students in advisory groups began coming to school more, got in less trouble, and felt that their advisor cared about whether they succeeded. Students want a teacher who cares about them; unfortunately that element is missing in many schools across the nation (Scott, 2005).

The NASSP (1996) argued that all high schools should be small in size, which would offer all students a teacher who knows them and gives them a personal adult advocate. Poplin and Weeres (1992), in “The Voices: Seven Issues from Inside the Classroom,” quoted a high school student as saying “teachers should get to know their students a little better...I have found that if I know my teacher, I feel more obliged to do their work so I don’t disappoint them. Once my trust is gained, I feel I should work for myself and also for my teacher” (p. 2).

Two dynamics in a student and staff interaction can take place for a student to feel that their teacher does not care about them: adults expressing momentary frustration with sharp tones or connotations, and remarks from staff members that show the student that they have given up on them (Scott, 2005). Poplin and Weeres (1992) quoted a high school student stating to the educational community that “something should be done about teachers. They need to be reviewed more carefully because not all teachers are doing more good than harm and those who are, I believe are not getting enough credit. I see that some teachers don’t care, which is scary because of their influence” (p. 5).

Students experience a type of connectedness and positive relationship that advisories offer in many school settings (Galassi & Gullledge, 1997). Quint (2006)

aligned her reports for high school reform along the premise that schools must create a personalized learning environment. Darling-Hammond (1997) stated in her book “The Right to Learn,” that schools that work and show academic success have in place a policy that structures the school and staff around caring for students.

Manning and Saddlemire (1996) stated that the number one purpose of a high school advisory program should be based around students and their need to have at least one caring adult within their school. Providing students with opportunities to build relationships with staff and students will reflect a positive school culture (Manning & Saddlemire). Feeling connected to other human beings is a basic need of all people (Scott, 2005). Additionally, relationships develop the sense of belonging and motivation that are essential for student success and engagement (Scott).

Summary

Based on the fact that society is changing and societal values are transforming, high schools must begin to change as well. High schools are a pivotal institution in the lives of teenagers and they have the ability to improve the American condition, which is only one of the reasons why high school reform needs to take place (NASSP, 1996). No program or strategy for dropout reduction is more powerful than creating positive teacher and student relationships, and students may not always remember what they were taught, but will always remember how they were treated (Scott, 2005).

The review of literature integrated research from high school reform, small learning communities, successes of small learning communities, advisory programs, successes of advisory programs, and finally relationships and how they correlate with increased student achievement and a decrease in school dropouts. In Chapter 3, the reader will be able to determine how the author will study the advisory program at a high school

in rural Western North Carolina. This study evaluated the Check and Connect program with surveys and focus groups.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In high schools today students are failing to achieve; therefore, the approach to high school must change (Wiggins & McTighe, 2008). Ancess (2003) defined how high school reform should take place: “Students report that caring relationships, characterized by unwavering teacher access, support, and pressure, are the most powerful force in getting them (high school students) to achieve at higher levels and graduate” (p. 4). The combination of thoughts and studies by Wiggins and McTighe and Ancess are the reason why the high school studied has undergone the change to institute an advisor/advisee program.

Research Design and Questions

The purpose of the advisor/advisee program, Check and Connect, is to change student behaviors and create stronger relationships among teachers and students. The creation of stronger relationships was reflected in an overall change in social behaviors. Key social behaviors include attendance, tardies, attitude, decision-making skills, quality of work, higher expectations, homework completion, class preparation, additional work beyond the requirements, motivation to perform better, desire to learn, vision of the future, cooperation, and being on task in class. Therefore, the purpose of this mixed method case study was to determine if the current Check and Connect program was building better relationships among teachers and students. The research questions that were used are as follows:

1. What was the impact of Check and Connect on student and staff relationships?
2. What was the impact of Check and Connect on monitoring student performance?
3. What was the impact of Check and Connect on social skills and behaviors?

In order to answer these key research questions, the researcher incorporated surveys and focus groups. This chapter will include the design and rationale of the study, who was participating in the study, the instruments that were used to gather the data, the procedures of how the instruments were used and finally the limitations of the study.

Research Design and Rationale

This study was a mixed method case study. Stake (1995) defined a case study as an in-depth look at a program, process, or activity over a sustained period of time. Creswell (2002) defined a mixed method research as “a procedure for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study, and analyzing and reporting this data based on a priority and sequence of information” (p. 560). Creswell also stated the history of mixed methods research. In 1970, researchers began to mix qualitative and quantitative methods, and in the 1980’s this type of method became more popular (Creswell). Creswell gives Sieber credit with putting together mixed methods research with advance surveys and data (Creswell). In 1979, “Jick used the combination of surveys, semi-structured interviews, observations, and archival materials to provide a rich and comprehensive picture” (Creswell, p. 561). The purpose of this study was to combine the data from the quantitative study with the data from the qualitative study to reach a conclusion about the effectiveness of the Check and Connect advisory program, which seeks to build stronger relationships between teachers and students.

Answering the Research Questions

The research questions, the impact of Check and Connect on student and staff relationships; the impact of Check and Connect on monitoring student performance; and the impact of Check and Connect on social skills and behaviors, were answered using focus groups and surveys. The surveys were used in a quantitative nature, using a Likert

scale to determine the perceptions of the students and teachers. The surveys for both the teachers and students also included an open-ended response for each question. Students and teachers were able to write specific examples to support their answers to the questions. The purpose of the student and teacher surveys was to assist the researcher in answering the three major research questions.

The researcher created a thematic frequency table for teachers and students based on the open-ended responses for each survey question. Narratives were included to explain the tables. The researcher was able to draw a better conclusion of the perceptions of the students and teachers with the specific examples that were written. The thematic frequency table added more validity to the study because of the added data.

The survey questions were asked on a Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Appendixes E and F). The researcher coded the answer choices from 1-5, making the survey quantitative. One was strongly agree, two was agree, three was neutral, four was disagree, and five was strongly disagree. The students and teachers taking the survey made one choice from A (Strongly Agree) to E (Strongly Disagree). The range of questions in the middle are agree, neutral, and disagree.

A frequency table of the answers was created and presented in Chapter 4. A teacher survey frequency table and a student survey frequency table were also created. The frequency table was used by the researcher to illustrate the occurrences of A, B, C, D, and E for each question on the survey. The responses allowed the researcher to draw conclusions based on the percentage of responses for each question.

The teacher and student surveys (Appendixes E and F) are imbedded with the research questions.

1. What was the impact of Check and Connect on student and staff relationships?

2. What was the impact of Check and Connect on monitoring student performance?

3. What was the impact of Check and Connect on social skills and behaviors?

The student and teacher surveys had 22 questions each. Each question was written the same for the teachers and students. The purpose of the parallel structure of the surveys was to allow the researcher to be able to compare the data from the student and teacher surveys. Questions 1 and 17 directly related to research question number 1: What was the impact of Check and Connect on student and staff relationships? Questions 2, 15, and 16 directly related to research question number 2: What was the impact of Check and Connect on monitoring student performance? Finally, questions 3-14, 18, and 20-22 directly related to research question number 3: What was the impact of Check and Connect on social skills and behaviors? Question number 19, was worded to develop an overall perception of the Check and Connect program from both students and teachers.

A frequency table created from the answers of the student and teacher surveys was sorted by the research questions as stated above. After the results were tallied, the researcher was able to combine the responses from both the student and teacher surveys.

After the data from the surveys were tallied, the researcher combined the positive answers and negative answers and compared the percentages. In this case, positive answers were defined as responses to the survey questions that have led the researcher to believe that the Check and Connect program was building better student and staff relationships, increasing student awareness of their grades and attendance, and finally increasing positive behaviors among the students. The negative answers were defined as the opposite of the positive definition. After the data were collected they were subject to an analysis using chi-square, to determine if there was a significance to the responses.

The teacher and student surveys were analyzed separately. The purpose of the chi-square analysis was to increase the validity of the answers from the survey questions.

Concluding the quantitative research section, the researcher compared the percentages of answers from each student and teacher survey using frequency tables. To determine if the teacher and student surveys had significance, a chi-square analysis was used to analyze those findings. After all of that data was gathered and analyzed the researcher drew conclusions of whether the Check and Connect program was building stronger relationships, monitoring student performance, and changing student behaviors.

The next part of the study used a qualitative research method. Creswell (2003) defined qualitative research as “using multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic, where the researcher goes to the site to conduct the research” (p. 181). The qualitative piece of the study was conducted by using focus groups. The researcher used a proxy to conduct the focus groups in the high school studied. The proxy was used to increase the validity of the findings. The proxy, who had previously conducted focus groups, digitally recorded the sessions. Also, the proxy used additional questions to assist the teachers in answering the questions in order for the researcher to find common themes in the focus groups. After the proxy was finished, the researcher transcribed the sessions, and sent the teachers a copy of the transcribed sessions. The purpose of the researcher sending the transcribed interviews to the teachers was to verify the contents of the focus group discussions.

Finally, the researcher coded and analyzed the data gathered during the focus groups. These data provided evidence related to the three major research questions. Creswell (2003) stated: “validation of findings occurs throughout the steps in the process of research; validity does not carry the same connotations as it does in quantitative

research, nor is it a companion of reliability” (p. 195). Creswell also stated:

The process of data analysis involves making sense out of text and image data. It involves preparing the data for analysis, conducting different analysis, moving deeper and deeper into understanding the data, representing the data, and making an interpretation of the larger meaning of data. (p. 190)

Aligned to Creswell’s (2003) ideas of interpreting data, the researcher was looking for frequencies in the occurrences of themes in the focus group sessions. The themes that the researcher was expecting to extract were based on key words that were repeated by the teachers who were interviewed. Those words or phrases included the following: feeling closer to teachers and/or students, change in student attendance and/or grades, a change in student behavior based on attendance and/or grades.

The frequency of themes that were extracted allowed the researcher to determine the significance of perceived behaviors. Percentages of the themes that were extracted allowed the researcher to prioritize the most prevalent themes. A thematic frequency table was illustrated to show the number of responses to the predetermined themes. The researcher gave a descriptive narrative about the data collected. Following the thematic table, the researcher included an overall strength table by themes. The strengths of the themes were as follows: One response from the focus groups was considered a weak response. Three and four responses of the themes were considered a moderate response. Finally, any theme that was repeated five or more times was considered a strong response. The reoccurrence of the most prevalent themes throughout the study increased the validity of this case study.

The focus group prompt for the teachers was open-ended (Appendix G). Creswell (2003) elaborated that “qualitative research is emergent rather than tightly prefigured” (p.

181). The purpose of the focus group was to give the teachers an opportunity to elaborate on any change in relationships, student performance, and student behaviors.

Participants

In order to determine if the Check and Connect advisory program built stronger relationships as determined by the perceptions of students and teachers, the researcher surveyed the 10th-12th grade students of the high school studied, as well as conducted focus groups with teachers. Ninth grade students were not surveyed because they were only in the high school for a month before the surveys were distributed. The surveys were given to the students and teachers during the Check and Connect period. Only students who were present on that day of school were able to complete the survey. All teachers turned in their surveys to the secretary of the school. She then checked to be sure all surveys were returned. Approximately 700 student surveys and precisely 66 teacher surveys were distributed.

The four focus groups, comprised of four to six teachers, were volunteers. The teachers were interviewed together based on the times they had planning during the fall 2008 school year. As previously stated, the focus groups were conducted by a proxy and recorded, and then the researcher transcribed, coded, and analyzed the sessions.

The teacher population of the school being studied was 66 and the student population was approximately 960. The teacher population was 99% white, all of whom were considered highly qualified teachers. One teacher was Hispanic. The student population was 96% white, in a rural Western North Carolina setting. Also, the student population was comprised of 36% of students receiving free or reduced lunch and 15% of the population were labeled as exceptional children.

Instruments

The researcher used two different types of instruments, surveys and focus group questions. The surveys (Appendixes E and F), quantitative in nature, were created by the researcher. The researcher field tested the surveys at the high school studied in the 2007-2008 school year to ensure their validity and reliability. The surveys given out in the fall of 2008 were slightly modified to make the questions easier for both the students and teachers to understand. Only the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grade students were surveyed because the ninth grade students were not in the Check and Connect program long enough to draw a significant conclusion. Likewise, only teachers who were part of the Check and Connect program during the previous school year participated in the survey and focus groups. The survey group consisted of a minimum of 700 students and 66 teachers. Creswell (2003) explained the number of samples will dictate the validity of the research.

The focus group prompt (Appendix G), qualitative in nature, was coded by themes. The researcher was looking for the following themes: relationships (trust, respect, and open dialogue), student performance (attention, grades, quality of student work) and student behaviors (promptness, attendance, and attitude). As previously stated, the purpose of the focus prompt was to extract the common themes from the sessions and to code and analyze the data to answer the research questions stated on page 38.

Procedures

First, a survey was created for both students and teachers with the research themes embedded throughout the survey. The purpose of the survey was to discover if both students and teachers believed that the Check and Connect program was building stronger relationships. The survey was created by the researcher and was given to students and

teachers at the conclusion of the 2007-2008 school year as a field test. The survey was slightly modified to make the questions easier to read for the students and teachers. The survey was dispersed and collected in the fall of 2008. When the survey was collected, the researcher disaggregated the data by creating a frequency table of number of A's, B's, C's, D's, and E's from the survey (Appendixes E and F). To determine the significance of the responses in the student and teacher survey, the SPSS program was used to calculate the chi-squared values for each survey. The data from the Likert scale surveys (teacher and student) were subject to a chi-square analysis, which was the quantitative part of this mixed method case study. The frequency table displaying the percentages of answers to each question and the chi-square results are displayed in Chapter 4. Narratives were used to explain the disaggregation of the data and draw conclusions from the surveys.

The second part of the mixed method case study was to record the results from the focus group interviews. Focus groups allowed the teachers the opportunity to expand on some of the questions they answered in the survey. The following themes were coded from the interviews given by the proxy: relationships, student performance, and student behavior. The proxy conducted the interviews with teachers only. The focus group prompt was used to capture all of the thoughts from the teachers about the Check and Connect program (Appendix G). The question was open-ended allowing for common themes to emerge from the interviews. During the interviews, the proxy digitally recorded the sessions to ensure validity of the answers. Following the interviews, the researcher transcribed the digitally recorded answers, coded the answers according to the research questions, and finally analyzed the codes. To ensure the validity of the transcribed sessions, the transcriptions were sent to the teachers, so they could verify their comments. The data was illustrated in a frequency thematic table and an overall strength code table

by themes.

After the surveys and focus group data were gathered and the results were tabulated, the researcher used a triangulation strategy to find common themes. Creswell (2002) defined this strategy as to “simultaneously collect both quantitative and qualitative data, merge the data, and use the results to best understand the research questions” (p. 564). Pulling together the common themes from the surveys and focus group interviews, the researcher was able to determine if the Check and Connect program did build stronger relationships, monitor student performance, and change social skills and behaviors. At the end of the case study, the researcher defined the success of the Check and Connect program by strong, moderate and weak. The researcher also made suggestions on how to create a stronger advisor/advisee program in Chapter 5.

Limitations

Creswell (2003) stated “limitations identify potential weaknesses of the study” (p. 148). The mixed method case study did have the following limitations. First, the researcher for this study is the principal of the high school studied. Creswell (1998) stated that the need for a study can be based on personal experience in a particular situation, which is why the researcher feels that this was a productive and useful study for future educators.

The second limitation to this study was that the mentoring program changed throughout its existence. Two major changes took place. The first change that took place was that the high school studied created a bi-monthly schedule to meet with their mentors in the 2007-2008 school year. In the year prior, the teachers met with their mentees during their planning period, pulling the students out of class. The second major change in the 2007-2008 school year provided teachers with the grades, attendance, and

discipline of the students to check before they met with their group. In the prior year, 2006-2007, teachers had to ask those questions of their mentees, which sometimes led to misinformation. In both years, the principal of the school served as a mentor.

Summary

In summary, the researcher conducted a mixed method case study to discover if teachers and students perceptions concurred that relationships were being built in the Check and Connect advisory program. Surveys and focus groups were used to collect data. Frequency tables for both teacher and student surveys were created and the percentages of the answers were compared for positive and negative responses. The researcher used a chi-square analysis to analyze each of the surveys and determined their significance for each question.

After the quantitative research was completed, the researcher also used qualitative research in the form of focus groups. A proxy conducted the focus groups. The interviews were analyzed by finding common themes. The data were illustrated in a thematic frequency table and in an overall strength code table by themes. At the conclusion of the qualitative research, a strategy called “triangulation” was used to compare and contrast the data found from the quantitative research and the qualitative research. The research questions that the researcher answered are as follows:

1. What was the impact of Check and Connect on student and staff relationships?
2. What was the impact of Check and Connect on monitoring student performance?
3. What was the impact of Check and Connect on social skills and behaviors?

Finally, the major limitation of this study was that the researcher is the principal and creator of the Check and Connect program at the high school studied.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Findings

The purpose of this mixed method case study was to determine if the Check and Connect advisory program at the high school studied increased the relationships between students and teachers. In the rural high school in Western North Carolina, the school's goal was to increase student and teacher relationships and then in turn lower the dropout rate of the school. To determine the effectiveness of the Check and Connect program, the researcher used surveys and focus groups of teachers and students to answer the following research questions:

1. What was the impact of Check and Connect on student and staff relationships?
2. What was the impact of Check and Connect on monitoring student performance?
3. What was the impact of Check and Connect on social skills and behaviors?

The purpose of the surveys and focus groups was to determine the perceptions of the students and teachers about the effectiveness of building relationships, monitoring student performance, and judging if students were changing their social skills and behaviors because of the advisory program. After analyzing the data, the researcher offered suggestions on how to improve the Check and Connect advisory program.

Student and Teacher Surveys

The data gathered for this Chapter came from a 22 question, 5-point Likert scale survey for both the teachers and students. Included with the survey questions was a free response category for each question to get specific answers for each (Appendixes E and F). The questions were set up in the survey in the following method: Questions 1 and 17 in both the teacher and student surveys related to building stronger relationships with the Check and Connect program. Questions 2, 15, and 16 related directly to how teachers and

students felt about how the Check and Connect program helped monitor student performance. Questions 3-14, 18, and 20-22 related directly to how teachers and students felt the Check and Connect program changed student behaviors and social skills. Finally, Question 19 related to the overall perception of the Check and Connect program.

The student and teacher surveys were structured in a parallel form, where both surveys asked the same type of question but were worded for the specific teacher or student responder. Surveys were given to the 10th-12th grade students. Surveys were not given to the 9th grade students because they had not been in the Check and Connect program long enough to form a consistent and meaningful perception. There were a total of 268 tenth graders at the high school studied and 174 surveys were returned, which calculated into a 65% return rate. There were a total of 214 eleventh graders and 163 surveys were returned, which calculated into a 76% return rate. Finally, there were 217 senior surveys given, and 148 surveys were returned, which calculated into a 68% return rate. Overall, 485 student surveys were returned out of a possible 699, which calculated into a 69% return rate of student surveys.

Teacher surveys were given to only the teachers that had been participating in the Check and Connect program from the 2007 to 2008 school years. Any first year teacher at the school being studied did not receive a survey. A total of 54 surveys were given out to the teachers, and 41 were returned, which calculated into a 76% return rate.

In both surveys, only some of students and teachers made responses to each survey question. Out of the 54 teacher surveys, a total of 139 comments were made. As for the student surveys, the total number of responses by grade level were as follows: 200 for the 10th grade, 240 for the 11th grade, and 128 for the 12th grade. Those comments were analyzed and gathered by grade level and teacher to be used within this Chapter.

Student Survey Results

In Tables 2-4 questions are sorted from the survey that relates directly to the research questions. The table reflects the 5-point Likert scale, strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neutral (N), disagree (DA), and strongly disagree (SD). Questions 1 and 17 relate directly to the first research question: What was the impact of Check and Connect on student and staff relationships?

Table 2

Frequency of Student Responses to Questions about Student and Staff Relationships (1 and 17)

<i>Question</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>SD</i>
<u><i>10th grade responses</i></u>					
Increased relationship	37	84	42	10	2
Relationship with students	37	67	49	12	7
<u><i>11th grade responses</i></u>					
Increased relationship	37	55	52	12	13
Relationship with students	22	51	58	19	12
<u><i>12th grade responses</i></u>					
Increased relationship	34	47	35	23	17
Relationship with students	15	39	46	29	17

Note: SA is strongly agree, A is agree, N is neutral, DA is disagree, and SD is strongly disagree.

In Table 2, Questions 1 and 17 relate to the connection that was established between the student and the mentor and the student with the other students in the Check and Connect group. In Question 1, the numbers for 10th grade students indicate that 69% of them either strongly agree or agree that they have made a connection with their mentor, whereas 55% of 11th grade students and 52% of 12th grade students either strongly agreed or agreed that they established a connection with their mentors.

Some 10th grade students made comments on their surveys about the connection they established or did not establish with their mentors. Twenty-six comments were made by the students under Question 1, and twenty-one of these comments were positive. The positive comments suggested that their mentor “cares” about them; the students feel they can “talk” to their mentor outside of class. Sample comments are “they check on my grades and attendance,” and “I can talk to my mentor in the hallways” (Anonymous student(s), personal communication, October 21, 2008). The five negative comments can be typified by “not talking to my mentor,” and “I would like to pick my mentor” (Anonymous student(s), personal communication, October 21, 2008).

There were a total of 25 comments made by the 11th graders for Question 1. Fourteen of those comments were positive about the Check and Connect program. Some of the comments consisted of “My mentor helps me,” “We have become friends,” “She is my number one fan,” and “He talks to us on our level” (Anonymous student(s), personal communication, October 21, 2008). The negative comments (11) can be typified by, “I haven’t had the same mentor, so how can I...(have a connection with him/her)” (Anonymous student(s), personal communication, October 21, 2008).

The 12th grade students made 21 total comments for Question 1. Twelve of the total comments made were positive. Some of the positive comments consisted of “I communicate with her,” “She is my favorite teacher,” “We talk and discuss grades,” and “She helps me” (Anonymous student(s), personal communication, October 21, 2008). The negative comments can be typified by “I don’t like my mentor,” “We don’t do anything in here,” “We don’t have a relationship,” and “Check and Connect hasn’t done anything for me” (Anonymous student(s), personal communication, October 21, 2008).

Also in Table 2, Question 17 relates to students establishing a connection with

other students in their Check and Connect group. The numbers indicate that 61% of 10th grade students either strongly agree or agree that they have made a connection with the other students in their Check and Connect group. Whereas 45% of 11th grade students and 37% of 12th grade students either strongly agreed or agreed that they established a connection with the other students in their Check and Connect group.

Table 3

Frequency of Student Responses to Questions Relating to Monitoring Student Performance (2, 15, and 16)

<i>Question</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>SD</i>
<u><i>10th grade responses</i></u>					
Increased thoughts of grades	28	55	70	13	7
Behavior change	23	55	72	11	8
Change in academics, behavior, attendance	25	59	71	12	6
<u><i>11th grade responses</i></u>					
Increased thoughts of grades	26	33	54	31	27
Behavior change	22	39	62	15	16
Change in academics, behavior, attendance	20	39	62	21	17
<u><i>12th grade responses</i></u>					
Increased thoughts of grades	18	38	54	24	23
Behavior change	18	32	51	30	17
Change in academics, behavior, attendance	15	32	48	36	15

Note: SA is strongly agree, A is agree, N is neutral, DA is disagree, and SD is strongly disagree.

Table 3 represents the perceptions of the students toward the Check and Connect program in regards to monitoring student performance. Student survey Questions 2, 15, and 16 relate directly to answering that research question.

The data indicated that 48% of 10th grade students, 34% of 11th grade students, and 35% of 12th grade students either strongly agreed or agreed that they think about their grades more because they are in the Check and Connect program (Question 2). Also, 47% of 10th grade students, 39% of 11th grade students, and 34% of 12th grade students either strongly agreed or agreed that they changed their behavior within their classes because their mentor checked on them (Question 15). Finally, 48% of 10th grade students, 38% of 11th grade students, and 32% of 12th grade students either strongly agreed or agreed that they changed their behavior because their mentor checks on their academics, discipline, and attendance (Question 16).

Under Question 2 for Grades 10-12, a total of 67 comments were made. Of those comments, 31 were positive. Seventeen of the positive comments came from the 10th grade students, eight from the 11th grade students, and twelve from the 12th grade students. The positive comments suggested that because of Check and Connect and their mentor checking on their grades, students did think about their grades more often. The negative comments are typified with a comment more than one student made: "I took care of my grades before Check and Connect."

Question 15 asked the students if they feel like they have changed their behavior in classes because of the Check and Connect program. A total of 15 comments were made by the 10th-12th grade students. Six of those comments were positive. Those comments can be typified with these two quotes: "I make sure I am behaving because my mentor will find out," and "I don't joke or talk as much" (Anonymous student(s), personal communication, October 21, 2008). The negative comments can be typified with these examples: "I have always been a good student," and "I've never had any discipline problems" (Anonymous student(s), personal communication, October 21, 2008).

Question 16 on the student survey asks the students if they feel like their behavior has changed because their mentor checks on their academics, discipline, and attendance. A total of 19 comments were made by the 10th-12th grade students. Seven of those comments were positive; four came from the 10th grade students. Those comments can be typified into: “I have changed my behavior because I don’t want to look bad or make his Check and Connect group look bad” (Anonymous student(s), personal communication, October 21, 2008). The negative comments can be typified by an 11th grade student’s comment, “I always have good behavior even without big brother surveillance” (Anonymous student(s), personal communication, October 21, 2008).

In Table 4, five specific questions are shown that relate directly to the third research question: What is the impact of Check and Connect on social skills and behaviors? The questions that are shown in Table 3 were chosen to summarize Questions 3-14, 18, and 20-22 that relate to the third research question.

Table 4

Frequency of Student Responses to Specific Questions that Relate to Social Skills and Behaviors (3, 18, and 20-22)

<i>Question</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>SD</i>
<u><i>10th grade responses</i></u>					
Changes in behavior	17	54	78	21	6
Increased social skills	24	59	85	17	7
Impact on attendance	28	52	68	14	8
Impact on timeliness to class	20	54	70	17	9
Increased time on task	26	54	69	19	8
<u><i>Overall perception for the 10th grade</i></u>					
C-N-C is beneficial	40	63	50	16	4
<u><i>11th grade responses</i></u>					
Changes in behavior	19	24	62	35	25
Increased social skills	25	36	61	24	13
Impact on attendance	25	25	64	25	23
Impact on timeliness to class	21	31	62	24	22
Increased time on task	22	31	54	22	21
<u><i>Overall perception for the 11th grade</i></u>					
C-N-C is beneficial	27	36	58	19	15
<u><i>12th grade responses</i></u>					
Changes in behavior	18	23	36	40	24
Increased social skills	16	26	53	33	15
Impact on attendance	14	28	45	36	17
Impact on timeliness to class	14	22	51	38	19
Increased time on task	14	17	58	37	15
<u><i>Overall perception of the 12th grade</i></u>					
C-N-C is beneficial	17	30	46	35	16

Note: SA is strongly agree, A is agree, N is neutral, DA is disagree, and SD is strongly disagree.

The 10th grade student data indicated that for Questions 3-14, a minimum of 36% of students answered neutral to changes in behavior, attitude, decision making, quality of work, higher expectations, completing more of their homework, preparing better for class, doing more than was required, being motivated, desiring to learn, having a vision of their future, and changing their cooperation because of the Check and Connect program. The data for Question 18 indicated that 44% of 10th grade students answered neutral to their social skills becoming better because of the activities that their mentor completes with them during Check and Connect. The data for Questions 20-22 indicated that an average of 31.3% of 10th grade students agreed that because of Check and Connect, their attendance has improved, their timeliness to class has improved, and overall, they have been more on task in school since the inception of the Check and Connect Program. However, the data also indicated that 39.3% of 10th grade students also answered Questions 20-22 as neutral. Overall, the data for Questions 20-22 indicated that an average of 9% of students disagreed, and an average of 5% strongly disagreed.

The 11th grade student data indicated that for Questions 3-14, a minimum of 33% of students answered neutral to changes in behavior, attitude, decision making, quality of work, higher expectations, completing more of their homework, preparing better for class, doing more than was required, being motivated, desiring to learn, having a vision of their future, and changing their cooperation because of the Check and Connect program. The data for Question 18 indicated that 38% of 11th grade students answered neutral to their social skills becoming better because of the activities that their mentor completed with them during Check and Connect. The data for Questions 20-22 indicated that an average of 20.6% of 11th grade students agreed that because of Check and Connect, their attendance has improved, their timeliness to class has improved, and

overall, they have been more on task in school since the inception of the Check and Connect Program. However, the data also indicated that 38.3% of 11th grade students also answered Questions 20-22 as neutral. Overall, the data for Questions 20-22 indicated that an average of 15% of students disagreed, and an average of 14% strongly disagreed.

The 12th grade student data indicated that for Questions 3-14, a minimum of 26% of students answered neutral to changes in behavior, attitude, decision making, quality of work, higher expectations, completing more of their homework, preparing better for class, doing more than was required, being motivated, desiring to learn, having a vision of their future, and changing in their cooperation because of the Check and Connect program. The data for Question 18 indicated that 37% of 12th grade students answered neutral to their social skills becoming better because of the activities that their mentor completes with them during Check and Connect. The data for Questions 20-22 indicated that an average of 15.6% of 12th grade students agreed that because of Check and Connect, their attendance has improved, their timeliness to class has improved, and overall, they have been more on task in school since the inception of the Check and Connect Program. However, the data also indicated that 36% of 12th grade students also answered Questions 20-22 as neutral. Overall, the data for Questions 20-22 indicated that an average of 26% of students disagreed, and an average of 12.5% strongly disagreed.

The data for Question 19 in Table 3 were different from 10th, 11th, and 12th grades. The question asks students if they felt that overall the Check and Connect program was beneficial to them as a person at the school being studied. Twenty-three percent of 10th grade students strongly agreed with that statement, whereas, 17% of 11th graders and 12% of 12th grade students strongly agreed with that statement. The data indicated that an average of 59%, 40%, and 33%, respectively of 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students either

answered strongly agree or agree with Question 19. Less than 11%, 22%, and 35%, respectively of 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students answered disagree or strongly disagree with Question 19.

Student Comments

As stated prior, the student and teacher surveys did allow a free response under each survey question. The free response area on the survey was entitled “specific examples.” Table 5 is designed to show the positive and negative comments by question made by the 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students from their surveys. Positive comments are defined as any comment that is favorable to the Check and Connect advisory program. A negative comment is defined as any comment that was unfavorable to the Check and Connect advisory program. A neutral comment is defined as a random comment by the student that had nothing to do with the question or the Check and Connect program. The three themes of positive, negative, and neutral are coded as the following in Table 5: strong, moderate, and weak. Strong is defined as 20 or more responses, moderate is defined as 10-19 responses, and weak is defined as 1-9 responses.

Table 5

10th Grade Student Rated Comments from the Survey Questions

<i>Common Themes</i>	<i># of times</i>	<i>Strength of theme</i>
<u><i>Questions relating to student and teacher relationships (1 and 17)</i></u>		
Positive	28	Strong
Negative	6	Weak
Neutral	3	Weak
<u><i>Questions relating to monitoring student performance (2, 15, and 16)</i></u>		
Positive	24	Strong
Negative	14	Moderate
Neutral	1	Weak
<u><i>Questions relating to social skills and behaviors (3, 18, and 20-22)</i></u>		
Positive	8	Weak
Negative	19	Moderate
Neutral	4	Weak

The data in Table 5 for 10th grade student comments indicated that 28 of 37 comments were positive and were made pertaining to building a relationship with their mentor or their fellow students (Questions 1 and 17). For questions pertaining to monitoring student performance (2, 15, and 16), the data indicated that a total of 39 comments were made and 24 of those comments were positive. For questions pertaining to the impact of Check and Connect on students social skills and behaviors (3-14, 18, and 20-22), the data indicated that a total of 109 comments were made by 10th grade students.

Out of the 109 total comments made, 41 comments were positive. Finally, the strength of themes indicated that for questions relating to building student and staff relationships and monitoring student performance, the data indicated a strong theme for positive responses.

Table 6

11th Grade Student Rated Comments from the Survey Questions

<i>Common Themes</i>	<i># of times</i>	<i>Strength of theme</i>
<u><i>Questions relating to student and teacher relationships (1 and 17)</i></u>		
Positive	16	Moderate
Negative	21	Strong
Neutral	3	Weak
<u><i>Questions relating to monitoring student performance (2, 15, and 16)</i></u>		
Positive	12	Moderate
Negative	24	Strong
Neutral	3	Weak
<u><i>Questions relating to social skills and behaviors (3, 18, and 20-22)</i></u>		
Positive	9	Weak
Negative	35	Strong
Neutral	5	Weak

The data in Table 6 for 11th grade student comments indicated that 16 of 30 comments were positive and were made pertaining to building a relationship with their mentor or their fellow students (Questions 1 and 17). For questions pertaining to monitoring student performance (2, 15, and 16), the data indicated that a total of 39 comments were made and 12 of those comments were positive. For questions pertaining

to the impact of Check and Connect on students social skills and behaviors (3-14, 18, and 20-22), the data indicated that a total of 152 comments were made by 11th grade students. Out of the 152 comments made, 22 were positive. Finally, the data indicated the strength of themes for all three research questions were strong for the negative responses.

Table 7

12th Grade Student Rated Comments from the Survey Questions

<i>Common Themes</i>	<i># of times</i>	<i>Strength of theme</i>
<u><i>Questions relating to student and teacher relationships (1 and 17))</i></u>		
Positive	13	Moderate
Negative	13	Moderate
Neutral	0	No response
<u><i>Questions relating to monitoring student performance (2, 15, and 16))</i></u>		
Positive	8	Weak
Negative	15	Moderate
Neutral	0	No response
<u><i>Questions relating to social skills (and behaviors (3, 18, and 20-22))</i></u>		
Positive	2	Weak
Negative	19	Moderate
Neutral	1	Weak

The data in Table 7 for 12th grade student comments indicated that 13 of 24 comments were positive and were made pertaining to building a relationship with their mentor or their fellow students (Questions 1 and 17). For questions pertaining to monitoring student performance (2, 15, and 16), the data indicated that a total of 23

comments were made and 8 of those comments were positive. For questions pertaining to the impact of Check and Connect on students' social skills and behaviors (3-14, 18, and 20-22), the data indicated that a total of 72 comments were made by 12th grade students. Out of the 72 comments made, 18 were positive. The data describing the strength of the themes for the three research questions was moderately negative.

Teacher Survey Results

In Tables 8, 9, and 10, the survey question numbers are identified, along with a frequency distribution of the number of teachers who answered strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neutral (N), disagree (DA), and strongly disagree (SD). A total of 54 teacher surveys were given out and 41 total teacher surveys were returned. The return rate of the teacher surveys was 76%. The teacher surveys were parallel in form to the student surveys; therefore, Questions 1 and 17 are formatted to answer the first research question: What was the impact of Check and Connect on student and staff relationships? Questions 2, 15, and 16 were formatted to answer the second research question: What was the impact of Check and Connect on monitoring student performance? Finally, Questions 3-14, 18, and 20-22 were formatted to answer the third research question: What was the impact of Check and Connect on social skills and behavior? Question 19 of both the student and teacher surveys is an overall perception question of the Check and Connect advisory program.

Table 8

Frequency of Teacher Responses to Questions Relating to Student and Staff Relationships (1 and 17)

<i>Question</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>SD</i>
Increased relationship	5	22	8	0	2
Relationship with students	4	22	5	2	4

Note: SA is strongly agree, A is agree, N is neutral, DA is disagree, and SD is strongly disagree.

In Table 8, Questions 1 and 17 directly related to how the teacher perceived the relationship that was built with their mentees and how their mentees built relationships with each other. The data indicated that 73% of teachers felt they had made a connection and built a relationship with their mentees (Question 1). For Question 17, the data indicated that 70% of teachers felt that their Check and Connect students made a connection with each other. Like the student survey, teachers also had a free response area located under each survey question. The area was entitled “specific examples.” One teacher wrote, “I had the opportunity to talk to students that I wouldn’t normally have a chance to see” (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Another teacher commented, “Some students opened up to me with issues at home and school” (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). One teacher commented that their students “seem to enjoy each other’s company” (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008).

Table 9

Frequency of Teacher Responses to Questions Relating to Monitoring Student Performance (2, 15, and 16)

<i>Question</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>SD</i>
Increased thoughts of grades	3	12	14	8	1
Behavior change	2	17	13	7	1
Change in academics discipline, and attendance	3	17	13	7	1

Note: SA is strongly agree, A is agree, N is neutral, DA is disagree, and SD is strongly disagree.

In Table 9, Questions 2, 15, and 16 directly relate to students' grades, behavior, and performance being monitored by the teachers. The data indicated for Question 2, that 39% of teachers either strongly agreed or agreed that they felt like their students grades had improved since the inception of the Check and Connect program. Thirty-six percent of teachers answered neutral to Question 2, and 24% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed. Question 15 related to the teachers' perceptions of their mentees' behavior changing because they check up on them. Forty-six percent of teachers either agreed or strongly agreed with that question. Also, for Question 15, 20% of teachers either disagreed or strongly disagreed with that question.

Finally, Question 16 related to the teacher's perception of students' performance changing because they monitor them in the Check and Connect program. Fifty-four percent of teachers either strongly agreed or agreed with that question. The data also indicated that 22% of teachers either disagreed, or strongly disagreed with Question 16. One teacher commented, "I have had fewer students on the D/F report" (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Another teacher commented,

“Students who do well in school, still do well in school” (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). One teacher commented that by monitoring student performance “less students are likely to fall through the cracks” (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Finally, another teacher commented, “Students are now trying to raise their grades in anticipation of Check & Connect meetings” (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008).

Table 10

Frequency of Teacher Responses to Specific Questions that Relate to Social Skills and Behaviors (3, 18, and 20-22)

<i>Question</i>	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>DA</i>	<i>SD</i>
Changes in behavior	2	14	15	4	2
Increased social skills	3	22	5	6	1
Impact on attendance	1	17	3	6	1
Impact on timeliness	1	8	17	5	2
Increases time on task	0	16	10	4	4
<i>Overall perception of the teachers</i> C-N-C beneficial	4	20	6	6	0

Note: SA is strongly agree, A is agree, N is neutral, DA is disagree, and SD is strongly disagree.

In Table 10, the questions relate directly to the teachers’ perceptions of students’ social skills and behaviors since the inception of the Check and Connect program. The data indicated that for Questions 3-14, 46% of teachers either strongly agreed or agreed that students had changed their behavior, attitude, decision making, and quality of work, had higher expectations, completed more of their homework, were prepared better for class, did more than was required, were motivated, desired to learn, had a vision of the

future, and finally changed their cooperation because of the Check and Connect program. Nineteen percent of teachers either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the same questions. The data also indicated for Questions 3-14, that at least 15 teachers either strongly agreed or agreed with each question except Questions 8, 10, and 12. Questions 8, 10, and 12 related to the teachers' perceptions of students completing more homework (8), exceeding their requirements for the course they teach (10), and their student's desire to learn (12) since the inception of the Check and Connect program. One teacher commented, "I had several students stop being sent to In School Suspension" (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Another teacher commented, "Check and Connect gave them (students) a way to vent from conflict with teachers and students" (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Finally, a teacher commented, "More students are staying for tutoring and asking for help" (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008).

Not all of the teacher's comments were positive about the social skills and behaviors of their students since the inception of the Check and Connect program. One teacher commented, "Students hate Check and Connect" (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Another teacher commented, "Thirty minutes every two weeks is hard to compete with hours of inappropriate music" (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Finally, some teachers commented that they have seen more failures since the inception of Check and Connect.

In Table 10, Question 18 asked the teachers if they felt like their mentees' social skills had improved from the activities that they had used in their Connect meetings. Sixty-eight percent of teachers either strongly agreed or agreed with Question 18. The data also indicated that 19% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with Question

18. One teacher commented, “Students are more aware of acceptable behavior and ways of handling situations” (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Another teacher commented, “We talked about correct responses for social situations” (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008).

Questions 20-22 in Table 9 directly relate to the teachers’ perceptions of students improving their attendance, timeliness to class, and time on task since the inception of the Check and Connect program. The data for Question 20 indicated that 64% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed that student’s attendance was improving since the inception of the Check and Connect program. The data also indicated that 52% of teachers answered neutral for Question 21, which related to students timeliness to class since the inception of the Check and Connect program. Twenty-seven percent of teachers strongly agreed or agreed with Question 21, while 21% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the same question. Finally, the data for Question 22 indicated that 47% of teachers agreed with the statement that students are more on task since the inception of the Check and Connect program. The data also indicated that 52% of teachers answered Question 22 as neutral. One teacher commented, “Students are being motivated and that is why the attendance is improving” (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Another teacher commented, “I feel as if I have more cooperation and willingness to participate in the past two years” (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008).

Question 19 in Table 9 refers to the teacher’s perception that the overall Check and Connect program benefits the students and the school. The data indicated that 67% of teachers strongly agreed or agreed with Question 19. The data also indicated that 17% of teachers disagreed with Question 19, and zero teachers strongly disagreed.

Teacher Comments

In Table 11, teacher comments are identified by question, positive comments, negative comments, and neutral comments. Positive comments are defined as any statement that indicates that the Check and Connect program has had a better impact on students. The negative comments are defined as any statement that indicates the Check and Connect program has had no impact on students. Finally, a neutral comment is defined as any statement that does not pertain to the question. The three themes of positive, negative, and neutral are coded as the following in Table 4: strong, moderate, and weak. Strong is defined as 20 or more responses, moderate is defined as 10-19 responses, and weak is defined as 1-9 responses.

Table 11

Rated Teacher Comments from the Survey

<i>Common Themes</i>	<i># of times</i>	<i>Strength of theme</i>
<u><i>Questions relating to student and teacher relationships (1 and 17)</i></u>		
Positive	16	Moderate
Negative	4	Weak
Neutral	0	No response
<u><i>Questions relating to monitoring student performance (2, 15, and 16)</i></u>		
Positive	14	Moderate
Negative	9	Weak
Neutral	3	Weak
<u><i>Questions relating to social skills and behaviors (3, 18, and 20-22)</i></u>		
Positive	11	Moderate
Negative	9	Weak
Neutral	1	Weak

The survey used a 5-point Likert scale, with a “specific example” area at the bottom of each survey question. The “specific example” area gave both teachers and students an opportunity to support their answer to the survey. Table 11 presents all of the comments made by the teachers from their surveys.

The data in Table 11 indicated for questions directly related to teacher-student relationships and student connections within the Check and Connect group, that 16 of the 20 comments made by teachers were positive. One teacher commented, “They (their mentees) come to me all the time” (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008).

Questions 2, 15, and 16 related directly to the teachers’ perceptions of students changing their behaviors in regard to grades, classroom behavior, and performance since the inception of the Check and Connect program. The data indicated that 14 of the 25 comments made by teachers for Questions 2, 15, and 16 were positive. One teacher commented, “Students are more aware of their grades and attendance and can communicate with teachers to up their grades” (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Not all of the comments were positive by the teachers. One teacher suggested that “they are still failing” (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Another teacher commented, “No mentor has ever asked me about a student in my classes” (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008).

Questions 3-14, 18, and 20-22 related directly to the teachers’ perceptions of students changing their social skills and behavior since the inception of Check and Connect. The data indicated that in Questions 3-14 that 46 of the 62 comments were positive. The data also indicated that 18 of the comments for Questions 3-14 were

negative. Finally, in Questions 3-14 the data indicated that there were less than two negative comments for each question except Question 10 that related to teachers' perceptions of students exceeding their expectations in their classes. Question 18 directly related to the teachers' mentees improving their social skills from the connect activities. The data indicated that five of the six comments by the teachers were positive. One teacher commented, "They are uncooperative during activities and view them as more work" (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). The other five comments can be typified as "teaching students how to interact in different situations in and out of school" (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Questions 20-22 directly related to the teachers' perceptions of students improving their attendance, timeliness to class, and time on task since the inception of the Check and Connect program. The data indicated that seven of nine comments made by teachers were negative.

Finally, the strength of themes indicated that for all three research questions, the data indicated a moderate theme for positive responses. The data also indicated that there is a weak theme for negative responses for all three research questions.

Question 19 on the teacher survey asked the teachers if they felt like the Check and Connect program overall was a benefit to the students and school. The data indicated that four of the six comments made were negative. One teacher stated, "The check point is okay, but losing half an hour of class to connect with them (students) is like a step backwards" (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Another teacher commented, "Many students need an adult who looks out for them" (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008).

Chi-Square Analysis

A chi-square analysis of each research question for all groups surveyed is shown in Table 12. The purpose of the chi-square analysis is to show the statistical significance of each survey question. The data indicated in Table 12 that every question is statistically significant.

Table 12

Chi-Square Analysis of Combined Survey Results by Question

<i>Survey Question</i>	<i>Chi-Square^a</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Asymp. Sig.</i>
Increased relationship	187.783	4	.000
Increased thoughts of grades	101.928	4	.000
Changes in behavior	129.928	4	.000
Change in attitude	155.217	4	.000
Increased decision making skills	133.924	4	.000
Improved quality of work	169.038	4	.000
Higher expectations	119.665	4	.000
Increase of homework completed	153.068	4	.000
More prepared for class	157.099	4	.000
Exceeded requirements in class	156.624	4	.000
Motivation in class	149.304	4	.000
Increased desire to learn	177.441	4	.000
Increased vision	139.494	4	.000
Increased cooperation	134.913	4	.000
Behavior change b/c of monitoring	205.711	4	.000
Change in academics, discipline, attendance	176.148	4	.000
Relationship built with fellow students	159.760	4	.000
Increased social skills	156.262	4	.000
Check and Connect is beneficial	129.228	4	.000
Impact on attendance	165.217	4	.000
Impact on timeliness to class	179.456	4	.000
Increased time on task in class	180.787	4	.000

Focus Group Data

This case study of the Check and Connect advisory program of a high school in Western North Carolina is a mixed-methods approach. The second part of this case study consists of four focus groups of teachers at the high school that were studied. A proxy was used to interview teachers that volunteered during their planning period. The proxy used one focus group question to gain the perceptions of the teachers about the Check and Connect program. The only focus group question was tell me about the Check and Connect program. The proxy interviewed five teachers first period, four teachers second period, five teachers third period, and four teachers fourth period. After the sessions were recorded and transcribed, the teachers received a copy of their comments to ensure the validity of the transcriptions.

As stated in Chapter 3, the researcher was looking for common themes to emerge from the teacher interviews. The three themes that were coded were: relationships, student performance, and student social skills/behaviors. In Tables 13, 14, and 15, the most prevalent themes have been coded as follows: 1-2 responses were considered a weak theme, 3-4 responses were considered a moderate theme, and 5 or more responses were considered a strong theme. The left hand column of Tables 13, 14, and 15 are the responses followed by the number of times it was stated by the teachers in the interview sessions. In the far right column is how the theme was coded: weak, moderate, or strong.

Table 13

Frequency of Themes by Relationships from Teacher Interviews

<i>Common Themes</i>	<i># of times</i>	<i>Strength of theme</i>
Positive Relationship	14	Strong
Trust	7	Strong
Respect	0	No response
Open Dialogue	8	Strong

In Table 13, the data indicated that positive relationships, trust, and open dialogue were strong themes between the 18 different teachers that were interviewed during the focus group sessions. The data also indicated that respect was not mentioned in any of the focus group interviews by the teachers.

Table 14

Frequency of Themes by Student Performance from Teacher Interviews

<i>Common Themes</i>	<i># of times</i>	<i>Strength of theme</i>
Attention to grades	9	Strong
Quality of student work	0	No response

In Table 14, the data indicated that attention to grades was a strong theme from the teachers' focus group sessions. The data also indicated that quality of student work was never mentioned by the 18 different teachers.

Table 15

Frequency of Themes by Student Social Skills and Behavior from Teacher Interviews

<i>Common Themes</i>	<i># of times</i>	<i>Strength of theme</i>
Promptness	1	Weak
Attendance	3	Moderate
Attitude	3	Moderate

In Table 15, the data indicated that attendance and attitude were considered moderate themes during the teachers' interviews. The data also indicated that promptness of the students was only mentioned one time which was considered a weak theme in the teacher focus groups.

Summary of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

This case study used a mixed method approach using quantitative data as well as qualitative data to answer the research questions. The research questions are as follows:

1. What was the impact of Check and Connect on student and staff relationships?
2. What was the impact of Check and Connect on monitoring student performance?
3. What was the impact of Check and Connect on social skills and behaviors?

The researcher used a 5-point Likert scale survey in a quantitative manner. Tables 2, 3, and 4 present the frequency responses by question for each grade level for the student surveys. Tables 5, 6, and 7 present the student comments of positive, negative, and neutral that are coded by strength of theme. Tables 8, 9, and 10 present the frequency responses by question for the teacher surveys. Table 11 presents the teacher comments in frequency tables of positive, negative, and neutral that are coded by strength of theme.

Finally, Table 12 presents the chi-square analysis which indicates that every question for each survey were statistically significant.

The second part of this mixed method case study was the qualitative research. Focus groups were used to interview four groups of teachers at the high school studied. A total of 18 teacher volunteers were interviewed by an outside proxy. In Tables 13, 14, and 15, a frequency and strength code table were created to show the number of times the pre-determined themes were mentioned by the teachers in the focus groups. Relationships, student performance, and social skills and behaviors were the themes of Tables 13, 14, and 15.

Triangulation

Finally, the researcher used a triangulation method to compare the two different types of data (surveys and focus groups). The comparison of the student survey data, teacher survey data, and focus group data is presented in Tables 16, 17, and 18. In each table +SSR is an abbreviation for positive student survey results, +TSR is an abbreviation for positive teacher survey results, which are both quantitative data. Questions 1 and 17 were used because they have a direct relationship to the first research question: What was the impact of Check and Connect on student and staff relationships? The percentages were determined by the total number of strongly agree and agree responses for the 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students. That number, which calculated to 525 responses, was then divided by the total number of responses from each question. That number calculated to 980. To find the percentage 525 was divided by 980 to get the percentage of positive student survey responses in Table 16.

The +TSR (positive teacher survey results) was calculated by completing the fore-mentioned steps from the student survey; however, there were no grade levels for the

teacher surveys. Questions 1 and 17 were used, and the total number of positive answers from each question (strongly agree and agree) were added up and divided by the total number of responses for each question. The total number of strongly agree and agree from Questions 1 and 17 added up to 63, which was then divided by the total number of responses to those questions which was 74. The percentage of the positive teacher surveys is identified in Table 13.

The qualitative data begins with a PR which is an abbreviation for positive relationships, trust, respect, and open dialogue. The strength code for each of the quantitative codes is listed below the theme.

Table 16

What was the Impact of Check and Connect on Student and Staff Relationships?

<u>Quantitative</u> +SSR	+TSR	<u>Qualitative</u> PR	Trust	Respect	Open Dialogue
54%	85%	Strong	Strong	No response	Strong

Note: +SSR is positive student survey responses, +TSR is positive teacher survey responses, and PR is positive relationships.

The data indicated in Table 16 that all of the data listed (positive student survey results, positive teacher survey results, positive relationships, trust, and open dialogue), except respect, show a strong response rate that the Check and Connect program has had a positive impact on student and staff relationships.

The purpose of Table 17 is to compare the quantitative data (student and teacher surveys) to the qualitative data (focus group themes). In Table 17, the quantitative data is again identified by the positive student survey data (+SSR) and positive teacher survey data (+TSR). Questions 2, 15, and 16 were used in the student and teacher surveys

because they directly relate to the second research question: What was the impact of Check and Connect on monitoring student performance? The strongly agree and agree responses from the student survey added up to 577, which was then divided by the total number of responses to Questions 2, 15, and 16. The total number of responses added up to 1450, which was then divided into 577 for the percentage of positive student responses.

The negative student survey results (-SSR) were calculated the same as the positive results. The total number of negative results (disagree and strongly disagree) from the student surveys added up to 329. That number was then divided by the total number of responses to Questions 2, 15, and 16, which was 1450.

The positive teacher survey results were calculated the same as the student survey results. The total number of positive responses (strongly agree and agree) from the teacher surveys added up to 54. That number was then divided by the total number of responses from Questions 2, 15, and 16, which was 116.

The negative teacher responses (-TSR) were calculated the same as the fore-mentioned negative student survey results. The negative teacher results (disagree, and strongly disagree) added up to 25, which was then divided by the total number of answers to the teacher surveys for Questions 2, 15, and 16. That number was 116. The qualitative data came from the strength of thematic frequencies in Table 14. ATG is an abbreviation for attention to grades, and QSW is an abbreviation for quality of student work.

Table 17

What was the Impact of Check and Connect on Monitoring Student Performance?

<u>Quantitative</u>				<u>Qualitative</u>	
+SSR	-SSR	+TSR	-TSR	ATG	QSW
40%	23%	47%	22%	Strong	No response

Note: +SSR is positive student survey responses, -SSR is negative student survey responses, +TSR is positive teacher responses, -TSR is negative teacher survey responses, ATG is attention to grades, and QSW is quality of student work.

The data in Table 17 indicated that 40% of students, 47% of teachers, and the strong response to attention to student grades by teachers in the focus groups denote that Check and Connect has had a positive impact on the monitoring of student performance.

The purpose for Table 18 is to compare the quantitative data (student and teacher surveys) to the qualitative data (focus groups). In Table 18, the quantitative data is again identified by both positive and negative results from the student and teacher surveys (+SSR, -SSR, +TSR, -TSR). Questions 3-14, 18, and 20-22 were used in the student and teacher surveys because they related directly to the third research question: What was the impact of Check and Connect on social skills and behaviors? The strongly agree and agree represent the positive student/teacher responses to the survey, and disagree and strongly disagree represent the negative student/teacher responses. The total number of positive results for the student surveys for Questions 3-14, 18, and 20-22 was 2819. The total number of positive responses for those questions added up to 7699. To find the percentage of positive answers, 2819 was divided by 7699, and the answer is found in Table 18.

The total number of negative results (disagree and strongly disagree) for the same

questions for the student surveys was 2026. It was then divided by the total number of responses, which added up to 7699. The positive teacher responses (strongly agree and agree) added up to 272, which was then divided by the total number of teacher responses to Questions 3-14, 18, and 20-22. The total number of responses for the teacher surveys was 574. The negative teacher responses (disagree and strongly disagree) added up to 119, which was then divided by the total number, 574, to get the percentage of negative teacher results.

The qualitative data came from the strength of thematic frequencies in Table 15. The themes of social skills and behavior were promptness (P), attendance (A1) and attitude (A2). Under A1 and A2, an abbreviation for moderate has been used (Mod.).

Table 18

What was the Impact of Check and Connect on Social Skills and Behavior?

<u>Quantitative</u>				<u>Qualitative</u>		
+SSR	-SSR	+TSR	-TSR	P	A1	A2
37%	26%	47%	21%	Weak	Mod.	Mod.

Note: +SSR is positive student survey responses, -SSR is negative student survey responses, +TSR is positive teacher responses, -TSR is negative teacher survey responses, P is promptness, A1 is attendance, A2 is attitude, and Mod. is moderate.

The quantitative and qualitative data in Table 18 does not indicate a positive impact on social skills and behaviors of students from the Check and Connect program. The data indicated that the majority of students and teachers answered neutral on the surveys for social skills and behavior questions. The data also indicated there are no strong themes cited in the teacher focus groups for social skills and student behaviors.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the data indicated in Table 16 that both the quantitative data and the qualitative data attest that there is a positive impact on student and staff relationships because of Check and Connect. The data indicated in Table 17, that both the quantitative and the qualitative data indicated that there is a positive impact on monitoring student performance because of the Check and Connect program. Finally, in Table 18, both the quantitative and qualitative data indicated that there was not a positive impact on social skills and behaviors because of Check and Connect. Based on Table 18, the data did not indicate a negative impact either, but rather a majority of students and teachers answered neutral to those survey questions. Teachers in the focus groups did not indicate a strong response to promptness, attendance, and attitude.

Chapter 5: Summary, Findings, Discussion, and Recommendations

This mixed method case study examined the Check and Connect advisory program at a high school in Western North Carolina. The purpose of this case study was to analyze the perceptions of students and teachers about the Check and Connect program. The purpose of the Check and Connect program at the high school studied was to increase student and staff relationships, monitor students' grades and attendance, and finally change students' social skills and behavior. The research questions used for this study to determine if the goals of the Check and Connect program were successful are as follows:

1. What was the impact of Check and Connect on student and staff relationships?
2. What was the impact of Check and Connect on monitoring student performance?
3. What was the impact of Check and Connect on social skills and behaviors?

This case study was a mixed method study. Surveys and focus groups were used to collect the data for this study. The surveys served in two capacities. First, the survey was a 5-point Likert scale survey which ranged from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Also included with the survey was a qualitative piece, which allowed students and teachers to write specific examples below each of the survey questions to support their answer. Both the student and teacher surveys were identical and were each 22 questions. The second and final instrument used to gather data were focus groups used as qualitative data. Teachers were interviewed during their planning period by an outside proxy. A total of 18 teachers were interviewed for this study.

Findings

The data aligned to the first research question indicated strongly that both students

and teachers perceived that the Check and Connect program did increase their relationship. Overall, 54% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the Check and Connect program increased their relationship with their mentors. The data for the teacher survey indicated that 85% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they built a relationship with their mentees. The focus group data indicated that teachers who were interviewed felt a strong correlation about developing positive relationships, trust, and open dialogue with their mentees.

According to the National Association of Secondary School Principals (1996), these findings align with the future of high school education. The NASSP indicated in 1996 that high schools would have to become much more personalized to increase the number of students graduating from high school. Building stronger relationships is also a major theme to building effective learning communities, according to Cohen (2001). In a 2006 study by Quint, she found that faculty advisory systems can give students a sense that there is an adult in the school looking out for their wellbeing. The data strongly suggested that the teachers' perceptions of their relationships with students would require no further changes; however, the students did not feel as strongly as the teachers. During the study, it became evident by student comments that some teachers were not using their time in their Check and Connect groups the same as others. According to Sinner (2004), a successful advisory program includes organization and leadership. It was apparent that the Check and Connect program should become more consistent and better monitored to be sure that each student is receiving the same amount of attention and teaching.

There were several reasons why the students' and teachers' perceptions of the Check and Connect program did have an impact on student and staff relationships. First, during the focus group interviews of the teachers, the proxy's prompt question was tell

me about the Check and Connect program. The teachers responded to that question by discussing primarily relationships and monitoring student performance. Secondly, students' responses to the questions relating to relationships were positive. One student wrote, "My mentor is caring and coaches us through school" (Anonymous student, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Another student wrote, "I can go to him if I need something" (Anonymous student, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Finally, the focus by the administration at the school has been on connecting with students by discussion and activities. If teachers were not connecting, then they were expected to be conversing with the students about attendance, discipline, and grades. The way many teachers accomplished that goal was by talking to each of their mentees one on one. It was easier too for students to get to know and feel more comfortable with teachers if they talked to them individually. The same was true for teachers.

The data aligned to the second research question indicated moderately that Check and Connect had an impact on monitoring of student performance. The student survey indicated that 40% of 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students agreed or strongly agreed with the survey questions directly related to the second research question. Only 23% of all 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the same questions. The teacher survey indicated that 47% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the questions related to the second research question. Only 22% of teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the same questions. The focus group data indicated that teachers felt strongly that students were paying closer attention to their grades since the inception of Check and Connect. However, there was not a response by the teachers about the quality of student work increasing since the inception of the Check and Connect program. The data indicated that it is not conclusive that teachers and students feel that

the Check and Connect program has helped students monitor their grades better since the inception of the program. Sinner (2004) conducted a study that indicated that advisory groups will increase the amount of students passing in a school that has an advisory program.

The reason the Check and Connect program did not completely impact the monitoring of student performance can be explained in two ways. First, the number of meetings a month was limited to only one to monitor student performance. Second, the length of time in between sessions was too long according to Myrick and Myrick (1990). Myrick and Myrick suggested that strong advisory programs meet at least two to three times a week. The student may have been concerned for that week, but then forgot about their concern before the next meeting, 3 weeks later. The mentor and mentee must have more contact so the mentor can continually coach the student, and in turn, students were more conscientious about their grades and tried to change their behaviors to improve their grades. As a result, the teachers would see an increase in the quality of student work.

Given the perceptions of both the teachers and students, it is apparent that the administration did succeed in delivering the information necessary to the teachers to monitor student performance; however, they did not offer enough guidance on how to use the information with the students. The school's administration will need to monitor the program better as well as offer staff development on interpreting data and using it to help students better their grades, attendance, and discipline.

The data aligned to the third research question had a weak indication that Check and Connect had an impact on social skills and behaviors for students. The student survey data indicated that 37% of 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students agreed or strongly agreed with the questions that directly related to the third research question. Twenty-six percent

of students either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the same questions. The teacher survey indicated that 47% of teachers agreed or strongly agreed with the questions that directly related to the third research question. Also, 21% of teachers either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the same questions. The focus group data indicated that the teachers who were interviewed moderately felt that student attendance and student attitudes had changed since the inception of Check and Connect. Also, the teachers who were interviewed weakly felt that students were more prompt since the inception of the Check and Connect program.

According to a study by Myrick and Myrick in 1990, advisory programs must be planned by a team from research that has been conducted prior. The data strongly suggested that in the area of changing social skills and behaviors, the administration did not convey the purpose to the students or teachers. In order for the social skills and behaviors to change, a team will have to plan and implement strategies to change the perceptions of students and teachers. Myrick and Myrick (1990) stated that a structured plan of each meeting needs to be created by all stakeholders in order for the goals of an advisory program to be met. They also stated that a successful advisory program meets at least three times per week.

Behaviors and social skills were not changed in the Check and Connect program. The data suggested that increased meeting times monthly would help change student behaviors and social skills. A case study conducted by Sardo-Brown and Sheltar in 1994 stated that advisory groups must meet at least three times per week and continuous staff development training should take place for the teacher advisors.

Findings from the Chi-Square Analysis

The researcher conducted a chi-square analysis to report the significance of each

research question by the students and teachers. The findings indicated that each survey question that was answered by the students and teachers was statistically significant. The importance of this analysis is if the surveys were given out repeatedly, the distribution of answers would be similar each time. The researcher can conclude that the answers by the students and teachers are then significant for each survey question.

Discussion

After concluding the data gathering and reporting the findings, it is evident that the Check and Connect program is perceived to be at three different levels. First, the students and teachers both feel that the Check and Connect program has built a stronger relationship between students and teachers. Second, the students and teachers perceive that the Check and Connect program has impacted the monitoring of student performance only moderately. Finally, the third level is perceived as weak by the students and teachers about the Check and Connect program impacting social skills and behaviors. These statements can be made based on the data from the survey and focus group results.

The specific data that stands out to support the prior statements can be found in the triangulation of data and comments made by both teachers and students. The numbers overwhelmingly indicated that a large majority of students and teachers feel they have built a better relationship with their mentors and mentees since the inception of the Check and Connect program. The majority of comments made by students and teachers indicated that they were building a stronger relationship with one another. The survey data and the focus group data indicated that both the students and teachers knew that the Check and Connect program was designed to foster those relationships.

The data for the second research question produced a moderate perception for both the students and teachers. The data indicated that between 40% and 50% of students

and teachers perceived that the Check and Connect program impacted the monitoring of student performance. The data was not as strong in this case to state strongly that Check and Connect did impact monitoring of student performance. However, in the student and teacher comments, it was evident that several students liked the D/F report and did think about their grades more often. The teacher comments were similar. In fact, one teacher commented, “Students raise their grades in anticipation of the next Check and Connect meeting” (Anonymous teacher, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Also, some students commented that they thought about their grades before the inception of the Check and Connect program. Some of the teachers’ comments reflected the same type of statement.

Finally, the data for the third research question indicated that the students and teachers do not feel that social skills and behaviors have changed since the inception of Check and Connect. One student commented, “I didn’t know Check and Connect dealt with behavior” (Anonymous student, personal communication, October 21, 2008). Several other comments by students were associated with their mentors not trying to change their behavior or social skills. Teachers’ comments aligned with the students’. Several teachers commented that students were in competition with their friends and life style.

Recommendations for Improvement

Overall, the data from both the student and teacher surveys and focus groups indicated that Check and Connect is meeting the goals of the high school in the areas of building student and teacher relationships and even monitoring student performance. Based on the data of perceptions from students and teachers, the Check and Connect program will have to change in order to meet the goals of the school for changing social

skills and behavior. The following are five recommendations to improve the Check and Connect program to begin to change student's social skills and behaviors:

1. Increase the meetings per month. The research indicated that successful advisory programs meet at least three times per week.
2. Create a committee of teachers, students, and parents to help create consistency in the program. A standard needs to be set for each meeting so all students are subject to the same type of mentoring during the connect activities. The research indicated that successful advisory programs are created and implemented by a team.
3. Increase monitoring of the Check and Connect program. The research indicated that successful advisory programs have strong administrative support and monitor the program closely.
4. Increase staff development for teacher advisors including activities to change social skills and behaviors of students.
5. Increase parent involvement. The research indicated that a connection needs to be made between the parent, teacher, and student, so they are working together to better the student.

There is not a guarantee that the recommendations stated above will meet the goals of the high school studied; however, the research conducted in the literature review strongly indicated that the recommendations listed above are correlated with successful advisory programs (Anfara & Brown, 1998; GAO, 2004; Myrick & Myrick, 1990; Sardo-Brown & Shetlar, 1994; Sinner, 2004).

Recommendations for Further Studies

The following are suggestions for further studies of advisory programs:

1. Complete a longitudinal study of an advisory program and compare the

perceptions of students and teachers in the beginning of the program and then at the end of the longitudinal study.

2. Study high schools with advisory programs against high schools that do not have advisory programs and compare the perceptions of students and teachers about their working and learning environment.

3. Create a study that would be able to prove that an advisory program was the reason a high school was successful as defined by the state's testing standards.

References

- Ancess, J. (2003). *Beating the odds: High schools as communities of commitment*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Anfara, V. A., Jr., & Brown, K. M. (1998, November). *Advisor-advisee programs in middle schools: Community building in a state of affective disorder*. Paper presented at Convention of the University of Council of Educational Administrators, St. Louis, MO. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED426987). Retrieved February 15, 2008, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED426987&
- Balfanz, R., Neild, R., & Herzog, L. (2007). An early warning system. *Educational Leadership*, 65(2), 28-33.
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2006). *High school for the new millennium*. Retrieved February 12, 2007, from <http://www.gatesfoundation.org>
- Bridgeland, M., DiIulio, J., & Morrison, B. (2006, March). *The silent epidemic*. Retrieved February 12, 2008, from <http://www.civicerprises.net/pdfs/thesilentepidemic3-06.pdf>
- Catterall, J. S. (1998). Risk and resilience in student transitions to high school. *American Journal of Education*, 106, 302-333.
- Chaney, J., & DeGennaro, A. (2005, November). Where everybody knows your name. *Principal Leadership*, 22-26.
- Cohen, M. (2001). *Transforming the American high school: New directions for state and local policy*. Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute & Jobs for the Future. Retrieved February 15, 2008, from <http://earlycolleges.org/Downloads/transforminghs.pdf>
- Cotton, K. (1996, May). *School size, school climate, and student performance*. Retrieved March 25, 2008 from <http://www.nwrel.org/scpd/sirs/10/c020.html>
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2002). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill/Pearson.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1997). *The right to learn*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Company.

- Darling-Hammond, L. (2002). *Redesigning schools: What matters and what works*. Stanford, CA: School Redesign Network at Stanford University.
- Ellis, T. I. (1990). *Counselors and teacher as student advisors, highlights: An Eric/CAPS digest*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED315703). Retrieved February 15, 2008, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED426987&
- Evelo, D., Sinclair, M., Hurley, C., Christenson, S., & Thurlow, M. (1996). *Keeping Kids in School: Using Check & Connect for Dropout Prevention*. Retrieved July 28, 2007, from the University of Minnesota, The College of Education and Human Development website: <http://www.universityofminnesota>
- Forte, I., & Schurr, S. (1993). *The definitive middle school guide: A handbook for success*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED365450). Retrieved February 15, 2008, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED365450&
- Fulk, B. (2003). Concerns about ninth grade students' poor academic performance: One school's action plan. *American Secondary Education*, 31(2).
- Fullan, M. (2001). *The change leader*. Retrieved March 13, 2008, from the Center for Development and Learning website: http://www.cdl.org/resource-library/articles/change_ldr.php
- Galassi, P. J., & Gullede, S. (1997). The middle school counselor and teacher-advisor programs. *Professional School Counseling*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EDEJ560553). Retrieved February 15, 2008, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=The+Middle+School+Counselor+and+Teacher-Advisor+Programs&searchtype=keyword&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=ti&_pageLabel=RecordDetails&objectId=0900019b8011b0c0&accno=EJ560553&_nfls=false
- Hyslop, A. (2006). Create a positive school culture that stresses personalization in Relationships. *Techniques*. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. EJ751461). Retrieved February 15, 2008, from http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=EJ751461&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=EJ751461
- Lachat, M. (2001). *Data-driven high school reform: The breaking ranks model*. Retrieved February 12, 2007, from Brown University, The Education Alliance website: www.alliance.brown.edu/pubs/hischlrfm/datdrv_hsrfrm.pdf

- Manning, A. M. (2007, February). Self-concept and self-esteem in adolescents. *Principal Leadership*, 11-15.
- Manning, M. L., & Saddlemire, R. (1996). *High school advisory programs: The Roosevelt roads experience*. Retrieved February 15, 2008, from http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/search.asp?isNew=False&btnSearch=Search&resetForm=TRUE&qu=High+School+Advisory
- Mathematica, Policy Research Inc. (1999). *How Can We Help? Lessons from Federal Dropout Prevention Programs*. Retrieved November 7, 2007, from www.mathematica-mpr.com/PDFs/Howhelp.pdf
- McAndrews, T., & Anderson, W. (2002, January). *Schools within schools*. Eugene, OR: Eric Clearinghouse on Educational Management. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 461915). Retrieved February 15, 2008, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED461915&
- Meloro, P. C. (2005). Do high school advisory programs promote personalization? Correlates of school belonging (Doctoral dissertation, University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island 2005). Retrieved July 26, 2008, from (Dissertations & Theses: The Humanities and Social Sciences *Collection*) database. (Publication No. AAT 3188841).
- Myrick, L., & Myrick, R. (1990). *The teacher advisor program: An innovative approach to school guidance*. Ann Arbor, MI: School of Education, University of Michigan. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED316791). Retrieved February 15, 2008, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED316791&
- National Association of Secondary School Principals. (1996). *Breaking ranks II: Strategies for leading high school reform*. Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals.
- National Conference of State Legislatures. (2008). *High School Redesign*. Retrieved March, 24, 2008, from <http://www.ncsl.org/programs/educ/HSReform.htm>
- Osofsky, D., Sinner, G., Wolk, D., & Miles, S. (2003). *Changing systems to personalize learning: The power of advisories*. Providence, RI: The Education Alliance at Brown University. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED482971). Retrieved February 15, 2008, from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/Home.portal?_nfpb=true&ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED482971&

- Owen, R., Cooper, K., & Brown, M. (2002, September). *Getting small: Transforming our high schools: Sacramento's large, impersonal high schools are becoming smaller learning communities that provide customized paths for students to reach standards mastery*. Retrieved March 24, 2008, from http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0HUL/is_1_32/ai_94872295/pg_2
- Oxley, D. (2001). Organizing schools into small learning communities. *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin*, 85, 5-16.
- Oxley, D. (2005). *Small learning communities: Extending and improving practice*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.
- Poplin, M., & Weeres, J. (1992). *Voices from the inside: A report on schooling from inside the classroom*. Claremont, CA: The Institute for Education in Transformation at the Claremont Graduate School.
- Quint, J. (2006, May). *Meeting five critical challenges of high school reform: Lessons from research on three reform models*. Retrieved March 24, 2008, from <http://www.mdrc.org/publications/428/overview.html>
- Reinhard, B. (1997). Detroit schools target 9th grade in effort to reduce dropout rate. *Education Week*. Retrieved May 24, 2007, from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/1997/12/03/15nine.h17.html>
- Sardo-Brown, D., & Shetlar, J. (1994). Listening to students and teachers to revise a rural advisory program. *Middle School Journal*, 26(1), 23-25.
- Scott, S. K. (2005, November). Reduce your dropouts: It's not as hard as you think. *Principal Leadership*, 38-42.
- Sinner, G. (2004). Home sweet home. (2005). *Principal Leadership*, 4(7), 37-41.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Tierney, J. P., Grossman, J. B., & Resch, N. L. (1995) *Making a difference: An impact study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters (BB/BS)*. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.
- United States Department of Education. (2000). Educate America Act of 1994, 20 U.S.C.A. § 5801 et seq. Goals 2000: Educate America Act, P.L. 103-227). Retrieved February 15, 2008, from <http://ed.gov/legislation/GOALS2000/TheAct/sec302.html>
- United States Department of Education. (2004). *No Child Left Behind* (Section 1802). Retrieved February 15, 2008, from <http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg15.html#sec1802>

- United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *National Center for Educational Statistics*. Retrieved February 15, 2008, from <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=16>
- United States General Accounting Office. (2004). *Student mentoring programs: Education's monitoring and information sharing could be improved*. (DHHS Publication No. GAO-04-581). Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Vander Ark, T. (2002, February). The case for small high schools. *Educational Leadership*, 59(5), 55-59.
- Wagner, T. (2001). Leadership for learning: An action theory of schools change. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 82(5), 378-383.
- Wagner, T. (2003). *Making the grade: Reinventing America's schools*. New York, NY: Routledge Falmer.
- Wallis, A. T. (2007). *Advisory programs: A case study of parental perceptions of A high school advisory program* (Doctoral dissertation, Stephen F. Austin State University, 2007). (ProQuest UMI 3269138). Retrieved October 12, 2007, from <http://proquest.umi.com.ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=1367845301&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=2&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=PQD&TS=1238259640&clientId=15045>
- Wasley, P., & Lear, R. (2001, March). Small schools, real gains. *Educational Leadership*, 58(6), 22-27.
- Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2008). Put understanding first. *Educational Leadership*, 65(8), 36-41.
- Yin, R. (1984). *Case method; Social sciences; Research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Zigmond, N. (1990). Rethinking secondary school programs for students with learning disabilities. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 23(1).

Appendix A

Mentor/Mentee Contact Log

MENTOR/MENTEE CONTACT LOG

August 28-September 1

Suggested topics of discussion:

- Overview of your role as mentor (review log)
- Their schedules
- Schools rules
- Counselor information
- Their interests (promote involvement in clubs/sports)
- Plans after high school
- Class effort

Please review the following:

Attendance # of days missed _____

Grades	1 st period	_____
	2 nd period	_____
	3 rd period	_____
	4 th period	_____

Extra Curricular Activities

General Concerns

Other students
Teachers
Bus issues
Parents
Friends
Work

Discipline Referrals

Student signature: _____

Mentor signature: _____

Comments:

*Please give to your department liaison.

Dept. liaison initials: _____

*Please give sheet to counselor immediately if a severe issue arises.

Appendix B
Mentor Evaluation Sheet

Mentor Evaluation Sheet

1. What is your idea for an effective mentor program?
2. How does the current mentor program fit into your plan for an effective mentor program?
3. Have any of your assigned students come to you on their own?
4. Can you name your assigned students without looking at your sheet?
5. Have you helped your students? If so, how?
6. What suggestions do you have for the grouping of students with mentors?
7. What are your student's responses to your monthly visits?

Appendix C

Freshman Survey Spring 2007

Freshman Survey
Spring 2007

In an effort to make the transition from middle school to high school easier for future “Rebels,” WLHS is conducting a survey of current Freshmen. We hope you had a good start to what will turn out to be the best four years of your life. (You will realize that later in life!)

Directions:

Please put your letter choice to the left of the question. This is not a graded assignment, and we only ask for your honesty in this process. DO NOT include your name.

1. Freshman orientation helped made me feel better about coming to WLHS and made the transition easier:
 - A. Very True
 - B. True
 - C. Did not attend
 - D. Not True
2. My mentor (teacher who met with you throughout the year) made me feel better about several things throughout the year:
 - A. Very True
 - B. True
 - C. Undecided
 - D. Not True
3. The Mentor Program that was in place this year held me accountable for my grades and attendance:
 - A. Very True
 - B. True
 - C. Undecided
 - D. Not True
4. I learn best when my teacher gives me a book to read and a worksheet to go with it:
 - A. Very True
 - B. True
 - C. Undecided
 - D. Not True
5. I learn best when my teacher gives projects in my classes:
 - A. Very True
 - B. True
 - C. Undecided
 - D. Not True
6. I learn best when my teacher puts me in a group to work on class work or special projects:
 - A. Very True
 - B. True
 - C. Undecided
 - D. Not True

7. I learn best when my teacher uses a mixture of some book work, hands on projects, and group projects:
 - A. Very True
 - B. True
 - C. Undecided
 - D. Not True
8. The relationship I have built with my Mentor (teacher who met with you monthly) will continue over the course of my high school career:
 - A. Very True
 - B. True
 - C. Undecided
 - D. Not True
9. On an average weeknight, how many hours did you spend at night studying or working on homework?
 - A. None
 - B. Less than 30 minutes
 - C. Between 30 and 60 minutes
 - D. More than an hour
10. How many hours a night do you spend playing on the computer, listening to music, talking on the phone, or watching TV:
 - A. Less than 30 minutes
 - B. 30 to 60 minutes
 - C. Between one and two hours
 - D. More than two hours
11. How many activities did you participate in after school hours with WLHS: (Sports, clubs, band, chorus, if you have specific questions ask your teacher)
 - A. 0
 - B. 1
 - C. 2
 - D. 3 or more activities
12. If you were in our Freshman Mentor program again which of the following would you choose:
 - A. Leave the mentor program the way it is
 - B. Turn homeroom into mentor groups and receive mentoring during homeroom
13. What are your plans after high school?
 - A. Join the workforce
 - B. Attend a two year college or vocational school
 - C. Attend a four year college or university
 - D. Join a branch of the military

Appendix D

Freshman Survey Results Spring 2007

Freshman Survey Results Spring 2007

In an effort to make the transition from middle school to high school easier for future “Rebels,” WLHS is conducting a survey of current Freshmen. We hope you had a good start to what will turn out to be the best four years of your life. (You will realize that later in life!)

Directions:

Please put your letter choice on your scan-tron sheet. This is not a graded assignment, and we only ask for your honesty in this process. **DO NOT** include your name.

1. Freshman orientation helped made me feel better about coming to WLHS and made the transition easier:

a. Very True	14%
b. True	57%
c. Did not attend	19%
d. Not True	10%

2. My mentor (teacher who met with you throughout the year) made me feel better about several things throughout the year:

a. Very True	12%
b. True	46%
c. Undecided	20%
d. Not True	22%

3. The Mentor Program that was in place this year held me accountable for my grades and attendance:

a. Very True	23%
b. True	19%
c. Undecided	24%
d. Not True	34%

4. I learn best when my teacher gives me a book to read and a worksheet to go with it:

a. Very True	12%
b. True	19%
c. Undecided	34%
d. Not True	35%

5. I learn best when my teacher gives projects in my classes:

a. Very True	20%
b. True	14%
c. Undecided	24%
d. Not True	42%

6. I learn best when my teacher puts me in a group to work on class work or special projects:

a. Very True	52%
b. True	22%
c. Undecided	11%
d. Not True	15%

7. I learn best when my teacher uses a mixture of some book work, hands on projects, and group projects:
- | | |
|--------------|-----|
| a. Very True | 34% |
| b. True | 31% |
| c. Undecided | 18% |
| d. Not True | 17% |
8. The relationship I have built with my Mentor (teacher who met with you monthly) will continue over the course of my high school career:
- | | |
|--------------|-----|
| a. Very True | 13% |
| b. True | 30% |
| c. Undecided | 32% |
| d. Not True | 25% |
9. On an average weeknight, how many hours did you spend at night studying or working on homework?
- | | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| a. None | 22% |
| b. Less than 30 minutes | 34% |
| c. Between 30 and 60 minutes | 29% |
| d. More than an hour | 15% |
10. How many hours a night do you spend playing on the computer, listening to music, talking on the phone, or watching TV:
- | | |
|------------------------------|-----|
| a. Less than 30 minutes | 18% |
| b. 30 to 60 minutes | 19% |
| c. Between one and two hours | 23% |
| d. More than two hours | 40% |
11. How many activities did you participate in after school hours with WLHS: (Sports, clubs, band, chorus, if you have specific questions ask your teacher)
- | | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| a. 0 | 38% |
| b. 1 | 28% |
| c. 2 | 17% |
| d. 3 or more activities | 17% |
12. If you were in our Freshman Mentor program again which of the following would you choose:
- | | |
|---|-----|
| a. Leave the mentor program the way it is | 61% |
| b. Turn homeroom into mentor groups and receive mentoring during homeroom | 39% |
13. What are your plans after high school?
- | | |
|---|-----|
| a. Join the workforce | 13% |
| b. Attend a two year college or vocational school | 21% |
| c. Attend a four year college or university | 46% |
| d. Join a branch of the military | 14% |

181 Surveys Returned

Appendix E

Check and Connect Student Survey

WLHS
Check-N-Connect
Student Survey

Directions: Please choose one answer and circle the entire answer. This survey was used to help guide the direction of the mentoring program for the future. Please do NOT put your name on the survey. This survey is based on last year and this year's Check-N-Connect program. Please list any examples below the answer choices to support your answer.

1. I feel like I have made a connection and built a relationship with my mentor?
 - A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

2. I feel like I think about my grades more because I am in the Check-N-Connect program?
 - A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

3. I feel like I think about my behavior more because I am in the Check-N-Connect program?
 - A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

4. I feel like my attitude has improved for school since I have been in the Check-N-Connect program?
 - A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

5. I feel like my decision making skills have improved since I have been in the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

6. I feel like my quality of work has improved since I have been in the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

7. I feel like I have higher expectations for myself since I have been in the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

8. I feel like I have completed more of my homework since I have been in the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

9. I feel like I have prepared myself better for class since I have been in the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

10. I feel like I have done more in my courses than is required since I have been in the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

11. I feel like I have been motivated to perform better in my classes since I have been in the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

12. I feel like my desire to learn has increased since I have been in the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

13. I feel like my vision of the future has increased since I have been in the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

14. I feel like I have become more cooperative since I have been in the Check-N-Connect program?

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Neutral
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

15. I feel like I changed my behavior within my classes because my mentor did check on my performance as a student?

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Neutral
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

16. I feel like the Check-N-Connect program has changed my behavior because my mentor monitors my academics, discipline, and attendance?

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Neutral
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

17. I felt like I established a better relationship with the other students in my Check-N-Connect group?

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Neutral
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

18. I feel like my social skills has improved from the activities my mentor does with us in our connect meetings?

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Neutral
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

19. Overall, I feel like the Check-N-Connect program was beneficial to me as a person and student at WLHS.
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

20. I feel like the Check-N-Connect program has an impact in improving my attendance to school?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

21. I feel like the Check-N-Connect program has an impact in improving my timeliness to class?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

22. Overall, since I have been in the Check-N-Connect program at WLHS, I am on task more often in class?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

Appendix F

Check and Connect Teacher Survey

WLHS
Check-N-Connect
Teacher Survey

Directions: Please circle one answer for each question. This survey was used as data to continue to better our mentoring program for the future. Do NOT put your name on this survey. This survey is based on last year's and this year's Check and Connect program and students. After circling your answer, please give any specific examples that support your answer below the answer choices.

1. I feel like I have made a connection and built a relationship with my mentees?
 - A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

2. I feel like my students grades have improved since the inception of the Check-N-Connect program?
 - A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

3. I feel like my students behavior has improved since the inception of the Check-N-Connect program?
 - A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

4. I feel like my student's attitude has improved since the inception of the Check-N-Connect program?
 - A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

5. I feel like my students decision making skills have improved since the inception of the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

6. I feel like my students quality of work has improved since the inception of the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

7. I feel like my students have higher expectations of themselves since the inception of the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

8. I feel like my students have completed more assigned homework since the inception of the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

9. I feel like my students have prepared themselves better for class since the inception of the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

10. I feel like my students have exceeded my requirements for the courses I teach since the inception of the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

11. I feel like my students have had increased motivation to perform better since the inception of the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

12. I feel like my students desire to learn has increased since the inception of the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

13. I feel like my students have had a better vision of the future since the inception of the Check-N-Connect program?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

14. I feel like my students have been more cooperative since the inception of the Check-N-Connect program?

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Neutral
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

15. I feel like the Check-N-Connect program changes behavior in the classroom because my mentees know that I will check up on them?

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Neutral
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

16. I feel like the Check-N-Connect program has changed student's behaviors because their performance was monitored?

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Neutral
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

17. I feel like students made a connection with the other students in my Check-N-Connect group?

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Neutral
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

18. I feel like my mentees social skills have improved from the activities that we have used in our connect meetings?

- A. Strongly Agree
- B. Agree
- C. Neutral
- D. Disagree
- E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

19. Overall, I feel like the Check-N-Connect program is beneficial to our students at WLHS?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

20. I feel like the Check-N-Connect program had an impact in improving my mentees attendance to school?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

21. I feel like the Check-N-Connect program had an impact in improving my mentees timeliness to class.
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

22. Overall, since the inception of the Check-N-Connect program, more students are on-task in the classes I teach?
- A. Strongly Agree
 - B. Agree
 - C. Neutral
 - D. Disagree
 - E. Strongly Disagree

Specific Examples:

Appendix G

Focus Group Prompt

Focus Group Prompt

1. Tell me about Check and Connect.