

An Analysis of What the Best Method Is To Help At-risk  
Students Be Successful In the Classroom.

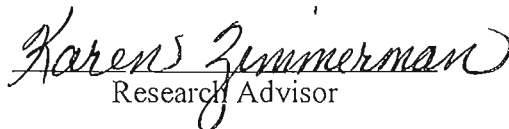
by

Jeff A Bortle

A Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the  
Masters of Science Degree  
in

Education

Approved: 2 Semester Credits

  
Research Advisor

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

August, 2010

**The Graduate School**  
**University of Wisconsin-Stout**  
**Menomonie, WI**

**Author:** Bortle, Jeff A.

**Title:** *An Analysis of What the Best Method Is To Help At-risk Students Be Successful In the Classroom*

**Graduate Degree/Major:** MS Education

**Research Advisor:** Karen Zimmerman, Ph.D.

**Month/Year:** August, 2010

**Number of Pages:** 53

**Style Manual Used:** American Psychological Association, 6th edition

**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to determine what the best method is to help the at-risk students in the seventh and eighth grade at the Manawa Middle School. The three programs that are offered for the students are the Student Assistance Program, the Transition Program, and the At-Risk Program. The study found that the Transition Program had the best results during the year in which students were receiving academic help. The At-Risk Program was found to have the worst results because their grade point average went down during the year they received academic aid. The main recommendation is to offer a program similar to the Transition Program, but to ensure future success students need help to transition from the program back into mainstream classes.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
.....	Page
ABSTRACT.....	2
List of Tables .....	5
Chapter I: Introduction.....	6
Importance in Manawa .....	8
Manawa Special Education.....	9
Statement of the Problem.....	9
Purpose of the Study .....	10
Research Questions.....	10
Definition of Terms.....	10
Assumptions and Limitations of the Study.....	11
Methodology .....	12
Chapter II: Literature Review .....	13
What is an At-Risk Student.....	13
Why do At-Risk Students Need to be Identified .....	14
Identifying At-Risk Students and Their Needs.....	18
Student Programs .....	20
Struggling Students.....	22
Manawa School District.....	24
Chapter III: Methodology .....	26
Purpose of Study .....	26
School Description and Selection of Sample.....	27

Manawa School District Middle School At-Risk Programs .....	28
Student Assistance Program .....	28
Transition Program .....	28
At-Risk Program .....	29
Data Collection .....	29
Data Analysis .....	31
Limitations .....	32
Summary .....	32
Chapter IV: Results.....	33
Student Assistance and Letter Grades.....	33
Transition Group and Letter Grades .....	36
At-Risk Group and Letter Grades .....	40
Chapter V:Discussion .....	44
Conclusions.....	44
Core Subject Areas .....	45
Limitations .....	47
Recommendations.....	48
References .....	50

**List of Tables**

.....Page

Table 1: Student Assistance Group Quarter Grades Year One.....28

Table 2: Student Assistance Group Quarter Grades Year Two .....29

Table 3: Student Assistance Group Quarter Grades Year Three .....30

Table 4: Transition Group Quarter Grades Year One.....32

Table 5: Transition Group Quarter Grades Year Two .....33

Table 6: Transition Group Quarter Grades Year Three .....34

Table 7: At-Risk Group Quarter Grades Year One.....35

Table 8: At-Risk Group Quarter Grades Year Two.....36

Table 9: At-Risk Group Quarter Grades Year Three.....37

## Chapter I: Introduction

All students do not have the work ethic or the support system to be successful students. According to Johnson and Perkins, “students across the United States are deciding to leave school before they graduate” (Johnson & Perkins, 2009, p.123). In a perfect world all students would have the same opportunities within their life and also have an equally satisfying and supportive home life.

When a student transitions to middle school, many things change in their academic life. Students are expected to be more independent. In many of cases more homework is assigned in the middle school than there was in the elementary school setting. “These new schools are typically larger in class and school size and, compared to the smaller, single teacher environment of elementary school, students are exposed to many teachers in middle schools and high schools” (Barber & Olsen, 2004, p.4). This change in their life often causes a student to struggle. A student that is struggling may be labeled at-risk.

What happens if students struggle and do not get the help that they need in middle school? In some cases students will make it through to high school and then their struggle gets worse and they fail classes. This failing then causes them to fall behind in their educational grade and in some cases the student drops out of school because they believe they cannot succeed. “These struggling students exhibit high absentee rates, several course failures, and difficulty in accumulating enough credits to advance past ninth grade” (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009, p.177). In a lot of cases once a student finishes their freshman year it becomes a lot harder to save them. Student who once thought about college now accept defeat. “These students are unlikely to benefit from a rigorous high school with greater course requirements or a college-preparatory mandate because they are likely to stumble during their first year, never get back on

track, and then drop out” (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009, p.177). It is essential that these students receive the help that they need immediately. If they do not it may be too late.

There are different reasons that each at-risk student struggles. The transitions from elementary school to middle school and from middle school to high school are challenging for students. “When students have difficulty with these transitions, schools often provide additional support through school social workers or special programs to enhance school success” (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001, p.235). Some struggle because of learning disabilities, while others struggle because they come from a household where education is not emphasized sufficiently. No matter what the reason is that causes a student to struggle, every student needs to be given a chance to succeed. Programs need to be in place in schools so that students can succeed. “These programs often include tutoring, individual counseling, advocacy, and efforts to increase parental involvement” (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001, p.236).

Both special education and at-risk programs give support in schools. Some students that qualify can get help from the special education department. If a student is part of mainstreamed special education, they still learn the same material as a student who is not in special education. “Students with exceptional learning needs must have access to the general education curriculum” (Rieck & Wadsworth, 2005, p.106).

If a student does not get help from the special education department then they need to receive help from another program. This is where at-risk programs are valuable. At-risk programs help students who do not qualify to get aid from the special education department, but still need assistance because they have not handled the transition to the new grade well. It is the at-risk programs job to help students function the way that they did in previous grades in order for them to be successful. “There is substantial evidence that student functioning declines at

transition” (Barber & Olsen, 2004, p.4). The at-risk program desires to help ease transition or to stop the decline in their academics grades.

So what it comes down to is if a student requires assistance with their learning they should receive help from the special education department or the school needs to provide some sort of at-risk programming. It is the schools responsibility to help students learn.

### **Importance in Manawa**

In the School District of Manawa we have had a high number of failing students. In the last three years, six seventh and eighth graders have failed. That is not including the 23 students who had to attend summer school in order to pass. Since we only have 126 seventh and eighth graders, this is a large amount of students that failed or were close to failing. Some students fail because they miss too much school, while others are failing because they simply will not do any homework outside of the classroom. In Manawa we have a high percentage of parents who did not graduate from high school. Since they did not graduate, they do not put a big emphasis on their children graduating.

In looking within our school, many of our students are given enough attention in the elementary grades so that they will pass the grade without ever really learning the material. This is evident through the fact that our test scores at the end of fourth grade are below the state average. The students are passing the grades, but not gaining the knowledge that they should have. When the students enter seventh grade they instantly have more responsibility for their own learning and at the same time teachers have less time each day with them to meet the students’ needs. When grades come out at the end of the quarter, there is an abundance of lower grades and every one assumes that something went wrong during seventh grade that is causing



problems. When in all actuality the problems have been there, but were not being addressed.

When we can create a program to address these basic educational needs we will help our at-risk students become more successful.

### **Manawa Special Education**

The Manawa Middle School Special Education Program helps aid students from fourth through eighth grade. If students need help and qualify they will receive extra aid from the special education teachers. These teachers will use the strengths of the students to assist them while they try and learn the standard curriculum within the school district. Some students meet regularly with the special education staff, while others only receive minimal help from the special education department. Students that need help and qualify receive a great educational boost and support while being able to work with the special education staff as well as with the regular education staff.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Some students in the Manawa Middle School have struggled academically over the last few years because of a lack of a support system when they enter seventh grade. This struggling has caused our Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam, WKCE, test scores to be lower than what is accepted by our school board. Throughout their seventh and eighth grade years, these at-risk students have had problems when they have encountered higher expectations upon entering seventh and eighth grade. Finding the best method to help these at-risk students is going to be a key to their success and our district's success. Surveys with past and present students will help identify what methods work best in helping at-risk students become successful.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to identify which of the three programs offer the most help to struggling students within the Manawa School District. The study will identify which program helps which core area the most during the middle school to high school transition. Once the program is identified, the School District of Manawa may be able to put more resources into the actual programs that help the students the most.

## **Research Questions**

1. Why do at-risk students need special programs?
2. What will the impact be of special programs for at-risk students be?
3. What are some methods of meeting the needs of at-risk students?
4. What method works best for meeting the needs of at-risk students?
5. Which core class is helped out the most by the programs offered in Manawa?

## **Definition of Terms**

**At-risk student.** Students who have school needs not related to a disability.

**Special education.** Direct instructional activities or special learning experiences designed primarily for students identified as having exceptionalities in one or more aspects of the cognitive process or as being underachievers in relation to general level or model of their overall abilities.

**WKCE.** Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam. State test that all publicly educated students between second and tenth grade take to determine how well the school is doing.

**Agenda.** This is a notebook that students fill out so that they can write down their assignments.

**Student Assistance.** A class in Manawa created to replace study halls in the middle school where at-risk students meet daily with a teacher to make sure all of their work is done and their agenda is filled out. The second level of Student Assistance is when students do not meet daily with a teacher, but their work and grades are still being monitored daily by a designated teacher.

**Core Class.** This is a term used in reference to the seventh and eighth grade math, science, language arts, and social studies classes.

**Transition Program.** A program offered in Manawa that monitors students who are beginning to have academic problems or had problems in the past but have worked to overcome their academic problems.

### **Assumptions and Limitations of the Study**

It is assumed that a majority of the at-risk students will not get very much help from home, so most if not all of the methods must be able to be finished during school hours. Not all students will work hard to be successful, so some students who are not willing to work will impact the results of the study. It is also understood that a method that works for most of the students will not necessarily work for all students. The findings of the study cannot be generalized to larger schools or urban settings. I am based in a small town, which has different characteristics than much larger cities.

A limitation of the study is the inability to keep students within one district. Since Manawa is located in a somewhat transient area in Waupaca County, many students in our district come from other districts during their schooling and often leave during their schooling. If a student leaves during or after they have received help from our program, their comparison analysis will not be possible to be followed. The grade point averages will be found of these students only while they are in the Manawa School District. Some students will enter the varied programs offered in the Manawa Middle School with different academic backgrounds and thus not be at the same academic level during the program.

### ***Methodology***

The following sections are a literature review section which finds documented information that connects to the information on my topic. Following the literature review is a methodology section which talks about how data is being collected and analyzed along with what information is being studied. The third section following is the results section. This section displays the information that was collected in tables and also discusses the findings of the information. The last section of the paper is the discussion section. This section summarizes the purpose of the paper and what conclusions and recommendations can be made from the study.

## **Chapter II: Literature Review**

A student struggling during the transition from an elementary setting to a middle school or junior high setting is very common. These struggling students become at-risk of failure. Helping at-risk students succeed in the classroom will directly lead to helping those students succeed in life. There are many things that need to be done in order to help a struggling student become a successful student. Some students who struggle get help from the special education department. The problem is that there are some students who struggle a lot, but do not get enough help because they do not qualify as having a disability. This chapter covers what an at-risk student is and what you can do to identify each at-risk student. Also, we will begin to discuss various instructional methods that can be used to meet the needs of an at-risk student.

### **What is an At-Risk Student**

Each class that travels through school has some students who are naturally successful, some students who have to work extremely hard to succeed, and some students who work hard, but still have a hard time in school. Some classes also have some students who do have to work hard to succeed, but choose not to. Students that struggle in school for one reason or another are at-risk students. According to Johnson and Perkins, “schools are focusing more effort on reaching students who are identified as at risk of becoming future dropouts due to poverty, behavior, and/or academics” (Johnson & Perkins, 2009, p.128).

According to Rees, “Students may be labeled at risk if they are not succeeding in school based on information gathered from test scores, attendance, or discipline” (Rees, 2007, p.1). This definition simply says that if a student is struggling for a variety of reasons that they can be labeled at-risk. Mill Creek High School in Washington defines at-risk as, “A Student at-risk is

any student who because of his/her individual needs, requires some kind of specially designed intervention in order to achieve in school, graduate, and be prepared for transition from school to post-high school options” ( Mills Creek High School, 2007, p.1). This definition takes it one step further and defines the goals the school has for the at-risk students. All students need to be prepared for success after high school.

### **Why Do At-Risk Students Need to be Identified**

Why do at-risk students need to be identified? Very simple, if they are not identified you are not giving them the best opportunity to learn. “Substantial numbers of students who might benefit from additional educational and behavioral supports may go unrecognized or overlooked” (Lane, Parks, Kalberg, & Carter, 2007, p.209). Colby Community College has as part of their mission statement, “All students deserve the right to succeed regardless of their specific goals or aspirations” (Colby Community College, 2007, p.1). This is not just at community colleges or universities. This also pertains to elementary, middle, and high schools. “Such efforts are necessary because the unique challenges of early adolescence can bring about increased academic and behavioral problems and can eventually lead to school dropout” (Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2007, p. 50).

Besides academic success there are other reasons to help the at-risk. “This negative impact drives school personnel to seek school-wide interventions that reduce the occurrence of at-risk behavior and reconnect students with their school culture” (Converse & Lignugaris, 2009, p.33). Roeser, Eccles, and Freedman-Doan exclaimed, “We begin in the middle school years because both the fruits of adolescents’ earlier adaptive strivings as well as the seeds of their future success or maladaptation in the academic and emotional domains

become particularly prominent during this period” (Roeser, Eccles, & Freedman-Doan, 1999, p.135). “The middle school years are where at-risk students are the most needy. Today, national legislation like No Child Left Behind and Improving America’s Schools Act have brought to light the importance of focusing extra attention, earlier rather than later, on children who have any type of disadvantage that might hinder them in their education” (Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2004, p.122).

“Transferring to a new school creates a transition period that is frequently marked by declining academic performance, increased absences, and increased behavior disturbances” (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010, p.449). “Some students reported that academic and social changes were the most difficult aspects of the transition” (Stein and Hussong, 2007, p.61). Knowing that this transition can lead to a lot of difficulties is a main reason to have at-risk programming. Rudolph, Lambert, Clark, and Kurakowsky found, “Some adolescents may experience greater difficulties negotiating challenging encounters such as transitions than other adolescents” (Rudolph, Lambert, Clark, & Kurakowsky, 2001, p.930).

Some students develop the need for additional assistance at different times in their life. The change from a self contained elementary classroom where teachers are able to give a lot more one on one attention to the middle school classroom where students have teachers for only one hour of the day can be a very challenging time. The needs develop for students that become at risk for a few reasons. Middle school is “a time when students are at increased risk of encountering the personal and family problems, school difficulties, and behavioral problems that contribute to a failure to graduate” (Jozefowicz-Simbeni, 2007, p.50). The change in setting from an elementary setting to a middle school setting is a primary cause. Teachers are different, expectations are different. Often the way teachers teach becomes more reliant on motivated

students. Blyth, Simmons, and Bush affirm, “During the transition from primary to secondary school, children face a range of new demands associated with differences in school structure, classroom organization, teaching strategies, academic standards, and teacher expectations,” (Blyth, Simmons, & Bush, 1978, p. 149).

Transitioning from an elementary setting to a middle school or junior high setting can be a stressful time in a student’s life. Grolnick, Kurowski, Dunlap and Hevey found, “Research has generally supported the notion that this transition is a time of vulnerability, although the universality of disruption is controversial” (Grolnick, Kurowski, Dunlap & Hevey, 2000, p.1). The change overall can negatively affect a middle school student’s life. “This was accompanied by increases in homework difficulty and quantity, poorer relationships with teachers, and feeling disconnected from school” (Stein & Hussong, 2007, p.61). The transition may not be the same for all of the students, but some students are affected by the transition in a great way. Lord, Eccles, and Macarthy agree that, “Thus, the literature has turned from an emphasis on whether, in general, the transition is disruptive for children, to an examination of who is vulnerable and what factors protect children from experiencing declines in self-perceptions and academic performance” (Lord, Eccles, & Macarthy, 1994, p.165).

“Studies have documented, for example, that a substantial number of children show declines in their academic motivation and achievement, and increases in behavioral problems and emotional distress during the middle school years” (Eccles, Lord, & Roeser, 1996, 52). Programs are needed to help the students that are already showing or begin to show struggles in the academic progress.

This issue also shows up when students transition from middle school to high school. Roeser, Eccles, and Freedman-Doan maintain, “We examine whether different groups of



children change in different ways across this important normative life transition,” (Roeser, Eccles, & Freedman-Doan, 1999, p.141). Some students do not adapt very well and thus need different programs to help them with the transition during this important stage of their life.

These changes can cause a downward spiral in academics. Studies show that the transition times from either elementary to middle or middle to high school are some of the hardest academic times in a student’s career. Harter conveys, “The many changes experienced in secondary school have been found to exert an adverse influence on adolescent functioning that includes declines in academic motivation, perceived competence, and intrinsic interest in school” (Harter, 1981, p.300).

Besides the transition itself, another thing that impacts students and their success is how much parents are involved in their child’s education. If the student is from a single or two parent household can also have an impact. Grolnick, Kurowski, Dunlap and Hevey reiterate, “We view the family as another context that may contribute to children's response to the transition” (Grolnick, Kurowski, Dunlap, & Hevey, 2000, p.466). “The reduction of parental supervision and support, accompanied by the increase in peer influence that characterizes adolescence, may result in increased risk-taking behaviors and declining academic performance” (Nield, 2009, p.58). This may result in increased risk-taking behaviors and declining academic performance. In particular, the resources provided by families to children may serve as protective factors during this vulnerable period,” (Nield, 2009, p.53).

Students that are labeled at-risk in middle school often can not doing anything to help it initially. Some studies have shown that students’ ability to be successful in middle school decreases over the time they spent in elementary school. Barber and Olsen found, “There is

substantial evidence that student functioning declines at transition” (Barber & Olsen, 2004, p. 4.).

### **Identifying At-Risk Students and Their Needs**

“At-risk students have special needs that must be met for them to be successful in school” (Sullivan & Bishop, 2005, p.23). Knowing what an at-risk student is does not mean that they are easily identified. Researchers have a variety of thoughts on criteria for identifying at-risk students. Richardson, Casanova, and Placier say, “The concept at-risk may be viewed as a combination of personal and background characteristics of a child and the social and academic context of the school” (Richardson, Casanova, & Placier, 2006, p.9). There is not one specific mold for all at-risk students. Some students have the ability to succeed, but not the work ethic. Other students have the work ethic, but not the ability.

A number of at risk characteristics show up in middle school. Hankin says the following about the middle school years, “This period is associated with sharp increases in rates of psychological symptoms and maladaptive behaviors, such as anxiety, depression, substance abuse, and anti-social conduct” (Hankin, 1998, p. 128). In some cases, there are other circumstances that impact how students are doing within the classroom. Students who live in a low-income area or an area with a high rate of violence can have larger struggles than the average student. Lerner says, “High school dropout rates, for example, are as much as 300% higher among poor youth” (Lerner, 1995, p.82). McLoyd claims, “Low income urban youth face many ecological barriers and restraints that keep them from achieving their true potential” (McLoyd, 1998, p.188). A student in this situation has entirely different needs and difficulties than what other students have.

Identifying what each student needs is a huge part of identifying at-risk students. Donnelly states, “At-risk students need to be identified as early as possible and regularly reevaluated because their family status and living situations can change” (Donnelly, 2007, p.1). Many times when you see a student struggling in a class you would think that their need is to improve their grade in that class. In many cases there is an underlying factor that needs to be identified. Killion insists, “Knowing students are weak in mathematics is insufficient as a starting point” (Killion, 1999, p.2). You need to look deeper than the first observation.

Successful programs end up with a lot of similarities. In most cases the schools find out what help best fits each individual student. The school district of Waukesha declares, “Services for at-risk students include school counseling, school social work, extra help from teachers, alternative programs both in school as well as off-campus, and community-based programs” (School District of Waukesha, 2007, p.1). Geogiana Swauger exclaims that one characteristic of a good at-risk program is, “Teachers make the classrooms places of belonging” (Swauger, 2002, p.1). If the students feel that they are part of something they have had better success with them working harder.

In a lot of cases the needs of students can be similar. In most cases at-risk students do not have a sense of belonging to anything.

Finn and Rock (1997) say,

Successful at-risk students who participated in positive engagement behaviors --for example, coming to class and school on time, being prepared for and participating in class work, expending the effort needed to complete assignments in school and as homework and not being disruptive in class -- counteracted other influences to produce acceptable grades, test scores and on-time graduation (p.221.).

If belonging and responsibility is the major need of a lot of at-risk students, this should be the focus of all at-risk programs. In Colorado, the police department started an athletic team for the repeat offenders. The program has been a great success so far. Every child deserves a chance to be successful.

### **Student Programs**

Students get help from many different programs offered throughout their education. Some students qualify for help from different programs while others do not. Johnson and Perkins found, “much of the research on at-risk students indicates that a lack of school engagement is a major contributing factor leading to adolescents dropping out of school” (Johnson & Perkins, 2009, p. 128).

Throughout their schooling, special education assistance is offered to some students. Watson declares, “Specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (Watson, 2004, p.1). In order to qualify for special education a student must meet one of thirteen qualifying categories. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Act the thirteen categories are Autism, Deaf or Blindness, Developmental Delays, Emotional Disturbance, Hearing Impairments, Mental Retardation, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairments, Other Health Impairments, Specific Learning Disabilities, Speech and Language Impairments, Traumatic Brain Injury, and Visual Impairments.

Students will be referred to the special education department by the students’ teacher. Any teacher that the student has can refer the student to be tested for the special education department. Once a student is referred the school may test the student to determine if the student has a disability and needs special education. According to the Learning Disabilities Association

of America, if a child is suspected to have special needs because of a disability, he or she may be referred to the school to be considered for special education and related services. This referral may be made by parents, teachers, doctors, a community agency, an individual, a group, or an organization that may have worked with the student or school. Referral may also be the result of district-wide testing or screening.

If a student does not qualify for special education, there are other programs that can be used to help meet their needs. One program that is offered to students who are at risk is a complete pullout program in which the students take classes on a computer. In most cases students stay in this program until they are caught up to where their classmates are. One such program is called Ombudsman. This is an example in a school in Missouri.

At Ombudsman (2010),

students in an Ombudsman learning center spend about three-quarters of the day working on computers to master their subjects with assistance from teachers and instructional staff. The rest of the day is spent doing writing assignments, participating in group projects and conducting research. There is one instructor for every 10 or fewer students, so students receive individualized attention. Students stay on task and remain focused, motivated and engaged (p.1).

A program like this is often the last chance for a student because they have fallen so far behind in their academic progress.

According to school officials of the Ombudsman program, “Ombudsman has helped more than 100,000 students since 1979. Eighty-five percent of Ombudsman students graduate, earn credits or return to their district school closer to or at grade level” (Ombudsman Program, 2010, p.1).

Another type of program is set up to help struggling or at-risk students in more of a small group setting. For part of the school day struggling students will work in a small group setting with a teacher in order to help the students with skills that they struggle with. Gillies states, “The results show that the children in the structured groups were more cooperative and provided more relevant verbal help and assistance to each other as they worked together in their groups than their peers in the unstructured groups” (Gillies, 2003, p.137)

Over time schools have identified the middle school or junior high years as a struggling time for students. Reform of schools has taken place to help some of this struggling.

Rudolph, Lambert, Clark, and Kurakowsky (2001) stated,

one goal of school reform during recent years has been to institute substantive policies in middle schools aimed at significantly altering both educational practices (e.g., an emphasis on mastery-orientated rather than performance-orientated goals) and school climate (e.g., a “team” approach that creates a more intimate atmosphere and facilitates student-student and student-teacher relationships). (p.931)

These atmospherical changes are a reason that Manawa created the Student Assistance program.

### **Struggling Students**

Even with proper programming some students will continue to struggle. Rudolph, Lambert, Clark, and Kurakowsky found, “Some adolescents may still feel overwhelmed by the inevitable changes faced at this time (e.g, larger and more crowded schools, changes in daily school routines, increased emphasis on grades, and higher teacher expectations,” (Rudolph, Lambert, Clark, & Kurakowsky, 2001, p.931).

Student motivation is one characteristic that separates many middle school students. Some students are motivated to do well, but others students need a little extra push to motivate them to do well. “Students who do not navigate a school transition well face the possibility of personal and academic turmoil and even falling off track for promotion and graduation” (Neild, 2009, p. 54). Eccles wrote, “The early adolescent years mark the beginning of a downward spiral in school-related behaviors and motivation that often lead to academic failure and dropping out of school” (Eccles, 1999, p.554). Helping students develop more motivation in order to succeed is a major point of middle school at-risk programs.

Students are often successful in elementary school and then struggle in middle school. “Research indicates that students’ overall intrinsic academic motivation declines along the years of schooling, particularly in transition between school systems” (Katz, Kaplan, and Gueta, 2009, 247). Without one teacher to watch over the student and their work, students must be motivated to do well on their own. According to Eccles, “Some of these changes in motivation are particularly likely to occur in conjunction with the middle school transition, leading researchers to suggest that school transitions at this period of life may have especially negative consequences for at least some early adolescents” (Eccles, 1999, p.555).

According to Eccles, “Fifth through 12th grade students’ beliefs and attitudes regarding Mathematics and English and found that middle and high school students’ ability beliefs and valuing of math were much lower than those of elementary school students” (Eccles, 1983, p.78). These attitudes about Math and English are also a huge obstacle to address when a student does not want to work hard. Getting a student to work hard on something that they do not really like is a huge challenge when working with at-risk youth.

Once students are identified and placed in programs, motivating students for success is the job of the teacher who runs the given program. Although every student may not be successful in a program, placing a student in a program that fits their needs is the best way to help students transition into the middle school well and be successful.

### **Manawa School District**

The Manawa School District consists of a total of 850 students. There are 315 students who attend our elementary school, 244 students attend our middle school, and 291 students attend our high school. The middle school is divided into two sections. One section consists of the fourth through sixth grade and the other section consists of the seventh and eighth grade. The seventh and eighth grade consists of 126 students.

Five percent of our total middle school population consisted of ethnic groups other than Caucasian. Most of that consisted of these were Hispanic students. Six students from the 126 students were from an ethnic background other than Caucasian.

Twenty-eight percent of our middle school students were economically disadvantaged. Thirty-five of the 126 students in seventh and eighth grade fell into this category.

Eleven percent of the total middle school population is enrolled with a disability. That means 14 students out 126 students had some sort of identifiable disability.

One hundred percent of the students in the seventh and eighth grade in the Manawa School District are English proficient. In other years we have had some students come through the seventh and eighth grade that are only proficient in Spanish.



In summary, students struggle greatly coming into the seventh and eighth grade at the Manawa Middle School. When students enter the seventh and eighth grade they are asked to do many different things that they have not done while they were in an elementary setting.

Students struggle with the transition to seventh grade. This struggle is from raised expectations and a change in their social life. This change coincides with a decreased emphasis on school work from the student.

When students begin to struggle in the Manawa Middle School they can be tested for special education or can be referred to one of the at-risk programs. Once a student is found to not have qualified for special education they are then placed in one of the three at-risk programs.

Once a student is referred to the at-risk department the student will be placed in a program that seems to best fit the student's ability and learning habits. These programs are set up to help instill behaviors that lead to success for each student.

### **Chapter III: Methodology**

This chapter identified the purpose of the study. In this section the different groups that data was collected from were described in detail. A detailed description of the Student Assistance Program, the Transition Program, and the At-Risk Program was given. It also explained how the data was collected and analyzed to come to the conclusions that were reached. As all studies, this study also had some limitations in its findings. The final part of this section explained the purpose of the study.

This study investigated the best method to help at-risk students succeed in the classroom. There were three different programs offered in the Manawa Middle School to help students that struggle with their academics. The three programs that were offered were the Student Assistance Program, the Transition Program, and the At-Risk Program.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this study was to identify which of the three programs offered to help Manawa Middle School seventh and eighth grade students helps the students the most during their year that they receive the educational help.

A secondary purpose of this study was to classify which program helped the students the most once they left the program. By identifying which program assisted the students the most after the students left the program one was able to see which program had the most long-term impact on the students.

### **School Description and Selection of Sample**

The Manawa Middle School seventh and eighth grade consisted of 126 students. Thirty of those students were in one of the three programs that helped students with their educational struggles. The Manawa Middle School had a high number of students who have failed a grade or were forced to go to summer school in order to try and recover some of the failed classes so the student could advance to the next grade. Some of the struggles came because a high percentage of the parents in the Manawa Community never graduated from high school.

The study sample was located by identifying the students in the Manawa Middle School Student Assistance Program, the Manawa Middle School Transition Program, and the Manawa Middle School At-Risk Program. For this study we concentrated on just the Middle School programs outside of the special education department. The students sampled needed to be in one of the three programs or have just completed the programs.

The sample group consisted of 15 seventh graders and 15 eighth graders. That is a total of 30 students. Of the 30 middle school students, 16 were male and 14 were female. One student was of Native American ethnicity.

The students in this sample all had similar academic backgrounds, although some attended other school districts besides the Manawa School District. All students in the three programs had been placed there with both teacher recommendation and parent approval. Teachers recommended the programs for students who struggled with academics or teachers recognized that the students would probably have issues with the transition to seventh and eighth grade.

## **Manawa School District Middle School At-Risk Programs**

### **Student Assistance Program**

Eighteen of the students had one hour each day were they were in a class called Student Assistance. This class was one period in length and the teacher monitored that the students' work was done on time and was done correctly. Every day, students entered the classroom and met with the teacher to go over the work that was assigned the previous day and to make a plan on what they need to work on for the day. If a student was not done with their work, the student would have to give up their noon recess time to work on late or missing work.

The teacher also monitored students overall grades and help the students learn the skills for studying for tests. Student Assistance was a small group class where students were able to ask for help on assignments in a less restrictive environment. Students were taught how to monitor their classroom grades from day to day so they could learn the responsibility of what it takes to be successful in all classes. Students were not allowed to come to Student Assistance from their other classes during other times during the day. This group of students usually were the students who had the lowest academic ability compared to the other two groups.

### **Transition Program**

A second group of students did not have a specific class or teacher to report to for extra help, but they were monitored and talked to once a week to check to make sure they were getting the work done on time and were receiving adequate grades. This was the Transition Program. This group consisted of seven of the students. These students often had completed a year of Student Assistance and were deemed ready to go back into the main stream classroom. The weekly meetings and monitoring allowed the students a small resource if they had questions or

issues with a class, but the students were very independent and self-motivated. This group of students was the most responsible and had a better work ethic than the other groups. This group was transitioning back into the regular education mainstream.

### **At-Risk Program**

Out of the students in the seventh and eighth grade, six students worked in an at-risk setting where they worked with one teacher and were allowed to leave other classrooms after instruction was complete in order to get help from this teacher on their homework or with re-teaching the material that was already taught. This is labeled the At-Risk Program. The students had one hour set aside every day to work in a one on one setting with this teacher. The teacher worked on motivational techniques and test taking strategies. Since the students are allowed to leave the classroom to meet with the teacher this resource teacher becomes a day long help to the students. This classroom was like a resource room. These students often had many issues going on in their life that distracted them from their education.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected using the Manawa School District's Grading Program and was collected by the researcher. The data that was collected was the students' letter grades from the math, science, social studies, and language arts classes. The data was found on the Skyward Grading System used by the Manawa School District. Data from the students' year receiving academic help was compared to the previous year and the year after receiving academic help. The data that was used was already available so no parental permission to participate was needed for this study. This data was collected in May and June of 2010.

The main purpose of the collection was to identify which instructional technique helped them the most towards becoming a better student. The grades identified the students' grade point average before entering the at-risk program, the grade point average at the time of finishing one year in the program, and the grade point average following the year in the at-risk program.

Some of students had grades collected from a sixth grade elementary setting from September 2006 to May 2007, a seventh grading setting getting help with various programs from September 2007 to May 2008, and grades the year after they no longer received help from a school program from September 2009 to May 2010. These were the students that first received academic help from out three programs during the 2007-2008 school year and were in seventh grade.

Some had grades collected from a seventh grade classroom setting from September 2006 to May 2007, an eighth grade setting in which the students received help from various programs from September 2007 to May 2008, and grades the year after the students no longer received help from a school program September 2008 to May 2009. These were the students that first received academic help from out three programs during the 2007-2008 school year and were in eighth grade.

Letter grades were collected for all four quarters for each of the three years used in the study. Letter grades were compared from the three year time period to show if students showed improved success in all four core classes or if it was limited to only certain classes. The letter grades were then calculated into a standard 4.0 grade point average scale. A 4.0 was an A. A 3.0 was a B. A 2.0 was a C and a 1.0 was a D. If a student received an F it was a zero on the grade point average scale. The relationship between the letter grades from the three year period will show if a student had success from their involvement in the at-risk program.

The researcher strived to create validity and reliability by comparing only classes that the students had both years being compared. The grades were used to help identify which method of instruction was best for them to succeed. No other information besides what was gathered from the Grading Program will be used during the information process.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of the data showed the connection between the three different programs and the grade point averages that each program had the year before the received academic help, the year that they received academic help and the year after they received academic help.

The data was organized into three groupings. The first group was the year before they received help, the second grouping was the year they received help, and the final grouping was the year after they stopped receiving help from one of the programs. A grade point average was computed for each of the three years for each of the three programs.

After computing the overall grade point averages for the three years of each program, that individual data of each core class was then tabulated in order to find the grade point average of each class for each of the three years in the study. This was done in order to see if one of the four core classes was impacted more by the three different programs over the three years.

Once all of the grade point averages were collected, each year was compared within each program to see which program had the greater increase in grade point average or the smaller decrease in grade point average.

Once all of the comparisons were complete the program with the greatest increase in grade point average from year one to year two was identified and the program with the smallest decrease from year two to year three was identified.

## **Limitations**

One problem that did persist with this study was that with only 30 total students one student can have a great impact on the overall class grade point averages. If a student was a major outlier with their data they can both raise or lower the overall grade point average and thus give a possible affected answer.

Another limitation about this procedure was that the information is collected over a three year span. During that time things do change. Teachers will change and so do students. Some students will move or have a change in their academic views. If a student was no longer in the district the student will not have full data collected. Since this study analyzed information over a three year period, many things can change for a student. Students could have developed a new outlook on academics during the three year span. If a student decided to work hard, that would have impacted the overall grade point average. This change in motivation could have been caused by one of the programs or it could have been from an impacting moment in a student's life. A student may also have had some out of school activities or actions that may impact their academics.

## **Summary**

This study identified which of the three programs helped students with educational needs the most. Individual student improvement from in the program to outside the program was examined. Every student's grades in each core class from year one to year two was studied. Overall subject grade point average will be found to see which subjects were impacted the most from year one to year two.



## Chapter IV: Results

This section showed the results that were found and how the three groups that were studied compared to each other. The data for this research was collected May and June of 2010. Students' grades were documented using the Manawa School District's Skyward Grading Program. For the students who were in seventh grade at the time that they received assistance in their education, quarter grades from their sixth, seventh, and ninth grade math, science, social studies, and language arts classes were documented. For students who were in eighth grade at the time that they received academic assistance in their education, quarter grades for the seventh, eighth, and ninth grade math, science, social studies, and language arts classes were documented. Grade point averages were then tabulated using a grading scale where a four point zero is an A.

### Student Assistance and Letter Grades

Table 1

*Student Assistance Group Quarter Grades Year One*

Grade	A	B	C	D	F
Math	0	10	23	23	9
Science	0	2	34	17	12
Social Studies	0	17	28	13	7
Language Arts	0	20	19	14	12

---

The first group of data that was studied is the group of 17 students who received help from the Student Assistance Program. This group consisted of eight eighth grade students and

nine seventh grade students. For the ease of collecting data all grades were collected and placed in either an A, B, C, D, or F category. These grades were then converted to an overall grade point average. One student in this group only attended one quarter of sixth grade in the Manawa School District. Another student from this group moved out of the district between their eighth grade and ninth grade year.

Table one shows the grades students achieved in the year prior to their extra services. These are the quarter grades for the four core area subjects. The year one overall grade point average was 1.65. This falls into about a C- average on a traditional grading scale. The math grade point average came out to 1.57 which was C-. The science grade point average was a 1.46 which is D+. The social studies grade point average was a 1.85 which was a C- on a traditional scale. The language arts grade point average was 1.78 which was a C- on our scale. This data will be able to be compared to the data from the next two tables to show if students using the Student Assistance Program were able to gain an educational advantage.

Table 2

*Student Assistance Group Quarter Grades Year Two*

Grade	A	B	C	D	F
Math	1	11	30	19	7
Science	0	14	28	22	4
Social Studies	6	22	23	14	3
Language Arts	10	21	21	13	3

Table two shows the grade distribution while in either seventh or eighth grade and also in the Student Assistance Program. Students had an overall grade point average of 1.99 while in the Student Assistance program. This was a letter grade of a C on a traditional grading scale. Six students actually had a lower grade point average while in the Student Assistance Program than they did the previous year. All six of the students were in seventh grade when they were in Student Assistance. The math grade point average is 1.69. The science grade point average is 1.73. Social studies was 2.20. The language arts grade point average is 2.32. The biggest improvement in a subject was in language arts, where there was a .54 improvement. This is almost half a letter grade. The smallest improvement was in math where they showed a .12 improvement.

Table 3

*Student Assistance Group Quarter Grades Year Three*

Grade	A	B	C	D	F
Math	7	18	15	15	9
Science	2	12	13	18	19
Social Studies	0	1	11	9	43
Language Arts	3	13	13	18	17

Table three shows the students' grades once they no longer receive any help from special services. These grades are all taken during the students ninth grade year. It was their first year of high school. The Student Assistance Program was only offered in seventh and eighth grade.

The overall grade point average for year three was 1.32. This was a D+ average on a traditional scale. This number also shows a decrease of .67 from the year they received help from the Student Assistance Program and a .33 decrease from the year before the program.

The math grade point average was the only class that showed an improvement in its third year. The math grade point average rose to 1.95. This was up from 1.57 from the first year. The science grade point average dropped from 1.73 to 1.37 in year three. The language grade point average dropped from 2.32 to 1.44. The biggest drop in grade point average happened in social studies. The grade point average dropped from 2.20 to .54. This is a drop of 1.66 or almost two full grades.

In summary, the Student Assistance program showed a .34 overall improvement in their grade point average from the year before the received assistance to the current year they were receiving assistance. Eight students showed an improvement in every core subject area from year one to year two. Only two students showed a decrease in all subject areas from year on two year two. The biggest overall improvement from year one to year two in grade point average was 1.5. This is a one and a half letter grade improvement in less than a year.

### **Transition Group and Letter Grades**

The second group of data that was studied was the students that were part of the Transition Program. This group consisted of the more high functioning people within the three programs. This group consisted of seven students overall. Five of the students were eighth graders and two students were seventh graders. One student in this group did not attend their third year in the Manawa School District. For ease of information, the same data collection

procedure and reporting was used with this group as was used with the Student Assistance Group.

Table 4

*Transition Group Quarter Grades Year One*

Grade	A	B	C	D	F
Math	4	3	12	6	2
Science	0	1	13	10	3
Social Studies	3	6	12	6	0
Language Arts	0	10	5	8	4

Table four shows the grades that were earned by the students the year before they entered the Transition Program. Seven A letter grades were earned in this group compared to zero from the Student Assistance Group. The year one overall grade point average was 1.85. This is .28 higher than that of the Student Assistance Group when they entered their program. Their math grade point average was 2.04. The science grade point average was 1.40. Two and nineteen one hundredths was the social studies grade point average in year one. Finally, the language grade point average was 1.81. Science was the only class where the Student Assistance Group had a higher grade point average entering year two.

The table in the following page shows year two for the Transition Program. All seven students completed the full seventh or eighth grade year in the Transition Program.

Table 5

*Transition Group Quarter Grades Year Two*

Grade	A	B	C	D	F
Math	2	12	9	5	0
Science	2	7	16	3	0
Social Studies	11	11	6	0	0
Language Arts	2	15	7	3	1

The Transition Group achieved a grade point average of 2.57. This is a C+ on a traditional grading scale. The grade point average was an increase of .72 over the previous year's grade point average. The Transition Program's grade point average was .33 higher than that of the Student Assistance group.

In year two all subject areas saw an increase in their grade point average. Year two in math showed a .2 improvement over year one. That brought the math grade point average up to 2.24. This was .55 higher than that of the Student Assistance Group's math grade point average. The science grade point average showed a .87 increase up to 2.27. The social studies grade point average increased the most of any of the subjects in year two. The social studies grade point average increased a full letter grade up to 3.19. This is a B average in social studies. The language grade point average increased .74 to 2.55.

This group showed the biggest gains from year one to year two of the two groups that were studied. The following table shows the letter grades achieved in year three of the program. Once again this year was a year after they received service in the Transition Program.

Table 6

*Transition Group Quarter Grades Year Three*

Grade	A	B	C	D	F
Math	3	3	5	8	5
Science	2	6	9	6	1
Social Studies	1	0	3	5	15
Language Arts	0	3	6	6	9

Year three data showed a definite slide in grade point average in all core areas. The overall grade point average fell 1.23. The grade point average dropped over an entire letter grade in year three bringing the grade point average to 1.34. This is a D+ average. The Student Assistance group fell .67 during year three which is half of the drop that the Transition Group had.

All four core grade point averages decreased during year three. The math grade point average dropped .57 from year two to year three. The social studies grade point average dropped 2.58 from year two to year three. This brought the grade point average down to .61. The science grade point average dipped .23 down to 2.04, while the language grade point average dropped 1.46 to 1.09.

In summary the Transition Group made great strides in year two of the study. Their grade point average in all of the core classes rose while being monitored loosely by an advisor. In year three all core classes saw their grade point average drop significantly once the students

were not being monitored any more. Three students saw an increase in their grade point average in all of the core subject areas from year one to year two. More importantly, no student saw a decrease in all subject areas from year one to year two. The biggest improvement a student had was 1.67. The student increased from a D average in year one to a B- average in year two.

### **At-Risk Group and Letter Grades**

The last group of data that was studied were students that took part in the At-Risk Program. This group consisted of six students. Four of the students were seventh graders and two were eighth graders. This group of students was more of the transient group of students. All of the students attended year one and two of the study, but three of the students left the district before year three of the study. The same data collection procedure was used for the At-Risk Group as was used for the other groups.

Table 7

#### *At-Risk Group Quarter Grades Year One*

Grade	A	B	C	D	F
Math	2	7	10	5	0
Science	0	3	11	7	3
Social Studies	0	9	9	4	2
Language Arts	0	6	7	5	6



Table seven shows the scores of our At-Risk Group in year one of their studies. Their grade point average for year one of the study was 1.88. This is a C- average. Math was the strongest subject during year one posting a grade point average of 2.28. This is the highest math average during year one of any of the groups. The science average came in at 1.59, while the social studies average was 2.08. One and fifty-eight hundredths was the grade point average for language arts. The math grades were the only grades between the three groups that showed a large variation in their grade point average. The difference between the highest and lowest year one math grade point average was .71.

The following table shows year two data for the At-Risk Group. This is the year that the students met individually with the teacher in the At-Risk Program. This is the only group that showed a drop in scores from year one to year two.

Table 8

*At-Risk Group Quarter Grades Year Two*

Grade	A	B	C	D	F
Math	0	7	7	8	2
Science	0	2	9	11	2
Social Studies	0	5	8	10	1
Language Arts	1	5	10	5	3

The overall grade point average for the At-Risk Group fell .21 points from year one to year two. This dropped their overall grade point average to 1.67. This was .32 lower than the

next closes grade point average in year two. The math grade point average fell .51. This fall was the greatest fall during the study from year one to year two. The science grade point average fell .14 to 1.45. The social studies grade point average was 1.70, which is down .38 from year one. The only subject that increased from year one to year two was language. It showed a .21 improvement bringing the grade point average up to 1.79.

The last table shows the scores during year three of the study for the At-Risk Group. Once again, three students did move out of the district during this time. This does cause a difference in the data.

Table 9

*At-Risk Group Quarter Grades Year Three*

Grade	A	B	C	D	F
Math	1	6	3	1	1
Science	0	3	6	2	1
Social Studies	0	0	4	1	7
Language Arts	0	3	4	0	5

Year three saw only a slight drop in grade point average from year two. The overall grade point average dropped .06 to 1.61. This is by far the smallest drop during the third year of any of the studied groups.

The math grade point average increased .57. This brought the grade point average up to 2.34 which is a C+ average. This was the biggest jump of any core class during year three of the

study. The science grade point average rose up .49 up to 1.94. The social studies and language grade point averages both dropped in year three of the study. Social studies dropped .95 down to .75 and the language grade point average dropped .37 down to 1.42.

The At-Risk Group showed the only drop during year one to year two of the study, but they also showed the only real gains during year two to year three of the study. Their overall grade point average was down .21 during year two. The At-Risk Group had one student who showed a decrease in their grade point average in all core subject areas from year one to year two. Four of the six students showed an improvement in their overall grade point average from year one to year two.

The At-Risk Program did the worst while receiving the extra help showed the least fall off when they no longer were receiving extra programming. They also had the highest overall grade point average in year one and also in year three. The Transition group had the highest grade point average during year two of the study.

## **Chapter V: Discussion**

Students face a daunting task when they transition from elementary to middle school or junior high. Things change in their social, academic, and family lives. Students will develop new friendships and create new relationships. In their classes, students will often receive more homework and have less guidance academically. Students will begin to gain more freedom and trust from the family and will begin to do things on their own. The goal of this study was to analyze which of the three programs offered in the Manawa Middle School works the best for helping students that are considered at-risk.

### **Conclusions**

This study found that the students that were monitored, but didn't meet daily with a teacher or supervisor made the biggest improvement during the year of academic help. The Transition Group made the biggest improvement from year one to year two. This group also maintained the highest grade point average during year two of the study. By increasing their overall grade point average by .72 to 2.57, the Transition group was able to raise their overall grade point average to a B- on a traditional grading scale.

The Student Assistance Group also made improvements from year one to year two, but the increase and overall grade point average were not as high as the Transition Group. Increasing their grade point average by .34 to 1.99 was a major improvement. Their overall grade point average would bring their letter grade up to a C average.

The At-Risk Group did not show progress at all during year two. Their overall grade point average dropped .37 to end at 1.60. This is a C- on a traditional grading scale. The drop in grade point average shows that the one on one help all of the time might have hindered the

academic development of these students. They may have become more reliant on the help and they may not have been able to function on their own. “When students have difficulty with these transitions, schools often provide additional support through school social workers or special programs to enhance school success” (Chapman & Sawyer, 2001, p.235). Sometimes these programs do not help all students succeed. When a student receives one on one help during the day it is assumed that the students have major needs. The At-Risk group had a higher proportion of students that were in major need of academic help than the other two groups.

### **Core Subject Areas**

Although the overall grade point average in the most important piece of data being considered in this study, the individual core subject area grade point averages also are important. It is noteworthy to identify if one of the four core subject areas was impacted more than the other subject areas.

The Transition Group also made the biggest improvement during the second year in their math class. The Transition Group increased by .2 while the Student Assistance Group increased by .12. The At-Risk group decreased .53 in their math grade point average from year one to year two.

In science the Transition Group once again had the biggest increase of .87 to 2.27 compared to that of the Student Assistance Group of .27 to 1.73. The At-Risk group repeated their performance and decreased in science also. The increase by the Transition Group brought their grade point average up to a C. Along with decreasing, the At-Risk Group also had the lowest overall year two grade point average of 1.43.

The social studies class showed much of the same with the Transition Group increasing their grade point average a full point to 3.19. This is the only class in the study that produced a B average. The Student Assistance Group increased their grade point average to 1.73. The At-Risk once again saw a decline in their grade point average that ended up with the lowest grade point average of 1.77.

Language Arts was the only subject where the At-Risk Group increased from year one to year two. The Transition Group increased by .74 and once again had the highest grade point average in language arts. The Transition Group also had the biggest increase of any of the groups in language arts.

Year three represents some very interesting data. Two of the three groups decreased in the overall grade point average. The Transition Group which showed major improvement from year one to year two showed the biggest decrease of any of the three groups when they finished year three. The Transition Group had their grade point average drop by 1.23 points. Their grade point average fell to 1.34. In fact the only group that showed only a small increase during year three was the At-Risk Group. The At-Risk Group had their overall grade point drop along with their math, science, and social studies grade point average drop. They only had a .06 drop from year one to year two.

Overall, the Transition Group seemed to show the most improvement during year two over the other two groups, although they did struggle when they entered year three. The At-Risk group showed no improvement during year two, but had the most success during year three. The Student Assistance Group fell in the middle of both groups. They did not increase as much as the Transition Group in year two, but did not drop as much as they did in year three. Support is needed to be successful. "To help students experiencing school failure, many schools have

incorporated programs that provide students with extra academic and personal support”  
(Chapman & Sawyer, 2010, p.235).

### **Limitations**

The data collected in this study may be limited to only these 30 students. The students in these groups have been placed in these programs by teacher and parent requests. The 30 students in the three programs do not have the same motivation or work ethic. They do not have the same academic ability. Since their work ethic and motivation were different, the data from one group to another group in the same settings may differ.

The grade point average is greatly affected by one student in this study. We had three students move out of the district during the study and one that only attended part of year one. This lack of their data may have changed the overall grade point average since there are relatively small numbers in each group.

The difficulty of the class is also a variable. In most cases this balances out from year to year, but inspection of the year three tables shows you a very high number of students had major problems in social studies. In total there were 65 Fs out of 96 total letter grades. That means that 68% of the letter grades were Fs. No other subject during any of the three years even came close to this percentage of failing grades. This difficult class impacts the overall grade point average in year three of the study. It does impact all three groups, but it makes it more difficult to compare that data to the data collected in year one and year two.

## Recommendations

The data from this survey can lead to a few different conclusions. While inspecting the data you also need to consider the research collected about at-risk students. “Middle school students are transitioning from late childhood to early adolescence. It is a time of many changes and, at times, turmoil” (Kruczek, Alexander, & Harris, 2005, p.235) These changes are not the same for all students and thus the results we collected would not be the same for all students.

One recommendation from this study is concerning the Transition Program. This group saw the most overall success, but yet had the least amount of direct attention from a teacher or supervisor. The data showed that before these students entered the program they already had the highest grade point average. These students already had a solid academic base built, but needed a little extra attention to keep them on track for success. This attention ensured success for those students. Not all students would be successful with so limited attention. If that were the case, we would not have students on the verge of retention.

Offering students assistance for only one year is not successful. Schools must have a program set up to gradually decrease the level of assistance which will give students the opportunity to slowly transition back into the classroom without the aid of a program. If you look at the Student Assistance Program, a majority of those students needed more one on one help. The same goes for the At-Risk Program. When students are given help on their academics and then do not receive any help the students will struggle.

Having Student Assistance for the more needy students who require more attention and help with their motivation is a must. The Student Assistance Program was very helpful while students were in it. It gave them a chance to communicate and build a good relationship with a



teacher, while also building up their academics. By combining the Student Assistance Program with the Transition Program a large number of the students' academic needs would be met.

The second conclusion that I collected from this data is the need for help once they are being removed from the program. Two of the three groups of students had great success while receiving some extra attention, but all three groups saw their grade point average drop once they no longer received help. All three groups third year grade point averages dropped below what it was during their second year. If students are receiving academic help you can not expect them to transition back into the classroom without any help without their grades dropping. Students need to have a step by step process to transition into being mainstreamed. If students are put back in the classroom and have all help removed most students will go back to their motivation and work ethic from before they entered a program.

The final observation would be to conduct further research. In this study a small group of students were used from a small school setting. Having a larger group of students would give more accurate information. A larger school setting would allow an assortment of teachers per subject area which would eliminate one teacher from impacting the grade point average as much as the third year social studies class did in this study.

In conclusion, this data seems to demonstrate that the Transition Program and the Student Assistance Program are the most successful programs in order to meet the needs of middle school or junior high students. Also, Language Arts is the subject that improved the most in all three programs. In all three programs, only Language Arts' grade point average increased in year two of the study. Multiple programs are needed to meet the needs of every student and these programs need to ease students back into their standard academic path before high school to be effective.

## References

- Barber, B. & Olsen, J. (2004). Assessing the transitions to middle and high school. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 19, 3-30.
- Blyth, D.A., Simmons, R.G., & Buch, D. (1978). The transition into early adolescence: A longitudinal comparison of youth in two educational contexts. *Sociology of Education*, 51, 149-162.
- Chapman, M. & Sawyer, J. (2001). Bridging the gap for students at risk of school failure: A social work-initiated middle to high school program. *Children and Schools*, 23, 235.
- Cohen, J. & Smerdon B. (2009). Tightening the dropout tourniquet: Easing the transition from middle school to high school. *Preventing School Failure*, 53, 177-184.
- Colby Community College Website (2007). *Mission statement*. Retrieved October 27, 2007 from <http://colbycc.edu/?m=8&s=230>
- Converse, N. & Lignugaris, B. (2009). Evaluation of a school-based mentoring program for at-risk middle school youth. *Remedial and Special Education*, 30, 33-46.
- Donnelly, M. (2007). *Family I.Q. articles*. Retrieved October 27, 2007 from <https://www.familyiq.com/news/StudentsAtRisk.asp>
- Eccles, J. (1999). The development of children ages six to fourteen. *When School is Out*, 9, 30-44.
- Eccles, J., Adler, T.F., Futterman, R., Goff, S.B., Kaczala, C.M., Meece, J.L., & Midgley, C.(1983). Expectancies, values and academic behaviors. *Achievement and Achievement Motivation*, 75-146.
- Eccles, J. S., Lord, S., & Roeser, R. W. (1996). Round holes, square pegs, rocky roads, and sore

- feet: A discussion of stage-environment fit theory applied to families and school. *Rochester Symposium on Developmental Psychopathology, volume VII: Adolescence: Opportunities and challenges*, p. 47-92. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.
- Finn, J. & Rock, D., (1997). Academic success among students at risk for dropout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 82, 221-234.
- Gillies, R. M. (2003). The behaviors, interactions, and perceptions of junior high school students during small-group learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 95, 137-147.
- Grolnick, W. S., Kurowski, C. O. , Dunlap, K. G., & Hevey, C. (2000). Parental resources and the transition to junior high. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 10, 465-488.
- Hankin, B.J. (1998). Development of depression from preadolescences to young adulthood: Emerging gender differences in a ten year longitudinal study. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 107, 128-140.
- Harter, S. (1981). A new self-report scale of intrinsic versus extrinsic orientation in the classroom: Motivational and informational components. *Developmental Psychology*, 17, 300-312.
- Johnson, A, & Perkins, G.(2009). What we know about at risk students. *NASSP Bulletin*, 93, 122-134.
- Jozefowics-Simbeni, D. (2007). An ecological and developmental perspective on dropout risk factors in early adolescence: Role of school social workers in dropout prevention efforts. *Children and Schools*, 30, 49-62.
- Katz, I., Kaplan, A., & Gueta, G. (2009). Students' needs, teachers' support, and motivation for doing homework: A cross-sectional study. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 78, 246-267.

- Killion, J. (1999). *Design staff development with student needs in mind*. The National Staff Development Council. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.
- Lane, K., Parks, R., Kalberg, J., & Carter, E. (2007). Systematic screening at the middle school level: Score reliability and validity of the student risk screening scale. *Journal of Emotional & Behavioral Disorders*, 15, 209-222.
- Lerner, R. M. (1995). *America's youth in crisis: Challenges and options for programs and policies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lord, S. E., Eccles, J. S., & McCarthy, K. A. (1994). Surveying the junior high school transition: Family processes and self-perceptions as protective and risk factors. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 14, 162-199.
- McCallumore, K. & Sparapani, E. (2010). The importance of the ninth grade on high school graduation rates and student success in high school. *Education*, 130, 447-456.
- McLoyd, V. C. (1998). Socioeconomic disadvantage and child development. *American Psychologist*, 53, 185-204.
- Millcreek High School Website (2007). *At-risk student definition*. Retrieved October 27, 2007 from [http://mhs.washk12.org/At\\_Risk\\_Student.html](http://mhs.washk12.org/At_Risk_Student.html)
- Neild, R. (2009). Falling off track during the transition to high school: What we know and what can be done. *Future of Children*, 19, 53-76.
- Ombudsman Website. *Programs for At Risk and Struggling Teens in Missouri*. Retrieved Jun 18, 2010 from <http://www.iser.com/ombudsman/ombudsman-MO.html>
- Picucci, A., Brownson, A., Kahlert, R., & Sobel A. (2004). Middle school concept helps high-poverty schools become high-performing schools. *Middle School Journal*, 36, 4-11.
- Rees, S. (2007). *Education jargon*. San Jose, CA. School Wise Press.

- Richardson, V., Cassanova, U., Placier, P., & Guilfoyle, K. (1989). *School children at risk*. New York, NY: The Falmer Press.
- Rieck, W. & Wadsworth, D. (2005). Assessment accommodations: Helping students with exceptional learning needs . *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 41, 105-109.
- Roeser, R. W., Eccles, J. S. & Freedman-Doan, C. (1999). Academic functioning and mental health in adolescence: Patterns, progressions, and routes from childhood. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 14, 135-174.
- Rudolph, D. K., Lambert, S. F., Clark, A. G., & Kurakowsky, K. D. (2001). Negotiating the transition to middle school: The role of self-regulatory processes. *Child Development*, 72, 929-946.
- Stein, G. & Hussong, A. (2007). Social and academic expectations about high school for at-risk youth. *American Secondary Education*, 36, 59-79.
- Sullivan, M., & Bishop, P. (2005). Disaffiliated boys: perspectives on friendship and school success. *Middle School Journal*, 37, 22-30.
- Swauger, G. (2002). *Successful teachers of at risk youth-what they do*. Retrieved November 28, 2007 from [www.education.eku.edu/Coop\\_KTIP/help\\_student/Swauger%20807%20Strategies\\_for\\_Success%5B1%5D.ppt](http://www.education.eku.edu/Coop_KTIP/help_student/Swauger%20807%20Strategies_for_Success%5B1%5D.ppt)
- Watson, S. (2004). *What is Special Education?* Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Waukesha School District Website (2007). At-risk/alternative program sources. Retrieved November 30, 2007 from <http://www.waukesha.k12.wi.us/District/AtRisk.asp>