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An Evaluation of the "Freshman Academy's" Programs Effectiveness to Provide a Smaller Community Environment

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MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK THESIS

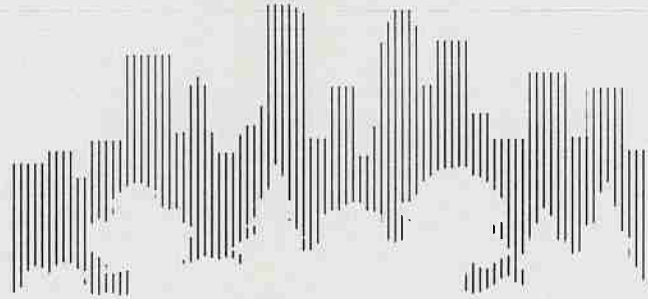Dru Kneeland

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2000

AN EVALUATION

OF THE "FRESHMAN ACADEMY'S" PROGRAMS

EFFECTIVENESS TO PROVIDE A SMALLER COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

DRU KNEELAND

Submitted in partial fulfillment of
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT OF THESIS

An Evaluation of The "Freshman Academy's" Programs Effectiveness
To Provide a Smaller Community Environment

A Program Review

Exploratory Study

Dru Kneeland

March 5, 2000

Large schools of 1000 + students have become very prevalent. Studies have shown,

however, that small size and tight-knit structured learning communities allow the

school to give increased amounts of attention to students (Cotton, 1996). In large

schools, a sense of anonymity prevails causing students to feel disconnected and

without roots, sometimes leading to frustration, anger and rage. As the last few

years have shown, the results are violence, anti-social behavior and other serious

violations of community rules. Research has shown that small schools have a better

chance of meeting the needs of these disenfranchised adolescents by giving them

roots and a place to belong (Sommers 1997).

   The purpose of this study was to examine the Freshman Academy Program

at the high school in suburban Eden Prairie, Minnesota. The focus of inquiry is to

evaluate the programs effectiveness of fostering a smaller community like setting,

providing more support services, and increasing adult/student contact for the 9th

grade student body. Research for the study was done by a triangulation approach of

1) gathering primary and secondary source data, 2) examining existing surveys, and

3) drawing from school dialogue and meeting minutes.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Not only are schools the chief educational arena for adolescents in America, but they also play an extremely important role in shaping the adolescent's social world and in shaping the adolescent's developing sense of identity and autonomy. Because teenagers spend much of their waking day at schools, schools are called upon to shoulder a disproportionate share of the socialization education for youth. In addition to traditional subject matter, we need schools to address nontraditional subjects such as drug abuse, sex, violence prevention, and mental health issues to prepare today's teenagers for the social and emotional rigor of 21st–century adult life. It is therefore crucial that we understand how best to structure schools (Steinberg 1996, Victor 1998).

The trend towards large schools has begun to take a turn as our nation is forced to rethink the notion that "bigger is better". Research has shown that students who are exposed to a smaller school setting are more connected to adults and other peers. The chances are better in a smaller school of meeting student needs by giving them roots and a place to belong (Cotton 1996, Barker & Gump, 1964, Sommers 1997). Also findings point to the importance of consistency among the adults who deal with students, consistency that is easier to attain in smaller organizations (Duke, 1990). With this information in mind, many large schools are attempting to downsize their schools in many creative ways in an effort to expose students to smaller community like environments within schools. Some efforts

include the school-within-school model, academies, charters, magnets, and other ideas.

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Freshman Academy program. The Freshman Academy is a program in a large suburban high school that has attempted to downsize its school focusing on its 9th grade population. Evaluation of the Freshman Academy's programs effectiveness will consist of addressing the following questions 1) Does the Freshman Academy foster a smaller community like setting for the 9th grade student body? 2) Does the Freshman Academy provide more support services then before, for the 9th grade student body? 3) Does the Freshman Academy increase adult/student contact? 4) Is the transition program sufficient? The researcher will also discuss adult/student ratios for best practice.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter will examine literature regarding comparisons between large high schools and small ones, and various ways large schools attempt to downsize and personalize the high school experience for their students. It will also examine reasons why large schools are turning towards considering smaller environments for student learning and development. Transition needs for 9th grade students, and school climate will also be examined.

Large Schools/Small Schools

The populations of schools have grown tremendously during this last century, particularly in urban areas. Nationwide since World War II, the number of schools declined 70 percent while average size grew fivefold. More than one in four secondary schools nationwide enrolls more than 1,000 students, and enrollments of 2,000 and 3,000 are not uncommon (Rotherham, 1999). The thinking behind large schools was that bigger meant more extracurricular opportunities, a more diverse curriculum, and more resources for students as a result of economies of scale. Assuming that larger schools did equate to more fiscal efficiency, diverse curriculum, and extracurricular activities, those factors have not translated into better student achievement. The research points out that smaller schools help promote learning. It also shows that small schools are able to offer a strong core curriculum and, except in extremely small schools, a comparable level of academically advanced courses (Rotherham, 1999). Ironically, the trend toward big schools coincides with research that has repeatedly found small schools-consensus of

researchers is no more than 1,000 for a high school-to be demonstrably better for students of all ability levels, in all kinds of settings (Cushman 2000, Rotherham 1999).

Other research shows significant reasons why the ambiance for learning often found in small schools results in greater learning and better students. In a study done in rural New York state, Monk and Haller (1986) found that the small schools in their sample had few, if any, of the "corrosive disciplinary problems" prevalent in many large schools. Monk and Haller also found that the students did as well academically as the average New York state students and, in many cases, substantially better. In addition, they found that the smaller schools provided far greater opportunity for students to develop their leadership potential and their non-academic skills than their larger counterparts. They also found that the point of diminishing returns is at about 400 students in a 9 through 12 high school building. In schools larger than that, over-all learning diminishes.

A major factor in the rising population of charters, pilots, and other innovative small schools is the mounting evidence that larger, more impersonal schools contribute to disturbing trends in student violence and other antisocial behavior. Whereas, the small size and tight-knit structure of learning communities allow the school to give increased amounts of attention to students-with more productive results (Cushman, 1999). A recent compilation examining 103 studies observed that many of them find student performance in small schools superior to that in large ones, while none finds the reverse to be true (Cotton 1996).

One study based on the experiences of nearly 12,000 students in 800 high schools nationwide confirmed conclusively that youngsters learn more in math, reading, history, and science in small schools than in large ones-especially disadvantaged students. For both elementary and secondary students, researchers also find small schools equal or superior to large ones on most student behavior measures. Rates of truancy, vandalism, classroom disruption, theft, gang participation, and substance abuse are all reduced in small schools. Moreover findings about the impact of size appear to hold at all grade levels, with a tendency for school size and organization to play a larger role as students get older (Raywid, 1997, Cotton 1996).

Not only in the area of academics does research support small schools, but also in the social/emotional areas. Research has been done long ago about which students are most penalized by bigness and which gain most from reducing school size. In the 1970's researchers found that minority and lower-achieving students seemed to do better in small schools (Summers and Wolf, 1976). As common sense would suggest, the generally advantaged students-those with high ability levels and affluent, educated, and supportive families-are less penalized by large schools than their less fortunate peers of lower ability or from poorly educated, low-income families. Some researchers find that high-ability students from well-to-do homes may actually profit more from large schools than from small schools (Howley, 1995).

Public schools are the single community institution mandated to receive each and every child within its borders. This includes the poor, the disabled, the abused, the neglected, the non-English speaking, the low functioning, and any other child

that moves into the community. If this is so, it is definitely not a situation in which what's best for the strongest students is best for all (Sapphire, 1999). Schools must begin to meet students where they are when they come through the doors, and have supports in place to work with them and their families to address the many different needs they bring with them.

Models of Small Schools:

Small schools have produced new types and models of effective secondary education. The Metropolitan Learning Center, a high school in Portland Oregon, for instance, is almost 30 years old. It is open to students throughout the city and imposes no special entrance requirements. It attracts students interested in the arts. Several years ago it was reporting a dropout rate of 2 percent, while that of the district stood at 30 percent. The Center also had the highest per capita scholarship rate in the city (Harris, 1987).

Another model of a small, alternative type school is Nova. Nova is a small, innovative high school in Seattle. Its 135 students enter with academic records ranging from strong to very weak, and they come from homes ranging from affluent to poor. But Nova sends 85 percent of its graduates to college, and its students' average SAT scores regularly stand at the top among Seattle's high schools (Seattle Weekly 1997).

California's Career Academies are an example of a successful new genre of schools-within-schools. They focus on introducing students to an entire industry- with the help of resources in the community-as the youngsters pursue a college prep

program. The Health and Media Academies in Oakland have become nationally know for their success in marshaling business collaboration in keeping minority, largely poor youngsters in school (Raywid, 1997).

The success of small schools is variously attributed to a number of things:

- To the more human scale of such schools,
- To their more satisfied and willing students,
- To more committed teachers,
- To the opportunity for choice such schools typically afford,
- To the fact that most of them have a focus or coherent mission,
- To their relative autonomy and distance from the bureaucracy,
- To heightened responsiveness to their constituents,
- And to a better school-student and school-family match (Raywid, 1997).

But irrespective of which of these features is most important, substantial agreement is emerging as to the centrality of three ingredients in producing them:

- Small size (Wallberg and Walberg 1994, Lee and Smith 1994, Lee et al. 1995),
- An organizational structure departing significantly from the conventional (Bryk and Thum 1989, Lee et al. 1995),
- And, a setting that operates more like a community than a bureaucracy (Bryk and Driscoll 1988, Bryk et al. 1993, Bryk and Thum 1989, Lee and Smith 1994, Wehlage et al. 1987)

Since research shows that all students can and do thrive in smaller more intimate setting, some large schools are seeking ways to downsize into smaller more intimate, community settings. Small schools can take many forms. Some can be housed with-in larger schools designed or remodeled to handle fewer students. Or several independent schools with different purposes could function side by side in the same building. Charters, magnets, and pilots are also becoming popular. Whatever the form it takes, smaller seems to be better (Sergiovanni, 1995).

Transition Needs for 9th graders

The move from a safe middle school or junior high setting into a large high school can be a stressful time for adolescents. Many students undergo a considerable amount of stress and anxiety during this transition. Providing students with transition activities at either the middle level or high school, or both, however, has proved to greatly reduce their apprehension and increase their sense of belonging (Hertzog & Morgan, 1997).

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines transition as "passage from one form, state, style or place to another." Following that definition, transition has been used to describe the movement of students from one environment to another. Usually this involves physically moving to different school locations, but includes moving up to a higher grade, albeit one that is developmentally significant (Sauter, 1998).

According to research by Seidman et al., (1996), those students who are considered "at-risk" due to socioeconomic status and/or are struggling with consequences of a "diverse racial and ethnic background" are particularly vulnerable and may be adversely affected by difficult school transitions. Multiple school transitions and poor social support have also been cited as explanations of difficulty in adjustment. In addition, a mismatch between the coping abilities, developmental level of the adolescent and the fit with the school environment have been cited as problematic (Barone et al., 1991), (Sauter, 1998).

The effects of these transitions are often seen in lower grade point average (GPA), poor attendance, decrease in extracurricular activities, reduced self-

esteem and poor achievement motivation. In addition there is a strong correlation

between difficulty adapting to and coping with these transitions and school drop out

(Eccles, Midgley, Adler, 1984). Because students make the decision to continue or

discontinue their high school experience within the first few weeks of the entering

year, a successful transition for students from the middle level to the high school

takes on even greater importance (Hertzog & Morgan 1999).

It is the high school that has the ultimate responsibility for making sure that

these students are productive adults, as a significant number of students go directly

from high school into the workforce. It is this first year of high school that is pivotal

in determining the students' success throughout her academic career (Zsirary,

Larsen, Liechty, 1996). According to research by Felner et al. (1981) and Seidman

et al. (1996), the transition from eighth grade to ninth grade is the most significant

as it foretells the students' success or failure during the rest of their academic

career. Eccles et al. states that ninth grade students are cognizant of the importance

of success or failure of this year as it relates to GPA, class standing and future

college entry.

In the transition from eighth to ninth grade, the young student is

generally entering a school that is much larger than her junior high or middle

school as there are often many feeder schools funneling into one senior high.

Teachers with increased student class loads are not always able to provide the

personal attention that many of the students had come to depend on (Sauter, 1998).

Grading is often stricter. The young student is expected to be much more

responsible for assignments, getting to class on time and navigating the social

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climate of the new school with its influx of unknown peers (Roderick, 1995). Eccles et al. (1984) highlighted an "impersonal, formal, competitive…" atmosphere that the new freshman must learn to navigate. Blyth et al. (1983) describe this shift as going from a "protected…child centered" school to one that is "larger, more diverse and more subject centered."

School Community/Climate

According to the Social Work Dictionary, "community" is defined as—A group of individuals or families that share certain values, services, institutions, interests, or geographic proximity. Schools rather large or small certainly would qualify as a community. The task is to make them small enough so that they are able to communicate effectively and meet the needs of its members. The qualities that are a basis for a community that functions well, answer yes to the following questions:

- Do the people involved communicate honestly with each other?
- Can they drop the posturing and mask-wearing that can characterize much of group dynamics?
- Are they committed to accept, support, and bear with one another? (Allen 2000)

When such a community exists in the classroom, the class becomes more inclusive and builds a sense of unity. Students and teachers get to know each other and feel safe to express themselves, disagree, and even be vulnerable with one another. Students feel valued and respected. An atmosphere of acceptance creates an environment for a lot of positive things to happen (Allen, 2000). Students tend to open up more and be more willing to take risks if they can relate to their teacher as

someone who knows and cares about them. Even in a large school, all students should have a friend on the faculty who sees them every day, who knows their name, and who can observe them closely (Scherer, 1998). Yet many students feel unhappy, isolated, and alone at school. In the October 1990 *Harvard Education Letter,* it states that among the reasons students give for dropping out of school, one reason consistently appears: the student feels nobody in the school really cares about them.

One advantage small schools have is the smaller numbers of students in a setting. This creates an opportunity to foster an environment of intimacy, community, and connection with adults which is much more difficult to do in large schools. Overcrowded schools, large classes, and funding cuts for education have created schools that are impersonal and unresponsive to the individual needs of students (Rockwell, 1997). According to research by Shapiro, Benjamin, and Hunt (1995), large student populations have a negative impact on academic achievement, attendance rates, students' sense of belonging, participation, self-esteem, involvement, recognition, morality, socialization, social control, provision of support for learning to problem solve effectively, and the ability of the staff to respond positively to other developmental needs.

Another advantage small schools have is greater connection with adults, and fewer reported incidents of violence. In the Aftermath of all the school killings this past year, the student killers were later identified by peers as being depressed, obsessed with death and violence. They were either distantly known or not know at all to school personnel (Sapphire, 1999). These students had no well-known adult person in school connected to them on a regular basis.

The public must insist that all students, congruent with and integral to their education, will be truly known within their schools. Educators need to maintain a constant level of observation, visibility, and attention to the needs of youngsters (Allen, 1998). This is not a guarantee of the end of violence. But there can be the expectation that the anonymous alienation, which ultimately breeds rage and violence, can be stemmed by relationships with support personnel charged with truly and consistently knowing all students (Sapphire, 1999).

In a National Institute of Justice study, 7% of high-schoolers admitted carrying a handgun in the previous 30 days; 14% of high-school males admitted it in a South Carolina Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study (Allen, 1998). Surveys attest to an extraordinary increase in the likelihood that kids will carry weapons. Kids carry weapons primarily because they feel threatened and can't count on adults to protect them. The most recent data, from the 1997 Center for Disease Control (CDC) survey, reveal that 28 % of adolescent boys carried a weapon-a gun, a knife, or a club- in the previous month, with 13% carrying a weapon to school in the previous month (Garbarino, 1999).

The best chances for preventing school violence lie in taking the initiative and using positive strategies to build a nonviolent school climate. A warmer, supportive school environment might identify outcasts and defuse the hostility and alienation that leads students to violent acts (Friedland, 1999). If an atmosphere of mutual respect, support, and caring-the "family" feel that schools strive for- is happening at a school, the chances of violence there are reduced. According to Ronald D. Stephens, executive director of the National School Safety Center (NSSC), this

atmosphere can be started by something as simple as having someone there to greet students as they arrive. It creates a sense of welcoming and safety (Allen,1998). Other tactics include having staff members visible in the hallways between classes and at special events. Principals should be seen frequently around school during the day. The single most effective thing in preventing violence is the physical presence of a responsible adult (Allen, 1998).

Resiliency Theory

Other factors that can help adolescents be successful in the school community are their ability to cope well with various situations they are faced with. Resiliency is a factor that has surfaced as an attribute to successful students. The resilient child is one "who loves well, works well, plays well, and expects well" (Werner and Smith, 1992). There are four attributes to a resilient child (Benard, 1991):

- Social competence—the ability to elicit positive responses from others, thus establishing positive relationships with adults and peers
- Problem-solving skills—the ability to plan, based on seeing oneself in control and on being resourceful in seeking help from others
- Autonomy—a sense of one's own identity and an ability to act independently and exert some control over one's environment
- Sense of purpose and future—having goals, educational aspirations, persistence, hopefulness, and a sense of a bright future

Many people have these four attributes to some extent. Whether the attributes are strong enough within a person to help him or her bounce back from adversity depends on whether certain protective factors exist in that person's life.

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The following are key protective factors needed within the family, school, and community (Benard, 1991):

- A caring environment—at least one adult knows the child well and cares deeply about the well-being of that child
- Positive expectations—high, clearly articulated expectations and the purposeful support necessary to meet those expectations exist for the child.
- Participation—the child has responsibilities and other opportunities for meaningful involvement with others.

The following practices found in schools that foster resiliency are (Krovetz, 1999):

- Classes are heterogeneously grouped for most of the day, with regrouping as appropriate;
- Students usually are working in small groups or independently;
- There is a well-defined safety net in place for students who are falling behind academically;
- Common instructional strategies are used in most classrooms within and across grade levels;
- When teachers ask questions, students are required to use higher-order thinking skill to answer and all students have equal opportunities to respond; and
- When students ask questions, teachers usually reply with a question that require thought by the student, rather than with the answer.

Fostering resiliency means developing and supporting school communities where adults know each student, students are supported to achieve at a high level, and is aware that she or he is a valued member of the school community. The best alternative schools and programs are small enough so that students can feel the sense of belonging and usefulness that is so important to becoming a successful, resilient person (Krovetz, 1999).

<u>Developmental Theory</u>

In the *Psycho-social Developmental Theory,* children are thought to go through a series of developmental stages. The stages occur as *drives* which are mental pressures to relieve physical needs such as hunger or thirst. Having the need creates tension or *libido, which* gives energy to act to meet the need (Payne, 1991). The Eriksonian theory has expanded on the stages of development by suggesting that at each stage the rational mind deals with a maturational crisis presented by the social circumstances of our life. His work emphasizes cultural and social pressures rather than inner drives. Erikson's eight stages of development are:

- Trust versus Mistrust (occurring at about ages 1 to 2)
- Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt (about ages 2 to 4)
- Initiative versus Guilt (ages 3 to 6)
- Industry versus Inferiority (ages six to 12)
- Identity versus role confusion (ages 12 to 18)
- Intimacy versus Isolation (ages 18 to 24)
- Generativity versus Stagnation (ages 24 to 54)
- Integrity versus Despair (older than 54)

Adolescents enter the fifth stage of Erikson's stages of development called "Identity versus role confusion". The task at hand in this stage is to develop a sense of identity, and to understand how one fits into the world. Not only is the adolescent faced with the task of resolving this stage, but he is also still involved with resolving the conflicts of the stages prior to this one in which the conflicts of trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, and industry versus inferiority exist (Zastrow, 1994).

Adolescents will experiment with many different roles that represent the many possibilities for their future identity in order to resolve the fifth stage of

development. Various ways they experiment are through academics, dating, jobs, use of drugs, alcohol or tobacco, or trying different religions, and a variety of organizations or various hobbies and interests (Zastrow, 1994).

If the adolescent resolves this conflict, they are able to integrate earlier identifications, present values, and future goals into a consistent self-concept. If he doesn't resolve this conflict he struggles with role confusion (Zastrow, 1994). Adolescents suffering from role confusion can appear anxious, depressed, indecisive and unfulfilled. Role confusion manifests in ways such as: regressing into childishness, avoiding responsibility, delaying acting like a responsible adult, committing oneself to poorly thought-out courses of action, or intolerance of differences (Zastrow, 1994).

Erikson described adolescence as a time of turmoil and stress. However, he considered it to be the result of an "identity crisis" that typifies this stage, rather than of a conflict between the ego and the id, which is Freud's belief. Erikson thought of identity formation as a process that continues throughout one's life; but believed that identity "has its normative crisis in adolescence". Furthermore, he viewed adolescence as a necessary and productive period during which the adolescent experiments with and works to consolidate his or her personal, occupational, and ideological identity (Encyl. of S.W., 1987).

Social Learning Theory

In Bandura's Social Learning Theory, he describes adolescence as a period of development that, for the majority of individuals, proceeds from childhood with

great continuity in behavior, interpersonal relationships, and self-evaluation. The behavioral and social learning principles that apply in infancy and childhood remain the same, with the possible expansion of sources of reinforcement in the environment, a greater number and variety of models, and an expanded capacity for self-regulated behavior. The process of socialization includes the development of behavioral repertoires through differential reinforcement, stimulus and response generalizations, higher order condition, modeling and rule learning. For example, adolescence shape each other's social behaviors by positively responding to specific mannerisms, dress, and the latest slang terms and by ostracizing or ridiculing behaviors that do not meet the norms of their peers (Encyl. of S.W., 1987).

According to Bandura, most learning is gained by people's perceptions and thinking about what they experience. They learn by copying the example of others around them. Hudson and MacDonald (1986) describe the main process by which this is done called *modeling*.

- A person sees someone else performing an action and pays attention to it
- The observer 'forms and idea' or codes in their mind how the behavior is done (including some rehearsals in practice or in their mind)
- The observer identifies circumstances in which the behavior occurs and has its consequences
- When an appropriate situation arises the observer repeats the behavior according to the 'idea' of it that they have formed.

Ecological Systems Theory: The Life Model

The Life Model is a systems theory in social work and other professions that emphasizes understanding people and their environment and the nature of their

transactions. Important concepts include *adaptation, transactions. Goodness of fit* between people and their environments, *reciprocity,* and *mutuality (Social Work Dictionary 1995).*

The life model sees people as constantly adapting in an interchange with many different aspects of their environment. They both change and are changed by the environment. Where we are able to develop through change and are supported in this by the environment, *reciprocal adaptation* exists. Social problems (e.g. poverty, discrimination, stigma) pollute the social environment reducing the possibility of reciprocal adaptation. Living systems (people, individually and in groups) must try to maintain a good fit with their environment. We all need appropriate inputs (e.g. information, food, resources) to maintain ourselves and develop (Payne, 1991). Children who grow up wanting for food, for affection, for caring teachers, for good medical care, and for values consistent with intellectual progress and social competence grow up less well than those children who do not lack these things. Their absence places a child "at risk" for impaired development. Providing professional intervention in the social environment and designing service programs that are guided by the ecological perspective can help to counteract the adverse impact of sociocultural risks (Pecora & Wittaker 1992). Where transactions upset the adaptive balance, stress results and this produces problems in the *fit* between our needs and capacities and the environment. Stress arises from:

- *Life transitions* (developmental changes, changes in status and role, restructuring of life space)
- *Environmental pressures (*unequal opportunities, harsh and unresponsive organizations)
- *Interpersonal processes* (exploitation, inconsistent expectations).

As in crisis theory, not all stressful events lead to actual stresses. Whether they do so depends on personal and environmental circumstances and especially perceptions of the events (in this sense the life model stresses the importance of cognition and capacity to control the outside world) (Payne, 1991).

Summary

This literature review presented supporting information that smaller schools seem to be the wave of the future. Smaller numbers of students allow schools to create an environment that is more conducive to a small community setting in which members are connected to each other and are known by each other. Adults are also able to give increased amounts of attention to students. Research showed that students in smaller schools learn more in math, reading, history, and science then in large schools.

In larger schools rates of truancy, vandalism, classroom disruption, theft, gang participation, and substance abuse are higher then in small schools. Larger, more impersonal schools contribute to disturbing trends in student violence and other antisocial behavior. The recent trends in school violence have forced us to take a look at school environments and structure. How and where do students fit in? Unfortunately, research has shown that many students in large schools feel like they don't fit in, and that no one cares about them. Because of these facts, large schools are looking for ways to downsize their schools.

From a theoretical frame of reference, the literature has pointed out that adolescent development, human needs and behavior, and attributes that support

people within their environment. Keeping in mind the needs of adolescents to belong to something, to have intimacy, to be connected and cared about and to have stress reduced, can aid with fostering community environments that support student's development. Many creative ways of doing this was pointed out in the review of the literature.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Statement

This research is a formative evaluation of the Freshman Academy's program effectiveness of fostering a smaller community like setting, providing more support services, and increasing adult/student contact for the 9th grade student body.

Evaluation of the Freshman Academy's programs effectiveness will consist of addressing the following questions 1) Does the Freshman Academy foster a smaller community like setting for the 9th grade student body? 2) Does the Freshman Academy provide more support services then before, for the 9th grade student body? 3) Does the Freshman Academy increase adult/student contact? 4) Is the transition program sufficient?

Research Design

The study utilizes a triangulation approach and includes qualitative research methods using 1) primary and secondary data in the form of program description, 2) information from school materials, including minutes from meeting and school dialogue, and 3) secondary data analysis of surveys. The surveys were administered and gathered prior to the research but no data analysis had been completed due to lack of resources. Students were surveyed in their Connections (homeroom) group settings. The study population consisted of the 1998/99' 9th grade student body at Eden Prairie High School, located in Eden Prairie, Minnesota.

Advantages of the study are the schools willingness to support the research by allowing the evaluation and the use of the surveys. Another advantage was the researchers personal experience as an Academy Advisor in the program.

A disadvantage of the study is that the surveys were taken a little over half way through the year rather then at the end of the year. Had the surveys been taken at the end of the year students who responded would have had an opportunity to experience the whole program. Therefore the surveys reflect the experiences of students responding to the same questions from different vantage points. Theories that were particularly useful in the analysis in framing the evaluation include the *Developmental Theory, The Resiliency Theory, The Social Learning Theory, and The Ecological Systems Theory* (See Lit. Review).

Conceptual Definition of Key Terms:

Adult/Student Contact: The interaction between school adults (such as teachers, advisors, counselors etc.) and students.

At-Risk Student: Youth at school who are vulnerable to not being successful in school for various reasons (Social, economical, physical, emotional, etc.).

School Climate: The atmosphere/culture of the school. The feel and function in the environment.

School Community: The groups of individuals within the school setting, including students, teachers, and other staff personnel.

Transition: The movement process of an 8th grader from a middle school or junior high into a high school. Also refers to the movement from each grade level in high school.

PRESENTATION OF DATA

In the following pages, data will be presented in the following way. Since the data is a triangulation of 1) primary and secondary data in the form of the program description, 2) secondary data analysis of surveys, and 3) meeting minutes and school dialogue. Each piece of data will be presented individually in the order listed above.

1) Primary & Secondary Data: Description of Program

The Freshman Academy is a program at Eden Prairie High School for 9th grade students. The program focuses on 9th graders to downsize the building giving them a separate place to receive all 9th grade services. Giving them a grounded start, more support throughout the year and more adult/student connections are a few of the goals of program.

History of the Problem:

Research has shown that students who are exposed to a smaller school setting are more connected to adults and their peers. Also chances are better in a smaller school of meeting student needs by giving them roots and a place to belong (Cotton 1996).

The site of this program is located in a large suburban high school in Eden Prairie, Minnesota. In 1997/98' the school's support staff looked at models to downsize their school of 2,300 students for the up coming school year of 1998/99, the decision was made to focus mainly on the six hundred fifty four 9th graders, thinking that they are the population most at risk in the large setting, and that the

high school should focus on giving them a grounded start upon entering the high school. The high school was a 9th -12th grade building at that time.

The concern for the need to change grew mainly out of the frustration of the student support services team's (consisting of counselors, deans, the school nurse, and the social worker) inability to meet student needs with the large, unmanageable student ratios that existed. At that time there was a ratio of one counselor per close to 500 students. They serviced the whole $9^{th} - 12^{th}$ grade student body. There were five counselors at that time and they divided the students according to alphabet. There were two deans who each worked with half the alphabet. There was also a half time social worker that did student crisis support half time and special education social work half time.

After almost a year of meetings, researching other large school models, and visiting sites locally and around the country, the result was the creation of two separate service centers, which opened in the year of 1998/99. One is the Freshman Academy that services all 9th grade students, and the other was a 10–12 Center. There was also consideration of moving to a 9–10 Center and an, 11–12 Center. This discussion is ongoing and is still a possibility for the future.

Three more counselors and one half time social worker were hired to help service the new centers. A "10 – 12 Center" servicing all 10th thru 12th grade students, and the "Freshman Academy" center, which would service all 9th grade students in all aspects of their freshman year, beginning in the middle of the 8th grade and going into the first term of the 10th grade. Because the emphasis was on the 9th grade, that center would have the smaller adult/student ratios. The 10-12

Center ended up with six counselors, two deans, and one half time social worker doing crisis intervention. Students are divided by alphabet between the six counselors. Their ratios are now around one counselor to 330 students. The deans still have half the alphabet, but now work with three counselors to make a "Quad" team. The counselors have taken on the attendance to lighten the load of the deans.

Freshman Academy Program:

The Academy is housed in a separate wing of the building by the entrance where the buses dropped off the students. The thinking behind the location was that most all-9th graders would be riding the bus and therefore arrive each day by the Academy's entrance- their place.

Five professionals and two support staff are the adults who run the Academy. The professionals are two counselors, one social worker, one dean and one associate principal. The seven hundred sixty eight 9th graders were divided up alphabetically between the five professionals. They are called "Academy Advisors". In the second year of the program, the principal did not receive an alphabet of students due to other workload, which kept him from seeing his students often enough. The social worker took on the extra 50 students.

Freshman Academy Advisors:

> are adult mentors who encourage
> meaningful connections with students
> through facilitating student management,
> academic advising and social development.

Alphabetical Break Down was:

- Associate Principal   A – Bi   Approximately 50 Students

- The Social Worker   Bj - Eb   Approximately 100 Students
- Counselor (1)   EC – Kni   Approximately 200 Students
- Counselor (2)   Knj – Ric   Approximately 210 Students
- Dean   Rid – Z   Approximately 210 Students

The social worker has slightly fewer numbers of students because half her time is spent with Special Education responsibilities for the school. Each member functions under blended roles but supports each other in their areas of expertise. It is the Advisor's responsibility to address all issues concerning students in their alphabet. Areas of responsibility include:

- Academics – to make sure students are successfully earning credits and receiving academic support.
- Attendance – to deal with any attendance issues, such as meeting with students who have skipped a class, filing truancy reports etc.
- Discipline – dealing with any student who has a discipline issue, be it in class, in the hallway, between students, between student/teacher etc.
- Social/Emotional Issues – counseling with students about various issues such as homework, peer concerns, chemicals, teacher concerns, grades, personal issues, death, parents, etc.

The associate principal supports the advisors and deals with the more serious problems. These more serious problems include:

- Dealing with possible expulsions.
- Dealing with difficult suspensions.
- Dealing with major chemical violations.
- Dealing with major fights.
- Dealing with major teacher concerns.
- Assisting in many other areas of support for the Advisors.

The Freshman Academy Philosophy is:

The Freshman Academy Team believes that
through collaboration with parents, school and
community, all students are guided toward
achieving their maximum potential.

<u>Components of the Program</u>

Transition:

Student's first connection to the program happens in 8th grade. Advisors and a few current 9th graders visit the middle school to introduce themselves, share high school experiences and answer questions. This event helps to calm fears of 8th graders and allows them to ask questions about concerns they have, and they can see that last years 8th graders have survived the fate that awaits them, the "Transition" to high school.

During the remainder of the school year there are a number of contacts and evening meetings with 8th grade students, their teachers, and their parents by the Academy Advisors to help with the transition to 9th grade. There is also the registration process, which is confusing and stressful for the students and especially for parents who are experiencing high school for the first time. Parents are in need of support to help with their fears of having their child enter high school, not to mention entering a large high school. During this time, advisors work several evenings to disseminate information, calm fears, and hold sessions for parents and students. Also, during the day, hot line phones are set up to answer calls from parents about registration questions. During the summer, parent/student questionnaires go out along with the first newsletter "Fresh Print" which goes out five times a year to give parents information about the Academy. Also other information goes out about the high school. In late August a freshman orientation is held at the high school. Students come and are toured through the school attending their classes, getting their lockers and other information necessary for a good start

to the year. Lunch is provided along with a social activity to help with the

connecting experience.

While in 9th grade, some of the transition pieces that continue to happen are:

- Career Assessment (done in Freshman Seminar)
- Portfolio (done in Freshman Seminar)
- Four Year Class Schedule Plan (done with advisor)
- Meetings with next years counselors and deans (done in groups in Freshman Seminar and in Connections by video)
- Exit meeting with advisor

As students move into the 10th grade, several pieces of transition that happen are:

- Counselors meet one on one right away with at-risk students
- Counselors meet with remainder of students sometime during 1st term
- Four Year Plans are up dated (done with counselor)
- 10th grade parent meetings (evening sessions)
- Introduction to the Career Resource Center (done in groups with counselors)

Freshman Seminar:

Freshman Seminar is a required, credited transition class experience for all

9th graders. It is an introduction to being successful at Eden Prairie High School.

Topics covered in Freshman Seminar:

Academic:
- Organization skills and orientation
- Study Skills
- Portfolios

Psycho/Social Development:
- Drugs/Alcohol
- Harassment/Civility
- Diversity/Racism
- Identifying Values

Career Planning/Educational Planning:
- Interest Inventories
- Community Involvement
- Volunteer Service

Ongoing:

- Personal Development
- Orientation
- Transition

Freshman Seminars:
   Objective-
      Freshman Seminar strives to enhance the growth of all
         students as successful, responsible learners.
   Mission-
      Freshman Seminar is dedicated to creating healthy
      community members who are reflective, engaged,
         and proactive in their decision-making.
   Purpose-
      Freshman Seminar participants will investigate and
         analyze career options and set goals for
         their educational and career future.

Other Supports for Students:
- Connections - homeroom type setting with a alphabetical break down by grade level having up to 20 students and an adult who meet once a week for 30 minutes. Students stay with same adult all four years of high school. A Student broadcast video production airs during this time, which gives information about school events.
- Advisor/Student Meetings – advisors have a goal to meet with their students a minimum of once per term (some students are seen much more, depending on issues) to review progress, go over report cards, discuss classes, review attendance, and work out a 4-year plan.
- Student/Teacher/Advisor Meetings – meetings occur to help support students who are not doing well in class. Sometimes a contract is written and many times the parent is invited to this meeting.
- Peer Counselors – are available for students to meet with to work out concerns they might have.
- Anger Management – Service provided by outside agency for students needing help in this area. Students are identified by referral process.
- WE-CEP – Work program for 9th graders.
- Discover Program – A classroom program for students needing support in homework completion, organization, more parent involvement and adult support. The program is linked to the 9th grade english and social studies classes.
- Compass – Support class for students needing a little less then what Discover provides. Compass focuses more on study skills and homework completion.
- Advisor/Teacher Meetings – advisors meet or communicate regularly with 9th grade teachers (by meetings, e-mail, phone calls), to stay updated on student's progress and to give teachers information about students.

- **Advisor Group Meetings** – advisors frequent Connections classes to meet with students and answer questions that might arise.

2) Secondary Data Analysis of Surveys

The survey is presented in the form of charts and graphs, which present the responses by students to the survey questions. In the pages that follow is the presentation of data for each of the 18 survey questions.

1. Gender - Of the 657 students that responded, 300 or 46% of them were males and 357 or 54% were female. 27 students did not respond.

Fig. 1

Gender Breakdown:

46%

54%

☐ Male=300

■ Female=357

Total number of responses = 657
Non-responses = 27

Q1
2/99
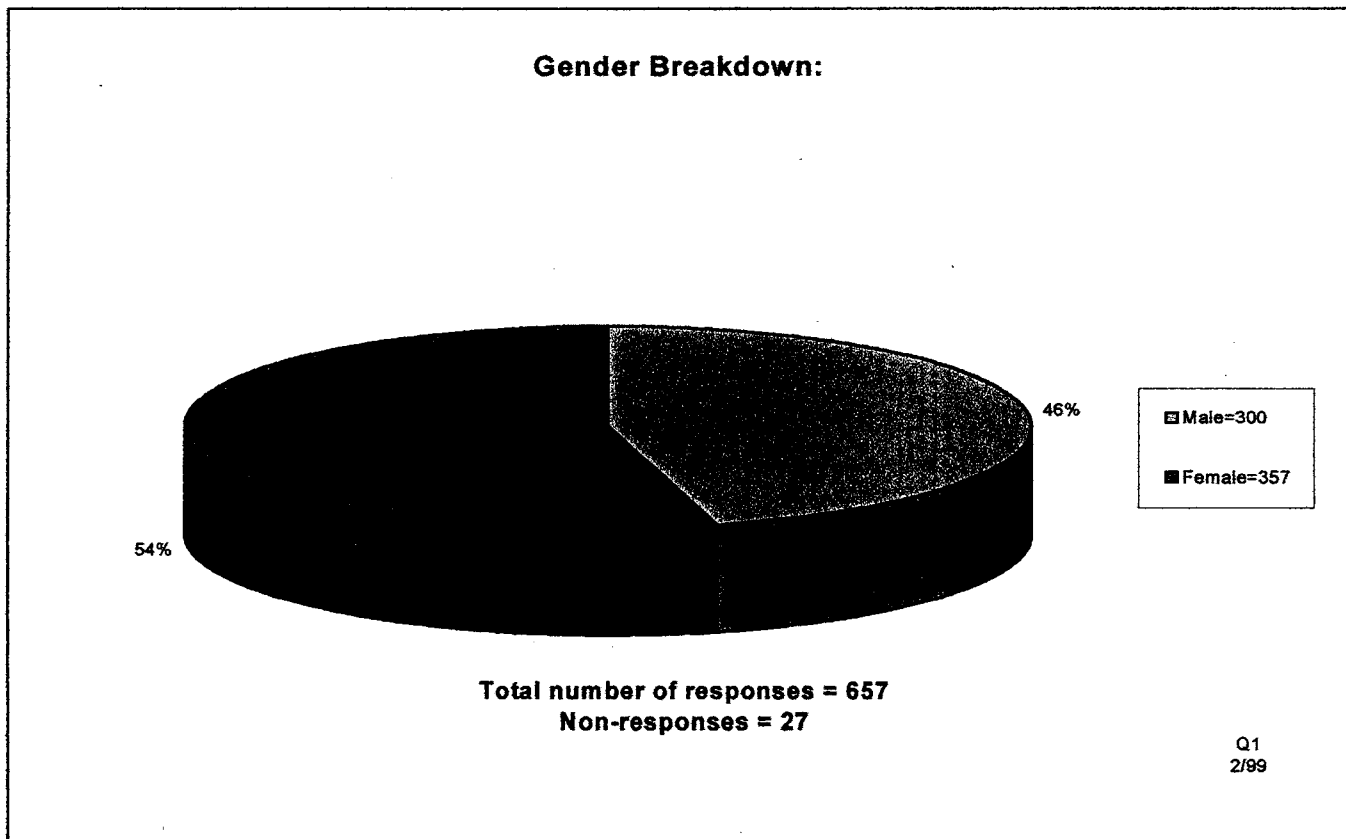
2.   Age – 95.08% of the students surveyed were ages 14 and 15 (average age of

9th graders). 4% were ages 12, 13 or 16.

Fig. 2

AGE OF 9TH GRADE STUDENTS

	Age 12 (N=8)	Age 13 (N=15)	Age 14 (N=289)	Age 15 (N=343)	Age 16 (N=5)
Percent	1.20%	2.30%	43.80%	52.00%	0.80%

Total Responses =660
Non-Responses =24

Q2 2/99
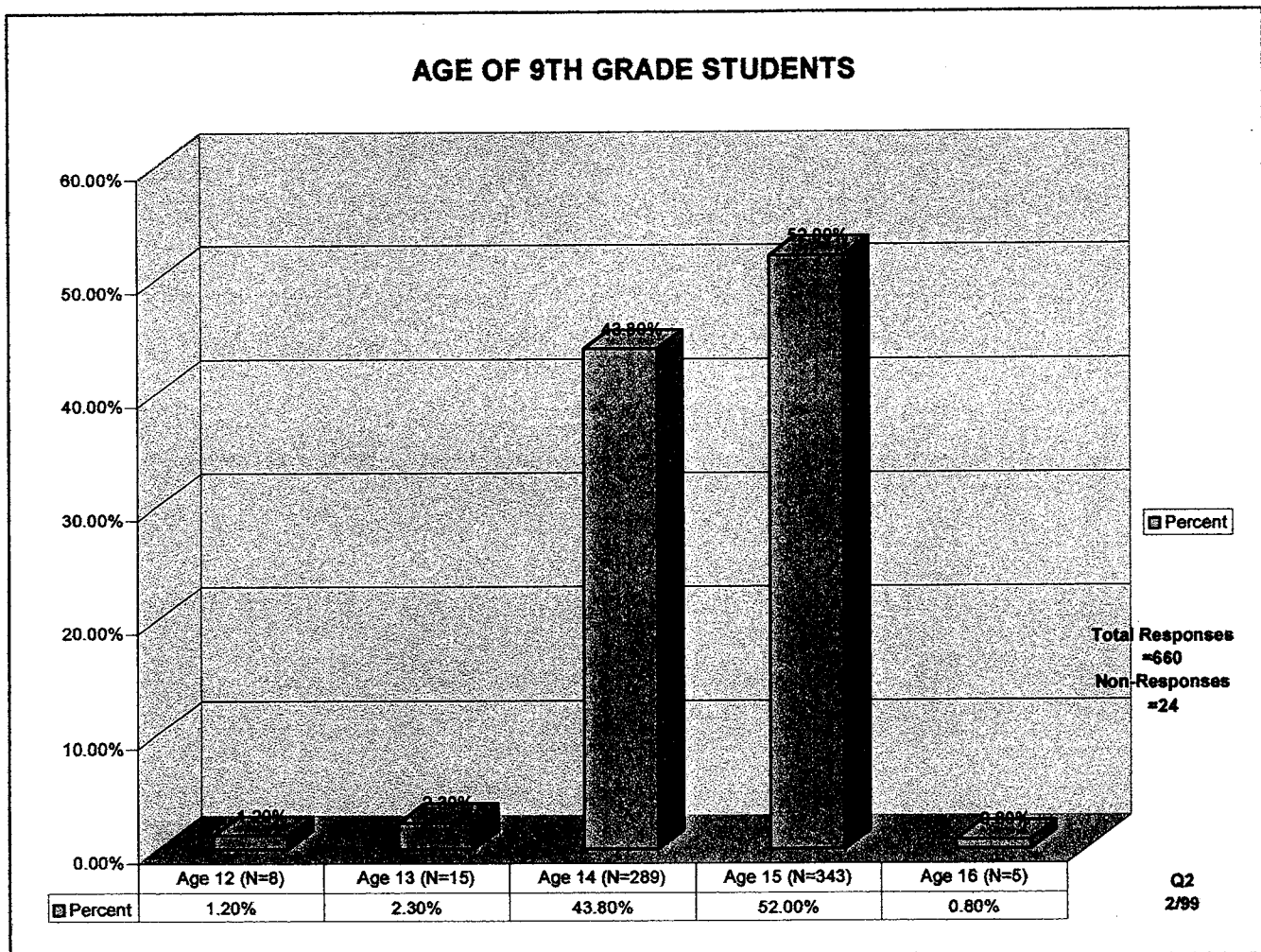
3.   **Number of individual contacts with any Freshman Academy Advisor.**

12.06% or 83 students reported not seeing their Advisor at that time. 44.05% or 293 students reported seeing an Advisor 1-2 times. 30.05% or 201 students reported seeing an Advisor 3-4 times. 5.09% or 39 students reported seeing an Advisor 5-6 times. 6.04% or 42 students reported seeing an Advisor 7 or more times. 26 students did not respond.

Fig. 3

Number of individual contacts with any Academy Advisor:

Legend: Percent

N=number of student responses

Total number of responses = 658
Non-responses = 26

Q3 2/99

0 contacts (N=83)   1-2 contacts (N=293)   3-4 contacts (N=201)   5-6 contacts (N=39)   7+ contacts (N=42)

12.60%   44.50%   30.50%   5.90%   6.40%
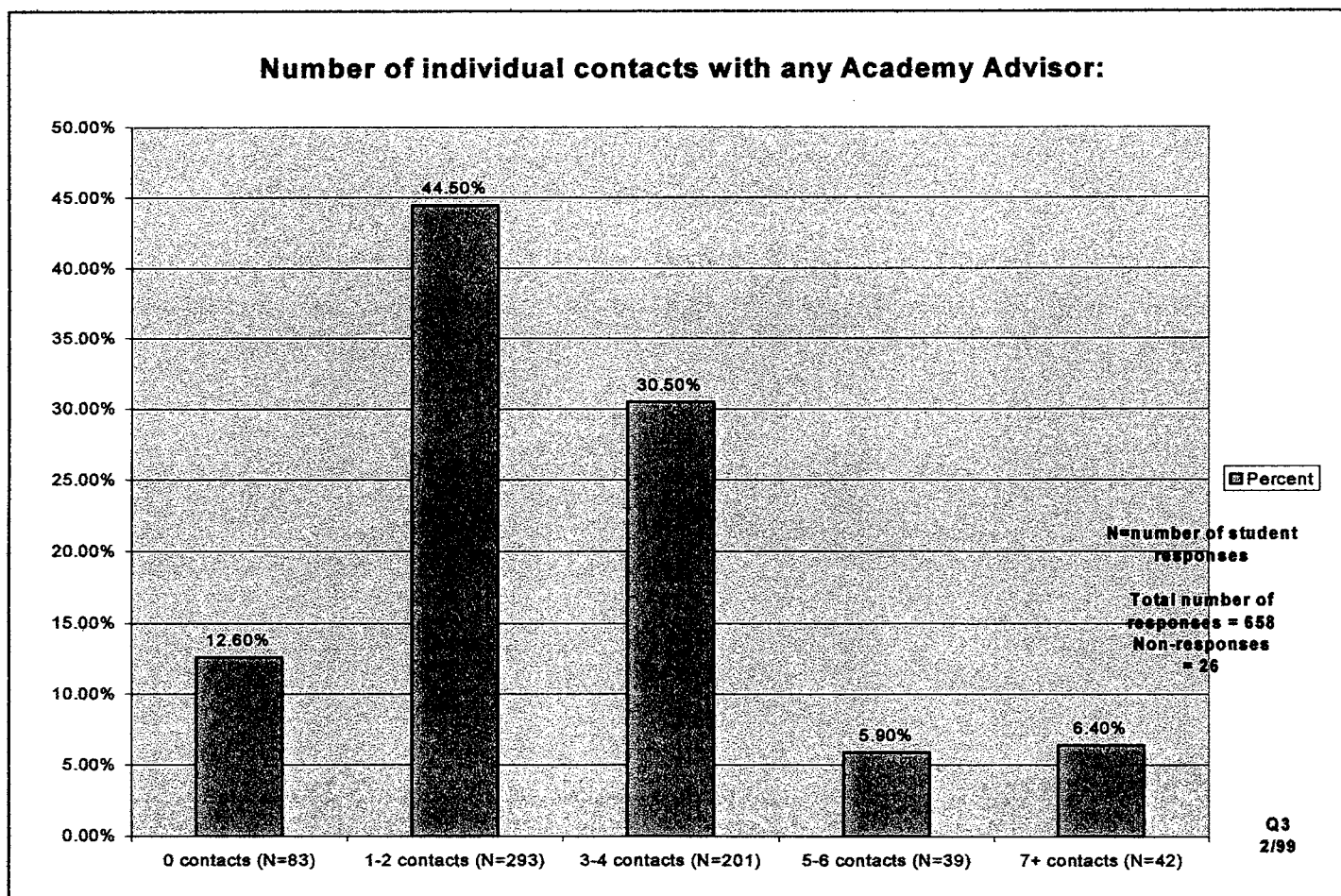
4.   Number of classroom or large group contacts with any Freshman Academy Advisor.

    Large group or classroom means that an Advisor went to a classroom or held a large group (larger than classroom size) session with students. 44.80% or 295 students had no large group or classroom contact at that time. 38.80% or 242 students had 1 large group or classroom contact. 12.50% or 82 students had 2 large group or classroom contacts. 2.40% or 16 students had 3 large group or classroom contacts. 3.50% or 23 students had 4 contacts in large group or classroom form. 26 students did not respond.

Fig. 4

Number of classroom or large group contact with any Freshman Academy Advisor:

44.80%
38.80%
12.50%
2.40%
3.50%

☒ Percent

N=number of student responses
Total number of responses=658
Non-responses =26

0 contacts (N=295)   1 contact (N=242)   2 contacts (N=82)   3 contacts (N=16)   4 contacts (N=23)

Q4
2/99
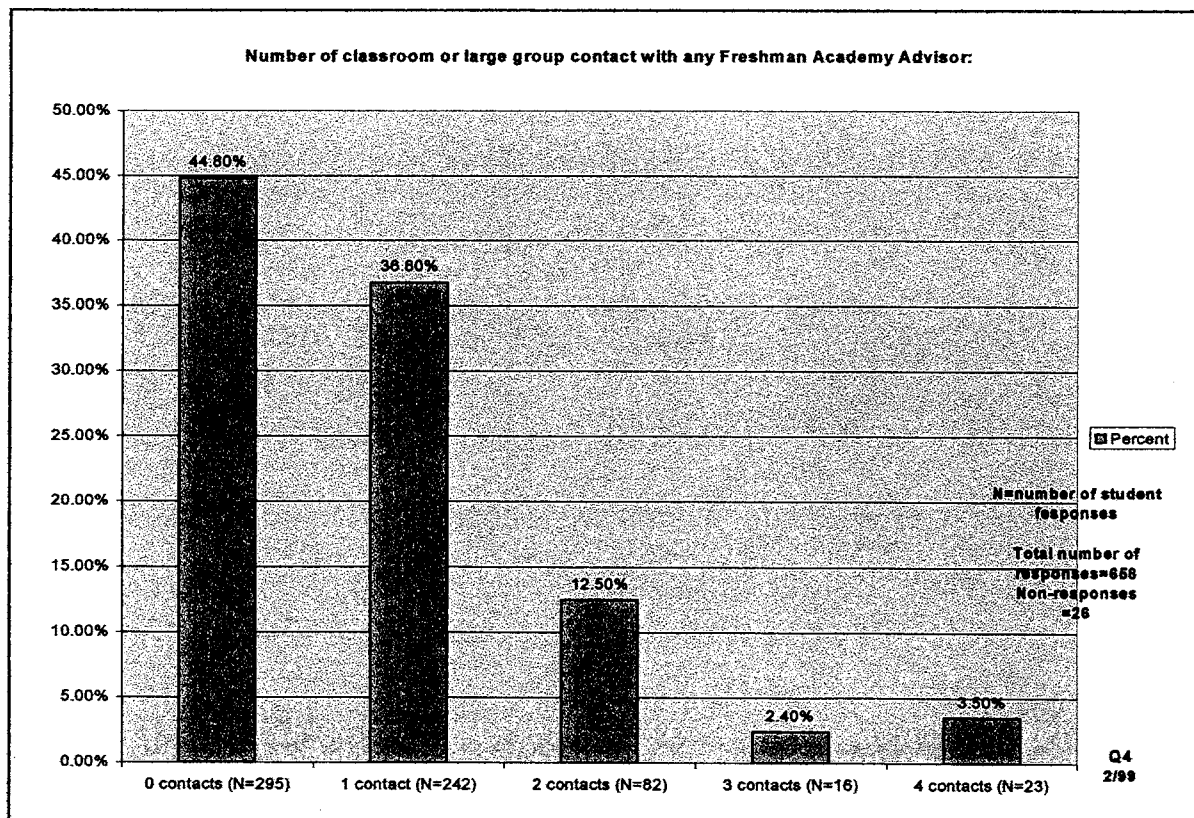
5. **Reasons you saw a Freshman Academy Advisor (Psycho-social):**

Students were able to respond to more than one reason. A total of 313

responses were made. The highest reason reported for seeing an Advisor was for

personal reasons (student concerns of various natures such as sex issues, suicide,

eating disorders, mental health concerns, etc.), with 69.00% or 216 students.

Chemicals were the least with 3.80% or 12 students reporting.

Fig. 5

Reasons you saw a Freshman Academy Advisor (Psycho-social)
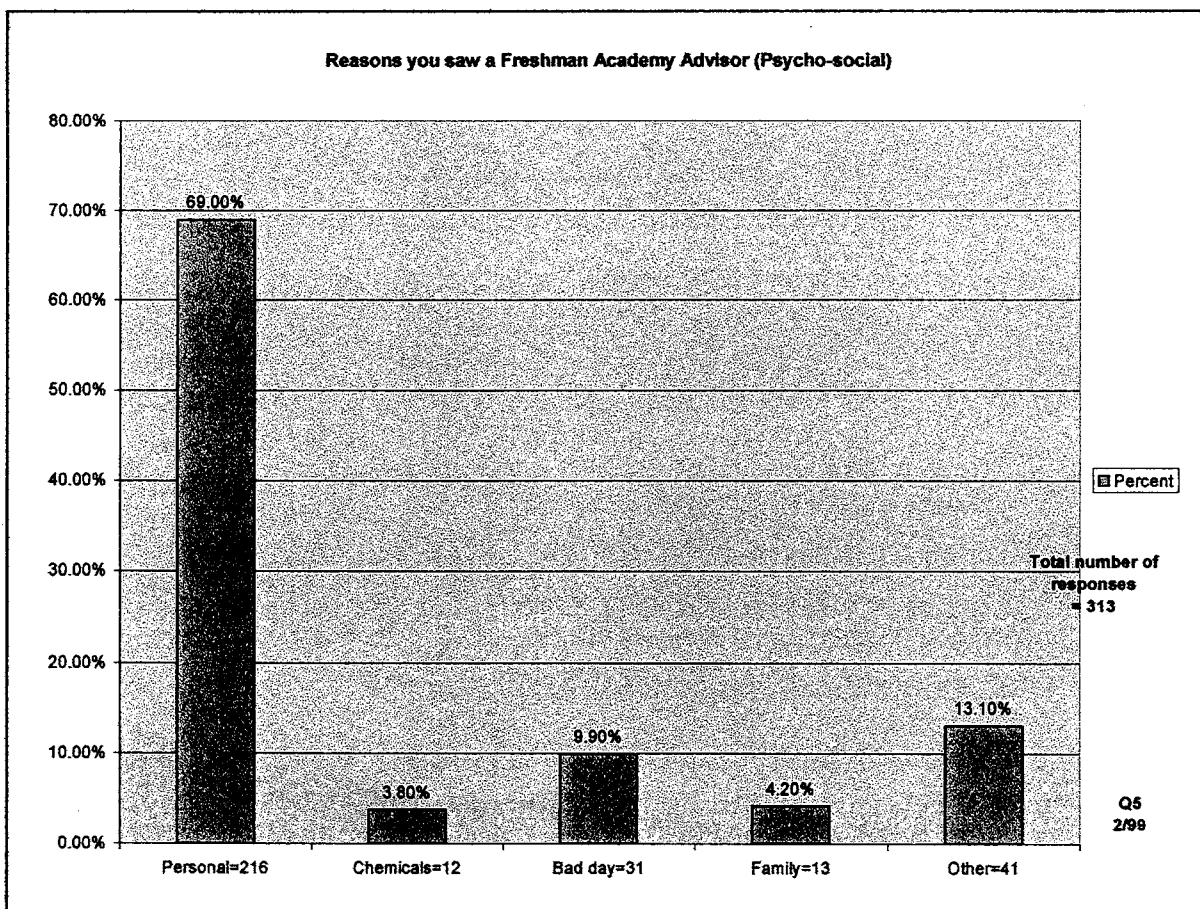
6. More Reasons (School related)

Students were able to respond to more than one reason. A total of 370 responses were made. The highest reason students saw Advisors related to school was for scheduling (making adjustments to class schedules), with 53.50% or 198 students responding. Academic (classroom performance), was second highest with 29.50% or 109 students reporting. Discipline was the least, with 3.20% or 12 students reporting a discipline issue with an Advisor.

Fig. 6

Reasons you saw a Freshman Academy Advisor (School related)
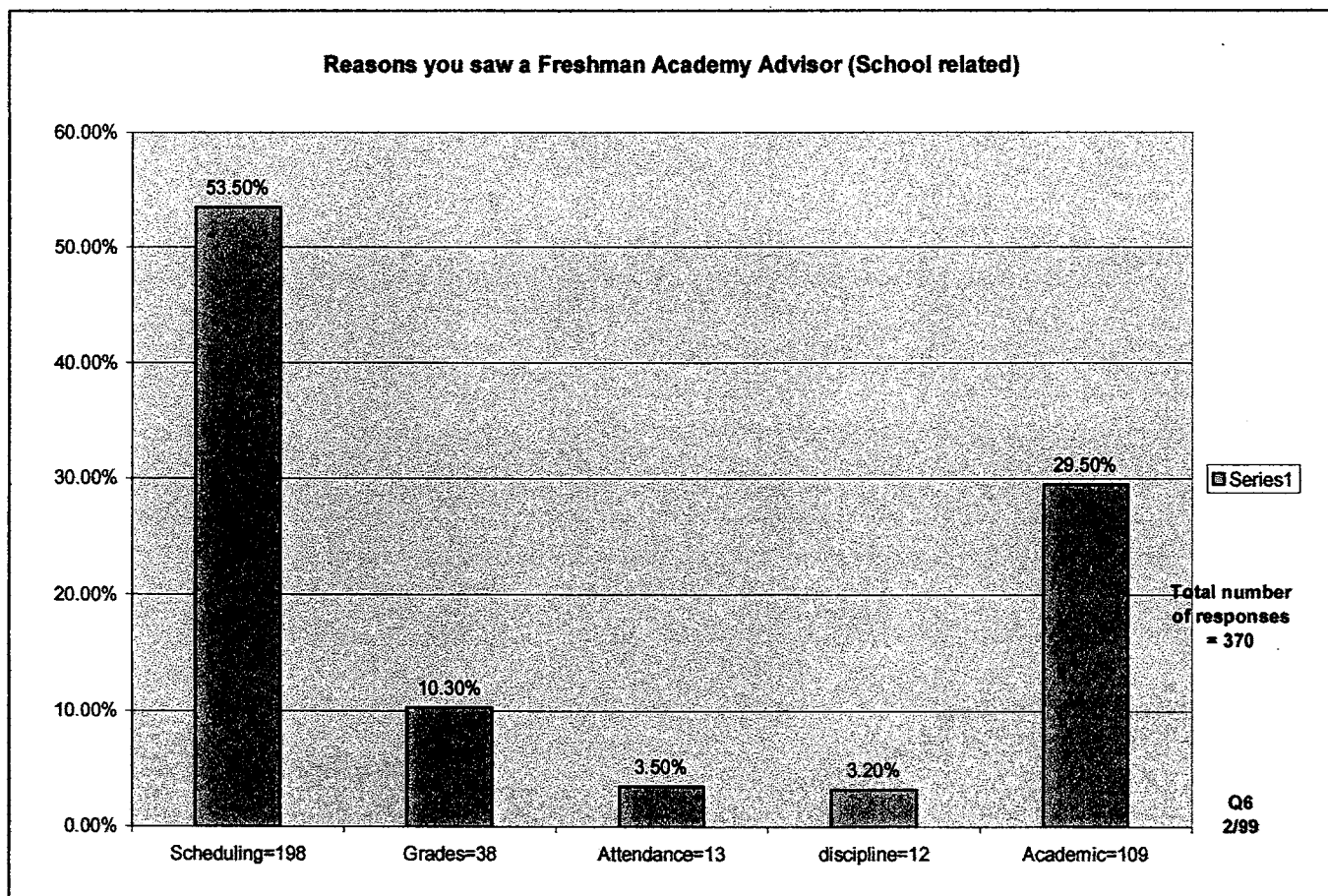
7. **How soon were you able to see your Freshman Academy Advisor?**

This chart illustrates the amount of time reported by students, that it took to see their Advisor after making an appointment. The largest % of students, 48.80% or 265 were able to see their Advisor immediately or that day. 34.70% or 189 students reported being able to see their Advisor in 2 school days. 10.50% or 57 students reported it taking up to 5 school days to see their Advisor. 6.10% or 33 students reported not being able to see their Advisor for up to 10 school days. 140 students did not respond to this question.

Fig. 7

How soon were you able to see your Freshman Academy Advisor?

Total number of responses =544

Non-responses = 140

Q7
2/99

Immediately= 108   That Day= 157   2 School Days= 189   5 School Days= 57   10 School Days= 33
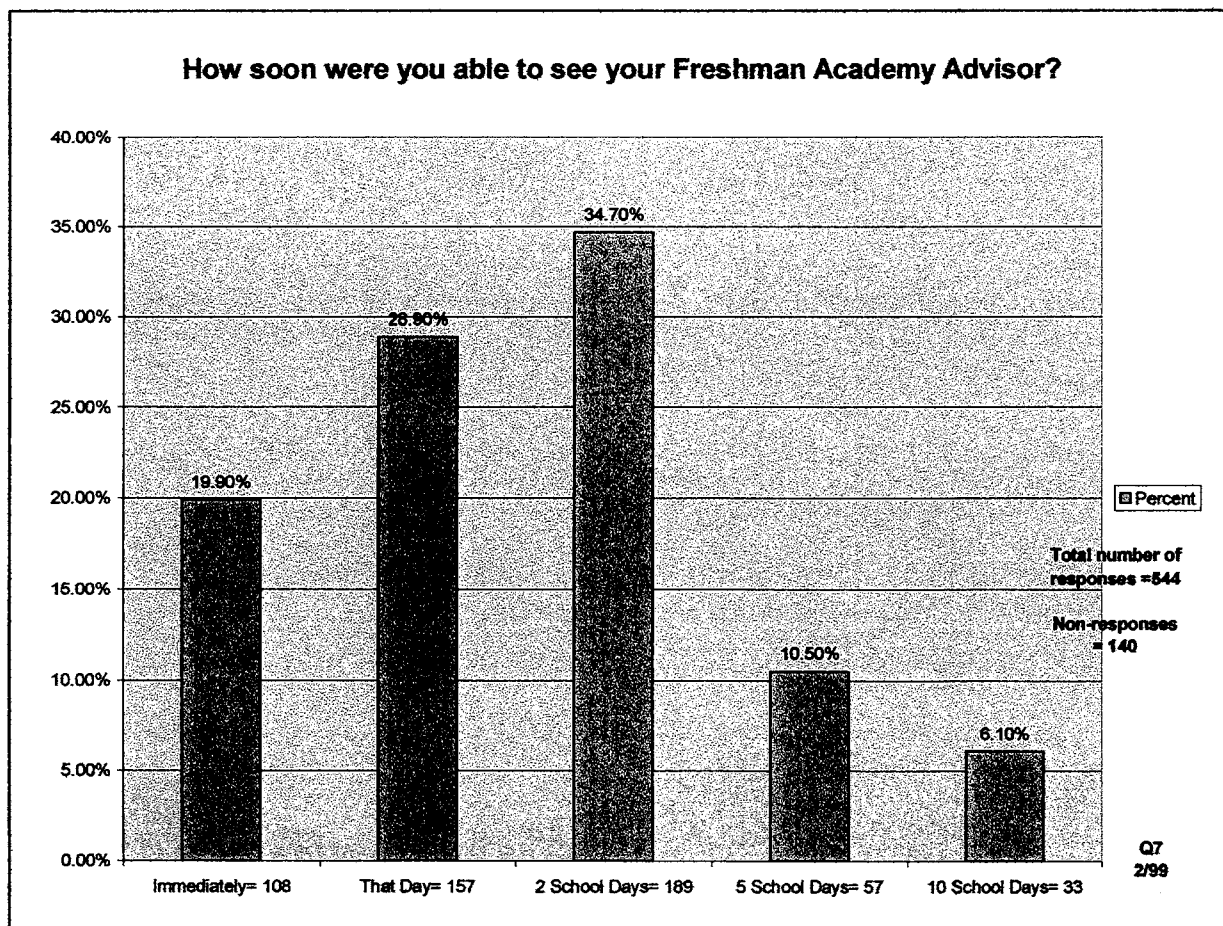
8.   How could the Freshman Academy better meet your needs?

As current 9th graders, the students were asked about further needs they have. The main concern reported was 29.20% or 134 of the students reported wanting assistance with transition to 10th grade. The second highest report was to have more individual meetings with Academy Advisors. This was reported at 28.80% or 132 students. A total of 459 students responded to this question. 225 did not.

Fig. 8
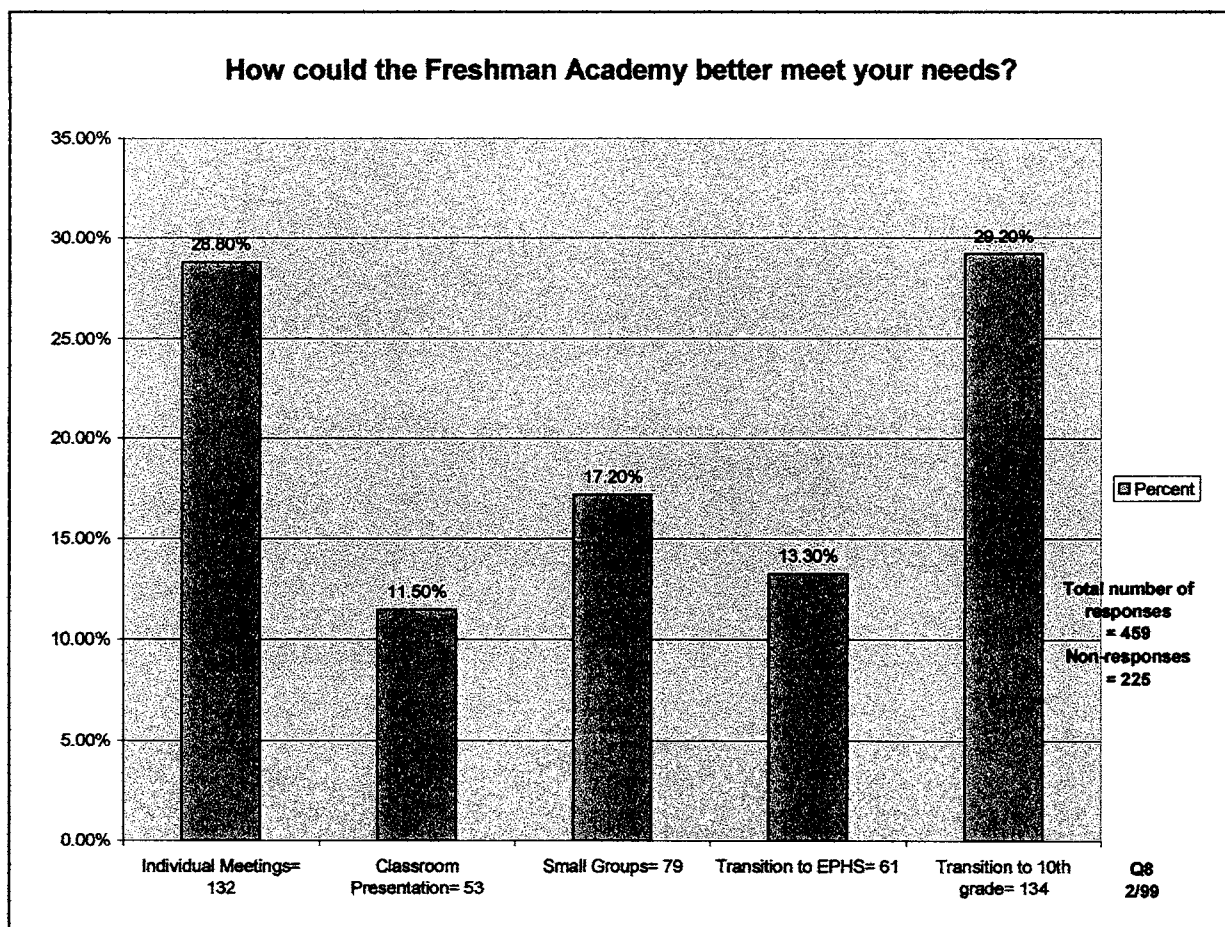
How could the Freshman Academy better meet your needs?

9.   Would you be interested in information or group presentations about academic & career issues?

In school concerns, the highest report for this question was the choice of career exploration, with 47.90% or 198 students. The least was organizational habits with 7.00% or 29 students. Total number of responses was 413. 271 students did not respond to this question.

Fig. 9
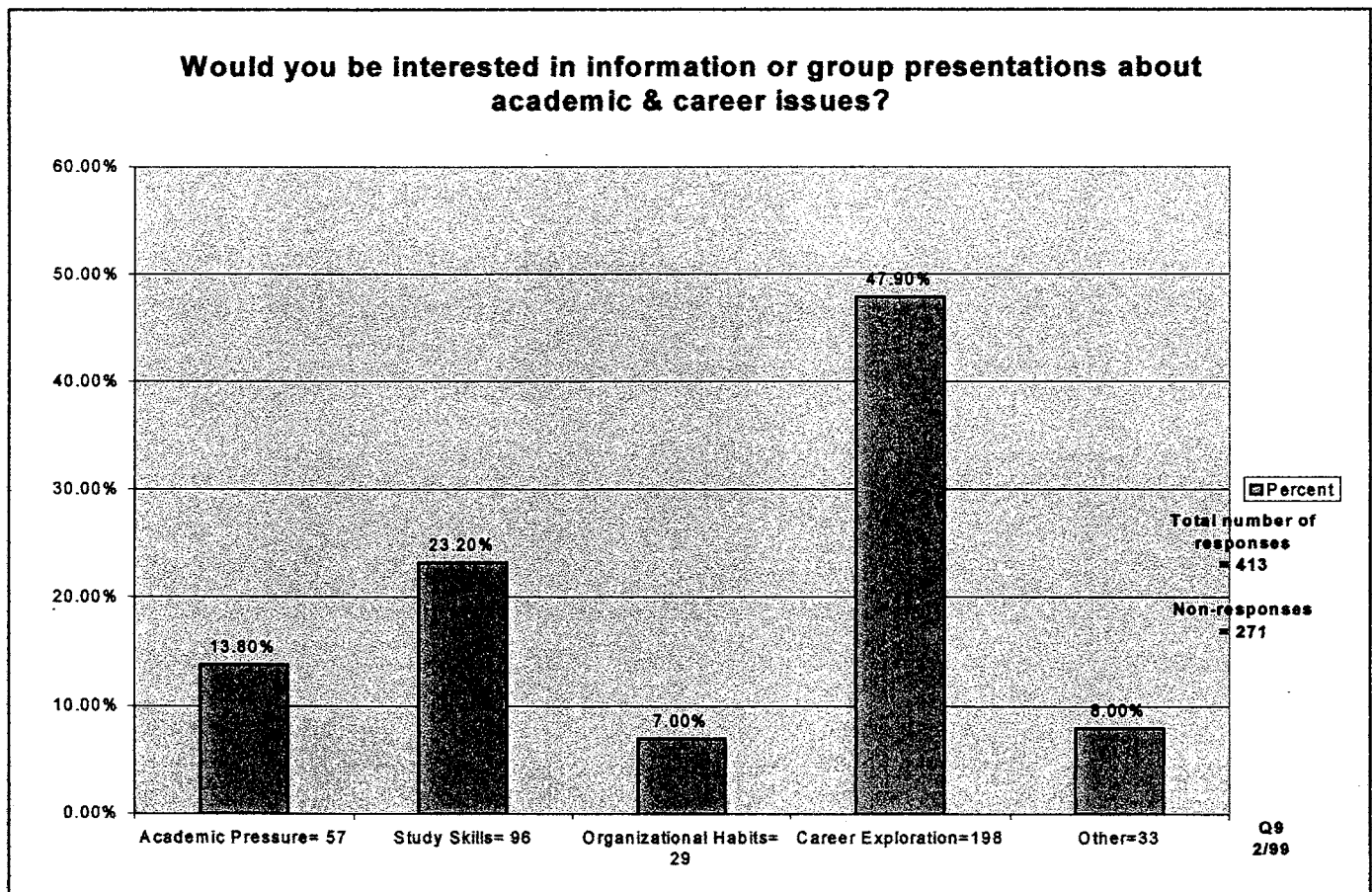
Would you be interested in information or group presentations about academic & career issues?

10.   Would you be interested in information to help you deal with psychological

and social issues?

In the area of psycho-social issues, the highest report was relationship issues

with 27.60% or 108 students. Information about personal issues was second with a

report from 99 students or 25.30%. Teacher concerns was a close third report with

24.50% or 96 students. The least report was chemical use with 9.20% or 36

students.

Fig. 10

Would you be interested in information to help you deal with
psychological and social issues?
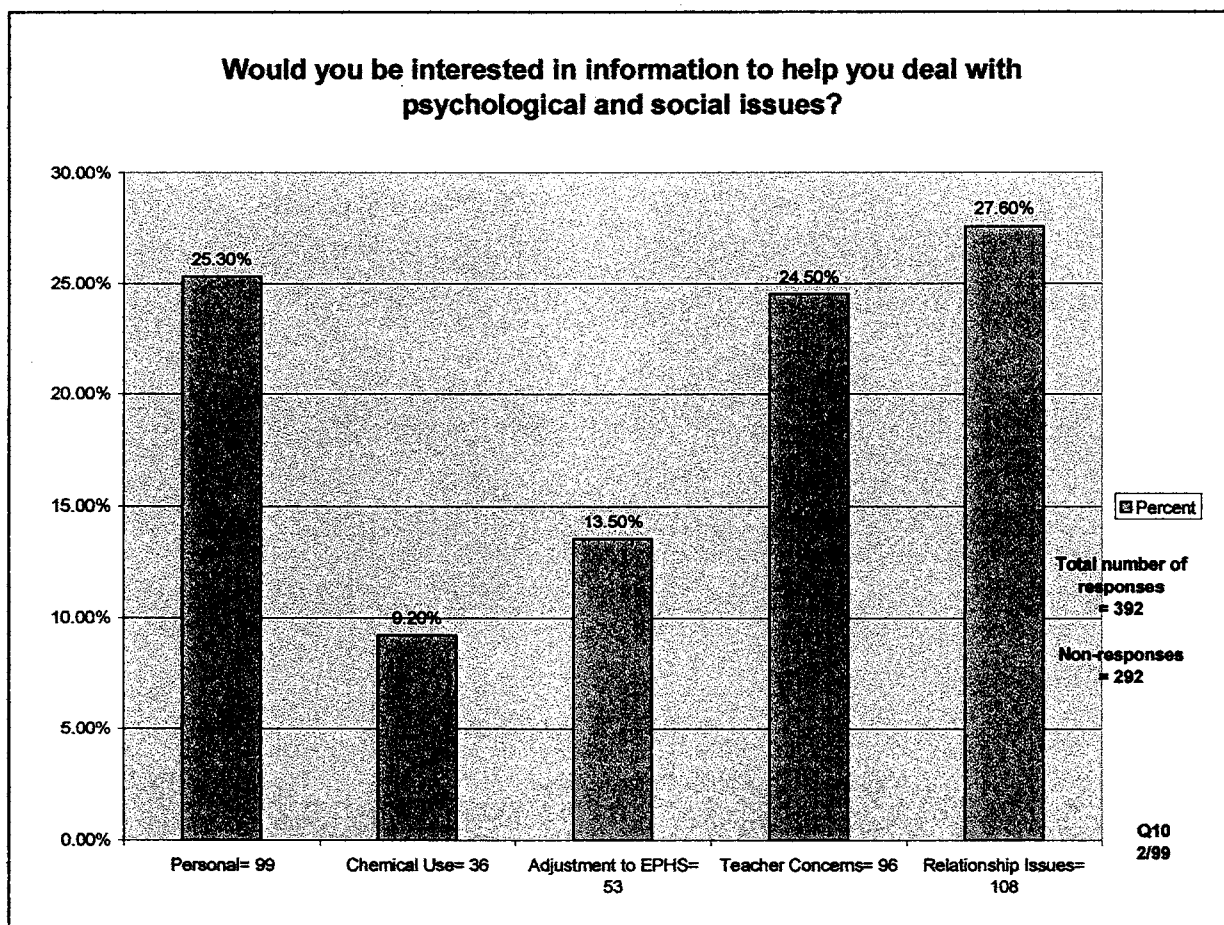
11.   I was satisfied with the amount of time my Advisor spent with me during visits:

Student were asked if when they had individual appointments with their Advisor, did they feel like the Advisor spent enough time with them. The highest report of 86.00% or 512 students agreed or strongly agreed that they had enough time with their Advisor when meeting individually. 14.00% or 84 students reported disagreeing or strongly disagreeing that they had enough time with their Advisors during individual meetings. 596 students responded to this question. 88 did not.

Fig. 11

I was satisfied with the amount of time my Advisor spent with me during visits:

Strongly Disagree (N=30)
5%
Disagree (N=54)
9%

Strongly Agree (N=225)
38%

Agree (N=287)
48%

🞐 Strongly Agree (N=225)

■ Agree (N=287)

☐ Disagree (N=54)

☐ Strongly Disagree (N=30)

Total number of responses = 596
Non-responses = 88
N = number of student responses

Q11
2/99
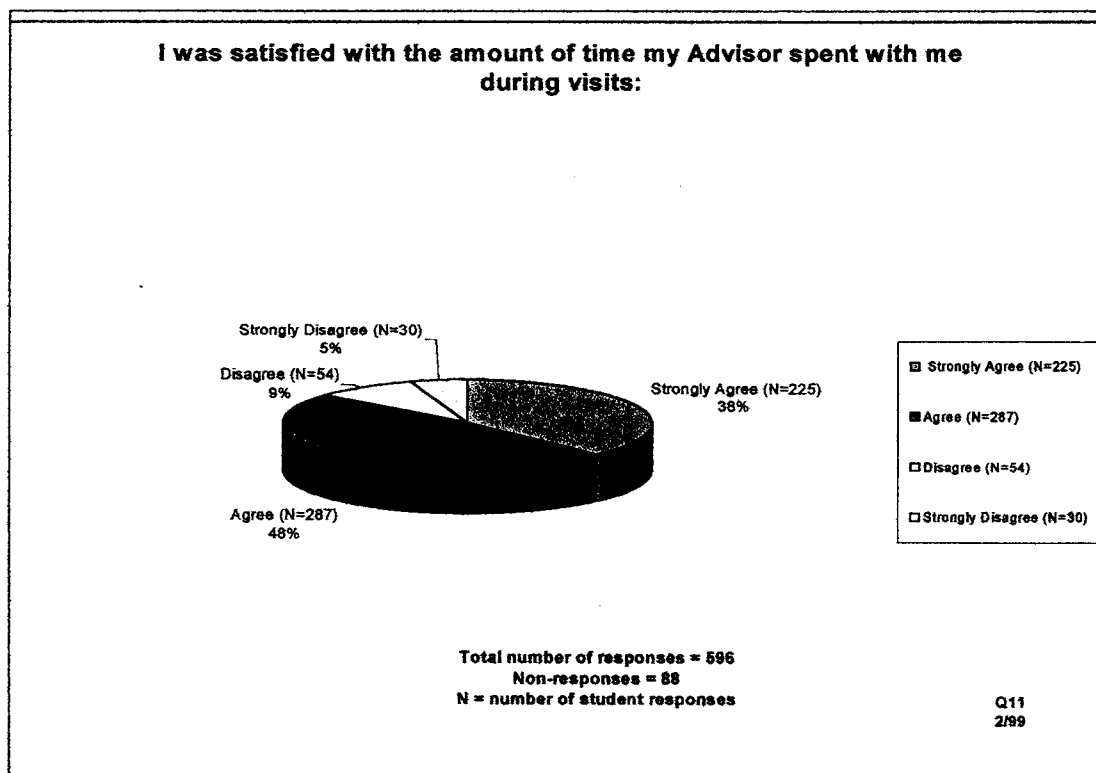
12.   I have been satisfied with the services my Advisor has provided:

510 students or 86% reported agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were

satisfied with the services provided by their Advisor. 79 students or 14% reported

disagreeing or strongly disagree that they were satisfied with the services provided

by their Advisor.

Fig. 12

I have been satisfied with the services my Advisor has provided:

Strongly Disagree (N=27)
5%
Disagree (N=52)
9%

Strongly Agree (N=213)
36%

Agree (N=297)
50%

⊡ Strongly Agree (N=213)

■ Agree (N=297)

☐ Disagree (N=52)

☐ Strongly Disagree (N=27)

Total number of responses = 589
Non-responses = 95
N = number of responses

Q12
2/99

43
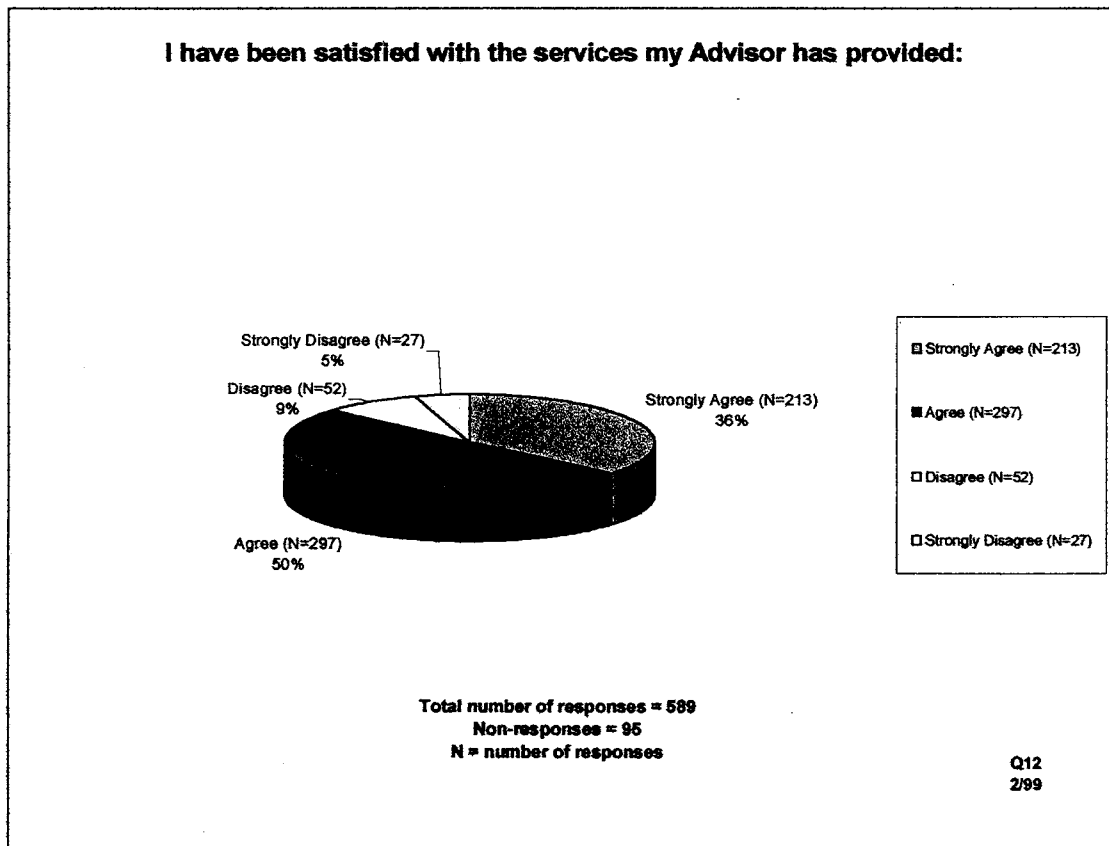
13. The Freshman Academy has been "user friendly"?

84% or 518 students reported the Freshman Academy as being "user friendly". This meant that they felt comfortable enough to go there and seek whatever support they needed, knowing that someone was there to help them. 16% or 94 students reported the Freshman Academy as not being "user friendly". These students did not feel that the Freshman Academy supported them adequately. Total number of responses was 612. 72 students did not respond.

Fig. 13

The Freshman Academy has been "user friendly"?

Strongly Disagree (N=29) 5%
Disagree (N=65) 11%
Strongly Agree (N=160) 26%
Agree (N=358) 58%

☐ Strongly Agree (N=160)
■ Agree (N=358)
☐ Disagree (N=65)
☐ Strongly Disagree (N=29)

Total number of responses = 612
Non-responses = 72
N = number of student responses

Q13
2/99

44
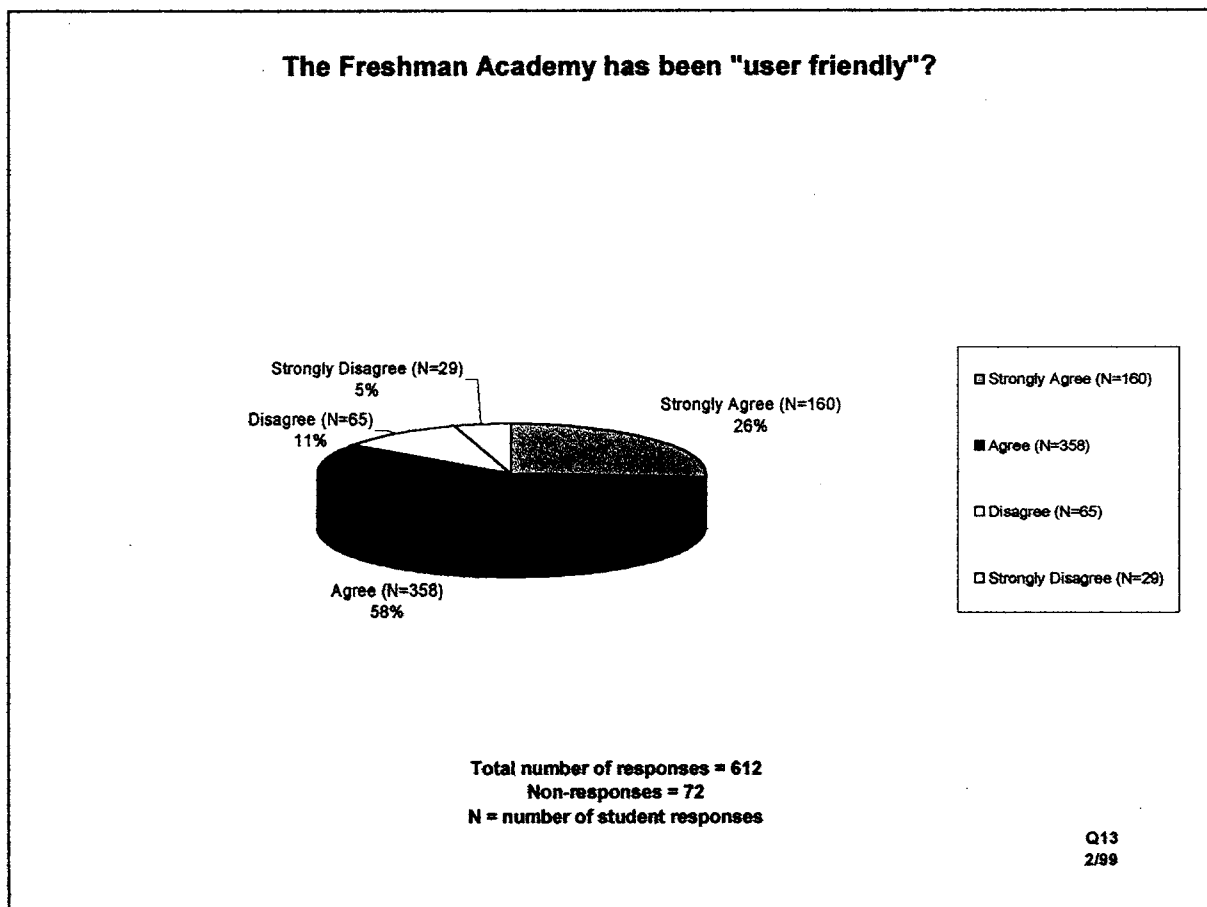
14.   I would like to meet with my Advisor more often:

Students responded almost half and half to this question. 52% or 323

students agreed or strongly agreed that they would like to meet more often with

their Advisor. 48% or 292 students reported that they disagreed or strongly

disagreed that they would like to meet more often with their Advisor. Total number

of responses was 615. 69 students did not respond.

Fig. 14

I would like to meet with my Advisor more often:

Strongly Disagree (N=67)
11%

Strongly Agree (N=93)
15%

Disagree (N=225)
37%

Agree (N=230)
37%

☒ Strongly Agree (N=93)

■ Agree (N=230)

☐ Disagree (N=225)

☐ Strongly Disagree (N=67)

Total number of responses = 615
Non-responses = 69
N = number of student responses

Q14
2/99
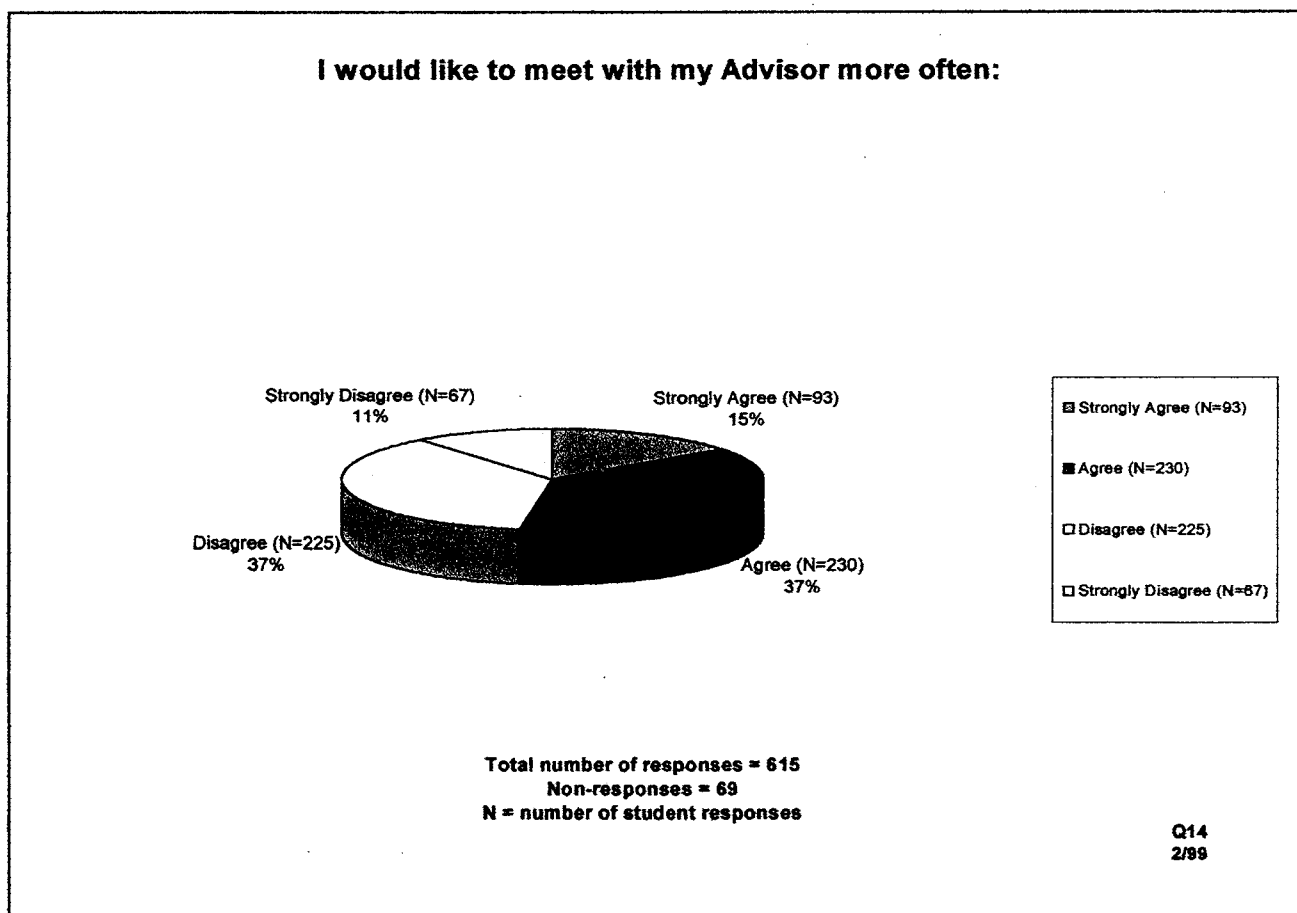
15.   At EPHS, I know an adult I can really talk to:

57% or 356 students reported agreeing or strongly agreeing that they knew
an adult that they can really talk to. 43% or 263 students reported disagreeing or
strongly disagreeing that they did not know an adult that they could really talk to.
A total of 619 students responded to this question. 65 did not.

Fig. 15

At EPHS, I know an adult I can really talk to:

Strongly Disagree (N=91) 15%
Strongly Agree (N=106) 17%
Disagree (N=172) 28%
Agree (N=250) 40%

▣ Strongly Agree (N=106)
■ Agree (N=250)
□ Disagree (N=172)
□ Strongly Disagree (N=91)

Total number of responses = 619
Non-responses = 65
N = number of student responses

Q15
2/99
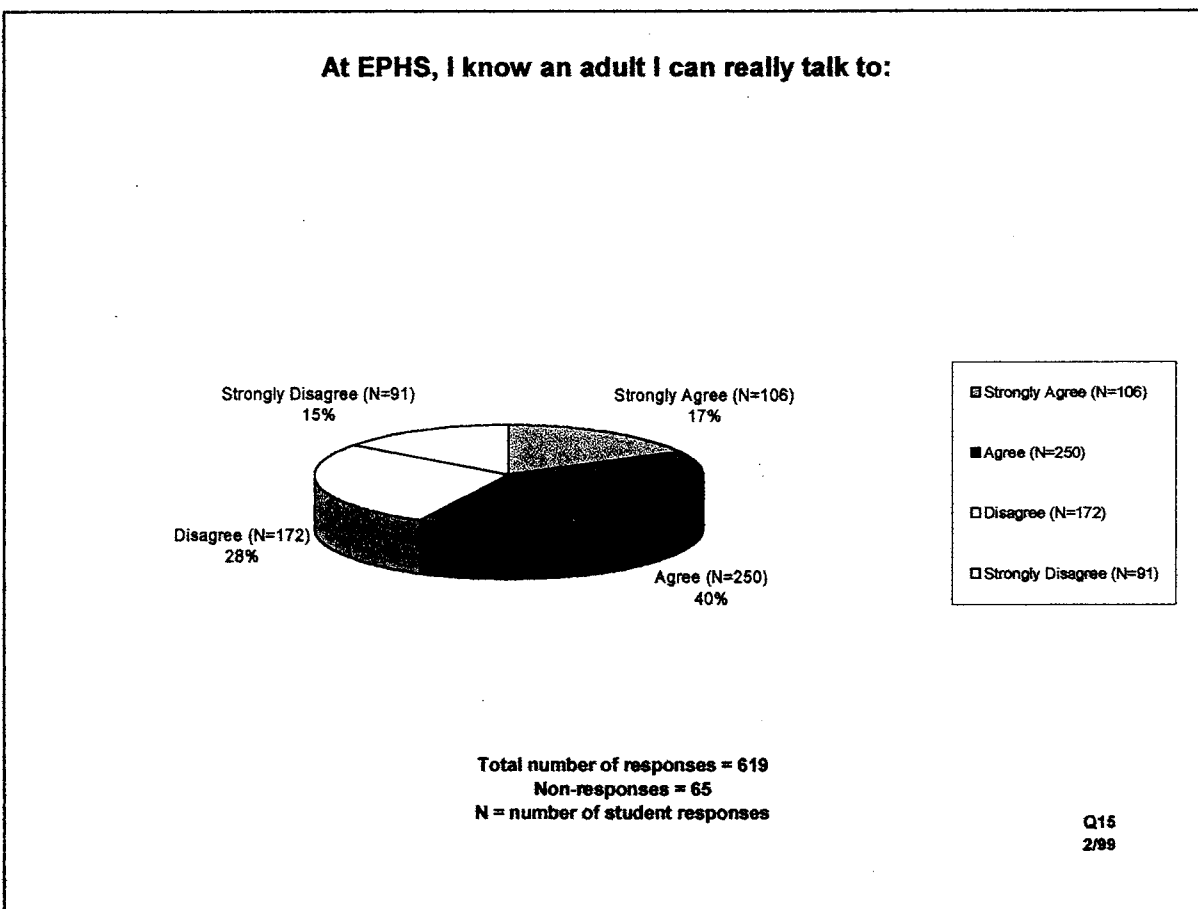
16.   I have a good connection with three adults at EPHS:

48% or 300 students reported agreeing or strongly agreeing having a good

connection with three adults. 52% or 322 students reported disagreeing or strongly

disagreed that they have a good connection with three adults. A total of 622

students responded to this question. 62 did not.

Fig. 16

I have a good connection with three adults at EPHS:

Strongly Disagree (N=109) 18%

Strongly Agree (N=63 10%

Disagree (N=213) 34%

Agree (N=237) 38%

◨ Strongly Agree (N=63

■ Agree (N=237)

☐ Disagree (N=213)

☐ Strongly Disagree (N=109)

Total number or responses=622
Non-responses = 62
N = number of student responses

Q16
2/99
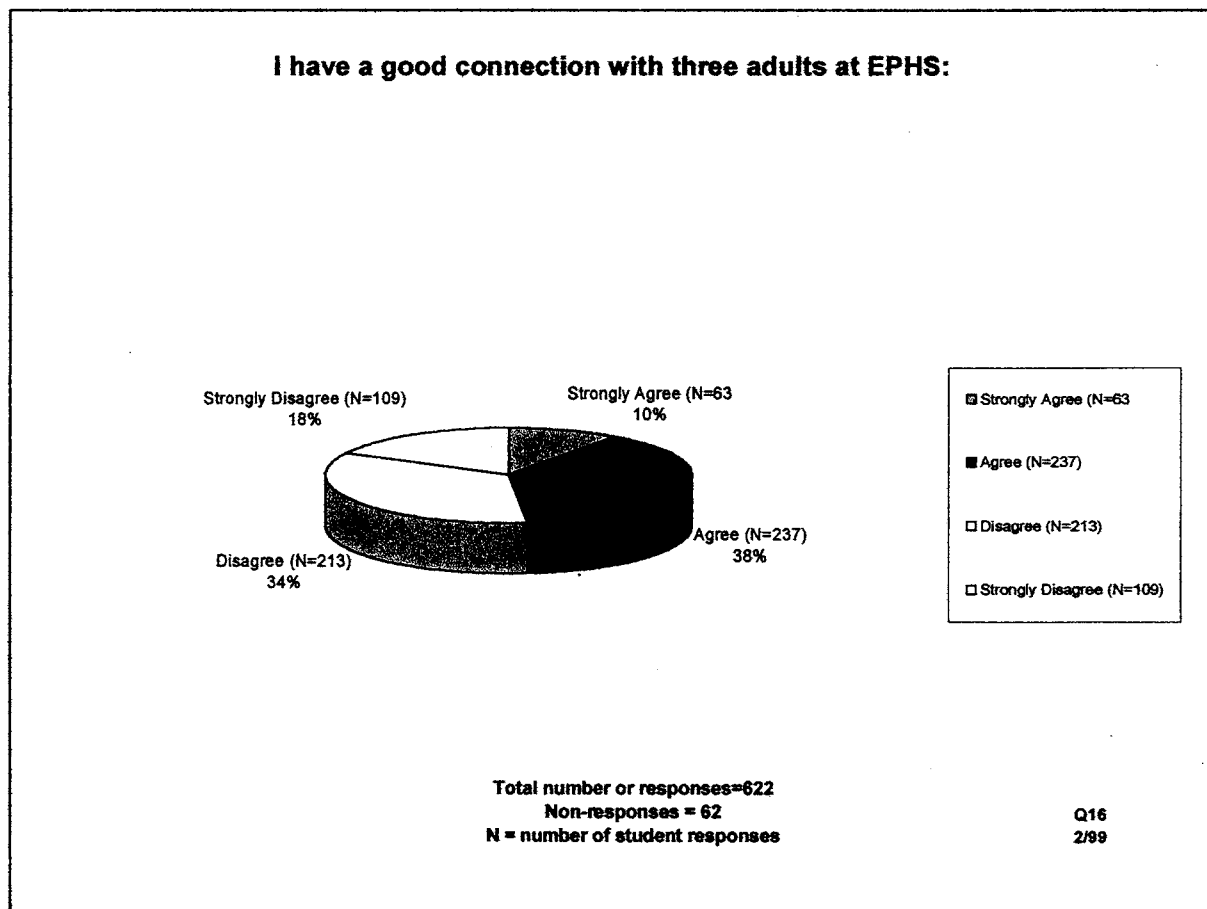
17.   If I have a problem, I know where to seek help?

83% or 520 students reported agreeing or strongly agreeing that they knew
where to seek help if they had a problem. 17% or 105 students reported disagreeing
or strongly disagreeing that they knew where to seek help if they had a problem. A
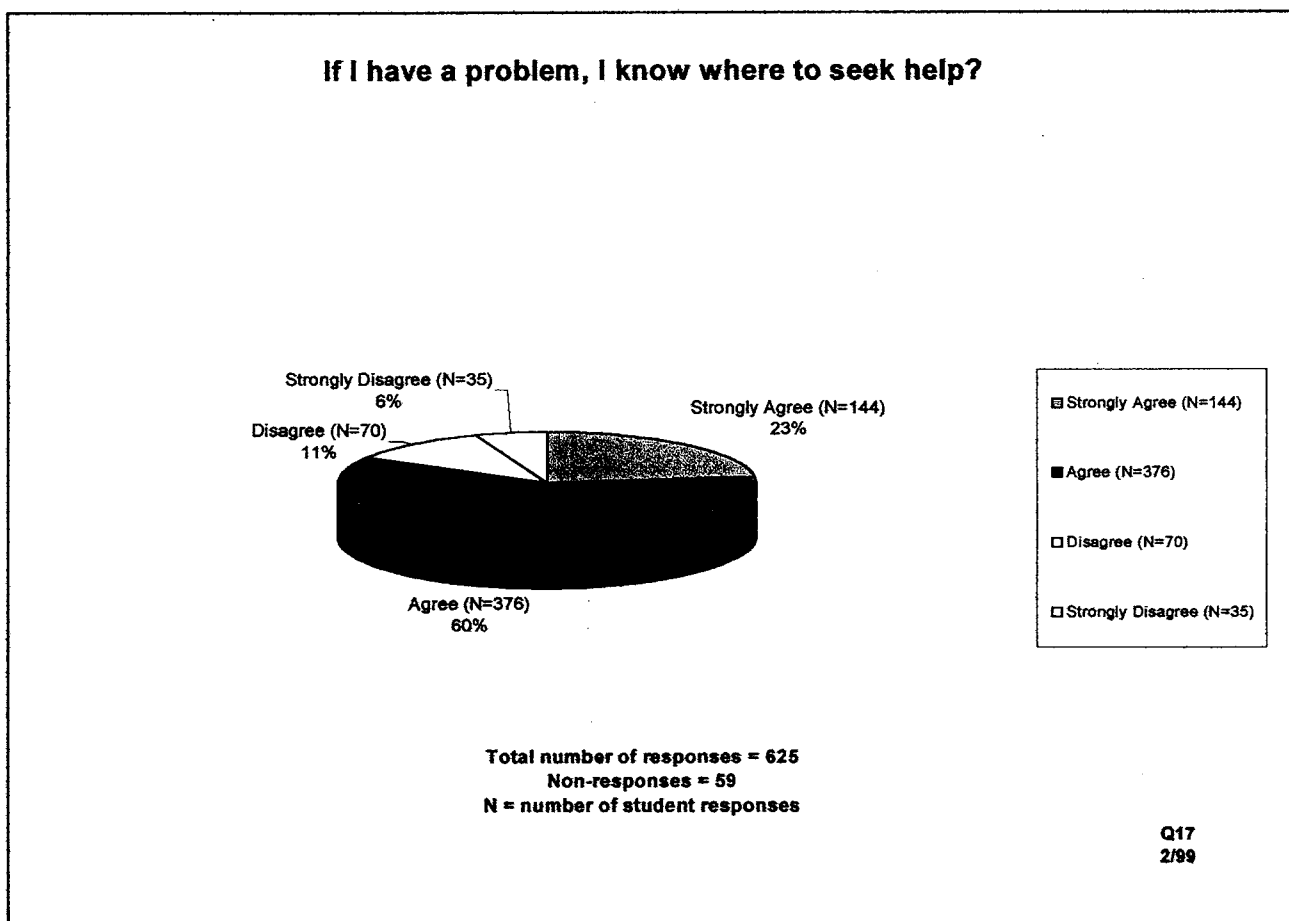total of 625 students responded to this question. 59 did not.

Fig. 17

If I have a problem, I know where to seek help?

Strongly Disagree (N=35)
6%
Disagree (N=70)
11%

Strongly Agree (N=144)
23%

Agree (N=376)
60%

☐ Strongly Agree (N=144)

■ Agree (N=376)

☐ Disagree (N=70)

☐ Strongly Disagree (N=35)

Total number of responses = 625
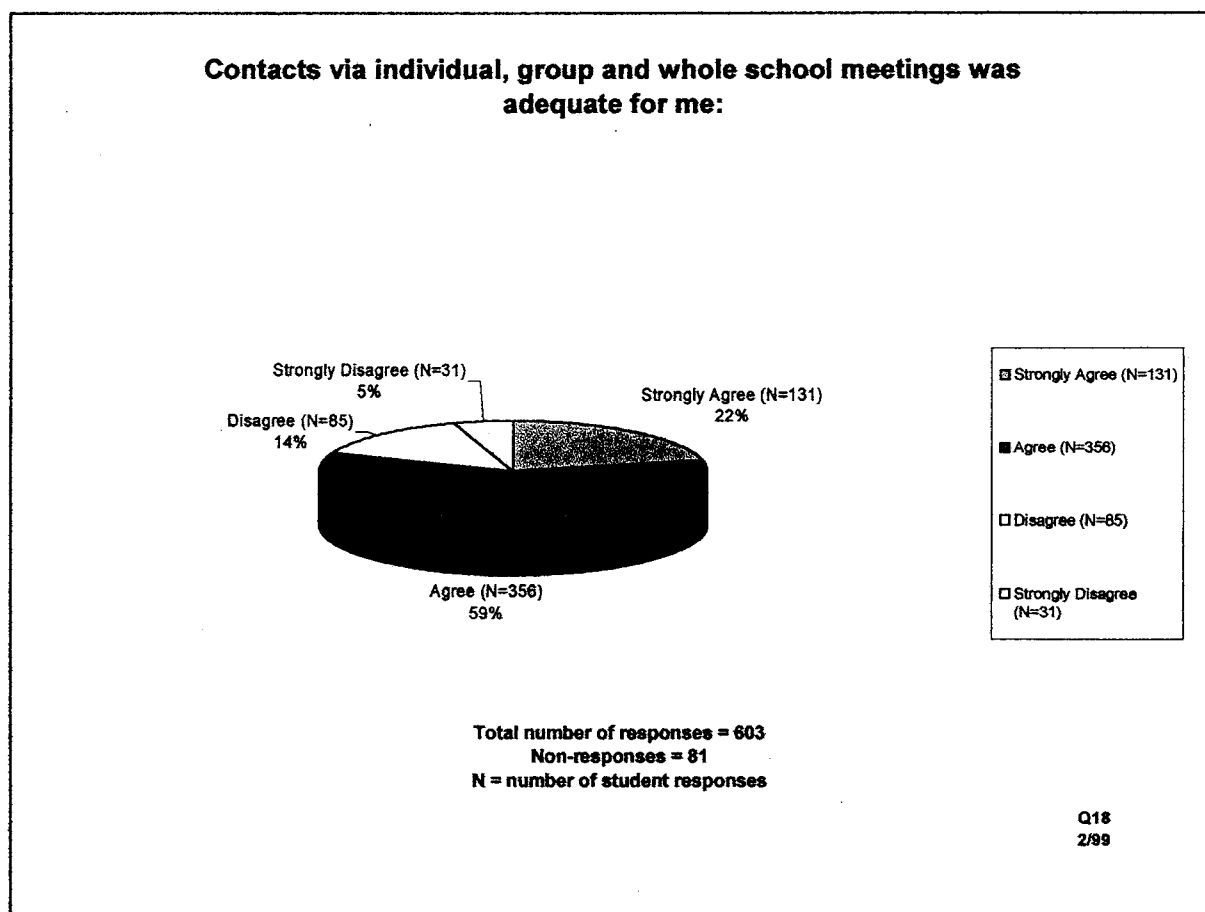Non-responses = 59
N = number of student responses

Q17
2/99

18.   Contacts via individual, group and whole school meetings was adequate for

me:

        81% or 487 students reported agreeing or strongly agreeing that methods of

contact were adequate for them. 19% or 116 students reported disagreeing or

strongly disagreeing that the method of contacts was not adequate for them. A total

of 603 students responded to this question. 81 students did not respond.

Fig. 18

Contacts via individual, group and whole school meetings was adequate for me:

Strongly Disagree (N=31)
5%

Disagree (N=85)
14%

Strongly Agree (N=131)
22%

Agree (N=356)
59%

☒ Strongly Agree (N=131)

■ Agree (N=356)

☐ Disagree (N=85)

☐ Strongly Disagree (N=31)

Total number of responses = 603
Non-responses = 81
N = number of student responses

Q18
2/99

3) School Dialogue & Minutes From Meeting Archives

I have listed meeting dates and the topics that were discussed on those dates that have relevance to the topic of discussion in the appendix. Because of confidentiality no further information is given (Appendix C).

SUMMARY

The presentation of data was presented in the form of a triangulation approach of data. This included: 1) primary and secondary data in the form of the program description, 2) a secondary data analysis of survey questions, and 3) meeting minutes and school dialogue.

The researcher gave a description of the Freshman Academy program. The history of how and why the program was started was given, and a description of components of the program.

The researcher then presented the secondary data analysis of the surveys taken by the school. Survey questions were each presented by charts and graphs, with an explanation for each question and chart.

The researcher explained that the minutes from school meetings and dates are logged in appendix C.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

In the following pages, the researcher will analyze the two pieces of data that was presented in the previous chapter. The third piece of data, minutes from meetings archives, will not be analyzed individually but included with the other two pieces of data analysis. The data that will be analyzed individually will be as follows: 1) Analysis of the Freshman Academy Program, and 2) The secondary analysis of the surveys. The data will be analyzed in that order.

Program Analysis:

In analysis of this program, the researcher will be speaking from a knowledge base of her own experience as the social worker in the program, from information gathered in meetings, and from public written information about the school.

The decision to separate the Academy into its own service area is beneficial to the 9th grade population in the sense that they always know where to go for services, as they are contained in one place. In that sense it does create a smaller environment within the Academy itself, but not really within the whole school. The 9th grade population is still dispersed throughout the whole building in terms of classes, lockers, and eating areas. With the building being so large, it still makes it easy for 9th grade students to "get lost" within the population of other students.

With the current numbers of 9th grade students divided by the Academy Advisors, they are at over 200 per student/adult ratio, with the social worker at 150. From experience, as the social worker in the Academy, the issues that are dealt with

concerning students, parents, teachers, and others are never ending. The ratios are too high to do an effective job. In year one of the program when the ratio for the social worker was 100 students, the social worker knew students much better and was more connected to them. More contact occurred. The goal of meeting with them all a minimum of once per term was met for the larger majority, and more parent communication occurred. This year, already by second term, not all students could be seen because of high demand in other areas. The trend continued into third term. The same feeling was expressed by the other Advisors also.

The 8th grade transition component of the program is developing well. 8th grade students are introduced to Academy Advisors and high school information in the middle of the year. The registration process takes place starting in January, which involves 8th grade students and parents with Advisors. This has caused an increase in work for the Advisors because they are now involved with the 8th grade population and their parents, as well as their own 9th graders. Advisors spend a lot of time returning phone calls about registration questions. They are also required to provide informational sessions in the evening for parents of 8th graders.

It was reported by the counselors in the 10 – 12 Center, that not all 10th grade students could be seen in the first term because of high numbers. Their numbers were now down to approximately 360 per counselor, but because of workload and student numbers, they too were unable to keep up or get to know their students. The four-year plan was only being updated if students made appointments to do so. Students were introduced to the Career Resource Center in groups by their English classes.

The required Freshman Seminar class for all 9th graders proved to be most effective for students who had the course in the first term. Information covered in the academic and psycho-social development area is helpful for the student as they go through 9th grade to help with transition. Those having the course in later terms cannot apply some of the information before then and may have some problems that could have been avoided by having the class earlier. Advisors did however; inquire of 8th grade teachers, which students were at-risk and would benefit from having Freshman Seminar in the first term. Those student's schedules were then changed so that they were placed in the first term of the course. This however, burnt out seminar teachers 1st term because they had classes full of at-risk students. This caused stress and a lack of learning. It was decided not to switch students into 1st term next year. This would keep the classes balanced so that students could support each other. Freshman Seminar class does create a community environment in the sense that students do many connecting activities with teachers and other personnel that regularly come into the class for activities. The students get to know each other and the teacher pretty well.

Connections time (homeroom) works well for connecting students to adults. Students are arranged according to grade and alphabet. Size ranges around twenty students to an adult. Students are with this adult all four years of their high school career. During this time students and adults get to know each other and build relationships. Connections meet once a week on Wednesdays for 30 minutes. Students spend time sharing with each other as well as watching the student produced "Eagle Vision" video program.

<u>Survey Analysis</u>

In analysis of the surveys, the researcher will be speaking from the facts of the survey results. Also from information brought up in agenda items from the archive of school meetings. The researcher will also speak from an experience base as the programs social worker. Surveys were taken in February of the first year of the program, 1999. Keep in mind that the time frame is in early third term. There was still four months left in the school year, some students had not yet been exposed to Freshman Seminar, and some may have met with their Advisor only once or twice.

Questions 1 & 2 were demographic questions. (not discussed)

Questions 3, 7, 11, and 14 concerned the Academy Advisor and contact with the student.

13% of all students who responded reported no contact with their Advisor. During the first year of the program it was reported in meetings that the principal was unable to meet with many of his students due to other responsibilities. The decision was made that in the following year, that alphabet would be given to the social worker. That would make about 150 students for the social worker. This did take place the second year. 201 students reported seeing their Advisor 3-4 times at that point. The Advisor's goal was to see students a minimum of 4 times a year. Keep in mind that only two terms had gone by and there were still two terms left. From the experience as the social worker, approximately 85 of her 100 students were seen a minimum of 4 times that year. In a weekly Academy meeting, the dean reported seeing 195 of her students 4 times. Both counselors reported seeing most of

their students a total of 3 times. It was also reported by the principal that he was unable to see some of his students even once (Appendix B). This information came in the fourth term. The procedure was that the Advisors made appointment for the students the first three terms and the student was to make their own appointment fourth term. Some of them did not make those appointments. Those students of the principal, who were either assertive or those that got into trouble were the ones to be seen. Those who were not the type to reach out probably went through the year with no significant adult contact. They may be reflected in question 14 as wanting to meet with their Advisor more often. This could also be a reflection of students who were often seen by their Advisor because they were in trouble. These students could also be reflected as disagreeing and strongly disagreeing in question 11 about the amount of time spent with Advisors during visits.

Students who reported it taking up to 5-10 days to see their Advisor were mostly students of the principal. This was brought up in meetings in the month of 1/99, and 3/99 (Appendix B). However, I also think that the question may have been unclear. Students may have been counting days from the beginning of school, as opposed to from the day that they made an appointment. This would account for the high numbers in the 5-10 day range. In my experience and from meeting notes, students for the four Advisors (not counting the principal), could be seen within two days (Appendix B).

Questions 8, 13, 15, 16, and 17 are questions about connecting at the high school.

The survey reflects about half of the students who responded reported having a good connection with adults at the high school. They knew where to go to get help with whatever they needed, and felt that the Academy was a friendly place. There is concern about the other half of the students who responded not feeling that way. We still are not meeting the needs of too many students. Those who felt they did not know an adult who they could talk to, are probably not connected to and a part of the school community. Those who reported not knowing where to seek help if they have a problem are a concern. This information is promoted in many ways beginning in 8th grade by saying the Advisor in your first person of contact. This information is given to parents as well as students, over and over. This information is also given in Freshman Seminar. Maybe these students have not had this class yet. Either way it is a concern that students are reporting this.

Students reported wanting transition to 10th grade information and more individual meetings with Advisors. They would have received some transition information in Freshman Seminar, as well as with their final meeting in fourth term with their Advisor. Unfortunately as they entered 10th grade, the counselors in the 10th-12th Center reported not being able to follow through because of high numbers. This includes the individual meetings with counselors also (Appendix B).

Questions 5 & 10 refer to psycho-social reasons students saw Advisors for or issues they wanted information about.

Information they wanted was reported highest as relationship issues, personal, and teacher concerns. The most significant reason reported that they saw

Advisors was for personal reasons. This is all developmentally right on for their age. They are sorting out identity versus role confusion, and they are focused on themselves. The Freshman Seminar course contains a psycho-social issues unit in it's curriculum, but students are asking for more information in this area, so maybe the course does not contain enough or the kind of information the students are looking for.

Questions 6 & 9 refer to academic reasons students saw Advisors or issues they wanted information about.

Students reported career exploration highest, with study skills ranking next as areas that they wanted more information about. Both topics are covered well in Freshman Seminar. They cover a whole unit on career exploration and they also do a careers inventory survey that is pretty in depth. People are brought in from the outside to score it and present it to students and their parents. Students also get a unit on study skills in Freshman Seminar, and teachers are asked to go over test taking skills before finals. It appears from my experience that these areas are covered well. It may be that the students who are reporting this are those who have not had Freshman Seminar yet. If not, and students are saying that they want to go to the next step with the career exploration. Then this unit should be incorporated into the Freshman Seminar unit to expand the current curriculum.

IMPLICATION FOR SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKERS

This research presents various implications for the school social worker.
School social workers have a broad knowledge base, which enables them to function in many different school settings.

Functioning as an Advisor, allows the social worker to be a leader in the blended role setting. Social workers are skilled the following areas that enable them to be effective Advisors in the program:

- In using problem solving methods
- Understanding attendance issues and truancy
- Crisis management
- Understanding developmental issues
- Resource and networking skills
- Takes a holistic approach to meeting client (student) needs
- Bridges gap between educational objectives and psychotherapeutic objectives (linking with teachers and other staff)
- Support to other Advisors in the program in these areas
- Being the liaison person between the program and special education

Should the program remove the social worker from the Advisor role and utilize them in the role of social worker for the whole program, in a full time capacity, the social worker could be more effective to the program. They would be able to meet the needs of more students as well as staff. Other areas in addition to the ones listed above that school social workers would be able to support are:

- Running support groups
- They would be another adult to support all students in the program
- Focus on at-risk programming
- Working with mental health issues
- Linking school and community resources
- Helping school personnel to understand the links between school and social issues students bring with them

There are many other skills that school social workers have in which they could be used to support students, teachers, staff and community. Those listed above are only a few. School social workers are also used in the Special Education processes in various capacities at schools. With their knowledge base they are able to function in many areas that other professionals are not equipped to do.

It is therefore important that school social workers have clear and defined roles and are not spread too thin, which keeps them from being very effective at all. It is also important that schools understand the importance of working with the whole student and know that this is a time consuming process that requires full time people to do an effective job.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the Freshman Academy has accomplished some of its goals, on various levels, for the program. The questions examined by the researcher were: 1) Does the Freshman Academy foster a smaller community like setting for the 9th grade student body? 2) Does the Freshman Academy provide more support services then before, for the 9th grade student body? 3) Does the Freshman Academy increase adult/student contact? 4) Is the transition program sufficient?

A smaller community environment for 9th grade students has been formed. By placing the Academy in an area of its own and servicing all 9th grade student needs out of that center, it has forced a community setting geographically. Students, teachers, Advisors and other staff communicate and work together to support each other.

Because of the size of the building and the numbers of 9th grade students, it is still however a very large community and therefore many of the issues that plague a large school are still there. With the large size of the school, students can easily get lost in the shuffle and not know adults. Students reported in the survey that they wanted to spend more time with Advisors. This cannot happen for all students unless the numbers of students to Advisor is smaller. In the literature review, according to Allen, the task of communities is to make them small enough so that people are able to communicate effectively and meet the needs of its members. In the Academy the students need to meet more with their Advisor is affected by the size of the student body. The programs need to build greater connection with its

students is hindered by the size of the student body. The community is still too large to have all of the positive qualities of communication, trust, support, and knowing each member, operating effectively.

The goal of increased adult/student contact has happened. 9th graders are having increased contact with adults; however, this is not consistent for all 9th graders. Those who end up in trouble and those who are assertive are the students who consume the time of the Advisors. Numbers of students to Advisor is still too large. This keeps Advisors from knowing their students as well as is suggested in the literature review. Time to build trust and comfort with students does not usually happen within one year. It depends on how often students are seen. In the Academy, many students did not see their Advisor enough to be able to build any kind of solid relationship of trust. Freshman Seminar is one of the areas that this contact with a significant adult takes place. Activities that connect and build trust were a part of the curriculum so students get to know their Seminar teachers pretty well. Connections is also another place where significant contact occurs.

It is my recommendation that the school consider increasing staff to make numbers much smaller for Advisors. If numbers were more in the range of 150 students to 1 full time adult, it is my belief that Advisors could accomplish the goal of getting to know each of their students well. They would be able to spend more quality time, do better programming with students, work more with parents and help students to have more success.

Because the literature review has shown that it takes time to build trusting relationships and that developmentally, adolescents are in need of those

relationships of caring adults, it is my recommendation that the high school consider the other option of programming in the form of a 9–10 Center. This of course should be done only with an increase of staff to lower the number of students to adult ratios. Students should stay with their Advisor for two years in order to create a greater connection with an adult. This will also give the student a better chance to get grounded before they are moved (transitioned) into another center with another adult to become comfortable with.

There would then be a 9-10 Center and an 11-12 Center. Students in 9th and 10th grade are developmentally in the same place. Their concerns are mostly focused on them, relationships, and starting a high school career. Whereas 11th and 12th graders are more focused on careers, college and transitioning out of high school. It might then be a little easier to foster community with the longevity of two years to work with students. This would create a better opportunity to build trust and really get to know students as individuals. Keep in mind that this is still contingent on adult/student ratios being lowered.

The goal to increased support services for 9th grade students is happening. Students have all of the support services listed on pages 27-30 to help them through 9th grade. One of the problems is identifying and getting the students to the support services when they need them. More steps need to be in place to target students earlier so that they can get support before they fall apart. Like the students who are identified in 8th grade as needing Freshman Seminar first term. They are placed before they have a chance to miss support that could help them to be more

successful. It is taking a proactive approach rather then reactive, which is the way too many systems work. Another important step to help in the process is the parent connection. When Advisors are able to meet with parents and students, to discuss the student's needs, it creates a larger team of people who have the student's best interest in mind. It helps with the holistic approach of working with the student both in and out of school. Parents are able to give important information that the school might not otherwise know. If Advisors were able to meet with each parent individually throughout the school year, it would be a valuable practice. However, with current ratios this would not be possible to do with all families.

If Advisors had fewer students to work with, they might be able to do a better job of identifying and communicating with teachers, parents and others to help students get the supports needed for them to be more successful.

The transition program from 8th to 9th grade is working pretty well. Changes and growth in this area occur each year and I think it will continue to become more effective as it is adjusted each year. One thing that might help with identifying at-risk students sooner might be to increase contact with 8th grade teachers. This would mean more time spent on 8th grade students when there is a concern about the numbers of 9th grade students and lack of time for them. This could also however be a proactive step that could help that student in their 9th grade year, which could free up time for the Advisor who might not have to deal with certain issues that might be solved because of action taken in 8th grade.

Transition for 9th to 10th grade is lacking. Students enter the 10th grade and it's another new adult and a whole new system to learn. They are not nurtured and

protected as they were going into 9th grade. Their counselor has many other students in the 11th and 12th grades and even less time to spend with them. They are to make all of their own appointments, which means they might see even less adults if they are not assertive enough to do so. In the review of the literature, according to Seidman et al., (1996), those students who are considered at-risk are particularly vulnerable and may be adversely affected by difficult school transitions. Multiple school transitions and poor social support have also been cited as explanations of difficulty in adjustment. In addition, a mismatch between the coping abilities, developmental level of the adolescent and the fit with the school environment have been cited as problematic (Barone et al., 1991), (Sauter, 1998).

Some students from the year before came back to 9th grade Advisors to advise with them because they felt more comfortable talking to them. They still felt like they had a fit in the Academy. They had a hard time getting to know another person all over. This makes it difficult for the Advisor who now has to work with 8th graders, 9th, and some 10th too. Even though the transition period is considered to be the middle of 8th grade through the middle of 10th. Academy Advisors will not be able to service all of these students and need to be able to hand some over, or create a system in which numbers are much smaller.

If a 9-10 Center were created, this would help with the transition problem of 9th to 10th. Of course a 10th to 11-12 transition would still need to happen, but students are developmentally in a different place then. Students would not need to go through another upsetting move into another system as 10th graders. Developmentally, they would have another year to get grounded and settle into high

school. Because transition is said to go through the middle of 10th grade, during this fragile time students would still be with the person they know most, their Advisor, to help them continue the connecting and settling process.

Because students reported wanting more career planning information, it is my recommendation that either a larger unit on this topic be placed within Freshman Seminar, or that the school consider a 10th grade seminar also and place the career planning in that course. This could also be a place where transition stuff happens for 10th to 11 –12 Center. Should the school decide to switch to a 9 –10 Center and an 11 – 12 Center, developmentally appropriate information for 10th grade students could be incorporated within a seminar class.

Since the beginning of the program, adult to student ratios have gone up. In the second year, Advisors had an increase of between 30 to 55 students. There are currently eight hundred and four 8th graders in the middle school. This does not include new students that move in or out over the summer. Numbers will go up again next year. There is also talk of lowering the number of students that the social worker and dean have, without increasing staff. If the school continues with the current program as a Freshman Academy, it needs to take a serious look at staff and consider increasing the adults in the program who work with students. All people need to be full time and numbers need to go down if they intend to improve on the goals that they have set for the program to function best. The blended roles have worked well, but the school might want to consider removing the social worker from the Advisor role. By using the social worker for full time direct service for all 9th and 10th grade students, some of the services that could be provided are:

- Running support groups
- They would be another adult to support all students in the program
- Focus on at-risk programming
- Working with mental health issues
- Linking school and community resources
- Helping school understand the links between school and social issues students bring with them

This might be more effective use of the social workers skills. This would however, have to be a full time position.

Students are in need of caring, nurturing adults who know them. The program can only give that to <u>all</u> students provided that Advisors and counselors have appropriate numbers in which to work with students. In my opinion, appropriate numbers would be a ratio of one full time adult to 150 students. This also holds if the school decides to change to a 9-10 Center. Advisors would then be able to really get to know their students, spend time with them and extra time with those who are at-risk. Communication with other teachers, parents and the middle school would then be able to happen more. This would enable students who are at-risk to be identified sooner and get set up in support programs to help them succeed. Should these things happen, then the program will be operating closer to the goals and ideas that the school had planned for it.

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February 21, 2000

Sharon K. Patten, Ph.D., Chair
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Augsburg College, Campus Box 85
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Minneapolis, MN 55454-1351

Dear IRB Committee Members:

We give Dru Kneeland permission to use the results of two (2) 9th grade student body survey results, gathered by Eden Prairie High School in 1998 and 1999, as part of her thesis research.

Ms. Kneeland understands that the research was in the form of self-administered, anonymous, group surveys and that there is no identifying information with the exception of grade level.

We understand that the only identifying information needed by Ms. Kneeland is only the grade level. We also understand that there will be no risk to the survey participants. Direct benefits to Eden Prairie High School for participation in this research will be to receive a copy of the results of the research.

If you have questions you may contact Cynthia Hays, Ed.D., Principal, Eden Prairie High School, at (612) 975-8015.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Hays, Ed.D., Principal
Eden Prairie High School

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX B

SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Gender

2. Age

3. Number of individual contacts with any Freshman Academy Advisor.

4. Number of classroom or large group contacts with any Freshman Academy Advisor.

5. Reasons you saw a Freshman Academy Advisor (Psycho-social).

6. Continuation of #5 More reasons (School related)

7. How soon were you able to see your Freshman Academy Advisor?

8. How could the Freshman Academy better meet your needs?

9. Would you be interested in information or group presentations about academic & career issues?

10. Would you be interested in information to help you deal with psychological and social issues?

11. I was satisfied with the amount of time my Advisor spent with me during visits.

12. I have been satisfied with the services my Advisor has provided.

13. The Freshman Academy has been "user friendly".

14. I would like to meet with my Advisor more often.

15. At EPHS, I know an adult I can really talk to.

16. I have a good connection with three adults at EPHS.

17. If I have a problem, I know where to seek help at EPHS.

18. Contact by individual, group and whole school meetings was adequate for me.

APPENDIX C

MEETING ARCHIVE DATES

MEETING DATES	DISCUSSION TOPIC
January 14/99	Transition Student Supports How often students being seen
February 10/99	Transition 9th grade teacher communication Attendance Parent meetings
February 12/99	Freshman Academy's functioning At-Risk Students Transition Intervention models
February 25/99	How the Academy working
March 26/99	How often students being seen 10th grade transition Concerns about student ratios
April 15/99	How the Academy is working Student Supports
May 10/99	At-Risk students Freshman Seminar development Academy improvement How often students being seen 10th grade transition Grade level development
May 13/99	Transition Attendance
September 2/99	9th grade teachers Freshman Orientation follow-up
September 9/99	Student contracts (behavior) Curriculum Night

September 16/99	At-Risk students How often students are seen
September 21/99	Academy Advisor duties Student ratios 8th/9th Orientation Freshman Seminar Career Unit
September 23/99	At-Risk students Crisis Team planning
October 14/99	Conference Night Panel At-Risk students
November 30/99	Freshprint (Newsletter) Registration
February 29/00	Registration Timeline Freshman Orientation Curriculum Night Math Classes Speaker (Freshman Orientation)
March 3/00	At-Risk students Communication with 9th grade teachers
March 21/00	At-Risk students
March28/00	Spring Orientation At-Risk students