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THE EXPLORATORY STUDY OF JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS'  
FRESHMAN ACADEMIES OF LOUISVILLE MODEL ON STUDENT PROMOTION,  
ATTENDANCE, AND SENSE OF BELONGING

By

Andrew Lewis Thomas  
B.S., University of Louisville, 2007  
M.A., Spalding University, 2012

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Education and Human Development of the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education  
in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development

Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational Development  
University of Louisville  
Louisville, Kentucky

May 2022

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A Dissertation Approved on

March 28, 2022

by the following Dissertation Committee:

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## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my late brother, Adam Layman Thomas. On January 13, 2022, my brother died a hero trying to save another woman's life in the Ohio River. His generosity ran deep, and he was not scared of anything. People might think this heroic act was a random act of kindness, but it was not. That was just what Adam did throughout life and who he was as a person. He died a beloved hero.

His daughter, Ayla, was his entire world. She has a Daddy she will always look up to in life. He can rest easy knowing our family will make sure she will be very well taken care of throughout life. Adam inspired me to finish this dissertation. The dissertation journey has been the hardest thing I have ever done in my life, and I am so proud to dedicate this body of work in loving memory of my little brother, Adam Layman Thomas (March 25, 1987 – January 13, 2022).

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank my mother, Elizabeth Thomas, for all her support throughout life. She instilled the value of education in my brothers and I at a very young age by investing in our education. She earned her BS in Business Administration from the University of Louisville and later earned her MA in Teaching with a Rank 1 in Special Education from Bellarmine University. My mother is a model of hard work and determination while always providing for and putting her family first. I sincerely appreciate the childhood she gave my brothers and I. We are very fortunate to call her “Mom.” Her love and support are overwhelming and instrumental in my success through life.

I would also like to acknowledge my entire dissertation committee for their support throughout this journey. I would like to thank Dr. Immekus, my Dissertation Chair and Methodologist, for his continued support throughout this process. He pushed me to be great, and by doing so, he made this major accomplishment more meaningful. I cannot thank him enough for taking a chance on me as I never had him as a professor in class. He is an expert in the field of quantitative methodology, and he was a leader to me over the course of the past three years. I am so proud of this body of work and that is because of him. I would like to thank Dr. Muñoz. He has been a mentor and dear friend to me since I started this program in August 2016. I had him as a professor for two of my statistics courses. He helped me understand and comprehend Intermediate Statistics as well as Multivariate Statistics. Dr. Muñoz was instrumental in the development of this

study and methodology. He met with me many times throughout the dissertation process to answer any questions and help me with the development of this research. I cannot thank Dr. Muñoz enough for all his support. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Powers and Dr. Buecker for all their support, as well. Dr. Powers supported me by stepping in as a committee member when another member was no longer able to fulfill his responsibilities on my committee. Both Dr. Buecker and Dr. Powers were “cheerleaders” to me throughout this six-year journey. Their “can-do” attitude motivated me and inspired me to finish my dissertation. I thoroughly enjoyed having them as professors in class and learned so much from them both in the field of educational leadership.

I would like to give a huge thank you to two amazing leaders and dear friends I worked for over the past eleven school years of my career at Waggener High School: Dr. DeFerrari and Dr. Hitchings. Dr. DeFerrari was the Principal at Waggener High School from the 2011-12 through the 2015-16 school years and is the current Assistant Superintendent for Culture and Climate in Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS). She changed the trajectory of my career and success in education. Dr. DeFerrari believed in me and invested in me as a leader in education. In return, she made me believe in me, never give up, and pursue many leadership opportunities. She hired me as a Career Planner through the Louisville Education Employment Partnership in 2011-12 with only little experience in education as a Substitute Teacher. Throughout the course of the next three school years, she provided me leadership opportunities at Waggener and built me as a leader in the building. At the start of the 2014-15 school year, she added a third School Counselor position at Waggener and hired me as the Freshman Academy Counselor. In 2015, she talked me into pursuing my Doctor of Education at the University of



Louisville. She saw something in me and pushed me to be great. I would not be where I am today in my career or would have completed this degree if it were not for Dr. DeFerrari.

Dr. Hitchings is the current Principal at Waggener High School. I worked side-by-side with her when she was the Freshman Academy Principal during my first two school years as the Freshman Academy Counselor. She was a mentor to me as we shared an office when she was the Freshman Academy Principal. She pioneered our Freshman Academy model, and many of her Freshman Academy student-centered systems, supports, and structures are still in place here at Waggener High School. Our Freshman Academy went through the National Career Academy Coalition (NCAC) review process during the Spring 2020 semester to become the first and only Model/nationally accredited academy in JCPS and the state of Kentucky. That is because of the work she pioneered. In 2016-17, she became Waggener's Principal. She is a fearless, collaborative leader that always puts the needs of our students first. She has always been there for me as one of her employees/friends and pushed me to finish my Ed.D. I have learned and grown from her leadership over the past eight school years. I am who I am today because of Dr. Hitchings and am fortunate to call Dr. Hitchings my boss and friend. I am forever thankful for her.

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him and his true friendship. Dr. Knowsley, Freshman Academy Principal, is my right-hand person in the Freshman Academy at Waggener High School. I have worked side-by-side with her over the past five school years. We truly complement one another as leaders and that is what makes our partnership so great. Dr. Knowsley always has my back and has pushed me to complete this degree. I am forever thankful for Dr. Knowsley, as well.

## ABSTRACT

### THE EXPLORATORY STUDY OF JEFFERSON COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS' FRESHMAN ACADEMIES OF LOUISVILLE MODEL ON STUDENT PROMOTION, ATTENDANCE, AND SENSE OF BELONGING

Andrew Lewis Thomas

March 28, 2022

The middle school years are a pivotal time in a student's life in which they deal with a range of issues, one of which is high school transition (Osler & Walden, 2012). McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) describe ninth grade as the critical year for completing high school. To facilitate the transition from middle to high school, freshman academies, a smaller learning community, seek to increase student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and sense of belonging through a myriad of interventions (Jefferson County Public Schools, 2018). There is a need to compare the student outcomes who attend traditional schools that do not use any type of freshman academy with the student outcomes of schools that do have a freshman academy model to support a successful transition from middle school to high school (Osler & Walden, 2012).

The purpose of this study was to examine if there are differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth grade, attendance, and reported sense of belonging between lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race within the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville over school years 2015-16 to 2018-19. Jefferson County Public

Schools' (JCPS) Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented in 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year. This one-group time-series design of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model on student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging was examined through a quantitative methodological approach. An analysis of the data was conducted through a mixed-design ANOVA to examine whether there are average score differences across the academic years of 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 (within: over time) for students' promotion, attendance, and reported sense of belonging across lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race (between: levels). Most notably, promotion rates were higher once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year. Overall, the findings of this study suggested there is no clear trend in scores across JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville. The key outcomes of student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging vary by school and more research is needed to fully understand how school-level factors may contribute to these key outcomes.

To more fully understand how students are engaging and learning within JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville, academies need to self-assess and adjust their work with Appendix A outlining JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville expectations and performance descriptors based on the 10 National Career Academy Coalition (NCAC) National Standards of Practice (NSOP). Future research should include a five to ten-year longitudinal study on freshman academies to address the Implementation Dip and Flywheel Effect. This study should include freshman academies outside of JCPS in other KY counties or states to provide more research of the core features and objectives of freshman academies not presented within JCPS. It would be beneficial for a qualitative

approach to be done to explore the perceptions of students, teachers, and administration on freshman academies.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The middle school years are a pivotal time in a student's life in which they deal with a range of issues, one of which is high school transition (Osler & Walden, 2012). To facilitate the transition from middle to high school, freshman academies seek to increase student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and sense of belonging (Jefferson County Public Schools, 2018). Specifically, Partland (2012) states freshman academies are smaller learning communities, a school within a school, implemented at the ninth-grade level to ensure student success as they transition from the middle school to high school levels. Structures and activities may include a private, freshman-only wing of the building, a collaborative Freshman Academy Principal, dedicated Counselor, core group of teachers, freshman orientation, team meetings, intentional interventions, field trips, and incentive celebrations, so freshmen are promoted to sophomore year, are present, and maintain a sense of belonging (Partland, 2012). There is a need to compare the student outcomes who attend traditional schools that do not use any type of freshman academy with the student outcomes of schools that do have a freshman academy model to support a successful transition from middle school to high school (Osler & Walden, 2012). Furthermore, future research would improve our understanding of the relationship between school structure, in this case the freshman academy model, and student retention (Moller et al., 2006).

The freshman year will be the focus of this study as the influence of the middle to high school transition is widespread and affects students' academic achievement in unpredictable ways (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) state during a student's ninth-grade year, it is the first time many students must earn passing grades in their core content courses to be promoted each year, graduate within four years, and meet college admission requirements. Students struggle, fail, and drop out due to increased graduation requirements, rocky transitions from middle school to high school, and among other things (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). The purpose of this study is to examine if there are differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and reported sense of belonging between lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race within the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville over school years 2015-16 to 2018-19. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and Jefferson County Public Schools (JCPS) being in the virtual learning context in 2019-20 and 2020-21, data from those school years will not be used in this study.

McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) describe ninth-grade as the critical year for completing high school. During the first few weeks of their freshman year, students will decide if they intend to continue their high school education and not drop out (McIntosh & White, 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reports the United States' adjusted cohort graduation rate for public high school students from the 2017–2018 academic year was 85%. Among racial sub-groups, Asian/Pacific Islander students had the highest reported graduation rate (92%), followed by White (89%), Latinx (81%), Black (79%), and American Indian/Alaska Native (74%) students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Kentucky's four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for

2019-20 was 91.1% (Kentucky Department of Education, 2020). Kentucky Department of Education (2020) reported the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for females was 93.3% and males was 89% in the 2019-20 school year. Additionally, Asian students had the highest graduation rate (94.3%), followed by White (92.8%), American Indian/Alaska Native (90.2%), two or more races (89.1%), Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (87.5%), Latinx (84.4%), and African American (83.3%) in the 2019-20 school year (Kentucky Department of Education, 2020). Lastly, Kentucky Department of Education (2020) stated the graduation rate for economically disadvantaged was 88.1% versus non-economically disadvantaged at 94.2%. More narrowly, JCPS (2020) states their four-year 2019 graduation rate was 82.3%.

Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) found more students fail ninth-grade than any other grade of school. They assert that the transition into high school causes anxiety and can challenge the coping skills of students. Twenty percent of freshmen who struggle with basic reading and math skills drop out of school within two years (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Furthermore, they discovered minority and poor students are twice as likely to be retained. High schools have begun combating these challenges with middle to high school transition programs, intervention classes in high school, and other efforts to support students during this fraught time (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

Schools with extensive transition programs had significantly lower dropout and failure rates than schools that did not offer comprehensive programs (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2010) asserted there is a need to develop and maintain a community of care within schools for all students, especially incoming ninth-grade students, so they make a successful transition from middle school to high school.

One of many strategies educators have employed to improve student achievement at the ninth-grade level are smaller learning communities, referred to as freshman academies or ninth-grade academies. These are designed to ensure first year freshmen have every opportunity to be academically successful in all areas (Osler & Waden, 2012). Freshman academies are for first year freshman students transferring from middle school to high school, so they are successful academically and start off on the right path toward high school graduation. The many facets of a freshman academy have yielded increased academic performance, improved student attendance most years, and a reduction in the number of expulsions (McIntosh & White, 2006). McIntosh and White (2006) further state that students transitioning from middle school to high school need that structured freshman academy environment to promote their academic achievement.

Partland (2012) describes a freshman academy as a separate transitional program provided to students in their first year of high school. This places them with small interdisciplinary teams of four or five teachers who share the same 150 to 180 students and a block schedule with common planning time. Nationally, these academies are for first year freshmen, and they remain in the Freshman Academy for the duration of their freshman year. This unit has its own part of the building. The Freshman Academy Principal, Counselor, core classrooms, and lockers are located in the Freshman Wing (McIntosh & White, 2006). Activities include a freshman orientation, team meetings, intentional interventions, field trips, and incentive celebrations. Partland (2012) further points out the freshman academies' major responsibility is to find solutions for individual student academic, attendance, and behavior problems, which rest with the teacher teams, where each team leader utilizes data to set goals and monitor trends of student behavior.



The subsequent section addresses the conceptual framework between academy structure and outcome metrics such as promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging.

### **Conceptual Framework**

There are several theories that could provide a framework for looking at the effects of freshman academies on student learning outcomes, including role theory, contingency theory, organizational theory, and systems theory (Biddle, 1986; Bonner et al., 2004; Donaldson, 2006; Owens, 2004). Role theory is useful as a framework for examining relationships between organization and person as well as interpersonal behavior. Furthermore, role theory could be adopted in this study by looking at how staff in freshman academies influence promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging of freshmen. The foundation of contingency theory provides the explanation of why organizations adopt the structures that they do and thereby produce the associations between structural and contingency variables. Contingency theory could be adopted by analyzing the 11 freshman academies to determine the selection of the organizational design and administrative style based on significant contingencies in the specific school. Organizational theory could be used through the implementation of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model as a way about bringing about desirable changes in organizational structure to increase freshman promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging (see Appendix A). Systems theory suggests an organization exists for the purpose of reaching a goal or set of goals through accomplishing certain tasks. Rationally, an organizational model is structured and staffed to accomplish its mission. Systems theory further asserts the realm of organizational behavior tends to focus primarily on the school and school district as a system (Owens, 2004). Eighth-graders

who struggle with the transition to high school are influenced by the Freshman Academy's structure, systems, and supports. In return, the assumption is this model will yield higher promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging.

Role theory is a useful framework for examining interpersonal relationships that exist in schools and school systems (Owens, 2004). Regarding JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model, role theory could be adopted in this study by looking at how staff in freshman academies influence promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging of freshmen. Moreover, role theory explains the fact that human beings behave in ways that are different and predictable depending on the respective social identities and the situation (Biddle, 1986). Biddle (1986) stated the theory began life as a theatrical metaphor from Georg Simmel, George Herbert Mead, Ralph Linton, and Jacob Moreno. If performances in the theater were differentiated and foreseeable because actors were forced to perform "parts" for which "scripts" were written, then it seemed rational to believe that social behaviors in other contexts were also associated with parts and scripts understood by social actors (Biddle, 1986). Through later literature, Biddle used the term role to refer to characteristic behavior patterns. Within educational settings, school staff have specific roles to perform, and many interactive factors help determine exactly what kind of "performance" each role entails based on the social identity and context. Role theory is useful as a framework for examining relationships between organization and person as well as interpersonal behavior by looking at how staff in freshman academies influence promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging of freshmen in this study.

Contingency theory plays a role in a school's organizational design by specifying which structures (e.g., JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model) fit which circumstances (e.g., a student's ninth-grade year; Donaldson, 2006). The foundation of contingency theory provides the explanation of why organizations adopt the structures that they do and thereby produce the associations between structural and contingency variables. For example, school change over time in their structures because of changes in their student populations. By providing a comprehensive framework that relates variations in organizational design to variations in the contingencies of the organization, contingency theory informs the theory of organizational design. Donaldson (2006) goes onto say contingency theory explains the phenomenon of the existence of fits between structure and contingencies by their beneficial effects on organizational performance.

Contingency theory could analyze JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville to determine the selection of the organizational design and administrative style based on significant contingencies in the specific schools. Organizational design can help administrators attain higher performance for their organizations by adopting a more effective structure. The contingency approach helps administrators to identify misfits between their structures and contingencies, such as size and diversification (Donaldson, 2006). Owens (2004) states contingency theory is based upon the viewpoint that there is no one universal "best" way of dealing with organizational issues. The best approach is contingent upon variable factors in the context of the situation. To be able to analyze and diagnose the specific situation that exists, contingency approaches to organizational behavior require developing a systematic understanding of the dynamics of organizational behavior. Each school is different and academic programs such as

freshman academies is contingent upon the needs of the freshmen in that specific school to promote student development. JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model is the same across all 11 high schools. Contingency theory could be adopted by analyzing the 11 freshman academies to determine the selection of the organizational design and administrative style based on significant contingencies in the specific school.

Organization theory is mainly an academic discipline which analyzes how schools should operate to be effective (Hage & Finsterbusch, 1989). Hage and Finsterbusch (1989) state organizational theory derives from the sociology of formal or complex organizations, while one of its major phenomena of interests is organization change. Organization theory concentrates on the performance of variables: efficiency, effectiveness, innovation, morale, and the structures which achieve such performances under various conditions. In their specific context, organizational theory focuses on designing organizations to be effective in achieving goals. Change points, parts of the system usually changed, include structure, coordination/control processes, environment, and inputs. For example, JCPS implemented the Freshman Academies of Louisville model in the 2017-18 school year to increase student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and sense of belonging. Organizational theory provides a systematic body of information on which we base assumptions about the nature of organizations and the behavior of people in them (Owens, 2004). It is used constantly by administrators as a basis for the professional work they do every day. The structure of an organization is the prime determinant of the behavior of people in the organization. The people in the organization tend to shape the structure of the organization. This influences student development through the staff in academic programs such as freshman academies.

Organizational theory could be used through the implementation of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model as a way about bringing about desirable changes in organizational structure to increase freshman promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging (see Appendix A).

The conceptual framework for this study is systems theory because the realm of organizational behavior tends to focus primarily on the school and school district as a system (Owens, 2004). Ludwig von Bertalanffy, a biologist, formulated the general systems theory in 1950. Owens (2004) describes the systems theory as it would relate to this study as:

An organization is an integral system of interdependent structures and functions.

An organization is constituted of groups and a group consists of persons who much work in harmony. Each person must know what the others are doing. Each one must be capable of receiving messages and must be sufficiently disciplined to obey. (p. 119)

An organization exists for the purpose of reaching a goal or set of goals through accomplishing certain tasks. Rationally, an organizational model is structured and staffed to accomplish its mission.

The conceptual framework for JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville is an open system linked to the social systems theory. The community and larger world in which it exists influence the Freshman Academies. Eighth-graders who struggle with the transition to high school are influenced by the Freshman Academy's structure, systems, and supports. In return, the assumption is this model will yield higher promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging.

Freshman academies are a school within a high school model for incoming first year ninth-graders transitioning from middle school. As outlined in Appendix A, specific structure, systems, and interventions support the outcome metrics of freshman academies. This study focuses on freshman academies increase on the outcome metrics of student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging. JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville exist to increase promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging of freshmen through the model's systems, structure, and interventions for ninth-graders in the 11 academy schools.

Owens (2004) states the social systems theory requires us to see the organization (in this case, freshman academies within a school) as a system that creates the context in which the whole pattern of human behavior that characterizes the organization occurs. One of many strategies educators have employed to improve student achievement at the ninth-grade level are smaller learning communities, referred to as freshman academies, designed to increase promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging. JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville create an environment in which human interactions occur with positive regularity and predictability. Therefore, freshman academy structures, systems, and interventions must be in place because the organizational culture of the system is critical to the success of freshmen.

Hertzog and Morgan (1999) state evidence indicates that the way in which students make the move from middle school to high school predicts student success at the ninth-grade level because many students make the decision to complete or quit school within the first weeks of their freshman year. Despite such evidence, high school educators report using only a few practices to support their incoming ninth-grade students

during this critical period (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). Through systems theory, this study seeks to address that a collaborative and caring freshman academy environment is vital to the high school success of students through promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging. The assumption is this model will yield higher promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging. This one-group time-series design of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model on student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging will be examined through a quantitative methodological approach. A mixed-design analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be used to examine whether there are average score differences across the academic years of 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 for students' promotion, attendance, and reported sense of belonging across lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine if there are differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and reported sense of belonging between lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race within the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville over school years 2015-16 to 2018-19. McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) describe ninth-grade as the critical year for completing high school. During the first few weeks of their freshman year, students will decide if they intend to continue their high school education and not drop out (McIntosh & White, 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reports the national adjusted cohort graduation rate for public high school students from the 2017–2018 academic year was 85%. Furthermore, Asian/Pacific Islander students had the highest graduation rate (92%), followed by White (89%), Latinx (81%), Black (79%), and American

Indian/Alaska Native (74%) students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Kentucky's four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for 2019-20 was 91.1% (Kentucky Department of Education, 2020). Kentucky Department of Education (2020) reported the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for females was 93.3% and males was 89% in the 2019-20 school year. Additionally, Asian students had the highest graduation rate (94.3%), followed by White (92.8%), American Indian/Alaska Native (90.2%), two or more races (89.1%), Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (87.5%), Latinx (84.4%), and African American (83.3%) in the 2019-20 school year (Kentucky Department of Education, 2020). Lastly, Kentucky Department of Education (2020) stated the graduation rate for economically disadvantaged was 88.1% versus non-economically disadvantaged at 94.2%. More narrowly, JCPS (2020) states their four-year 2019 graduation rate was 82.3%.

In the 2017-18 school year, JCPS, a large urban school district in Louisville, Kentucky, introduced the Academies of Louisville and spent over \$3.1 million funding the initiative (JCPS, 2018). This funding contributed to additional administrators, teachers, equipment, operations, training, and renovations. JCPS (2018) describes the Academies of Louisville as small learning communities - schools within schools - that allow all students to connect what they are learning in the classroom to the real world through a subject that interests them. Every student receives a personalized experience within a small learning community, participates in hands-on, project-based learning, and develops 21<sup>st</sup> century essential skills. Academies offer a shift from traditional techniques and environments to deeper learning and transition students to college, career, and life readiness (JCPS, 2018). The personalized learning experience provides each freshman



with a freshman-only principal, counselor, core teachers, and wing of the building to build a sense of belonging and increase student achievement.

The three dependent variables of this study are student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging. Student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade is a freshman accumulating at least five credits by the conclusion of their ninth-grade year (JCPS, 2018). JCPS (2018) defines student attendance as a full day of attendance shall be recorded for a pupil in attendance more than 84% of the regularly scheduled school day for the pupil's grade level. Student sense of belonging is the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment (Hagerty et al., 1992). The purpose of this study is to examine if there are differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and reported sense of belonging between lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race within the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville over school years 2015-16 to 2018-19.

As reported, a mixed-design ANOVA will be used to examine whether there are average score differences across the academic years of 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 for students' promotion, attendance, and reported sense of belonging across lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race. Jacobs et al. (2009) state a one-group time-series design involves periodic measurements on one group (true freshmen in 11 JCPS high schools) and the introduction of an experimental treatment (JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model) into this time series of measurements (school years 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19). This study uses before-and-after measures and lacks a control group, which is a limitation. This is a weakness because of its failure

to control history; that is, it is possible that it is not JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville but, rather, some simultaneous event that produces the observed change such as other school events or seasonal changes (Jacobs et al., 2009). This study will be conducted in JCPS, a large urban school district in Kentucky.

JCPS (2020) reports 57% of their high school students are minority and 58.5% come from low-socioeconomic households. Schools with extensive transition programs had significantly lower dropout and failure rates than schools that did not offer comprehensive program (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). To address these challenges, JCPS introduced the Freshman Academies of Louisville model to increase promotion to sophomore year as well as JCPS' four-year graduation rate of 81.6% (JCPS, 2018). In the academic year of 2017-18, to address the challenges of transitioning from middle school to high school, Jefferson County Public School District (JCPS) implemented the Freshman Academies of Louisville model in all 11 Academy high schools. These schools included: The Academy at Shawnee, Ballard, Doss, Jeffersontown, Marion C. Moore School, Pleasure Ridge Park, Seneca, Southern, Valley, Waggener, and Western. Operating under the philosophy of a successful transition to high school, an Academy Principal, Counselor, and core group of teachers provide a small learning community and are dedicated solely to the work in the freshman academy. The location of the Academy Principal, Counselor, and core teachers are in a specific, private hallway, establishing an ongoing collaborative environment between the freshmen, core teachers, and Freshman Academy administrators. The Freshman Academy Principal, Counselor, and teachers in JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville provide a myriad of interventions to increase student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging. Hagerty et al. (1992) define

sense of belonging as the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment.

JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville Rubric for Success further discusses what the Academies are, how they are structured, and the intended outcomes (see Appendix A).

Most importantly, the Freshman Academies of Louisville model was implemented in 11 JCPS high schools to increase student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and sense of belonging.

Table 1 reports the 11 JCPS high schools in the 2017-18 school year that comprised the Freshman Academies of Louisville initiative. For the 2017-18 academic year, the enrollment, percentage of free/reduced (F/R) lunch, the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate, and the retention rate is represented at each specific school. Overall, the total enrollment population at the 11 JCPS high schools was 12,836 students, 68.29% were on F/R lunch, the average graduation rate was 84.02%, and 9.09% of the students were retained.

**Table 1***2017-18 School Year Enrollment, Free/Reduced Lunch, Graduation Rate, and Retention**Rate*

High School	Enrollment	F/R Lunch	Graduation Rate	Retention Rate
Academy @ Shawnee	485	82.9%	78.1%	N/A
Ballard	1898	36.8%	93.3%	4.3%
Doss	1116	76.1%	85.4%	10.6%
Jeffersontown	1110	61.2%	81.8%	13.9%
Marion C. Moore School	1150	69.6%	87.2%	3.8%
Pleasure Ridge Park	1705	62.1%	90.4%	11%
Seneca	1295	72.8%	84.3%	10.7%
Southern	1373	66.9%	84.5%	5.1%
Valley	1043	76%	80.5%	12%
Waggener	912	71.1%	84.1%	9.9%
Western	749	75.7%	74.6%	17.7%
Total/Average	12,836	68.29%	84.02%	9.90%

The freshman academy vision, mission, and goals guide the work of the Academy. JCPS (2018) states the Freshman Academies of Louisville vision reads:

To support our students through a successful transition from middle to high school by connecting them with a small learning community that respects all cultures while promoting positive relationships and responsible behaviors for college and/or career development through a successful high school transition that leads to sophomore level promotion. (p. 1)

The mission and goals tailors the work of each individual Academy school. These statements are branded throughout the freshman academy wings. Weekly freshman academy team meetings are also an integral part of the model to provide outcomes based on the school's vision, mission, and goals. Also, a Freshman Seminar course provides students with high school basics, career exploration, essential skills, and a 10-year plan. The key outcome metrics of the Freshman Academies of Louisville are to obtain at least a 90% promotion rate, attendance rate, and sense of belonging of rising sophomores.

In the 2017-18 school year, JCPS invested millions of dollars, as reported by JCPS' Department of Transition Readiness, in the implementation and operations of the Academies of Louisville initiative to address the middle school to high school transitional epidemic (JCPS, 2018). To serve as points of comparison, the Freshman Academies of Louisville model was not in place in the 2015-16 or 2016-17 school years. The purpose of this study is to examine if there are differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and reported sense of belonging between lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race within the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville over school years 2015-16 to 2018-19. The key need for the study will address the need to compare the events (promotion rate, attendance rate, and sense of belonging) of traditional schools without freshman academies with those of schools with freshman academies (Osler & Waden, 2012). Furthermore, this study will yield relevant data to guide future research that is needed to better understand the relationship between school structure and retention practices (Moller et al., 2006). Additionally, this research will provide JCPS with the Freshman Academies of Louisville outcome data needed to determine the success of the model after the first year of implementation.

## **Research Questions**

In the 2017-18 school year, JCPS implemented the Freshman Academies of Louisville model at of its high schools. To serve as points of comparison, the Freshman Academies of Louisville model was not in place in the 2015-16 or 2016-17 school years. Before the study, the assumption was JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model would positively influence student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging. In addition, another assumption was all 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville operated under the same philosophy and model provided by the district. To test these assumptions and provide research/data to JCPS on their newly implemented Freshman Academies of Louisville model, this quantitative study will be guided by the following research questions over school years 2015-16 to 2018-19:

### *Promotion*

1. Is there a difference in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students?
2. Is there a difference in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between male and female high school students?
3. Are there differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students?

### *Attendance*

4. Is there a difference in student attendance over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students?

5. Is there a difference in student attendance over multiple school years between male and female high school students?
6. Are there differences in student attendance over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students?

*Sense of Belonging*

7. Is there a difference in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students?
8. Is there a difference in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between male and female high school students?
9. Are there differences in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students?

**Research Design and Data Sources**

Existing data will be drawn from JCPS' Data Management Center for the first six research questions. The independent variables are the sub-groups (lunch status, gender, and race), and the dependent variables are student promotion and attendance. The dependent variable sense of belonging will be addressed in the last three research questions. All incoming freshmen from middle school automatically enroll in the freshman academy. JCPS (2018) defines student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade as a freshman accumulating at least five credits by the conclusion of their ninth-grade year. JCPS (2018) defines student attendance as a full day of attendance shall be recorded for a pupil in attendance more than 84% of the regularly scheduled school day for the pupil's

grade level. Attendance for all students in JCPS is calculated based on the amount of time that the student is present in school.

Research questions six through nine addressing differences in students' reported sense of belonging will be based on data obtained from district-wide administered Comprehensive School Survey (CSS) (see Appendix B). This survey is given to all parents, employees, and students in the fourth-grade and up every school year in the months of January through February. In this research question, the independent variables are the sub-groups (lunch status, gender, and race), and the dependent variable is student sense of belonging. Hagerty et al. (1992) define sense of belonging as the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment.

Beginning in the 1996-97 school year, the CSS has been conducted every year since. The survey is administered to all parents, employees, and students in the fourth-grade and up, with over 100,000 surveys returned each year. This data is analyzed and used to develop strategies to direct for the future of JCPS. The CSS is a vital tool for informed discussions, planning, and progress monitoring of the district. A Likert Scale is used for the CSS. The key is as follows: 4 = *Strongly Agree*, 3 = *Agree*, 2 = *Disagree*, and 1 = *Strongly Disagree*. This survey is written from a whole-child perspective (JCPS, 2018). JCPS' CSS asks 28 questions that relate to school with a reported reliability of .941 (JCPS, 2018) (see Appendix B).

In the 2017-18 school year, JCPS invested millions of dollars, as reported by JCPS' Department of Transition Readiness, in the implementation and operations of the Academies of Louisville initiative to address the middle school to high school transitional



epidemic (JCPS, 2018). To serve as points of comparison, the Freshman Academies of Louisville model was not in place in the 2015-16 or 2016-17 school years. This research will provide JCPS with the Freshman Academies of Louisville outcome metric data needed to determine the success of the model after the first two years of implementation. The key outcome metrics of the Freshman Academies of Louisville are to obtain at least a 90% promotion rate, attendance rate, and sense of belonging of rising sophomores. Of the 28 CSS questions, JCPS (2018) states a sense of belonging construct relates with three questions: I really like other students in my school, I feel that I belong in my school, and I feel like I am part of my school community. If  $p < .05$ , a statistical difference will be found, and the null hypothesis will be rejected. If  $p > .05$ , no statistical difference will be found, and the null hypothesis will be accepted.

### **Limitations**

There are threats to internal and external validity, and these threats will be addressed through this study. The instrumentation, maturation, and selection of subjects are specific threats to internal validity that will be discussed for this study (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Cook and Campbell (1979) state instrumentation is the changes in the instrument, observers, or scorers which may produce changes in outcomes. The instrumentation threats in this research include the CSS which only measure ninth-graders' perceptions regarding their Freshman Academy experience and not factual data. Secondly, a different set of ninth-graders were in each of the three academic years used in the study. To control for these threats, the CSS has been conducted every year since the 1996-97 school year. The survey is given to all parents, employees, and students in the fourth-grade and up, with over 100,000 surveys returned each year. This data is analyzed

and used to develop strategies to direct for the future of JCPS. The CSS is a vital tool for informed discussions, planning, and progress monitoring of the district. A Likert Scale is used for the CSS.

Cook and Campbell (1979) assert maturation as the processes within subjects which act as a function of the passage of time. The maturation threat in this study is the level of implementation of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model at each of the 11 high schools. Some of the high schools in this study had Freshman Academies in place prior to the implementation of the Freshman Academies of Louisville model. JCPS' Department of Transition Readiness completed a rubric of success on each of the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville at the conclusion of the 2017-18 school year (see Appendix A). For example, one freshman academy core feature is to have a freshman academy vision and mission statement. To determine the level of implementation for this core feature, each school would be rated as developed, in development, or does not exist. These rubrics will be used to address maturation by rating each freshman academy core feature as effective, developing, or not met at each specific school.

The last internal validity threat is the selection of subjects. Cook and Campbell (1979) define selection of subjects as the biases which may result in selection of comparison groups. All incoming freshmen from middle school, first year freshmen, automatically enroll in the freshman academy. Students who repeat their freshman year progress to an upperclassman academy and are not included in this study. Secondly, only 11 of 21 JCPS high schools were included in this study as only 11 high schools joined the Academies of Louisville model in the first year of implementation. This study only examines data from the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school year. Fairdale High School,

Iroquois High School, and Atherton High School joined the Academies of Louisville during the second year of implementation and are not included in this study.

Reactive effects of experimental arrangements, generalizability, and population representation are the external validity threats to this study (Cook & Campbell, 1979). The survey does not include any identifying information, such as the students' names, to address the reactive effects of experimental arrangements. Even though the participants are aware they are completing the CSS, the students will not be identified. The generalizability and population representation threats are being addressed in this study by including all the Freshman Academies of Louisville high schools in the 2017-18 school year. Limiting the generalizability of the findings, this study only focused on one large, urban school district in the Southeast United States. With the internal and external validity threats being addressed in this study, the results should be beneficial to JCPS and other districts/schools through providing the Freshman Academies of Louisville outcome metric data needed to determine the success of the model after the first two years of implementation.

Table 2 shows the 11 JCPS high schools in the 2017-18 school year that were a part of the Freshman Academies of Louisville initiative. For the 2017-18 academic year, the enrollment, percentage of free/reduced lunch, the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate, and the retention rate is represented at each specific school. This study will examine if there are differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and reported sense of belonging between lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race within the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville over school years 2015-16 to 2018-19. This table provides insight to the 11 high schools' enrollment,

socio-economic status, graduation rates, and retention rates during the first year of implementation of the Freshman Academies of Louisville model. Overall, the total enrollment population at the 11 JCPS high schools was 12,836 students, 68.29% were on F/R lunch, the average graduation rate was 84.02%, and 9.09% of the students were retained.

**Table 2**

*2017-18 School Year Enrollment, Free/Reduced Lunch, Graduation Rate, and Retention Rate*

High School	Enrollment	F/R Lunch	Graduation Rate	Retention Rate
Academy @ Shawnee	485	82.9%	78.1%	N/A
Ballard	1898	36.8%	93.3%	4.3%
Doss	1116	76.1%	85.4%	10.6%
Jeffersontown	1110	61.2%	81.8%	13.9%
Marion C. Moore School	1150	69.6%	87.2%	3.8%
Pleasure Ridge Park	1705	62.1%	90.4%	11%
Seneca	1295	72.8%	84.3%	10.7%
Southern	1373	66.9%	84.5%	5.1%
Valley	1043	76%	80.5%	12%
Waggener	912	71.1%	84.1%	9.9%
Western	749	75.7%	74.6%	17.7%
Total/Average	12,836	68.29%	84.02%	9.90%
Standard Deviation	382.46	0.12	0.05	0.04

## **Definitions of Key Terms**

The following terms are used in the context of this study:

**Academies of Louisville:** small learning communities - schools within schools - that allow all students to connect what they are learning in the classroom to the real world through a subject that interests them (JCPS, 2018)

**Freshman Academy:** a separate transitional program provided to students in their first year of high school that places them with small interdisciplinary teams of four or five teachers who share the same 150 to 180 students and a block schedule with common planning time (Partland, 2012)

**Freshman Academies of Louisville:** a small learning community that supports students through a successful transition from middle to high school that respects all cultures while promoting positive relationships and responsible behaviors for college and/or career development through a successful high school transition that leads to sophomore level promotion (JCPS, 2018)

**Contingency Theory:** the viewpoint that there is no one universal “best” way of dealing with organizational issues, and the best approach is contingent upon variable factors in the context of the situation (Owens, 2004)

**Organizational Theory:** provides a systematic body of information on which we base assumptions about the nature of organizations and the behavior of people in them (Owens, 2004)

**Role Theory:** explains the fact that human beings behave in ways that are different and predictable depending on the respective social identities and the situation (Biddle, 1986)

**Small Learning Community:** a personalized learning unit within a larger school setting where students and teachers are scheduled together and have a shared area of the school that holds most of their classes (Sparger, 2005)

**Student Promotion from Ninth to Tenth-grade:** a freshman accumulating at least five credits by the conclusion of their ninth-grade year (JCPS, 2018)

**Student Attendance:** a full day of attendance shall be recorded for a pupil in attendance more than 84% of the regularly scheduled school day for the pupil's grade level (JCPS, 2018)

**Student Sense of Belonging:** the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment (Hagerty et al., 1992)

**Systems Theory:** generally accepted in both the physical and social sciences, the concept that all observations of nature are embedded in complex, dynamically interactive systems (Owens, 2004)

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The influence of the middle to high school transition is widespread and affects students' social, emotional, and academic identities in unpredictable ways (Osler & Walden, 2012). Consequently, it is a time in students' academic journey in which they are likely to struggle, fail, and drop out due to increased graduation requirements and rocky transitions from middle school to high school (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). To better support students' transition, schools have begun to design and implement freshman academies for first year freshman students transferring from middle school to high school, so they are successful academically and start off on the right path toward high school graduation. There is a need to compare the student outcomes who attend traditional schools that do not use any type of freshman academy with the student outcomes of schools that do have a freshman academy model (Osler & Walden, 2012). Furthermore, future research would improve our understanding of the relationship between school structure, in this case the freshman academy model, and student retention (Moller et al., 2006). The purpose of this study is to examine if there are differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and reported sense of belonging between lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race within the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville over school years 2015-16 to 2018-19. Due to the COVID-19

pandemic and JCPS being in the virtual learning context in 2019-20 and 2020-21, data from those school years will not be used in this study.

McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) describe ninth-grade as the critical year for completing high school. During the first few weeks of their freshman year, students will decide if they intend to continue their high school education and not drop out (McIntosh & White, 2006). The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reports the United States' adjusted cohort graduation rate for public high school students from the 2017–2018 academic year was 85%. Among racial sub-groups, Asian/Pacific Islander students had the highest reported graduation rate (92%), followed by White (89%), Latinx (81%), Black (79%), and American Indian/Alaska Native (74%) students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Hattie's (2013) meta-analysis revealed that an average of 75% of United States students graduate high school. Students who remain on grade level increase their chances of graduation to 85%, and students who fall off grade level with their peers decrease their likelihood of graduating to 45%. Kentucky's four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate for 2019-20 was 91.1% (Kentucky Department of Education, 2020). More narrowly, JCPS (2020) states their four-year 2019 graduation rate was 82.3%. To increase graduation rates, high schools have begun combating the challenges of promotion, attendance, and graduation rates with middle to high school transition programs known as freshman academies (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

Partland (2012) describes a freshman academy as a separate transitional program provided to students in their first year of high school. This places them with small interdisciplinary teams of four or five teachers who share the same 150 to 180 students and a block schedule with common planning time. These academies are for first year



freshmen, and they remain in the Freshman Academy for the duration of their freshman year. This unit has its own part of the building with its own clearly labeled entrance. The Freshman Academy Principal, Counselor, core classrooms, and lockers are located in the Freshman Wing (McIntosh & White, 2006). Activities include a freshman orientation, team meetings, intentional interventions, field trips, and incentive celebrations. Partland (2012) further points out the freshman academies' major responsibility is to find solutions for individual student academic, attendance, and behavior problems, which rest with the teacher teams, where each team leader utilizes data to set goals and monitor trends of student behavior. JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville Rubric for Success further discusses what the Academies are, how they are structured, and the intended outcomes (see Appendix A).

Osler and Walden (2012) suggested future studies could compare the student outcomes who attend traditional schools that do not use any type of freshman academy with the student outcomes of schools that do have a freshman academy model. Moller et al. (2006) stated future research would improve our understanding of the relationship between school structure, in this case the freshman academy model, and student retention. Freshman academies are a school within a school model that provides a supportive learning environment to decrease student retentions. Further research may want to explore external variables that might affect students' sense of belonging to school such as small learning communities or freshman academies (Davis et al., 2014). Understanding the instruments that trigger successful support programs are vital to helping schools create and maintain structures that will support persistence in their students. Cohen and Smerdon (2009) shared research of middle to high school transition

program's efficacy is limited, but these programs show promise in addressing student transition problems.

The purpose of this study is to examine if there are differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and reported sense of belonging between lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race within the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville over school years 2015-16 to 2018-19. A mixed-design ANOVA will be used to examine whether there are average score differences across the academic years of 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 for students' promotion, attendance, and reported sense of belonging across lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race. Jacobs et al. (2009) state a one-group time-series design involves periodic measurements on one group (true freshmen in 11 JCPS high schools) and the introduction of an experimental treatment (JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model) into this time series of measurements (school years 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19). The one-group time-series design study, specifically through a mixed-design ANOVA, provides a basis to investigate differences over time. This research will provide JCPS with the Freshman Academies of Louisville outcome metric data needed to determine the success of the model after the first two years of implementation. Furthermore, this study will address the gaps in literature needed to compare the student outcomes who attend traditional schools that do not use any type of freshman academy with the student outcomes of schools that do have a freshman academy model (Osler & Walden, 2012). It will also provide research needed to better understand the relationship between school structure, in this case the freshman academy model, and student retention (Moller et al., 2006).

## **Key Issues in High School Education**

Currently, high school education in the United States operates under Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) where each state develops plans under the streamlined ESSA template to promote flexibility, innovation, and accountability to ensure every child has a chance to learn and succeed (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). ESSA has an emphasis on annual student testing to produce college and career ready graduates. This creates a need to better support students to ensure they are ready for what comes after graduation. The U.S. Department of Education (2007) states the previous version of the law, No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), assumed that most students had little need for rigorous academic preparation that would prepare them for college and would not go on to postsecondary education or training. This vision of the NCLB is that every student will reach a high level of proficiency in core academic skills, but the current American high school education system is based on a model established when the expectations of high school education were far different. Through freshman academies, schools are able to name and claim students to put the right supports, structures, and systems in place for students in hopes of changing the landscape of education in the United States. The key issues in high school education focus on promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging. Freshman academies are designed to increase promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging through a myriad of interventions as described in Appendix A.

Cohen and Smerdon (2009) assert the effect of the middle to high school transition is widespread and affects students' social, emotional, and academic identities in unpredictable ways. Because of this, students will decide if they intend to continue their high school education during the first few weeks of freshman year (McIntosh & White,

2006). In response, with regard to the students' transition from middle to high school, researchers have focused on transition programs such as freshman academies, intervention classes in high school, and other efforts to support students during this fragile time (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009).

One key issue in high school education is student promotion from one grade to another. Hattie's (2013) meta-analysis revealed that an average of 75% of United States students graduate high school. Students who remain on grade level increase their chances of graduation to 85%, and students who fall off grade level with their peers decrease their likelihood of graduating to 45%. If a student is not promoted, it significantly decreases his or her chance of graduating high school. Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) found more students fail ninth-grade than any other grade of school, and minority and poor students are twice as likely to be retained. The goal of freshman academies are to support students so they can progress as sophomores through a school within a school model where administrators and teachers are able to provide intentional academic interventions (Emmett & McGee, 2012).

Secondly, student attendance is another key issue in high school education. Utah Education Policy Center (2012) defined chronically absent as a student who misses school 10% of the time, or more, for any reason, according to Attendance Works. A student who is chronically absent in any year, starting in the eighth-grade, is 7.4 times more likely to drop out of school than a student who was not chronically absent during any of those years (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). The proportion of chronically absent students nationwide in ninth-grade is 14.7% (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reported most schools have

daily attendance rates of well over 90%. Although, according to the U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), about eight million students in the United States missed more than three weeks of school during the 2015–16 school year and represents an increase over the 6.8 million students who missed more than three weeks of school during the 2013–14 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). These students are referred to as being chronically absent and go on to have worse educational outcomes than they would if they had better attendance. Schools with a large share of chronically absent students are less likely to meet and improve on key academic measures. Student attendance at the ninth-grade year is vital to decrease a student’s chance of dropping out of high school.

Thirdly, a strong student sense of belonging is another issue in high school education. Hertzog and Morgan (1999) suggested numerous students have trouble during the transition from middle school to high school, finding it hard to adjust to their new school. Evidence indicates that the way in which students make the move from middle school to high school predicts student success at the ninth-grade level because many students make the decision to complete or quit school within the first weeks of their freshman year. Despite such evidence, high school educators report using only a few practices where freshman academies were not in place to support their incoming ninth-grade students during this critical period (Hertzog & Morgan, 1999). Investigations on how comprehensive high schools attempt to promote a supportive community for students found that many high schools are organized in ways that are counterproductive to promoting caring relationships and a deep sense of belonging (McQuillan, 1997).

Therefore, a collaborative and caring freshman academy environment is vital to the high school success of students' sense of belonging.

Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) state schools with extensive transition programs had significantly lower dropout and failure rates than schools that did not offer comprehensive programs. The transition programs target students, teachers, and parents and span from the spring before transition through the fall of transition. Activities address academic, procedural, and social concerns. Transition programs are only one piece to the solution, and the most at-risk students need more intensive support from teachers, counselors, and administrators. Learning communities, such as freshman academies, continue to be the heart of teaching and learning today (Yancy et al., 2008).

One of many strategies educators have employed to improve student achievement at the high school level are smaller learning communities called freshman academies or ninth-grade academies. These help to ensure first year freshmen have every opportunity to be academically successful in all areas (Osler & Waden, 2012). Partland (2012) describes a freshman academy as a separate transitional program provided to students in their first year of high school that places them with small interdisciplinary teams of four or five teachers who share the same 150 to 180 students and a block schedule with common planning time. Each unit has its own part of the building with its own clearly labeled entrance. A separate management team (the Academy Principal, Academy Counselor, and Academy Instructional Leader) oversees the ninth-grade academy. The author further points out the freshman academies' major responsibility is to find solutions for individual student academic, attendance, and behavior problems, which rest with the

teacher teams, where each team leader utilizes data to set goals and monitor trends of student behavior (Partland, 2012).

### **Academic Promotion**

Academic promotion requirements from ninth to tenth-grade varies by state, but is defined by a freshman accumulating a specific number of credits by the conclusion of their ninth-grade year as outlined by the Department of Education in each state (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Each school year a student must accrue a certain amount of credits to be promoted to the next grade and ultimately graduate in four years. Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) found more students fail ninth-grade than any other grade of school. Furthermore, minority and poor students are twice as likely to be retained. Twenty percent of freshmen who struggle with basic reading and math skills drop out of school within two years. Schools with extensive transition programs such as freshman academies had significantly lower dropout and failure rates than schools that did not offer comprehensive program (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006).

Trends and patterns in academic promotion were studied in the United States from 1995-2010 (Warren et al., 2014). Warren, Hoffman, and Andrew used univariate and multivariate (logistic regression) techniques to analyze data from the Current Population Surveys. The predictor variables were race, gender, parent's education level, region, nativity, family structure, and urbanicity. The outcome variable was retention. Findings indicated 2.2% of non- Latino whites, 4.1% of non- Latino Blacks, and 4.2% of Latinos are retained in the ninth-grade. Regarding gender, 3.5% of males and 2.2% of females are retained in the ninth-grade. Logistic regression analyses revealed that males are more likely to be retained than females, more Latinos are retained than any other race,

teenagers are more likely to be promoted when their parents complete more schooling and are married, immigrant children are more likely to be retained, and retention rates are higher in urban schools and schools in the south. Most notably, retention rates were highest in 2004-2005 at 2.9% and have fallen drastically to 1.5% in 2009-2010. Implications for future research are needed to study student grade-level retention and policy variables to answer important questions about who is retained and the consequences of such retention for later outcomes.

Moller et al. (2006) examined race, and class disparities in high school retention rates. Growth modeling was used to analyze the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) from 1988–1992. Independent variables were race and socio-economic status (SES), and the dependent variable was retention. Findings showed distinctive race and SES retention patterns in the NELS sample. Students in the bottom quartile of the SES category (24.2%) are more than twice as likely to be retained as students in the high SES category (9.6%). Likewise, Black students (20.6%) are almost twice as likely to be retained as white students (11.1%). When considering race in conjunction with SES, these irregular retention rates are more dramatic. Prior to eighth-grade, low SES Black students are three times as likely as high SES white students to have been retained. Undeniably, nearly 29% of low SES Black students were retained, while only 9% of high SES white students, and 23% of low SES white students were retained. Future research is needed to better understand the relationship between school structure and retention practices. This research should compare structural and individual characteristics of schools to determine why different retention patterns are prevalent. Secondly, it is vital to determine which school settings are more conducive to advancement among these



different groups of students studied. Future research should further uncover the consequences of retention policies and practices.

Fine and Davis (2003) examined grade retention and enrollment in post-secondary education. A logistic regression was used to analyze 10,000 1992 high school graduates in the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) data base. Predictor variables were gender and SES, and the outcome variable was retention. Findings indicated boys were nearly twice more likely to be retained than girls. Students in the lowest quartile of SES were also twice as likely to be retained compared to high SES graduates. Lower achieving graduates were more likely to be retained than were higher achieving graduates. Moreover, findings suggested that retaining students may be related to negative educational outcomes not realized for many years. Through establishing a supportive, caring freshman academy environment, educators can intentionally meet the academic and social needs of students, so they graduate on time. Limitations of this study included outdated data as well as not including students who were retained but received a General Education Diploma (GED). The research of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville will provide current data including students who students who were retained.

Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) assert that the transition into high school causes anxiety and can challenge the coping skills of students. They found more students fail ninth-grade than any other grade of school, and minority and poor students are twice as likely to be retained due to no transition program such as freshman academies. Schools with extensive transition programs had significantly lower dropout and failure rates than schools that did not offer comprehensive program (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). The

goal of freshman academies are to support students so that they can make sufficient academic progress during the critical freshman year and progress as sophomores through a school within a school model where teachers are able to provide intentional academic interventions (Emmett & McGee, 2012).

### **Student Attendance**

Utah Education Policy Center (2012) defined chronically absent as a student who misses school 10% of the time, or more, for any reason, according to Attendance Works. A student who is chronically absent in any year, starting in the eighth-grade, is 7.4 times more likely to drop out of school than a student who was not chronically absent during any of those years (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). The proportion of chronically absent students nationwide in ninth-grade is 14.7% (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Freshman academies aim to increase student attendance and success through multiple supports and interventions as described in Appendix A.

Osler and Waden (2012) researched the positive effect of academic technical solutions called: Ninth-grade Academies, Freshman Academies, and similar models upon ninth-grade minority student achievement and attendance. The sample in this study consisted of North Carolina public schools that had implemented ninth-grade academies. Data was also acquired from The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) reports recorded during the 2004–2005 to 2007–2008 academic years. In addition, administrators from the same institutions were interviewed. The research methods used in this study to analyze the data was a mixed-methods approach through interviews and a Meta-Cognitive Analysis via the Chi Square Goodness of Fit non-parametric statistical test. The outcomes of the research stated that ninth-grade

academies and center models are successful, made a difference, decreased retention, had a positive impact, increased participation, declined drop-out rates, positively affected standardized testing, increased graduation rates, and lastly, had a positive impact on attendance. Implications for future research are needed to compare the events (promotion rate, attendance rate, and sense of belonging) of traditional schools that do not use any type of freshman academy with the events of schools that do have a freshman academy model.

Trends in truancy rates as well as truancy correlations across racial/ethnic groups were studied between 2002 and 2014 (Maynard et al., 2017). Specifically, Maynard et al. (2017), used logistic regression to analyze data collected between that time as part of the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH). Independent variables were age, gender, race, and socio-economic status, whereas, truancy was the dependent variable. In this study, Maynard et al. defined truancy as one or more instances of skipping school for the entire day during the past 30 days. Findings revealed Latinos had the highest truancy (13.5%), followed by African-Americans (11.2%), and non-Latino whites (10.4%). Truancy was significantly higher for older adolescents compared to younger adolescents. The patterns of truancy are generally similar for both males and females. Low socio-economic students experienced higher rates of truancy, as well. Overall, truancy remained more-or-less constant across the study period. Implications for future research could examine effects of truancy interventions by race and ethnicity to explore whether certain interventions that target specific risk factors may be more effective with some racial/ethnic groups than others.

Maynard et al. (2012) examined the distinctive profiles of truant youth. Drawing upon data from the 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, Maynard et al. (2012) undertook a latent profile analysis, with age, gender, race, socio-economic status, and father in home serving as independent variables. Truancy served as the outcome variable. Findings indicated the achiever class with less truancy had the highest proportion of female youth (70.17%), high socio-economic youth (48.37%), white youth (79.09%), and youth with their father in the home (85.62%). The chronic skipper class had a substantially larger proportion of youth aged 16–17 than any other class (62.98%). Males, whites, and low-income students were the majority in this class, as well. Further research could explore the longitudinal trajectory of different latent classes of truant youth and utilize the findings of their present study to inform truancy intervention research.

Mallett (2016) examined the relationship between truant students, delinquents, and supportive interventions. Truancy is the habitual, unexcused absences from school, exceeding the maximum set by state law (Development Services Group, 2015). The number of truancy cases that ended up in juvenile court increased for all age groups except 13 to 15-year-olds, with increases of 155% for 17-year-olds and 99% for 16-year-olds. Most of these young people were male (55%), and truancy was the most common status offense for white, Black, and Asian youthful offenders (Development Services Group, 2015; Hockenberry & Puzzanchera, 2014). Presently, there exists a limited amount of descriptive research on students who are truant (Mallett, 2016). School-based programs, such as JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville, that

prioritize improving student and family engagement are most successful in improving student attendance.

A student who is chronically absent in any year, starting in the eighth-grade, is 7.4 times more likely to drop out of school than a student who was not chronically absent during any of those years (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Maynard et al. (2017) found Latinos had the highest truancy (13.5%), followed by African-Americans (11.2%), and non-Latino whites (10.4%). Truancy was significantly higher for older adolescents compared to younger adolescents. The patterns of truancy are generally similar for both males and females. Low socio-economic students experienced higher rates of truancy, as well (Maynard et al., 2017). Freshman academies have a positive impact on attendance and retention (Osler & Waden, 2012).

### **Sense of Belonging**

Freshman academies aim to increase students' sense of belonging as described in Appendix A. Barnes and Eadens (2014) found the effective implementation of the ninth-grade academy promoted a sense of belonging for students of color. The perceptions of students of color and their ninth-grade academic experience were the subject of a qualitative case study (Barnes & Eadens, 2014). They examined ninth-grade academy students from a small urban public high school in North Carolina with an ethnically diverse student population. Findings indicated 65% of the students of color had a positive experience at the ninth-grade academy, and they seemed to feel they learned from their teachers and received support. They favored an enclosed environment, and the effective implementation of the ninth-grade academy promoted a sense of belonging for students of color. There was evidence to suggest that students at the targeted ninth-grade

academy were motivated to learn, but what motivated these students was not clear and could be researched in future studies.

Davis et al. (2014) researched changes in students' relational engagement across the transition to high school using Latent growth curve (LGC) modeling technique to analyze 637 students enrolled in one of three high schools in a single district in the Midwest. Two of the three high schools were subject to reform efforts that included SLCs with interdisciplinary teaming. Independent variables were race, gender, and socio-economic status with school belonging the dependent variable. Findings indicated white students, female students, and students with higher socio-economic backgrounds tended to report significantly higher school belonging at the end of 8th grade.

The relationship of self-concept, school belonging, and school engagement to school performance was examined of Caucasian and African-American students (Singh et al., 2010). Independent sample *t* tests, correlational analyses, and regression analyses examined survey data collected from 1,157 high-school students in three school divisions in the Southwest region of Virginia in June 2002. The predictor variable was race, and the outcome variable was school belonging. Findings revealed school belonging was a significant influence on school outcomes for minority students. Schools can design and implement practices that can enhance sense of belonging and community for students such as small learning communities. Further research is needed for empirical research on social and psychological variables that are differentially related to school process and achievement outcomes for various groups.

Johnson et al. (2001) studied whether students of different racial-ethnic groups vary in attachment and engagement and whether properties of schools influence these

outcomes over and above individual characteristics. Using hierarchical linear modeling, they assessed the influence of both individual-level and school-level factors on school attachment and academic engagement from AddHealth data, an ongoing nationally representative study of U.S. adolescents in grades 7-12 that began in 1994. Findings indicated going to school with students of other races disrupted the community of care by causing challenges for the students. Overall, race and ethnicity, at both the individual and school levels, influence the educational experiences of U.S. middle school and high school students. Implications for future research is needed on the relationship between students' attachment and engagement, as well as on their connections to academic achievement.

Through a qualitative approach, Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2010) analyzed how Westshore High School created a community of care for its ninth-grade students. They asserted there is a need to develop and maintain a community of care within schools for all students, especially incoming ninth-grade students, so they make a successful transition from middle school to high school. Thus, the research question posed in this study is: How does Westshore High School create a community of care for its ninth-grade students? In the 2006-2007 school year at Westshore High School, Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2010) collected qualitative data through focus group interviews, observations, and individual interviews with one female teacher and nine of her students. Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2010) asserted teacher-to-program, teacher-to-student, and program-to-student are three caring relationships the Freshman Focus teachers and Freshman Focus program helped to establish that promoted a caring community. Within the teacher-to-program relationship, teacher buy-in was a major element that promoted care. As for the teacher-

to-student relationship, teachers with developmentally responsive “traits” promoted care. Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2010) found that teachers must be dedicated, talented, and passionate to teach freshmen. Lastly, within the program-to-student relationship, a personalized learning community promoted care. Further research is necessary to include additional investigations of these caring relationships and their associated outcomes.

A follow up study was conducted on this investigation that analyzed how one high school created a community of care for its ninth-grade students through the implementation of a ninth-grade transition program - Freshman Focus (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2013). Within this qualitative case study, Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2013) re-interviewed all the participants three years later during their senior year in order to investigate how Freshman Focus might have fostered a long-lasting community of care that extended throughout students’ high school years. Findings suggest to promote a positive school experience for students, program–student and teacher–student relationships served as ways to foster a community of care. Ellerbrock and Kiefer (2013) also found Freshman Focus fostered a community of care that lasted throughout these students’ high school years. Implications for future research need to determine whether long-lasting communities of care can be fostered at other schools through the implementation of ninth-grade transition programs.

A deep student sense of belonging is a desired result of freshman academies. Barnes and Eadens (2014) found the effective implementation of the ninth-grade academy promoted a sense of belonging for students of color. Singh et al. (2010) revealed school belonging was a significant influence on school outcomes for minority students. Future research may want to explore external variables that might affect



students' sense of belonging to school such as small learning communities or freshman academies (Davis et al., 2014).

### **Smaller Learning Communities**

Smaller learning communities (SLCs) organize around several hundred students who remain with teachers for multiple years (Oxley, 2008). As with freshman academies, teachers have a common planning time and share students, where they are able to work together on content as well as appropriate student supports and remediation efforts. Teaching teams, with a smaller number of students, can adapt instruction to diverse students. Affiliation in SLCs is based on teachers' and students' interests to ensure access and equity. School counselors are members of the team, and both counselors and teachers advise and mentor students as well as collaborate with parents (Oxley, 2008). The SLCs seek to provide students with a sense of belonging by tying them to a school within a school model that allows them to identify with an academy toward graduation.

On the brink of the 21st century, a SLC is one new idea brought forth to eliminate the disproportionalities in high schools (Lee & Friedrich, 2007). A SLC refers to a personalized learning unit within a larger school setting where students and teachers are scheduled together and have a shared area of the school that holds most of their classes (Sparger, 2005). The main purpose of SLC is to raise academic achievement for all students enrolled in large high schools by creating smaller learning communities within them (US Department of Education, 2001). SLCs improve attendance, graduation rates, and students' experience of high schools as supportive environments. Freshman

academies are one type of SLC that help address the middle school to high school transition epidemic.

Lee and Friedrich (2007) state the federal government provided approximately \$275 million to schools across the country from 2000 to 2004 in implementing small learning communities. Furthermore, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funded the SLC program with more than \$650 million across the United States (Sparger, 2005). As of 2006, because of this substantial funding, there are 1076 SLC schools in 480 school districts across the country (Lee & Friedrich, 2007). Lee et al. (2002) state the Barker and Gump initiated the SLC concept through their research traced back to the 1960s on an approach to schooling they named the ‘campus model’:

The campus school provides for repeated contacts between the same teachers and students; this continuity of associates probably leads to closer social bonds. A commonsense theory is that the campus school welds together the facility advantages of the large school and the social values of the small school. (p. 93)

The idea of small schools has reemerged at the core of high school reform discourses since the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*. Over the last decade, most research has consistently found small schools outperform large ones through making distinguished improvements in student achievement. As a result, small schools have gained the attention of many researchers, educators, and policymakers interested in high school reform (Lee & Friedrich, 2007).

The SLC program has been actively embraced across the country under Title V of the NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The main purpose of SLC is to raise academic achievement for all students enrolled in large high schools by creating smaller

learning communities within them (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Given the many variations, there is no universal definition or model that adequately captures the whole concept of SLC. Moreover, the federal government has provided a comprehensive policy guideline for SLC and structural examples of SLC that are currently in place in SLC schools (Lee & Friedrich, 2007). Implementing smaller learning communities within a larger high school allows for a successful transformation of modern learning environments (Armstead et al., 2010). Large high schools are redesigned to replace big and impersonal schooling with smaller, more career-oriented education environments in the SLC model. The main idea calls for small, interdisciplinary teaching and learning teams. The SLC reform provides students with rigorous and relevant curriculum and instruction, with a focus on comprehensive programming and inclusive classroom practices (Oxley, 2008). Shakrani (2008) notes students have opportunities to have more exposure to subjects of interest with real-world relevance, to form closer student to teacher relationships, and better preparation for postsecondary education or careers.

The federal government identifies four main structures of SLCs (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). The four SLC structures include the school-within-a-school, academy, magnet program, and house plan. Conceptually, these four structures are not disconnected with each other. A school-within-a-school holds a small, independent program housed within a larger school building. The academy is a smaller group consisting of teachers and students, all of whom focus on particular themes, which is most common. A magnet program attracts students from an entire school district by highlighting an academic specialty focus (e.g. mathematics, science, and arts) and putting in place competitive admission requirements or open enrollment systems. Lastly, the

house plan divides students in a large school into groups of several hundred, either across or by grade levels.

Furthermore, there are six SLC strategies – academic teaming, adult advocate systems, teacher advisory systems, alternative scheduling, freshman transition activities, and multiyear groups – designed to combine with the abovementioned SLC structures (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). In general, current SLC schools use more than one SLC strategy in combination with more than one SLC structure. Interdisciplinary groups of teachers who share the same students rather than the same subject is academic teaming. An adult advocate system provides at least one caring adult who can serve as a source of guidance and rapport for each student by meeting on a regular basis with each student in small groups or individually. Similarly, a teacher advisory system works with small groups of students to support academic achievement and personalize the high school experience. Alternative scheduling provides teachers the ability to create lessons around learning objectives by changing the length of the class period to support student growth. Freshman transition activities support all first-year students who have difficulty adjusting to the new school setting. Lastly, a multiyear group keeps teachers with students for two or more years to build trust and understanding. In these strategies, all stakeholders work to craft a unified, personalized academic and social environment designed to accommodate students as community members and to promote success (Lee & Friedrich, 2007).

Levine (2010) reviewed research that compares SLCs to comprehensive high schools on a variety of measures. The research neither supports nor disproves the promise of SLCs to improve academic achievement. Nevertheless, Levine (2010) does

suggest that SLCs can improve attendance, graduation rates, and students' experience of high schools as supportive environments. There are three challenges SLCs must overcome if they are to improve academic achievement: focusing on instructional improvement, ensuring equity and rigor, and transcending school history (Levine, 2010).

Firstly, Levine (2010) states SLCs will not realize their full potential to improve student learning if teachers do not focus on improving their own and their colleagues' instruction. Although, they may still produce some good outcomes by changing students' experience of support and connection and may have some impact on learning as well as absenteeism, drop-out rates, and graduation. Secondly, schools can ensure that SLCs do not re-create the segregation and stratification that occur within and across comprehensive high schools. Relatively, this requires creating forms of initial and ongoing review to ensure that all SLCs maintain rigorous standards. Failing to address this challenge will limit improvements in academic achievement for all students. Lastly, SLCs are usually formed from existing faculties who continue to work in existing and often low-performing schools. These schools' histories include norms, routines, and patterns of relationships that teachers carry inside them. To the extent that stakeholders explicitly discuss the challenges and pitfalls of having a history, they may be more able to understand and address the challenges as they seek a level of change that includes patterns of student learning (Levine, 2010).

Through surveys of teachers and students, site visits, and standardized achievement test scores to get at a variety of outcomes, Levine (2010) shared findings from evaluative studies of SLCs that include comparisons with matched comprehensive high schools. This study included the following SLC schools: 26 Gates-supported

conversion high schools, 23 First Things First (FTF) high schools and middle schools, 5 Talent Development (TD) schools in Philadelphia, and three conversion high schools (and eight of the small schools created within them) supported by the Chicago High School Redesign Initiative (CHSRI). Extant research neither supports nor refutes the promise of SLCs to improve academic achievement. Nonetheless, research does suggest that SLCs can improve attendance, graduation rates, and students' experience of high schools as supportive environments.

Furthermore, Levine (2010) shows how Table 3 answers the research question:

Do SLCs produce better outcomes than large comprehensive high schools?

**Table 3**

*Identifying Differences between Schools Breaking Up into SLCs and Comparison Schools on Commonly Measured Educational Outcomes*

Outcome	Gates Schools	Talent Development	First Things First	Chicago High School Redesign Initiative
Attendance	No significant difference	Improvement	Improvement at original sites	Improvement
Graduation rates	NA (no schools yet graduating seniors)	Possible Improvement	Improvement	Possible improvement
Progression rates from ninth to tenth grade	No significant difference	Improvement	NA	Possible improvement
Student engagement	Decrease	NA	Decrease at FTF high schools; increase at FTF middle schools	NA
Standardized academic achievement test data in math and English language arts	No significant difference	Slight improvement in math, none in reading	Improvements in both subjects at original sites; no pattern of improvements at newer sites	No significant differences

Armstead et al. (2010) examined SLCs' effectiveness, how students at all levels experience the benefits of SLCs, and what students want that would improve the SLC experience. Through a participatory research method, data-in-a-day was used to provide a systematic and inclusive method for gathering data on student perceptions. As defined in scholarly research, the SLC model not only provides a basis for a high-quality education but also provides the learning environment desired by students. SLCs are clearly a key factor in some students' satisfaction and success, and teachers are the driving force behind many students' experiences (Armstead et al., 2010). Students want what the SLC transformation is intended to deliver. Implementing SLCs in an inclusive and systematic way may impact low-performing large, urban high schools.

In conclusion, Sparger (2005) defines a SLC or academy as a personalized learning unit within a larger school setting where students and teachers are scheduled together and have a shared area of the school that holds most of their classes. The main purpose of SLC or academy is to raise academic achievement for all students enrolled in large high schools by creating smaller learning communities within them (US Department of Education, 2001). Nevertheless, research does suggest that SLCs can improve attendance, graduation rates, and students' experience of high schools as supportive environments. Consequently, freshman academies, one type of SLCs, help address the middle school to high school transition epidemic.

### ***Freshman Academies***

One of many strategies educators have employed to improve student achievement at the ninth-grade level are smaller learning communities, referred to as freshman academies or ninth-grade academies, designed to ensure first year freshmen have every



opportunity to be academically successful in all areas (Osler & Waden, 2012). Partland (2012) describes a freshman academy as a separate transitional program provided to students in their first year of high school that places them with small interdisciplinary teams of four or five teachers who share the same 150 to 180 students and a block schedule with common planning time. These academies are for first year freshmen, and they remain in the Freshman Academy for the duration of their freshman year. This unit has its own part of the building with its own clearly labeled entrance. The Freshman Academy Principal, Counselor, core classrooms, and lockers are located in the Freshman Wing (McIntosh & White, 2006). Activities include a freshman orientation, team meetings, intentional interventions, field trips, and incentive celebrations. Partland (2012) further points out the freshman academies' major responsibility is to find solutions for individual student academic, attendance, and behavior problems, which rest with the teacher teams, where each team leader utilizes data to set goals and monitor trends of student behavior. This section provides an overall history of freshman academies. Furthermore, it provides a clear definition, purpose, and key outcomes of freshman academies in education. Like SLCs, it goes onto discuss factors predicting the three dependent variables of this study: promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging.

Srofe (2009) stated the concerns about providing a caring environment for ninth-graders started the entire Middle School Movement that advocated replacing junior high schools serving seventh through ninth-grades with middle schools encompassing sixth through eighth-grades during the 1960s. This transformation moved ninth-grade students to high schools from junior high schools. Nevertheless, with many 14-year-olds struggling with the high school transition, some educators were wary of this movement

(Barnes & Eadens, 2014). The Gates Foundation found the challenge of helping ninth-graders reach academic success continued to be a problem over the years (Phillips, 2009). High schools endured many crises including academic deficiencies, behavior issues, and attendance rates as low as a 70% by the mid-1990s (Phillips, 2009). To address this problem, educators had to restructure the traditional high school. A school-within-a-school model also known as a freshman academy was one strategy educators established within high schools to combat this epidemic (Cook et al., 2008).

Freshman academies are for first year freshman students transferring from middle school to high school, so they are successful academically and start off on the right path toward high school graduation. A freshman academy is housed in a separate wing of the school with interdisciplinary team teaching, block scheduling, and curriculum and instruction focusing on core academic subjects (Cook et al., 2008). Freshman academies are implemented to provide the personalization to support the social and emotional needs of students during the transition from middle school to high school and to offer targeted remediation for students who enter high school with academic deficiencies (Emmett & McGee, 2012). By creating academies teachers often share common students and function as an instructional team to provide intervention for students.

The goal of freshman academies are to support students so that they can make sufficient academic progress during the critical freshman year and progress as sophomores (Emmett & McGee, 2012). These academies seek to accomplish an increase in promotion rates, reading levels, student engagement in schools as well as a decrease in suspension rates. The many facets of a freshman academy have yielded increased academic performance, improved student attendance most years, and a reduction in the

number of expulsions (McIntosh & White, 2006). The Freshman Academy Principal, Counselor, and teachers provide a myriad of interventions to increase student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging as described in Appendix A.

Bernstein et al. (2008) identify freshman academies as a type of house plan as defined in the Annual Performance Report. House plans divide students in a large school into smaller groups by grade levels or across grade levels. Students take classes with the same teachers and same house members. House plans personalize the high school experience, while building a sense of belonging. Each house usually has its own extra-curricular activities and discipline plan. Grouping ninth-graders into a separate house is one way to ease the freshman transition to high school as this provides students with a deep sense of belonging and connectivity (Bernstein et al., 2008).

There is a need to compare the student outcomes who attend traditional schools that do not use any type of freshman academy with the student outcomes of schools that do have a freshman academy model (Osler & Walden, 2012). Furthermore, future research would improve our understanding of the relationship between school structure, in this case the freshman academy model, and student retention (Moller et al., 2006). In the 2017-18 school year, JCPS invested millions of dollars, as reported by JCPS' Department of Transition Readiness, in the implementation and operations of the Academies of Louisville initiative to address the middle school to high school transitional epidemic (JCPS, 2018). The purpose of this quantitative study is to examine if there is an increase on student promotion, attendance, and reported sense of belonging across the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville from school years 2015-16 to 2018-19.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The transition from middle school to high school is a pivotal point in a student's life (McIntosh & White, 2006). There are several theories that could situate this study, including role theory, contingency theory, organizational theory, and systems theory (Biddle, 1986; Bonner et al., 2004; Donaldson, 2006; Owens, 2004). To understand what high schools are doing to combat the middle school to high school transitional epidemic, it is important to understand the conceptual framework between how these academies are structured and how they are intended to promote specific outcomes such as promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging. One must also consider student development as well as how the freshman academy program fits in as a resource to support student development.

Role theory is a useful framework for examining interpersonal relationships that exist in schools and school systems (Owens, 2004). Moreover, role theory explains the fact that human beings behave in ways that are different and predictable depending on the respective social identities and the situation (Biddle, 1986). Biddle (1986) stated the theory began life as a theatrical metaphor from Georg Simmel, George Herbert Mead, Ralph Linton, and Jacob Moreno. If performances in the theater were differentiated and foreseeable because actors were forced to perform "parts" for which "scripts" were written, then it seemed rational to believe that social behaviors in other contexts were also associated with parts and scripts understood by social actors (Biddle, 1986). Through later literature, Biddle used the term role to refer to characteristic behavior patterns. Within educational settings, school staff have specific roles to perform, and many interactive factors help determine exactly what kind of "performance" each role

entails based on the social identity and context. Role theory is useful as a framework for examining relationships between organization and person as well as interpersonal behavior. Furthermore, role theory could be adopted in this study by looking at how staff in freshman academies influence promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging of freshmen.

Contingency theory plays a role in a school's organizational design by specifying which structures (JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model) fit which circumstances (a student's ninth-grade year) (Donaldson, 2006). The heart of the theory is the statics of the effect of such fit on performance. For example, organizations change over time in their structures because of changes in their contingencies. By providing a comprehensive framework that relates variations in organizational design to variations in the contingencies of the organization, contingency theory informs the theory of organizational design. Donaldson (2006) goes on to say contingency theory explains the phenomenon of the existence of fits between structure and contingencies by their beneficial effects on organizational performance. Organizational design can help administrators attain higher performance for their organizations by adopting a more effective structure. The contingency approach helps administrators to identify misfits between their structures and contingencies, such as size and diversification (Donaldson, 2006). Owens (2004) states contingency theory is based upon the viewpoint that there is no one universal "best" way of dealing with organizational issues. The best approach is contingent upon variable factors in the context of the situation. To be able to analyze and diagnose the specific situation that exists, contingency approaches to organizational behavior require developing a systematic understanding of the dynamics of

organizational behavior. Each school is different and academic programs such as freshman academies is contingent upon the needs of the freshmen in that specific school to promote student development. Contingency theory could be adopted by analyzing the 11 freshman academies to determine the selection of the organizational design and administrative style based on significant contingencies in the specific school.

Organization theory is mainly an academic discipline which analyzes how schools should operate to be effective (Hage & Finsterbusch, 1989). Hage and Finsterbusch (1989) state organizational theory derives from the sociology of formal or complex organizations, while one of its major phenomena of interests is organization change. Organization theory concentrates on the performance of variables: efficiency, effectiveness, innovation, morale, and the structures which achieve such performances under various conditions. In their specific context, organizational theory focuses on designing organizations to be effective in achieving goals. Change points, parts of the system usually changed, include structure, coordination/control processes, environment, and inputs. Organizational theory provides a systematic body of information on which we base assumptions about the nature of organizations and the behavior of people in them (Owens, 2004). It is used constantly by administrators as a basis for the professional work they do every day. The structure of an organization is the prime determinant of the behavior of people in the organization. The people in the organization tend to shape the structure of the organization. This influences student development through the staff in academic programs such as freshman academies. Organizational theory could be used through the implementation of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model as a way

about bringing about desirable changes in organizational structure to increase freshman promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging (see Appendix A).

The conceptual framework for this study is systems theory because it is the basis for contemporary analysis of organizational behavior (Owens, 2004). Ludwig von Bertalanffy, a biologist, formulated the general systems theory in 1950. Owens (2004) describes the systems theory as it would relate to this study as:

An organization is an integral system of interdependent structures and functions.

An organization is constituted of groups and a group consists of persons who much work in harmony. Each person must know what the others are doing. Each one must be capable of receiving messages and must be sufficiently disciplined to obey. (p. 119)

An organization exists for the purpose of reaching a goal or set of goals through accomplishing certain tasks. Rationally, an organizational model is structured and staffed to accomplish its mission.

Owens (2004) states the social systems theory requires us to see the organization (in this case, freshman academies) as a system that creates the context in which the whole pattern of human behavior that characterizes the organization occurs. One of many strategies educators have employed to improve student achievement at the ninth-grade level are smaller learning communities, referred to as freshman academies, designed to increase promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging. Freshman academies create an environment in which human interactions occur with positive regularity and predictability. Therefore, freshman academy structures, systems, and interventions must

be in place because the organizational culture of the system is critical to the success of freshmen.

### **Study Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to examine if there are differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and reported sense of belonging between lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race within the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville over school years 2015-16 to 2018-19. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and JCPS being in the virtual learning context in 2019-20 and 2020-21, data from those school years will not be used in this study. In the 2017-18 school year, JCPS invested \$3.1 million, as reported by JCPS' Department of Transition Readiness, in the implementation and operations of the Academies of Louisville initiative to address the middle school to high school transitional epidemic (JCPS, 2018). Students fail ninth-grade more than any other grade of school, and this is a pivotal time in a student's life in which they deal with a range of issues, one of which is high school transition (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). The effect of the middle to high school transition is widespread and affects students' social, emotional, and academic identities in unpredictable ways (Cohen & Smerdon, 2009). McCallumore and Sparapani (2010) state during a student's ninth-grade year, it is the first time many students must earn passing grades in their core content courses. Students struggle, fail, and drop out due to increased graduation requirements and rocky transitions from middle school to high school (McCallumore & Sparapani, 2010). During the first few weeks of their freshman year, students will decide if they intend to continue their high school education and not drop out (McIntosh & White, 2006). The target population of this study are ninth-grade students transitioning



from middle school to high school. To help understand whether academies can make a measurable difference on student outcomes, this study will examine if there is an increase on student promotion, attendance, and reported sense of belonging across the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville.

This study will be conducted in JCPS, a large urban school district in Kentucky. Within the JCPS, 47% of the students are white, 37% are African-American, and 16% are other, while 62% of the students receive free-reduced lunch (JCPS, 2018). There were many trends in the findings as it relates to JCPS and this study. Males, Latinos/African-Americans, low socio-economic students, and students in urban schools were more likely to be retained. Latinos/African-Americans, teenagers, and low socio-economic students had the highest truancy rates. Lastly, white students, female students, and students with higher socio-economic backgrounds tended to report significantly higher sense of belonging. Overall, minority, low socio-economic, older adolescents, and males are the most at-risk students in schools today. This study will examine if there is an increase on student promotion, attendance, and reported sense of belonging across the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville from school years 2015-16 to 2018-19.

Ninth-grade academies and center models had a positive impact on attendance and retention (Osler & Waden, 2012). Barnes and Eadens (2014) found the effective implementation of the ninth-grade academy promoted a sense of belonging for students of color. Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) state schools with extensive transition programs had significantly lower dropout and failure rates than schools that did not offer comprehensive programs. Partland (2012) points out the freshman academies' major

responsibility is to find solutions for individual student academic, attendance, and behavior problems.

Osler and Walden (2012) suggested future studies could compare the student outcomes who attend traditional schools that do not use any type of freshman academy with the student outcomes of schools that do have a freshman academy model. Moller et al. (2006) stated future research would improve our understanding of the relationship between school structure, in this case the freshman academy model, and student retention. Further research may want to explore external variables that might affect students' sense of belonging to school such as small learning communities or freshman academies (Davis et al., 2014). Implications for future research is needed on the relationship between students' attachment and engagement, as well as on their connections to academic achievement (Johnson et al., 2001). Researchers suggest it would be informative to see if students who attended the freshman program versus a random sample of those who did not have higher promotion rates, grade point average, or other markers of academic success (Vera et al., 2008). Understanding the instruments that trigger successful support programs are vital to helping schools create and maintain structures that will support persistence in their students. Cohen and Smerdon (2009) shared research of middle to high school transition program's efficacy is limited, but these programs show promise in addressing student transition problems. These implications for future research provide an in-depth case for this study with JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville.

The conceptual framework for JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville is an open system linked to the social systems theory. The community and larger world in

which it exists influence the Freshman Academies. Eighth-graders who struggle with the transition to high school are influenced by the Freshman Academy's structure, systems, and supports. In return, the assumption is this model will yield higher promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging. JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville exist to increase promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging of freshmen through the model's systems, structure, and interventions for ninth-graders. This Freshman Academy model is structured and staffed to make all freshmen sophomore-ready in the 11 academy schools.

This research will provide JCPS with the Freshman Academies of Louisville outcome metric data needed to determine the success of the model after the first two years of implementation. Furthermore, this study will address the gaps in literature needed to compare the student outcomes who attend traditional schools that do not use any type of freshman academy with the student outcomes of schools that do have a freshman academy model (Osler & Walden, 2012). More narrowly, this study will look at differences in these schools across student sub-groups (lunch status, gender, and race) to shed light on how student sub-group outcomes may be changing over time. It will also provide research needed to better understand the relationship between school structure, in this case the freshman academy model, and student retention (Moller et al., 2006).

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This one-group time-series design of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model on student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging was examined through a quantitative methodological approach. An analysis of the data was conducted through a mixed-design ANOVA to examine whether there are average score differences across the academic years of 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 for students' promotion, attendance, and reported sense of belonging across lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race. In the 2017-18 school year, JCPS implemented the Academies of Louisville initiative with each school establishing a freshman academy in year one (JCPS, 2018). To serve as points of comparison, the Freshman Academies of Louisville model was not in place in the 2015-16 or 2016-17 school years. This quantitative study was guided by the following research questions over school years 2015-16 to 2018-19:

### *Promotion*

1. Is there a difference in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students?

2. Is there a difference in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between male and female high school students?
3. Are there differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students?

#### *Attendance*

4. Is there a difference in student attendance over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students?
5. Is there a difference in student attendance over multiple school years between male and female high school students?
6. Are there differences in student attendance over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students?

#### *Sense of Belonging*

7. Is there a difference in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students?
8. Is there a difference in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between male and female high school students?
9. Are there differences in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students?

This chapter is organized into four sections that detail key methodological components of the study, including: Participants, Procedures, Instrumentation, and Data Analysis. First, the context and sample in which the study will be conducted is described.

Secondly, the data collection and instrumentation procedures will be explained and identified. This is followed by the data analysis procedures and foreshadowing future findings. Lastly, the limitations of the study will be addressed.

### **Context and Sample**

This study was conducted in JCPS, a large urban school district in Jefferson County, Kentucky. The selection of the sample was due to JCPS implementing the Freshman Academies of Louisville model and the large sample size of Freshman Academies ( $N = 11$ ). JCPS served 2,837 students in its Freshman Academies of Louisville model in the 2017-18 school year. In the 2018-19 school year, 49.7% of JCPS' students in the high school graduating cohort were proficient, 53.5% were transition-ready, and JCPS obtained an 82.9% high school graduation rate (JCPS, 2018).

JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year: The Academy at Shawnee, Ballard, Doss, Jeffersontown, Marion C. Moore School, Pleasure Ridge Park, Seneca, Southern, Valley, Waggener, and Western. JCPS (2018) provided enrollment data for the table below showing the number of first year freshmen (true freshmen) as of October 1, 2017, JCPS' official enrollment count date, at each school during each school year. Only first year freshmen are in JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville. These students will serve as the sample for this study. This sample was used because JCPS is a large, diverse urban school district, and they spent over \$3.1 million dollars funding the Academies of Louisville initiative in the first year of implementation. JCPS needs the outcome data of this study to determine if this initiative's model (systems, structures, supports, and interventions) is successful. I also work as a Freshman Academy Counselor for JCPS

and want to contribute to the literature based on the Freshman Academies of Louisville’s effectiveness.

Table 4 shows the 11 JCPS high schools that were a part of the Freshman Academies of Louisville initiative. Under each academic year of the study, the number of first year freshmen (true freshmen) are represented within the Freshman Academies of Louisville at each specific school. The bottom of the table shows the total sample size for each academic year of the study. This table reflects a large sample size of Freshman Academies ( $N = 11$ ), serving 2,838 true freshmen in 2018-19, 2,837 true freshmen in 2017-18, 3,041 true freshmen in 2016-17, and 3,047 true freshmen in 2015-16.

**Table 4**

*Freshman Academies of Louisville Enrollment by School Years*

School	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16
Ballard	503	467	463	471
Doss	194	218	249	272
Jeffersontown	210	232	259	260
Marion C. Moore School	309	267	277	257
Pleasure Ridge Park	351	371	410	457
Seneca	261	270	282	268
Southern	315	312	311	282
The Academy @ Shawnee	115	99	140	141
Valley	204	251	246	280
Waggener	224	204	240	213
Western	152	146	164	146
Total Enrollment	2838	2837	3041	3047

Table 5 shows the 11 JCPS high schools that were a part of the Freshman Academies of Louisville initiative. Under each academic year of the study, the percentage of free/reduced lunch students are represented within the Freshman Academies of Louisville at each specific school. The bottom of the table shows the average percentage of free/reduced lunch students for each academic year of the study. This table reflects 71.81% free/reduced lunch true freshmen in 2018-19, 73.85% free/reduced lunch true freshmen in 2017-18, 73.36% free/reduced lunch true freshmen in 2016-17, and 74.83% free/reduced lunch true freshmen in 2015-16.

**Table 5**

*Freshman Academies of Louisville Free/Reduced Lunch Percentages by School Years*

School	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16
Ballard	43.94%	45.82%	44.49%	40.34%
Doss	82.47%	82.57%	82.33%	84.93%
Jeffersontown	64.29%	71.12%	66.80%	66.15%
Marion C. Moore School	78.64%	77.15%	77.98%	86.77%
Pleasure Ridge Park	71.23%	72.78%	68.78%	76.15%
Seneca	80.84%	84.44%	78.72%	81.34%
Southern	77.46%	74.36%	81.99%	80.14%
The Academy @ Shawnee	93.04%	91.92%	87.14%	89.36%
Valley	82.35%	86.06%	87.40%	87.14%
Waggener	78.57%	83.33%	78.75%	81.69%
Western	80.92%	84.25%	89.02%	87.67%
Average	71.81%	73.85%	73.36%	74.83%



Table 6 shows the 11 JCPS high schools that were a part of the Freshman Academies of Louisville initiative. Under each academic year of the study, the percentage of female students are represented within the Freshman Academies of Louisville at each specific school. The bottom of the table shows the average percentage of female students for each academic year of the study. This table reflects 47.46% female true freshmen in 2018-19, 48.96% female true freshmen in 2017-18, 48.47% female true freshmen in 2016-17, and 46.60% female true freshmen in 2015-16.

**Table 6**

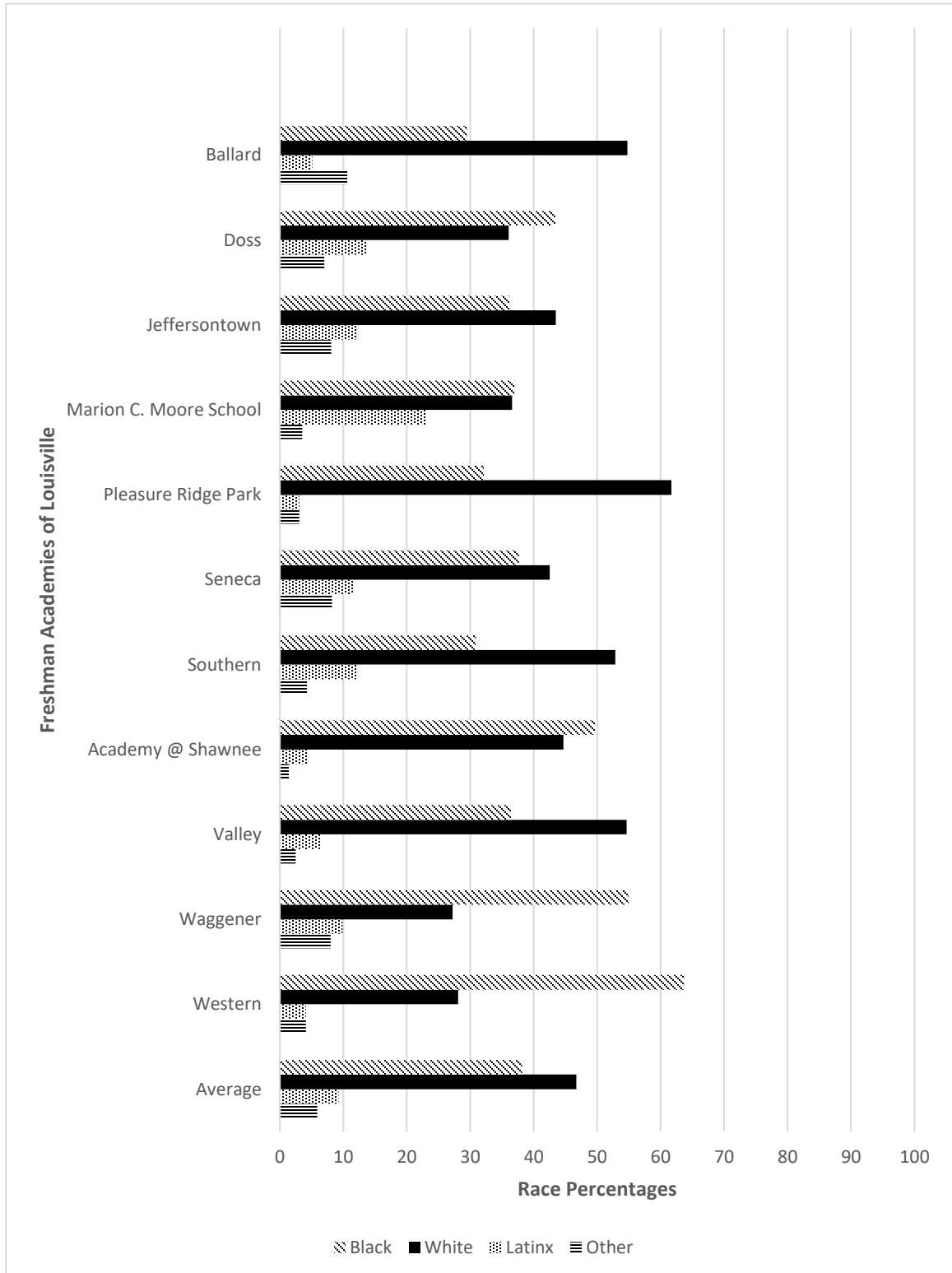
*Freshman Academies of Louisville Female Percentages by School Years*

School	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16
Ballard	49.90%	52.68%	55.94%	54.78%
Doss	49.48%	40.37%	36.55%	42.65%
Jeffersontown	45.24%	41.38%	36.29%	39.62%
Marion C. Moore School	45.63%	52.43%	48.01%	49.03%
Pleasure Ridge Park	45.58%	54.18%	57.80%	48.58%
Seneca	53.64%	53.70%	48.23%	46.27%
Southern	36.83%	40.38%	42.77%	36.36%
The Academy @ Shawnee	44.35%	38.38%	35.71%	40.43%
Valley	58.82%	54.98%	55.69%	48.57%
Waggener	51.79%	50.98%	53.75%	46.95%
Western	40.13%	45.89%	45.73%	45.89%
Average	47.46%	48.96%	48.47%	46.60%

Figures 1-4 show the 11 JCPS high schools that were a part of the Freshman Academies of Louisville initiative. Under each academic year of the study, the percentage of Black, White, Latinx, and Other race students are represented within the Freshman Academies of Louisville at each specific school. The bottom of the table shows the average percentage of Black, White, Latinx, and Other race students for each academic year of the study. This table reflects 38.17% Black, 46.70% White, 9.26% Latinx, and 5.87% Other race true freshmen in 2015-16, 40.09% Black, 44.95% White, 9.90% Latinx, and 5.06% Other race true freshmen in 2016-17, 39.37% Black, 43.57% White, 10.61% Latinx, and 6.45% Other race true freshmen in 2017-18, and 37.67% Black, 43.80% White, 12.44% Latinx, and 6.10% Other race true freshmen in 2018-19.

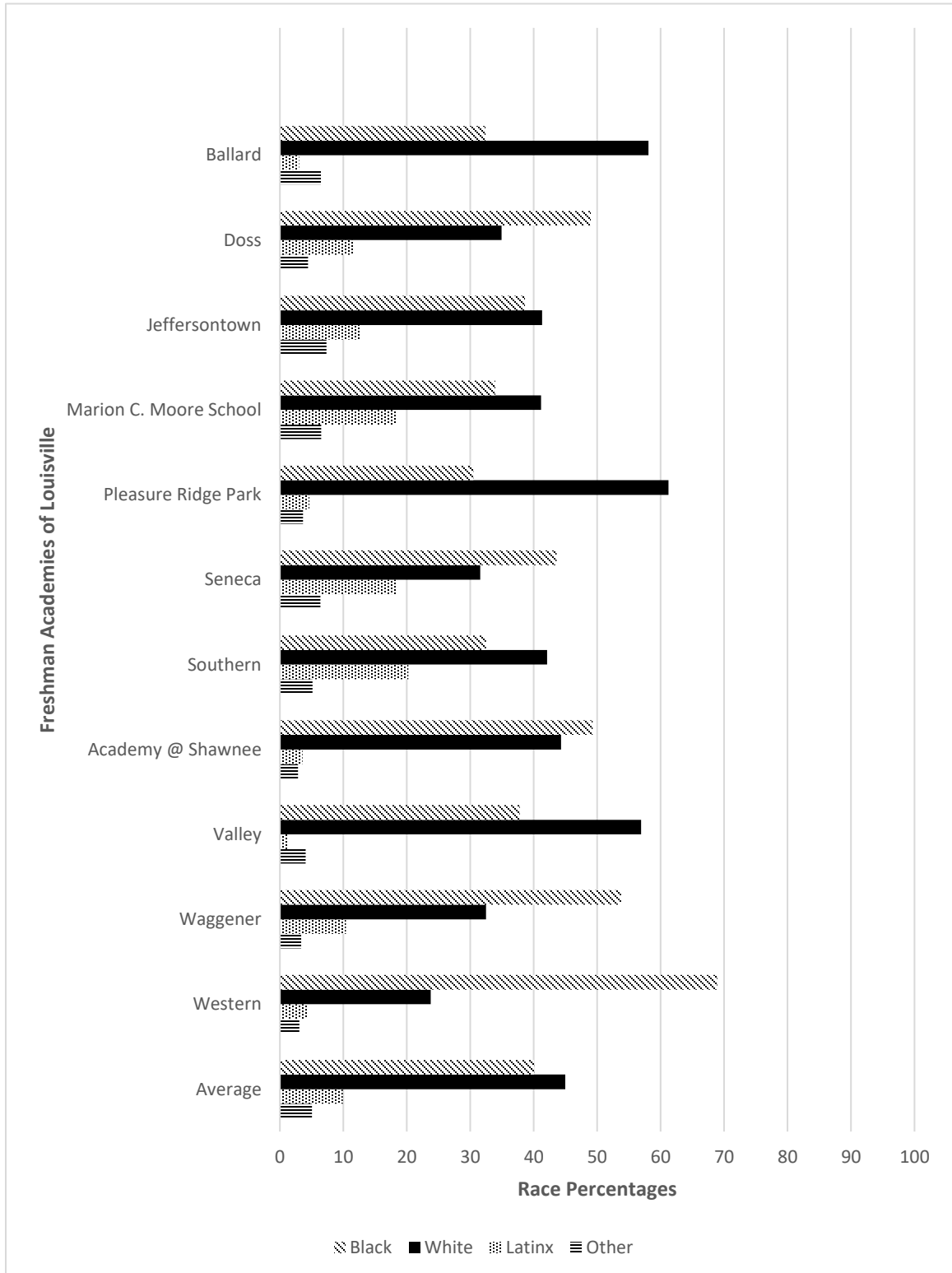
**Figure 1**

*2015-16 Freshman Academies of Louisville Race Percentages*



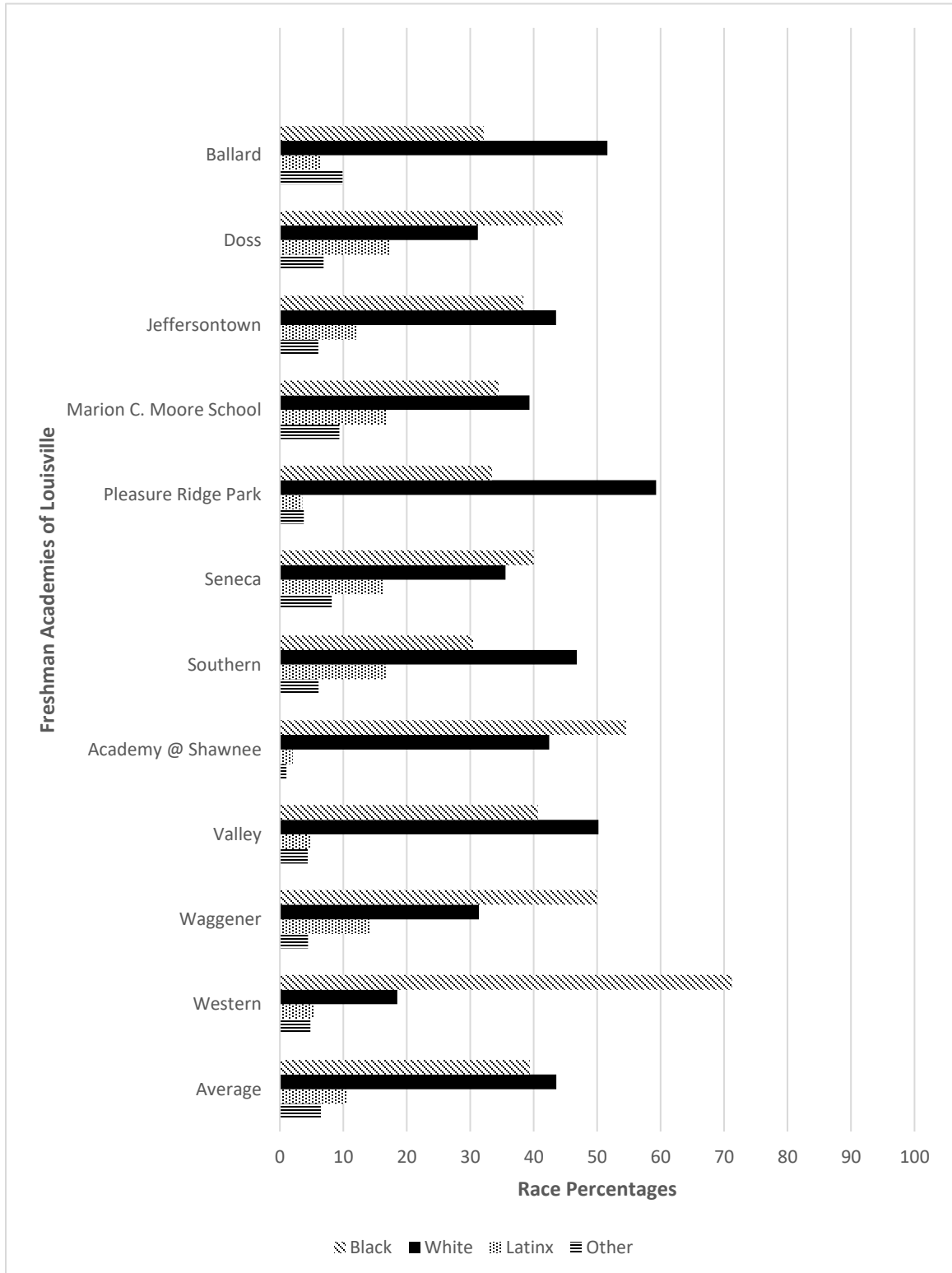
**Figure 2**

*2016-17 Freshman Academies of Louisville Race Percentages*



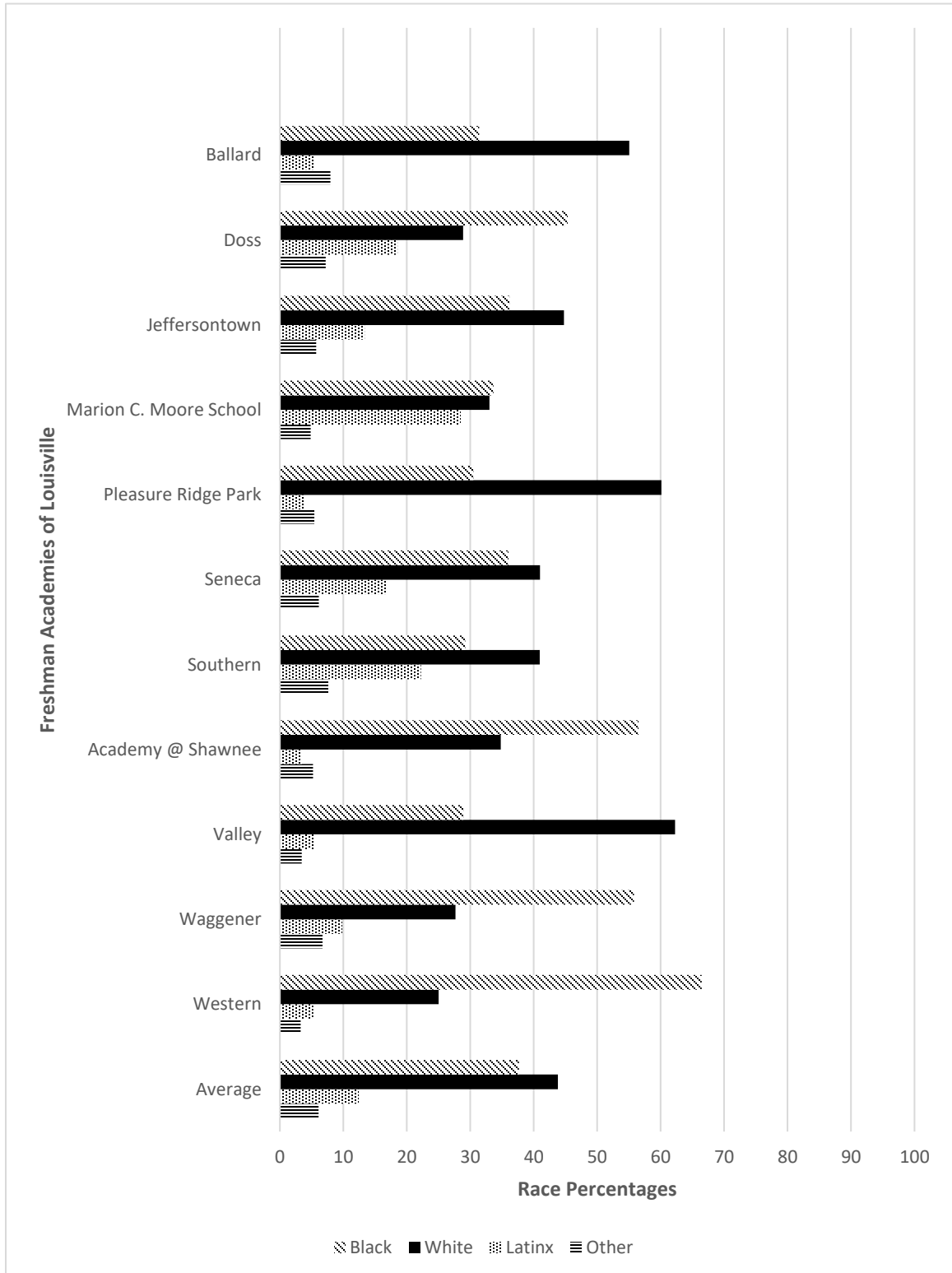
**Figure 3**

*2017-18 Freshman Academies of Louisville Race Percentages*



**Figure 4**

*2018-19 Freshman Academies of Louisville Race Percentages*



## **Data Collection and Instrumentation Procedures**

Data was collected through existing datasets from JCPS' Data Management Center for the following six research questions:

### *Promotion*

1. Is there a difference in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students?
2. Is there a difference in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between male and female high school students?
3. Are there differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students?

### *Attendance*

4. Is there a difference in student attendance over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students?
5. Is there a difference in student attendance over multiple school years between male and female high school students?
6. Are there differences in student attendance over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students?

The independent variables are the sub-groups (lunch status, gender, and race), and the dependent variables are student promotion and attendance. JCPS (2018) defines student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade as a freshman accumulating at least five

credits by the conclusion of their ninth-grade year. JCPS (2018) defines student attendance as a full day of attendance shall be recorded for a pupil in attendance more than 84% of the regularly scheduled school day for the pupil's grade level. Attendance for all students in JCPS is calculated based on the amount of time that the student is present in school.

Data was collected through existing data from JCPS' CSS for the following research questions:

*Sense of Belonging*

7. Is there a difference in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students?
8. Is there a difference in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between male and female high school students?
9. Are there differences in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students?

In these research questions, the independent variables are the sub-groups (lunch status, gender, and race), and the dependent variable is student sense of belonging.

Hagerty et al. (1992) define sense of belonging as the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment.

Beginning in the 1996-97 school year, the CSS has been administered annually (JCPS, 2018). The survey is administered to all parents, employees, and students in the



fourth-grade and up, with over 100,000 surveys returned each year. This data is analyzed and used to develop strategies to direct for the future of JCPS. The CSS is a vital tool for informed discussions, planning, and progress monitoring of the district. A Likert Scale is used for the CSS. The key is as follows: 4 = *Strongly Agree*, 3 = *Agree*, 2 = *Disagree*, and 1 = *Strongly Disagree*. The survey's composite score of items related to school are written from a whole-child perspective. JCPS' CSS asks 28 questions that relate to school with a reported reliability of .941 (JCPS, 2018) (see Appendix B). This study will utilize school-level and student-level data from the survey to look at overall average score differences across student sub-groups over school years 2015-16 to 2018-19.

### **Data Analysis Procedures and Foreshadowing Future Findings**

This one-group time-series design of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model on student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging was examined through a quantitative methodological approach. Jacobs et al. (2009) state a one-group time-series design involves periodic measurements on one group (true freshmen in 11 JCPS high schools) and the introduction of an experimental treatment (JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model) into this time series of measurements (school years 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19). Two measurements on the dependent variables (student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging) are taken of end of school years for 2015-16 and 2016-17 on the true freshmen in 11 JCPS high schools before JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model was implemented. Then, JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model was implemented, and one more measurement on the dependent variables (student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging) of end of school years 2017-18 and 2018-19 was made. By comparing the measurements before and after, this

study can assess the effect of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model on the performance of the group (true freshmen in 11 JCPS high schools) on school years 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 (Jacobs et al., 2009). This provides a basis for the research questions:

*Promotion*

1. Is there a difference in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students?
2. Is there a difference in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between male and female high school students?
3. Are there differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students?

*Attendance*

4. Is there a difference in student attendance over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students?
5. Is there a difference in student attendance over multiple school years between male and female high school students?
6. Are there differences in student attendance over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students?

*Sense of Belonging*

7. Is there a difference in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students?
8. Is there a difference in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between male and female high school students?
9. Are there differences in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students?

An analysis of the data was conducted through a mixed-design ANOVA to examine whether there are average score differences across the academic years of 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 for students' promotion, attendance, and reported sense of belonging across lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race. Cronk (2012) states a mixed-design ANOVA tests the effects of more than one independent variable. One of the independent variables must be between-subjects. One of the independent variables must be within-subjects (repeated measures) (Cronk, 2012). Since there are sub-groups in the analysis, the significance level for interaction between time (occasion) and sub-groups (e.g., lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race) will also be included. Of the 28 CSS questions, JCPS (2018) states a sense of belonging construct relates with three questions: I really like other students in my school, I feel that I belong in my school, and I feel like I am part of my school community. If  $p < .05$ , a significant main effect for the entire sample, sub-groups, or interaction effect of sub-groups and time will be found, and the null hypothesis will be rejected. If  $p > .05$ , no significant main effect for the entire sample, sub-groups, or interaction effect of sub-groups and time will be found, and the null hypothesis will be accepted.

If the ANOVA results are significant, a post-hoc contrast analysis will need to be conducted to see which pair of school years the significance lies. If significant differences are found, partial eta squared ( $\eta^2$ ) will be used to measure the effect sizes. To conduct a post-hoc contrast analysis, this study will compare school years 2015-16 to 2016-17, 2016-17 to 2017-18, 2017-18 to 2018-19, and 2015-16 to 2018-19. Because this study is conducting four tests, and therefore, inflating Type 1 error rate, this study will use a significance level of .013 (.05/4) instead of .05 (Cronk, 2012).

Stevens (2007) states since individual differences are the major reason for error variance, and the variability due to individual differences is removed from the error term, repeated measures designs are more powerful than completely randomized designs. Cronk (2012) notes one assumption of mixed-design ANOVA: the dependent variable should be normally distributed and measured on ratio or interval scale. This study meets both this assumption because the three dependent variables, student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging, are from the three independent variables, sub-groups (lunch status, gender, and race), within four school years. Thirdly, Stevens (2007) notes sphericity as a third assumption. This means the correlation between treatment levels is the same and is variance equality across different scores. If  $p < .05$ , sphericity is violated. If  $p > .05$ , sphericity is met. Carryover effects and that the order of treatments may make a difference, which can be dealt with by counterbalancing, are two potential disadvantages (Stevens, 2007). The fact that many few subjects are needed in a completely randomized sample and increased precision because of the smaller error term are two major advantages of repeated measures designs (Stevens, 2007).

## **Limitations**

There are threats to internal and external validity, and these threats were addressed through this study. The instrumentation, maturation, and selection of subjects are specific threats to internal validity that were discussed for this study (Cook & Campbell, 1979). The instrumentation threats include the CSS which only measure ninth-graders' perceptions regarding their Freshman Academy experience and not factual data because survey data only measures students' perceptions. Secondly, a different set of ninth-graders were in each of the three academic years used in the study. This matters because enrollment numbers, free-reduced lunch percentages, gender percentages, race percentages, and other factors vary from school year to school year. JCPS' Data Books allowed us to test whether the set of ninth-graders are similar or not (JCPS, 2018). To control for these threats, the CSS has been conducted every year since the 1996-97 school year. The survey is given to all parents, employees, and students in the fourth-grade and up, with over 100,000 surveys returned each year. This data is analyzed and used to develop strategies to direct for the future of JCPS. The CSS is a vital tool for informed discussions, planning, and progress monitoring of the district. A Likert Scale is used for the CSS.

The maturation threat is the level of implementation of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model at each of the 11 high schools. Some of the high schools in this study had Freshman Academies in place prior to the implementation of the Freshman Academies of Louisville model, which will alter the level of influence on the dependent variables, student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging. JCPS' Department of Transition Readiness completed a rubric of success on each of the 11

Freshman Academies of Louisville at the conclusion of the 2017-18 school year. These rubrics were used to address maturation (see Appendix A).

The last internal validity threat is the selection of subjects. Only first year freshmen were included in this study. Secondly, only 11 of 21 JCPS high schools were included in this study as only 11 high schools joined the Academies of Louisville model in the first year of implementation. This study only examines data from the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school years. Fairdale High School, Iroquois High School, and Atherton High School joined the Academies of Louisville during the second year of implementation and are not included in this study.

Reactive effects of experimental arrangements, generalizability, and population representation are the external validity threats to this study (Cook & Campbell, 1979). The survey does not include any identifying information, such as the students' names, to address the reactive effects of experimental arrangements. Even though the participants are aware they are completing the CSS, the students were not identified. The generalizability and population representation threats are being addressed in this study by including all the Freshman Academies of Louisville high schools in the 2017-18 school year. Limiting the generalizability of the findings, this study only focused on one large, urban school district in the Southeast United States. With the internal and external validity threats being addressed in this study, the results should be beneficial to JCPS and other districts/schools through providing the Freshman Academies of Louisville outcome metric data needed to determine the success of the model after the first two years of implementation.

## CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine if there are differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and reported sense of belonging between lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race across the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville for the academic years of 2015-16 to 2018-19. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and JCPS being in the virtual learning context in 2019-20 and 2020-21, data from those school years were not used in this study. This one-group time-series design of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model on student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging was examined through a quantitative methodological approach. Hypothesis testing was based on a mixed-design ANOVA to examine whether there are average score differences across the academic years of 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 for students' promotion, attendance, and reported sense of belonging across lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race. Data was obtained from existing datasets from JCPS' Data Management Center for the promotion and attendance dependent variables, and data was collected through existing data from JCPS' CSS for the sense of belonging dependent variable.

This study was conducted in JCPS, a large urban school district in Jefferson County, Kentucky. The selection of the sample was due to JCPS implementing the

Freshman Academies of Louisville model and the large sample size of Freshman Academies ( $N = 11$ ). JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across the following 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year: The Academy at Shawnee, Ballard, Doss, Jeffersontown, Marion C. Moore School, Pleasure Ridge Park, Seneca, Southern, Valley, Waggener, and Western.

Table 7 and Figure 5 show the 11 JCPS high schools that were a part of the Freshman Academies of Louisville initiative. Under each academic year of the study, the promotion rates from ninth to tenth-grade are represented within the Freshman Academies of Louisville at each specific school. The average promotion rate for each academic year of the study is also included. This table and figure report average promotion rates increased from 2015-16 (85.07%) to 2016-17 (85.88%), from 2016-17 (85.88%) to 2017-18 (88.78%), and slightly declined from 2017-18 (88.78%) to 2018-19 (88.35%). The promotion rates increased or decreased across each school year varied by school.



**Table 7***Freshman Academies of Louisville Promotion Rates by School Years*

School	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16
Ballard	94.03%	95.85%	90.93%	92.83%
Doss	90.37%	85.58%	89.08%	84.56%
Jeffersontown	82.67%	83.26%	77.51%	80.63%
Marion C. Moore School	96.41%	92.41%	90.98%	88.40%
Pleasure Ridge Park	95.35%	86.98%	94.76%	92.94%
Seneca	82.26%	88.37%	77.57%	86.10%
Southern	94.75%	96.69%	92.46%	91.67%
The Academy @ Shawnee	79.82%	87.37%	77.21%	79.55%
Valley	87.96%	90.79%	94.12%	85.19%
Waggener	88.48%	90.82%	85.84%	89.37%
Western	79.73%	78.42%	74.19%	64.58%
Average	88.35%	88.78%	85.88%	85.07%

**Figure 5**

*Freshman Academies of Louisville Promotion Rates by School Years*

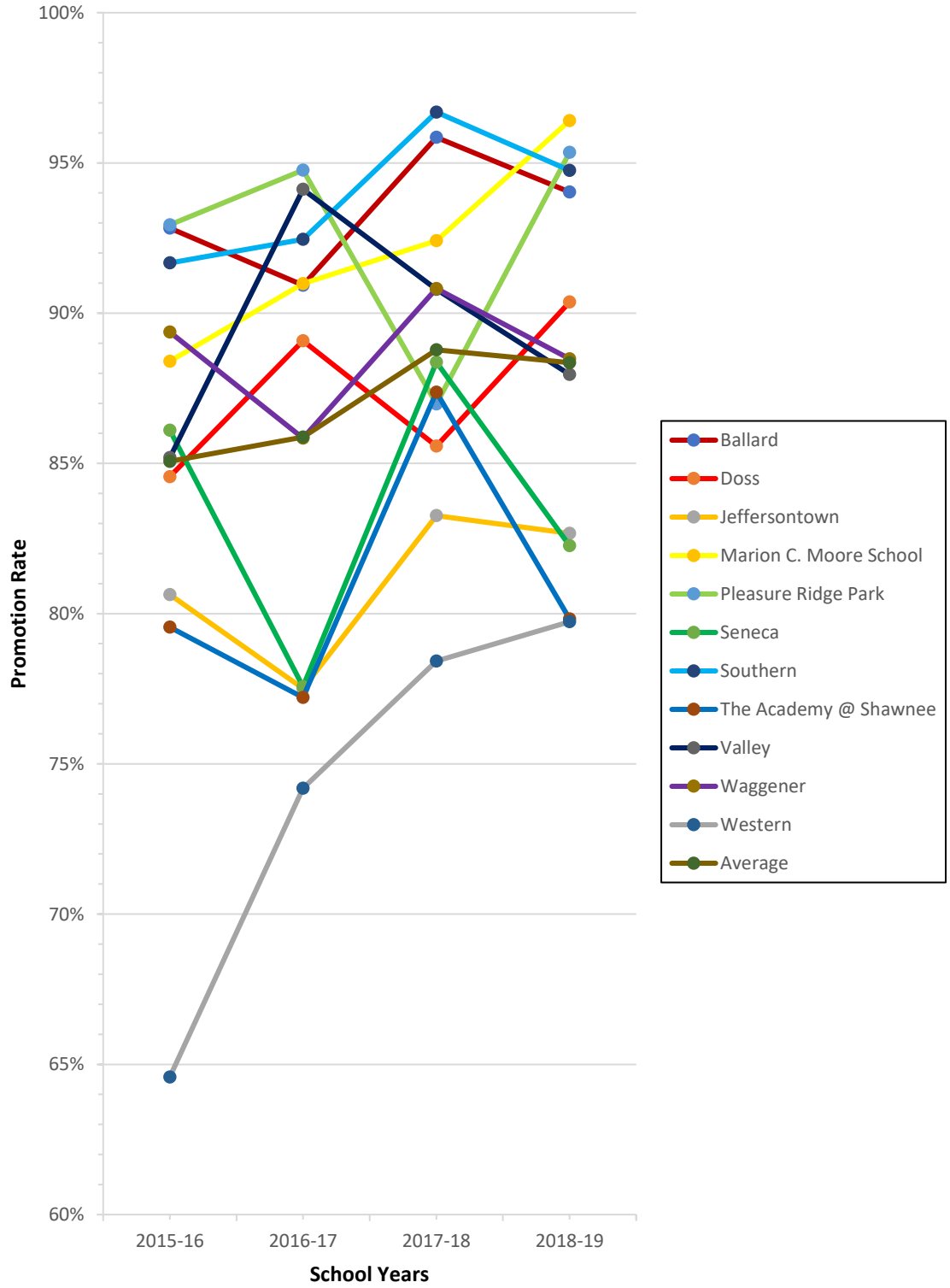


Table 8 and Figure 6 show the 11 JCPS high schools that were a part of the Freshman Academies of Louisville initiative. Under each academic year of the study, the attendance rates are represented within the Freshman Academies of Louisville at each specific school. The average attendance rate for each academic year of the study is also included. This table and figure report average attendance rates decreased from 2015-16 (91.83%) to 2016-17 (91.26%), from 2016-17 (91.26%) to 2017-18 (90.82%), and slightly increased from 2017-18 (90.82%) to 2018-19 (91.07%). The attendance rates increased or decreased across each school year varied by school.

**Table 8**

*Freshman Academies of Louisville Attendance Rates by School Years*

School	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16
Ballard	94.73%	94.35%	93.98%	95.25%
Doss	92.16%	90.29%	91.38%	91.00%
Jeffersontown	92.08%	91.70%	92.57%	94.54%
Marion C. Moore School	92.07%	91.79%	91.65%	93.44%
Pleasure Ridge Park	91.16%	90.73%	92.25%	92.66%
Seneca	91.13%	91.10%	91.84%	91.78%
Southern	91.19%	91.88%	91.50%	93.08%
The Academy @ Shawnee	88.51%	87.51%	89.70%	87.87%
Valley	88.30%	89.24%	89.91%	89.02%
Waggener	91.46%	91.52%	90.24%	92.47%
Western	89.02%	88.96%	88.83%	89.07%
Average	91.07%	90.82%	91.26%	91.83%

**Figure 6**

*Freshman Academies of Louisville Attendance Rates by School Years*

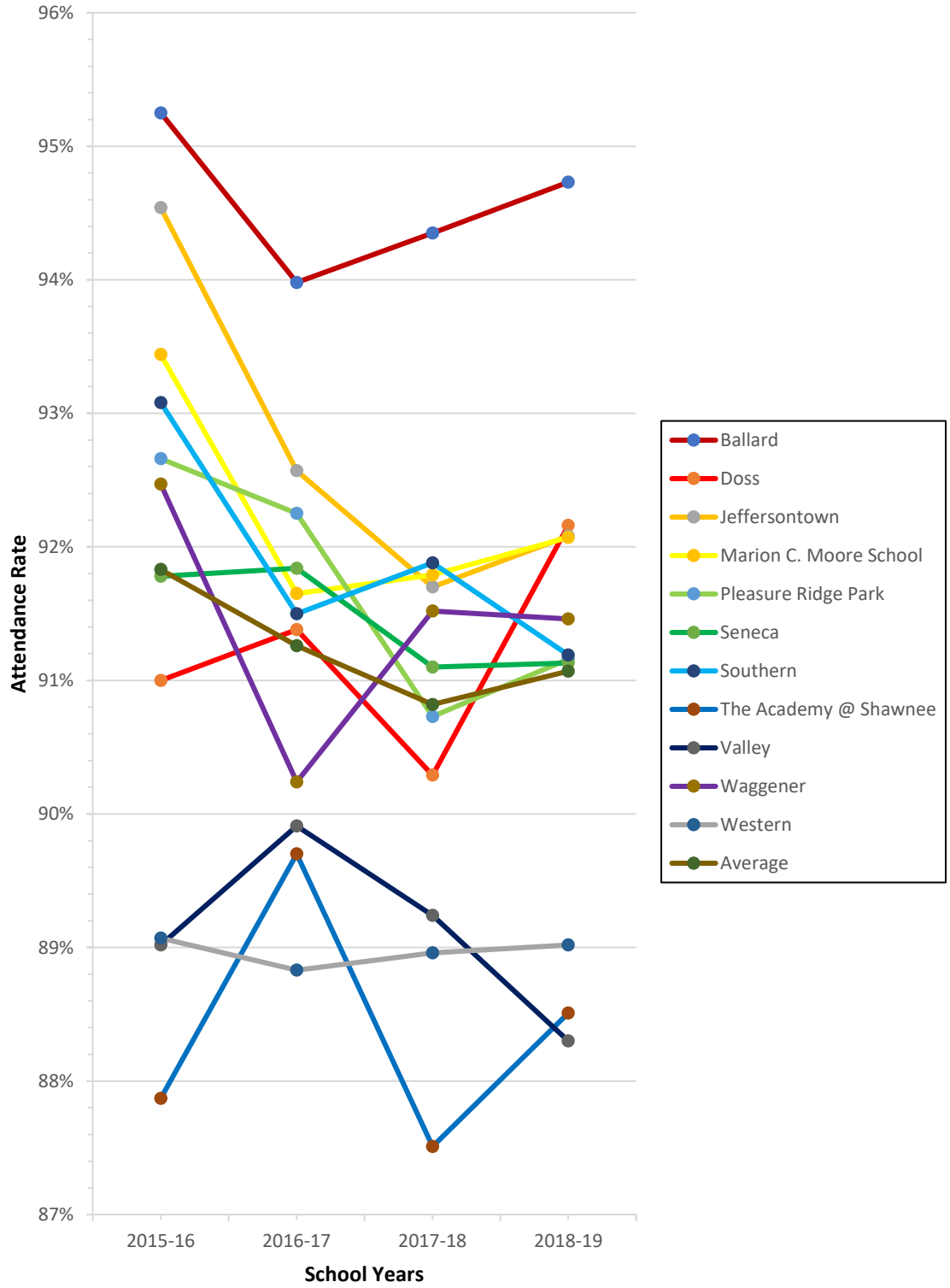


Table 9 and Figure 7 show the 11 JCPS high schools that were a part of the Freshman Academies of Louisville initiative. Under each academic year of the study, the reported sense of belonging rates through existing data from JCPS' CSS are represented within the Freshman Academies of Louisville at each specific school. The average sense of belonging rate for each academic year of the study is also included. This table and figure report average sense of belonging rates decreased from 2015-16 (65.74%) to 2016-17 (65.34%), from 2016-17 (65.34%) to 2017-18 (63.04%), and increased from 2017-18 (63.04%) to 2018-19 (65.70%). The sense of belonging rates increased or decreased across each school year varied by school.

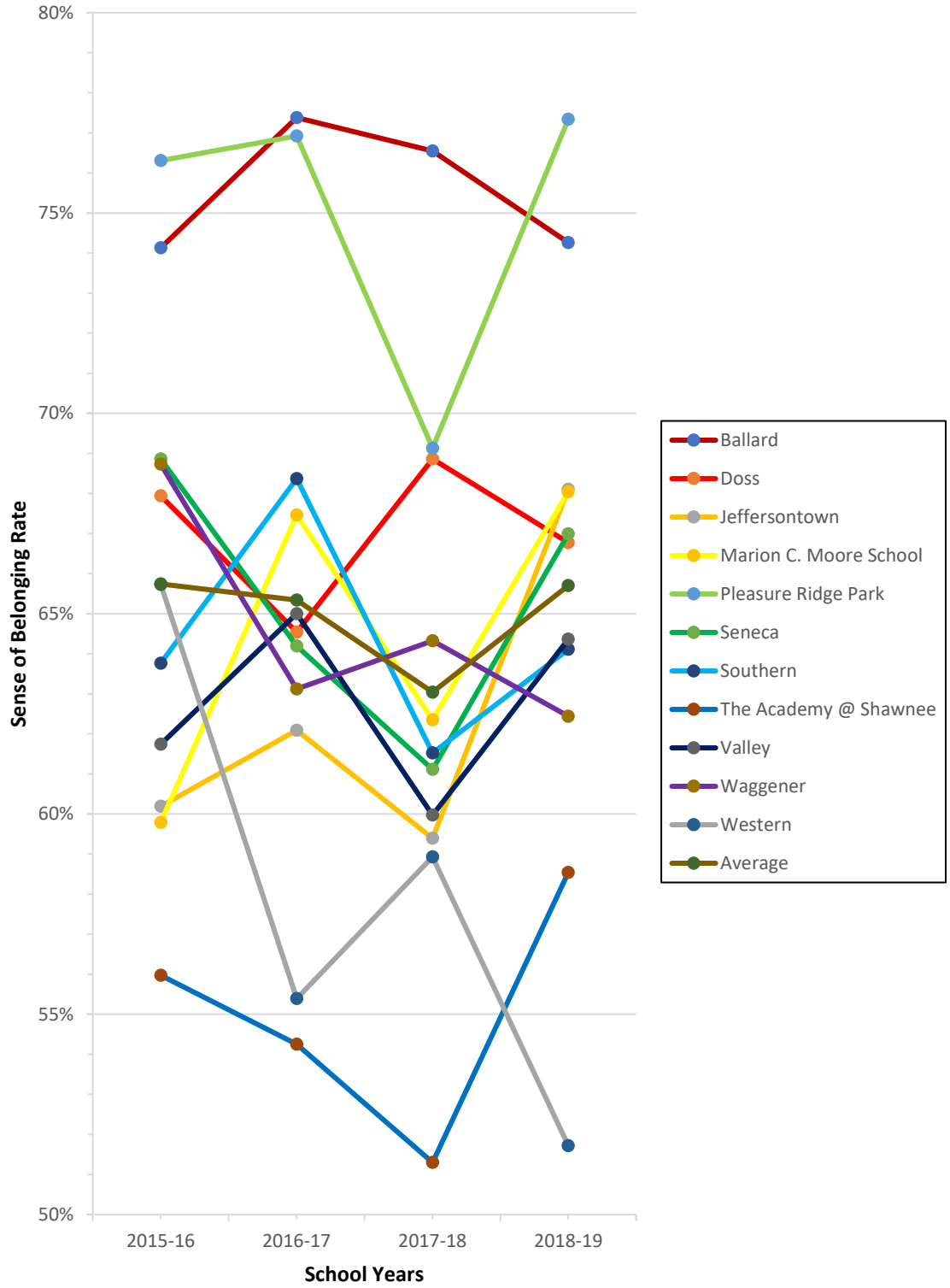
**Table 9**

*Freshman Academies of Louisville Sense of Belonging Rates by School Years*

School	2018-19	2017-18	2016-17	2015-16
Ballard	74.26%	76.55%	77.38%	74.13%
Doss	66.77%	68.86%	64.54%	67.94%
Jeffersontown	68.10%	59.39%	62.09%	60.19%
Marion C. Moore School	68.04%	62.35%	67.46%	59.79%
Pleasure Ridge Park	77.34%	69.13%	76.92%	76.31%
Seneca	66.99%	61.11%	64.19%	68.86%
Southern	64.11%	61.52%	68.37%	63.76%
The Academy @ Shawnee	58.54%	51.30%	54.25%	55.97%
Valley	64.36%	59.97%	65.00%	61.74%
Waggener	62.44%	64.32%	63.12%	68.73%
Western	51.72%	58.93%	55.39%	65.73%
Average	65.70%	63.04%	65.34%	65.74%

**Figure 7**

*Freshman Academies of Louisville Sense of Belonging Rates by School Years*



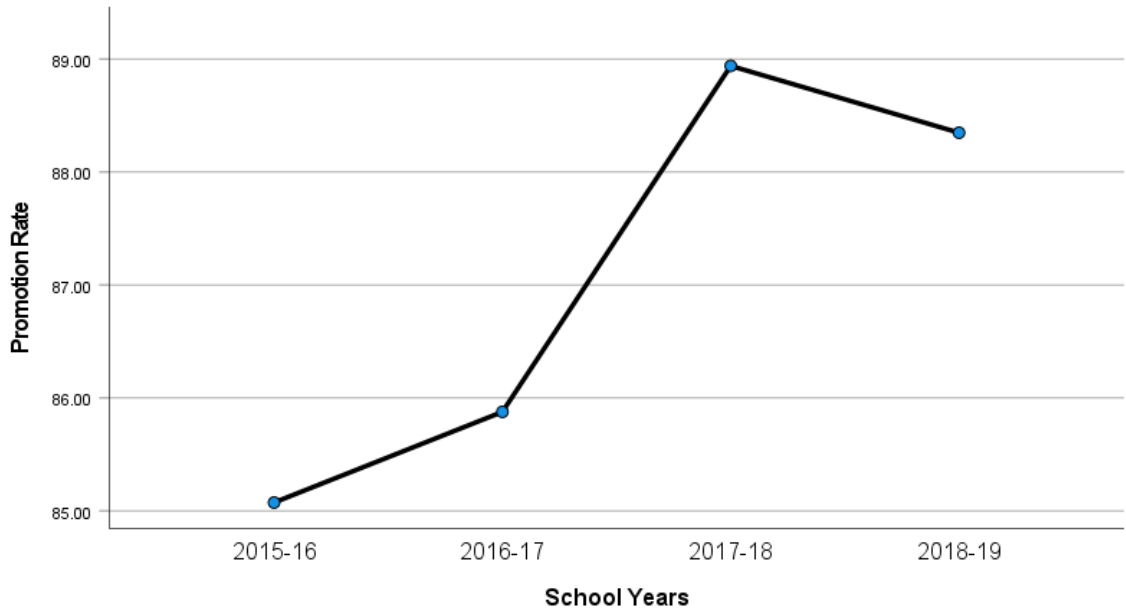
## **Analysis**

### ***Promotion***

A one-way repeated-measures ANOVA was used comparing student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over four school years: 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19. A statistical difference was found in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over four school years ( $F[3,30] = 3.21, p < .05$ ). Using  $\eta^2$ , the effect size was large at 0.24. Average promotion rates increased from 2015-16 ( $M = 85.08, SD = 8.16$ ) to 2016-17 ( $M = 85.87, SD = 7.76$ ), from 2016-17 ( $M = 85.87, SD = 7.76$ ) to 2017-18 ( $M = 88.94, SD = 5.51$ ), and declined from 2017-18 ( $M = 88.94, SD = 5.51$ ) to 2018-19 ( $M = 88.35, SD = 6.39$ ). Figure 8 shows how promotion rates increased or decreased over multiple school years. Most notably, promotion rates were higher once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year.

**Figure 8**

*Student Promotion from Ninth to Tenth-grade over Four School Years*



Research Question 1: Is there a difference in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students?

A 2 x 4 mixed-design ANOVA was used to examine the effects of lunch status (free/reduced lunch and paid lunch) and school years (2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19) on student promotion. The main effect for school years was significant ( $F[3,60] = 4.63, p < .05$ ). Using  $\eta^2$ , the effect size was large at 0.19. The main effect for lunch status was also significant ( $F[1,20] = 7.36, p < .05$ ). Using  $\eta^2$ , the effect size was large at 0.27. Student promotion was found to differ across school years and lunch status.

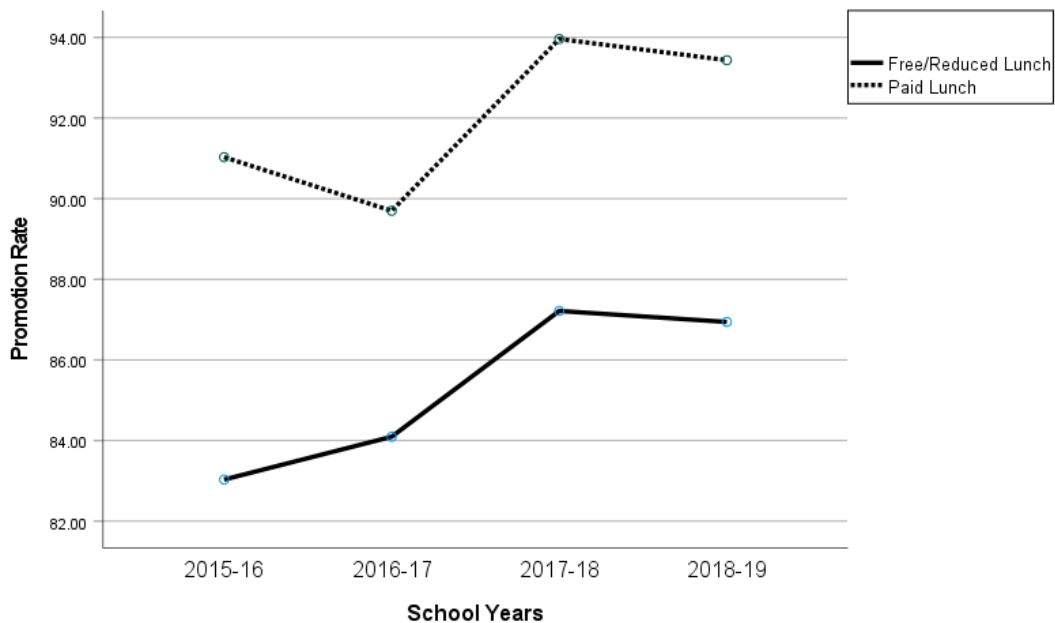


In addition, there was no interaction effect found between school years and lunch status,  $F[3,60] = 0.29, p > .05$ .

In conclusion, there is a difference in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students. Figure 9 shows how promotion rates increased or decreased over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students. Most notably, promotion rates were higher for both free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year.

**Figure 9**

*Effects of School Years and Lunch Status on Student Promotion*



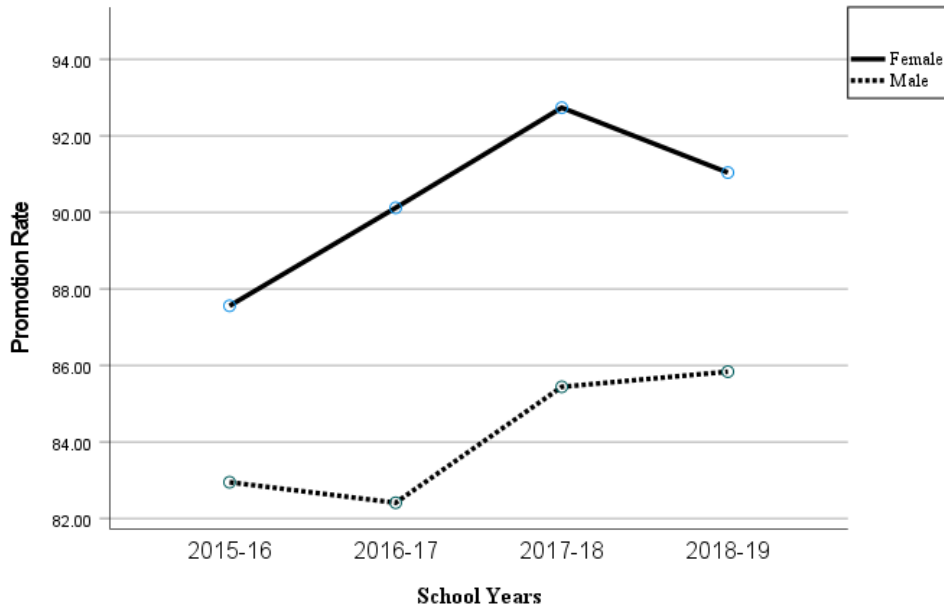
Research Question 2: Is there a difference in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between male and female high school students?

A 2 x 4 mixed-design ANOVA was used to examine the effects of gender (females and males) and school years (2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19) on student promotion. The main effect for school years was significant ( $F[3,60] = 3.75, p < .05$ ). Using  $\eta^2$ , the effect size was large at 0.16. The main effect for gender was also significant ( $F[1,20] = 5.26, p < .05$ ). Using  $\eta^2$ , the effect size was large at 0.21. Student promotion was found to differ across school years and gender. In addition, there was no interaction effect found between school years and gender,  $F[3,60] = 0.67, p > .05$ .

In conclusion, there is a difference in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between male and female high school students. Figure 10 shows how promotion rates increased or decreased over multiple school years between male and female high school students. Most notably, promotion rates were higher for both male and female high school students once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year. Furthermore, promotion rates declined for females in 2018-19, the last academic year of the study.

**Figure 10**

*Effects of School Years and Gender on Student Promotion*



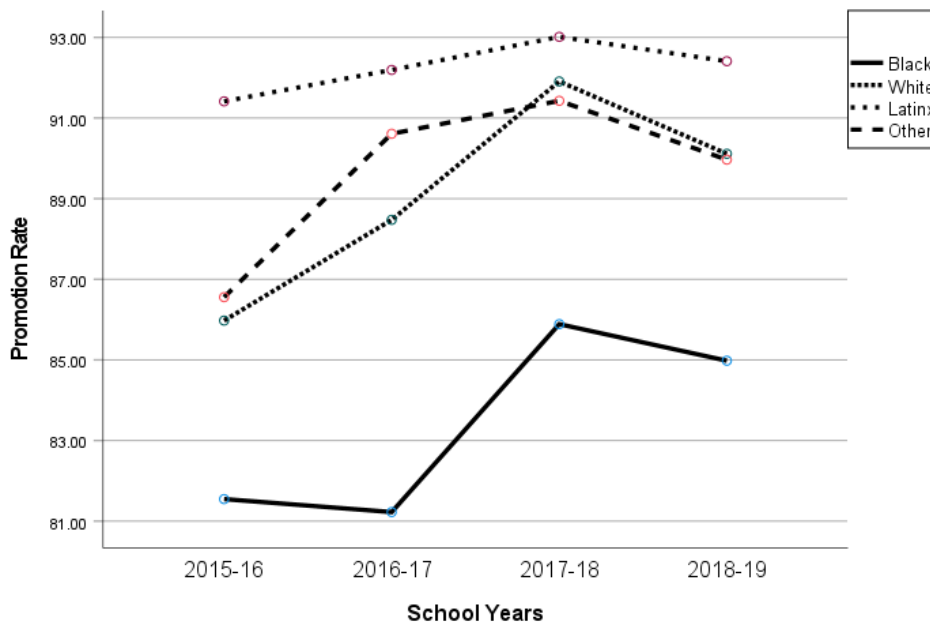
Research Question 3: Are there differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students?

A 4 x 4 mixed-design ANOVA was used to examine the effects of race (Black, White, Latinx, and Other) and school years (2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19) on student promotion. The main effect for school years was significant ( $F[3,120] = 2.69, p < .05$ ). Using  $\eta^2$ , the effect size was medium at 0.06. The main effect for race was also significant ( $F[3,40] = 3.33, p < .05$ ). Using  $\eta^2$ , the effect size was large at 0.20. Student promotion was found to differ across school years and race. In addition, there was no interaction effect found between school years and race,  $F[9,120] = 0.29, p > .05$ .

In conclusion, there are differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students. Figure 11 shows how promotion rates increased or decreased over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students. Most notably, promotion rates were higher for the most part for all racially diverse high school students once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year.

**Figure 11**

*Effects of School Years and Race on Student Promotion*



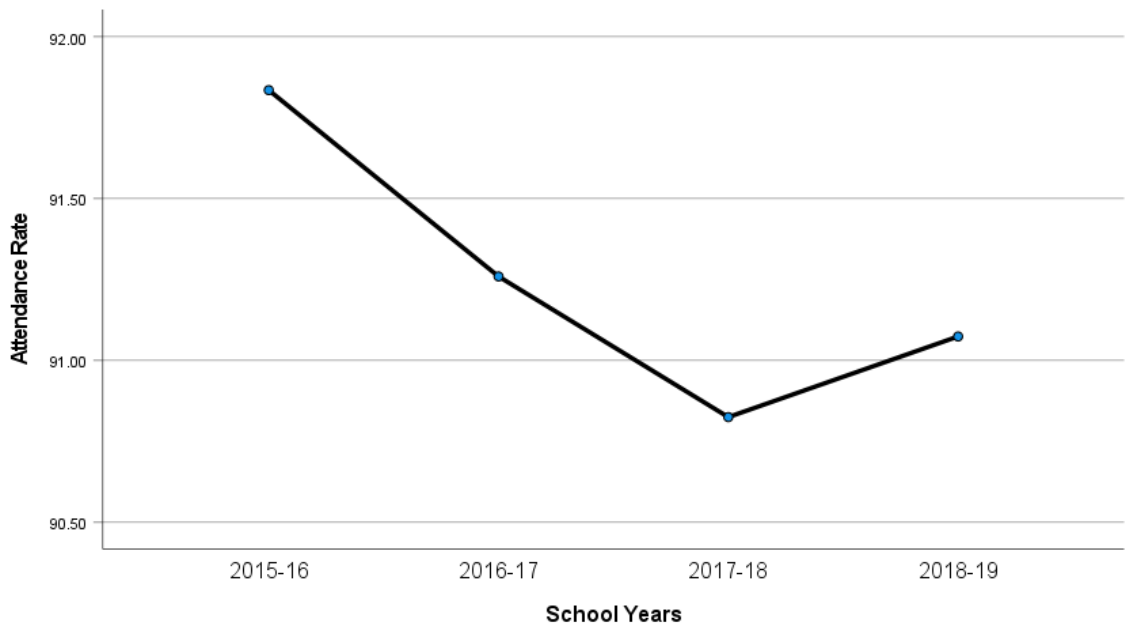
**Attendance**

A one-way repeated-measures ANOVA was used comparing student attendance over four school years: 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19. A statistical difference was found in student attendance over four school years ( $F[3,30] = 4.05, p < .05$ ). Using  $\eta^2$ , the effect size was large at 0.29. Average attendance rates declined from 2015-16 ( $M$

= 91.83,  $SD = 2.37$ ) to 2016-17 ( $M = 91.26$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ), from 2016-17 ( $M = 91.26$ ,  $SD = 1.48$ ) to 2017-18 ( $M = 90.28$ ,  $SD = 1.82$ ), but increased from 2017-18 ( $M = 90.28$ ,  $SD = 1.82$ ) to 2018-19 ( $M = 91.07$ ,  $SD = 1.88$ ). Figure 12 reports attendance rates across academic year's 2015-16 to 2018-19. Attendance rates declined from academic year's 2015-16 to 2017-18, but increased the following 2018-19 academic year.

**Figure 12**

*Student Attendance over Four School Years*



Research Question 4: Is there a difference in student attendance over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students?

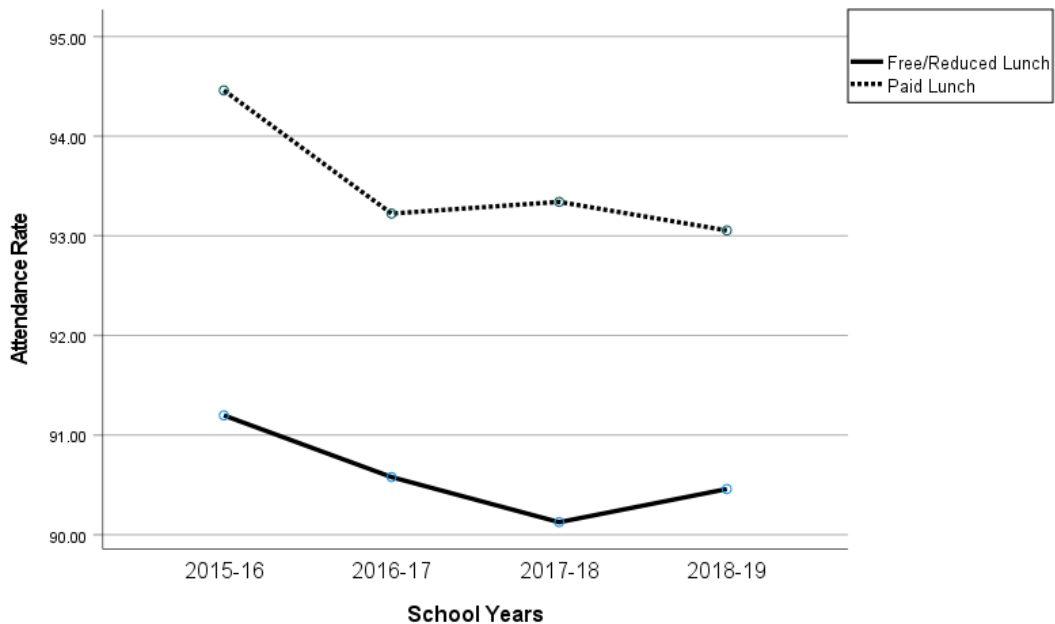
A 2 x 4 mixed-design ANOVA was used to examine the effects of lunch status (free/reduced lunch and paid lunch) and school years (2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19) on student attendance. The main effect for school years was significant

( $F[3,60] = 5.48, p < .05$ ). Using  $\eta^2$ , the effect size was large at 0.22. The main effect for lunch status was also significant ( $F[1,20] = 22.63, p < .05$ ). Using  $\eta^2$ , the effect size was large at 0.53. Student attendance was found to differ across school years and lunch status. In addition, there was no interaction effect found between school years and lunch status,  $F[3,60] = 0.65, p > .05$ .

In conclusion, there is a difference in student attendance over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students. Figure 13 shows how attendance rates increased or decreased over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students. Most notably, attendance rates were lower for the most part for both free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year.

**Figure 13**

*Effects of School Years and Lunch Status on Student Attendance*



Research Question 5: Is there a difference in student attendance over multiple school years between male and female high school students?

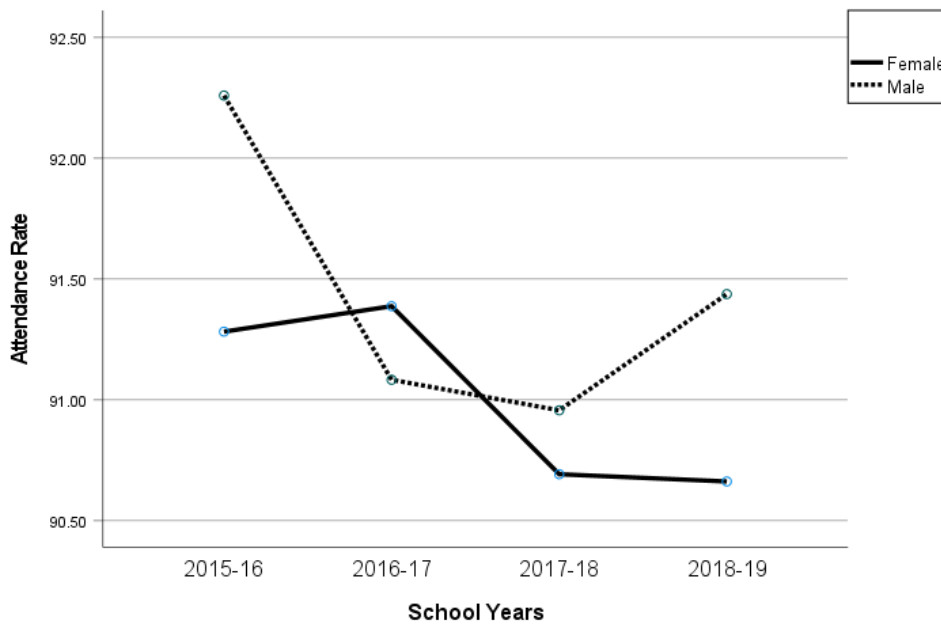
A 2 x 4 mixed-design ANOVA was used to examine the effects of gender (females and males) and school years (2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19) on student attendance. The main effect for school years was significant ( $F[3,60] = 4.54, p < .05$ ). Using  $\eta^2$ , the effect size was large at 0.19. The main effect for gender was not significant ( $F[1,20] = 0.30, p > .05$ ). Student attendance was found to differ across school years, but not by gender. In addition, there was no interaction effect found between school years and gender,  $F[3,60] = 2.29, p > .05$ .

In conclusion, there is not a difference in student attendance over multiple school years between male and female high school students. Figure 14 shows how attendance

rates increased or decreased over multiple school years between male and female high school students. Most notably, attendance rates were lower for the most part for both male and female students once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year.

**Figure 14**

*Effects of School Years and Gender on Student Attendance*



Research Question 6: Are there differences in student attendance over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students?

A 4 x 4 mixed-design ANOVA was used to examine the effects of race (Black, White, Latinx, and Other) and school years (2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19) on student attendance. The main effect for school years was significant ( $F[3,120] = 4.31, p < .05$ ). Using  $\eta^2$ , the effect size was medium to large at 0.10. The main effect for race was also significant ( $F[3,40] = 3.65, p < .05$ ). Using  $\eta^2$ , the effect size was large at

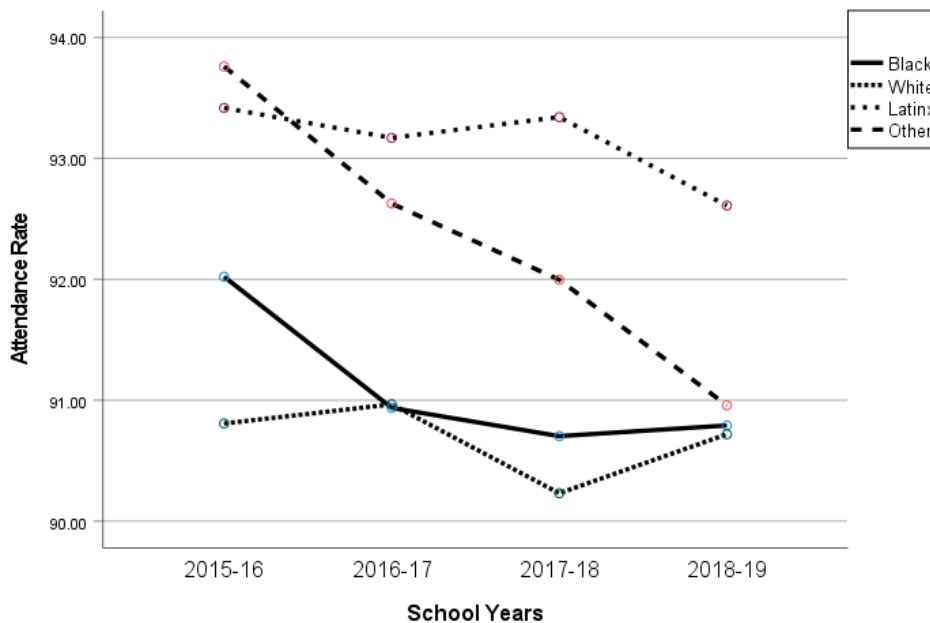


0.22. Student attendance was found to differ across school years and race. In addition, there was no interaction effect found between school years and race,  $F[9,120] = 1.10, p > .05$ .

In conclusion, there are differences in student attendance over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students. Figure 15 shows how attendance rates increased or decreased over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students. Most notably, attendance rates were lower for the most part for all racially diverse high school students once JCPs' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year.

**Figure 15**

*Effects of School Years and Race on Student Attendance*

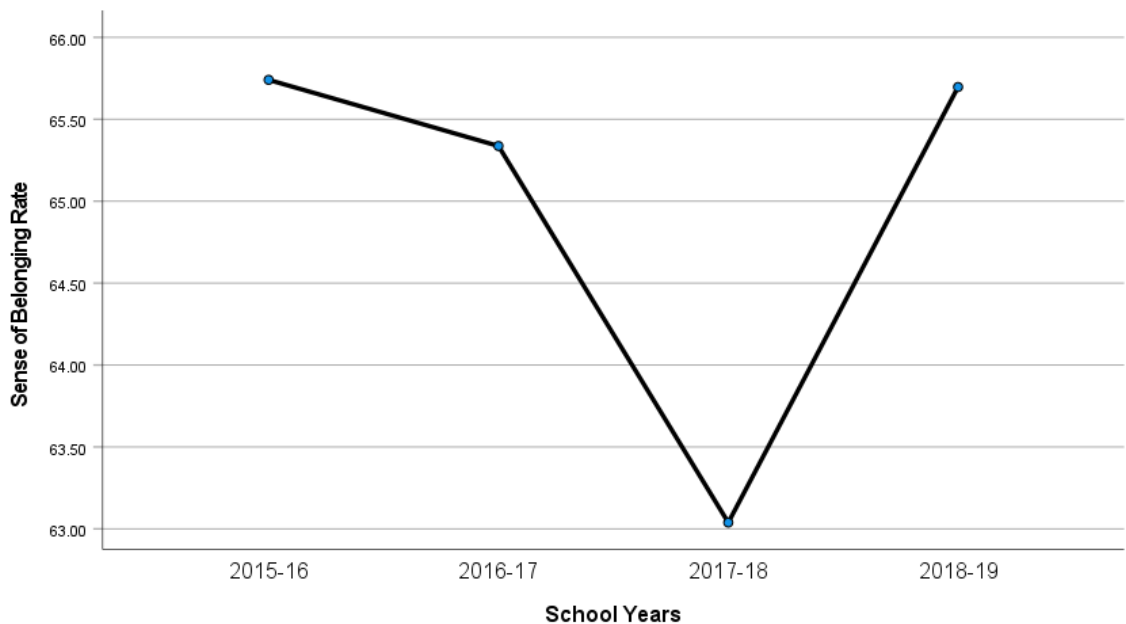


### *Sense of Belonging*

A one-way repeated-measures ANOVA was used comparing student sense of belonging over four school years: 2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19. No statistical difference was found in student sense of belonging over four school years ( $F[3,30] = 1.63, p > .05$ ). No significant difference exists among 2015-16 ( $M = 65.74, SD = 6.22$ ), 2016-17 ( $M = 65.34, SD = 7.30$ ), 2017-18 ( $M = 63.04, SD = 6.63$ ), and 2018-19 ( $M = 65.70, SD = 6.96$ ) means. Figure 13 shows how student sense of belonging rates increased or decreased over multiple school years. Based on the data in Figure 16, student sense of belonging rates were the lowest once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year, but increased the following school year in the 2018-19.

**Figure 16**

*Student Sense of Belonging over Four School Years*



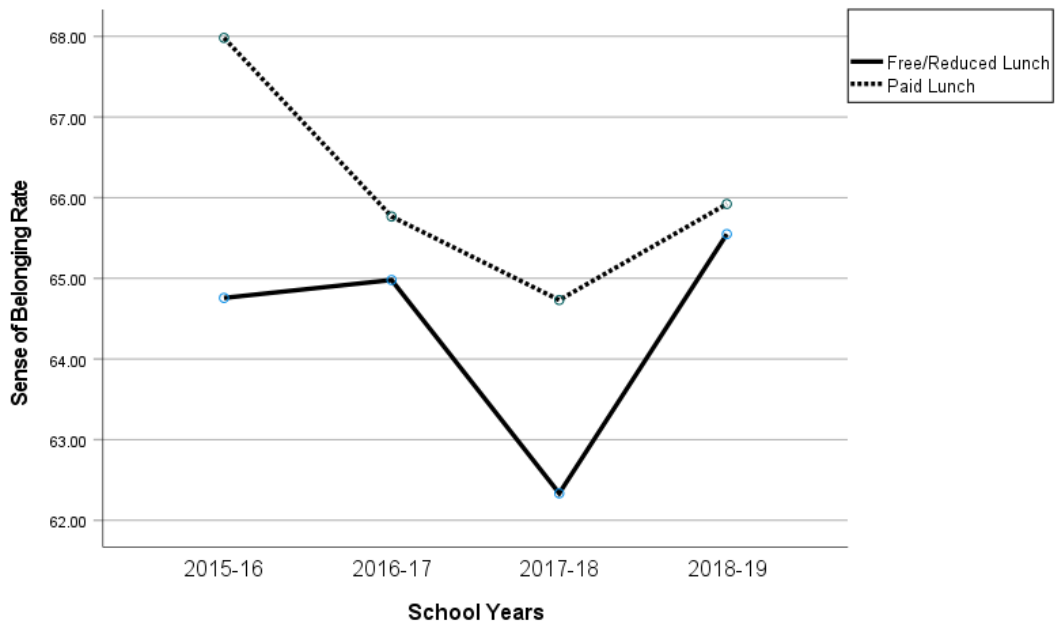
Research Question 7: Is there a difference in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students?

A 2 x 4 mixed-design ANOVA was used to examine the effects of lunch status (free/reduced lunch and paid lunch) and school years (2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19) on student sense of belonging. The main effect for school years was significant ( $F[3,60] = 1.22, p < .05$ ). Using  $\eta^2$ , the effect size was medium at 0.06. The main effect for lunch status was not significant ( $F[1,20] = 0.39, p > .05$ ). Student sense of belonging was found to differ across school years, but not by lunch status. In addition, there was no interaction effect found between school years and lunch status,  $F[3,60] = 0.37, p > .05$ .

In conclusion, there is not a difference in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students. Figure 17 shows how student sense of belonging rates increased or decreased over multiple school years between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students. Most notably, student sense of belonging rates were lower for the most part for both free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year.

**Figure 17**

*Effects of School Years and Lunch Status on Student Sense of Belonging*



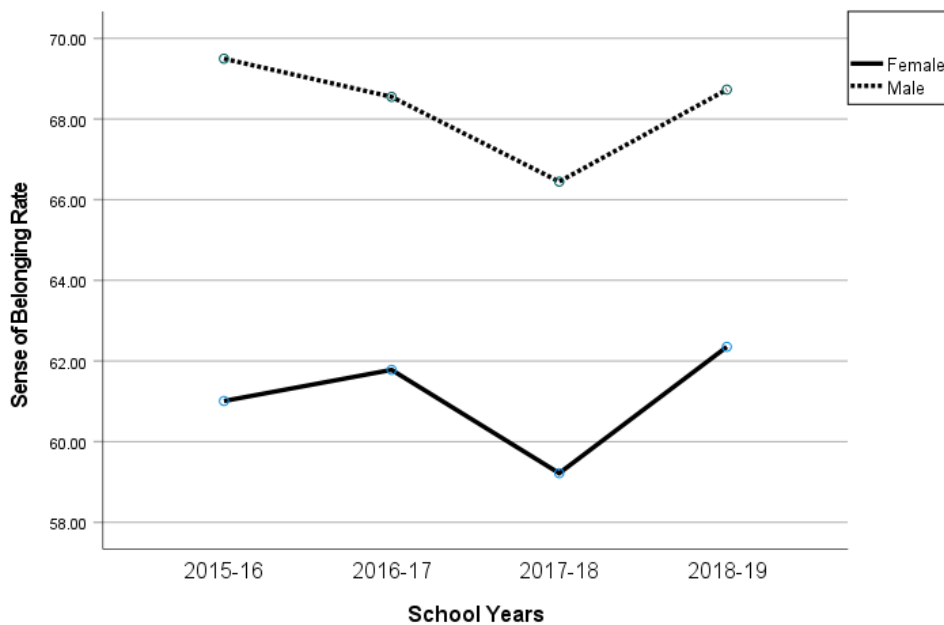
Research Question 8: Is there a difference in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between male and female high school students?

A 2 x 4 mixed-design ANOVA was used to examine the effects of gender (females and males) and school years (2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19) on student sense of belonging. The main effect for school years was not significant ( $F[3,60] = 1.81, p > .05$ ). The main effect for gender was significant ( $F[1,20] = 6.45, p < .05$ ). Using  $\eta^2$ , the effect size was large at 0.24. Student sense of belonging was not found to differ across school years, but was found to differ across gender. In addition, there was no interaction effect found between school years and gender,  $F[3,60] = 0.16, p > .05$ .

In conclusion, there is not a difference in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between male and female high school students. Figure 18 shows how student sense of belonging rates increased or decreased over multiple school years between male and female high school students. Most notably, student sense of belonging rates were lower for the most part for both male and female students once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year.

**Figure 18**

*Effects of School Years and Gender on Student Sense of Belonging*



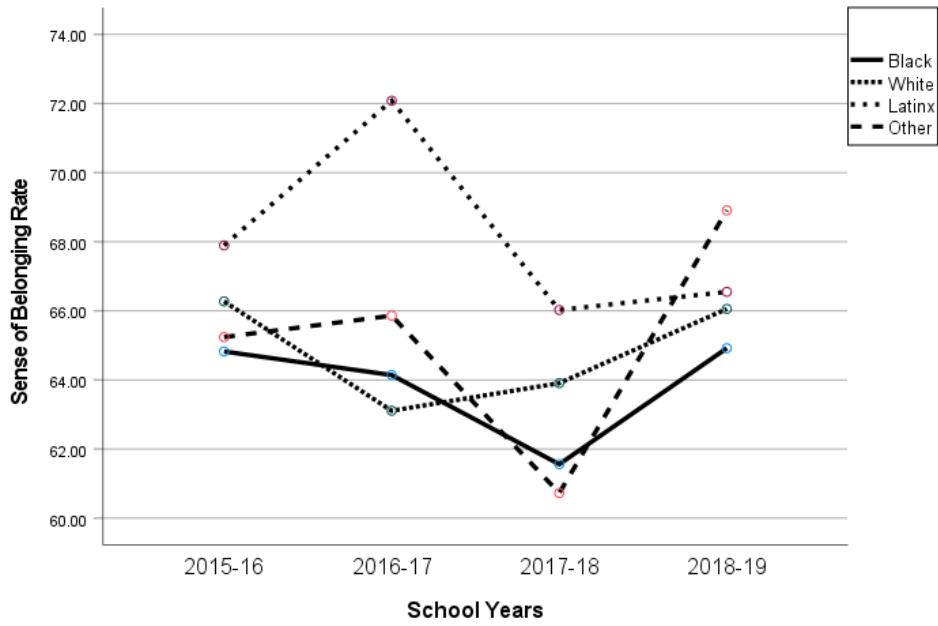
Research Question 9: Are there differences in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students?

A 4 x 4 mixed-design ANOVA was used to examine the effects of race (Black, White, Latinx, and Other) and school years (2015-16, 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19) on student sense of belonging. The main effect for school years was not significant ( $F[3,117] = 1.75, p > .05$ ). The main effect for race was also not significant ( $F[3,39] = 0.58, p > .05$ ). Student sense of belonging was not found to differ across school years or race. In addition, there was no interaction effect found between school years and race,  $F[9,117] = 0.69, p > .05$ .

In conclusion, there are not differences in students' reported sense of belonging over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students. Figure 19 shows how student sense of belonging rates increased or decreased over multiple school years between racially diverse high school students. Most notably, student sense of belonging rates were lower for the most part for all racially diverse high school students once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year.

**Figure 19**

*Effects of School Years and Race on Student Sense of Belonging*



## CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The middle school years are a pivotal time in a student's life in which they deal with a range of issues, one of which is high school transition (Osler & Walden, 2012). To facilitate the transition from middle to high school, freshman academies seek to increase student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and sense of belonging (JCPS, 2018). This study examined if there were differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and reported sense of belonging between lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race across the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville over school year's 2015-16 to 2018-19. The findings of this study suggested there is no clear trend in scores across JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville. The key outcomes of student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging vary by school and more research is needed to fully understand how school-level factors may contribute to these key outcomes.

Remarkably, this study found there is not a significant main effect in students' reported sense of belonging between free/reduced lunch and paid lunch eligible high school students as well as between racially diverse high school students. Through an equity lens, the Freshman Academies of Louisville model is a universal intervention and supports sub-groups equally as it relates to students' sense of belonging. This is



important because schools must provide interventions that promote equity toward increasing students' sense of belonging for all students.

There were many trends in the literature review as it relates to JCPS and the findings of this study. Freshman academies seek to increase student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade as described in Appendix A. Schools with extensive transition programs such as freshman academies had significantly lower dropout and failure rates than schools that did not offer comprehensive program (Cauley & Jovanovich, 2006). Cauley and Jovanovich (2006) found more students fail ninth-grade than any other grade of school. Furthermore, minority and poor students are twice as likely to be retained. Moller et al. (2006) found low socio-economic students are more than twice as likely to be retained. Likewise, Black students are almost twice as likely to be retained as white students. Similar to the literature, this study found free/reduced lunch, male, and Black students were more likely to be retained. Most notably, this study found promotion rates were higher once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year.

Secondly, freshman academies aim to increase student attendance and success through multiple supports and interventions as described in Appendix A. Freshman academies have a positive impact on attendance and retention (Osler & Waden, 2012). The proportion of chronically absent students nationwide in ninth-grade is 14.7% (Utah Education Policy Center, 2012). Maynard et al. (2017) revealed minorities had the highest truancy. Furthermore, low socio-economic students experienced higher rates of truancy. Similar and unlike the literature, this study found free/reduced lunch, female, and white students had the highest truancy rates. Moreover, this study found attendance

rates were lower once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year, but increased the following school year in the 2018-19.

Thirdly, freshman academies aim to increase students' sense of belonging as described in Appendix A. Barnes and Eadens (2014) found the effective implementation of the ninth-grade academy promoted a sense of belonging for students of color. Findings indicated 65% of the students of color had a positive experience at the ninth-grade academy, and they seemed to feel they learned from their teachers and received support. They favored an enclosed environment, and the effective implementation of the ninth-grade academy promoted a sense of belonging for students of color. There was evidence to suggest that students at the targeted ninth-grade academy were motivated to learn, but what actually motivated these students was not clear and could be researched in future studies. Singh et al. (2010) revealed school belonging was a significant influence on school outcomes for minority students. Like and unlike the literature, this study found paid lunch, male, and Latinx students reported higher sense of belonging. Furthermore, this study found student sense of belonging rates were the lowest once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year, but increased the following school year in the 2018-19. Future research may want to explore external variables that might affect students' sense of belonging to school such as small learning communities or freshman academies (Davis et al., 2014).

Overall, the literature and results of this study found minority, low socio-economic, and males are the most at-risk students in schools today. This research provided JCPS with the Freshman Academies of Louisville outcome metric data needed

to determine the success of the model after the first two years of implementation by examining if there were differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and reported sense of belonging between lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race across the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville over school years 2015-16 to 2018-19. Furthermore, this study addressed the gaps in literature needed to compare the student outcomes who attend traditional schools that do not use any type of freshman academy with the student outcomes of schools that do have a freshman academy model (Osler & Walden, 2012). More narrowly, this study looked at differences in these schools across student sub-groups (lunch status, gender, and race) to shed light on how student sub-group outcomes may be changing over time. It provided the research needed to better understand the relationship between school structure, in this case the freshman academy model, and student retention (Moller et al., 2006).

### **Limitations**

There are threats to internal and external validity, and these threats were addressed through this study. The instrumentation, maturation, and selection of subjects are specific threats to internal validity of this study (Cook & Campbell, 1979). Cook and Campbell (1979) state instrumentation is the changes in the instrument, observers, or scorers which may produce changes in outcomes. The instrumentation threats in this research include the CSS which only measure ninth-graders' perceptions regarding their Freshman Academy experience and not factual data. Secondly, a different set of ninth-graders were in each of the three academic years used in the study. To control for these threats in this study, the CSS has been conducted every year since the 1996-97 school year. The survey is given to all parents, employees, and students in the fourth-grade and

up, with over 100,000 surveys returned each year. This data is analyzed and used to develop strategies to direct for the future of JCPS. The CSS is a vital tool for informed discussions, planning, and progress monitoring of the district. A Likert Scale is used for the CSS. To further overcome these threats, this study used aggregated (school-level) data from the same 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville across the academic years of 2015-16 to 2018-19. Future research could use disaggregated (student-level) data that would target resources for specific groups of freshmen that need them most.

Cook and Campbell (1979) assert maturation as the processes within subjects which act as a function of the passage of time. The maturation threat in this study is the level of implementation of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model at each of the 11 high schools. Some of the high schools in this study had Freshman Academies in place prior to the implementation of the Freshman Academies of Louisville model. JCPS' Department of Transition Readiness completed a rubric of success on each of the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville at the conclusion of the 2017-18 school year (see Appendix A). For example, one freshman academy core feature is to have a freshman academy vision and mission statement. To determine the level of implementation for this core feature, each school would be rated as developed, in development, or does not exist. These rubrics will be used to address maturation by rating each freshman academy core feature as effective, developing, or not met at each specific school.

The last internal validity threat is the selection of subjects. Cook and Campbell (1979) define selection of subjects as the biases which may result in selection of comparison groups. All incoming freshmen from middle school, first year freshmen, automatically enroll in the freshman academy. Students who repeat their freshman year

progress to an upperclassman academy and are not included in this study. Secondly, only 11 of 21 JCPS high schools were included in this study as only 11 high schools joined the Academies of Louisville model in the first year of implementation. This study only examined data from the 2017-18 and 2018-19 school year. Fairdale High School, Iroquois High School, and Atherton High School joined the Academies of Louisville during the second year of implementation and were not included in this study.

Reactive effects of experimental arrangements, generalizability, and population representation are the external validity threats to this study (Cook & Campbell, 1979). The survey does not include any identifying information, such as the students' names, to address the reactive effects of experimental arrangements. Even though the participants are aware they are completing the CSS, the students will not be identified. The generalizability and population representation threats are being addressed in this study by including all the Freshman Academies of Louisville high schools in the 2017-18 school year. Limiting the generalizability of the findings, this study only focused on one large, urban school district in the Southeast United States.

With addressing the internal and external validity threats in this study, the results should be beneficial to JCPS and other districts/schools through providing the Freshman Academies of Louisville outcome metric data needed to determine the success of the model after the first two years of implementation. This is done by examining if there were differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and reported sense of belonging between lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race across the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville over school years 2015-16 to 2018-19. The

instrumentation, maturation, and selection of subjects were specific threats to internal validity of this study (Cook & Campbell, 1979).

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

There are several implications for this study. This study is relevant to other districts and states that have adopted the freshman academy model and understanding a unified approach to freshman academy expectations and performance descriptors (see Appendix A). The findings of this study suggested there is no clear trend in scores across JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville. The key outcomes of student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging vary by school and more research is needed to fully understand how school-level factors may contribute to these key outcomes.

Appendix A shows JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville expectations and performance descriptors. The core features of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville are broken down to three objectives: Transforming the School Experience, Support Programs for Students, and Student Personal Skills and Career Development. These are the non-negotiables of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model. The freshman academy at each specific high school are rated as effective, developing, or not met for each core feature of the freshman academy model. The level of implementation with fidelity for each core feature varies at each specific school and influenced the results of this study. The data from this study can guide future work on intentional implementation of freshman academy core features in JCPS, other districts, and states.

The results of this study may have been influenced by an Implementation Dip. Fullan (2001) defines the Implementation Dip as a dip in performance and confidence as one encounters an innovation that requires new skills and new understandings. While

promotion rates were higher once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented across 11 high schools in the 2017-18 school year, attendance and sense of belonging rates were lower once JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville were implemented.

This study only included two school years after JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model was implemented in 11 high schools. A very common type of Implementation Dip is when newly introduced practices (e.g., JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville model) are too loosely or not clearly defined at first (Fullan, 2001). Fullan (2001) goes onto say there are two kinds of implementation problems: social-psychological fear of change and lack of technical know-how or skills to make the change work. There are many strategies to address the dip: anticipate, appreciate, and accept the dip/setback (change is messy), utilize strategies which are evidenced-based and implementation that is well-planned, ensure appropriate training and support are provided throughout the system, and provide time to practice, review and reevaluate, adapt (PDSA) (Fullan, 2001).

The results of this study may have been influenced by the Flywheel Effect, as well. Collins (2001) describes the Flywheel Effect as no matter how dramatic the end result, good-to-great transformations never happen in one fell swoop. In building a great enterprise, there is no single defining act, no grand model, no one killer innovation, no lone lucky break, and no miracle moment (Collins, 2001). Collins (2001) goes onto say rather, the process resembles relentlessly pushing a massive, heavy flywheel, turn upon turn, building momentum until a point of breakthrough, and beyond. This study only examines data from two school years after the Freshman Academies of Louisville model

was implemented. JCPS Freshman Academies of Louisville needs to continue to build momentum over multiple school years by implementing JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville core features to an increase in student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging (see Appendix A).

To promote the transition and implementation of academies to high-level of fidelity, academies need to align their work with the 10 National Career Academy Coalition (NCAC) National Standards of Practice (NSOP) (National Career Academy Coalition, 2022). These nationally recognized standards were developed by nationally recognized educational organizations from around the United States using research to determine best practices for effective academies in better preparing students for academy and high school success. Once the academy systems, structures, and supports have been aligned with these standards, academies need to go through the NCAC review process to become a national model/accredited academy.

Waggener High School's Freshman Academy recently went through the review process during the Spring 2020 semester to become the first and only Model/nationally accredited academy in JCPS and the state of Kentucky. The academy review is conducted by a team of two trained and certified NCAC national reviewers. These reviewers examine the academy documentation/evidence of the 10 NSOP within the academy that has been uploaded to the NCAC website. On the designated review date, the review team spends four hours at the academy and school and interviews academy faculty, staff, administration, partners, and students. Finally, a report is submitted to the principal and academy contact consisting of a thorough assessment of the academy with recommendations.



The NCAC review is a very reflective process ensuring the academy work is based on each of the 10 research based NCAC NSOP. Ultimately, this information is of great value to academies to ensure students are receiving exceptional preparation for academy and high school success, and readiness for college, career, and life experiences. This process helps truly transform the academy model to best meet the needs of students.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this research only included two academic school years after the Freshman Academies of Louisville model was implemented in 11 high schools. To further investigate freshman academies on student promotion, attendance, and sense of belonging, future research could include a five to ten-year longitudinal study to address the Implementation Dip and Flywheel Effect. Also, it would be noteworthy to look at freshman academies outside of JCPS in other KY counties or states. This would provide more research of the core features and objectives of freshman academies. Thirdly, it would be beneficial for a qualitative approach to be done to explore the perceptions of students, teachers, and administration on freshman academies. Using a qualitative approach could also address maturation validity threats. This methodological approach could provide a deeper understanding on how students, teachers, and administration feel about freshman academies, how to improve the model, and if the core features were viewed as compliant activities. Regarding the concept of unit of analysis, more research is needed on disaggregated (student-level) data. The unit of analysis of this study is aggregated (school-level) data, and disaggregated (student-level) data would target resources for specific groups of freshmen that need them most.

The purpose of this study was to examine if there are differences in student promotion from ninth to tenth-grade, attendance, and reported sense of belonging between lunch (socio-economic) status, gender, and race across the 11 Freshman Academies of Louisville over school years 2015-16 to 2018-19. To more fully understand how students are engaging and learning within JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville, academies need to self-assess and adjust their work with Appendix A outlining JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville expectations and performance descriptors based on the 10 NCAC NSOP. The core features of JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville are broken down to three objectives: Transforming the School Experience, Support Programs for Students, and Student Personal Skills and Career Development. During the assessment, academies are ranked as effective, developing, or not met for each performance descriptor and should adjust their work from there. Future research should include a five to ten-year longitudinal study on freshman academies to address the Implementation Dip and Flywheel Effect. This study should include freshman academies outside of JCPS in other KY counties or states to provide more research of the core features and objectives of freshman academies not presented within JCPS. It would be beneficial for a qualitative approach to be done to explore the perceptions of students, teachers, and administration on freshman academies.

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## APPENDIX A

JCPS' Freshman Academies of Louisville Rubric for Success includes the following components:

### Freshman Academy Expectations and Performance Descriptors

#### Objective 1: Transforming the School Experience

Core Feature	NCAC	Effective	Developing	Not Met
Dedicated FA Assistant Principal	IV.a; II.d; III.b	AP fully dedicated to working with true 9th grade students physically located in the academy	Either fully dedicated but not physically located or Located physically but not fully dedicated	Neither fully dedicated not physically located in Freshman Academy
Dedicated FA Counselor	IV.c; II.d; III.b	Counselor fully dedicated to working with true 9th grade students physically located in the academy	Either fully dedicated but not physically located or Located physically but not fully dedicated	Neither fully dedicated not physically located in Freshman Academy
Dedicated FA Teacher Team Leader	IV.a	Team of teachers dedicated to true freshman in one or more teams who are physically located in proximity	Team of teachers dedicated to true freshman in one or more teams who are not physically located in proximity	Teachers not teamed or physically located in proximity
New (to the building or academy) Teacher and Administrator Orientation	V.b	All new teachers and administrators participate in both school-based and district created orientation specific to FA	All new teachers and administrators participate in district created orientation specific to FA	No specific expectation for freshman academy orientation
Number/Percent FA teachers trained in Interdisciplinary teaching	V.b	75-100% FA team teachers trained	25-50% FA team teachers trained	0-25% FA team teachers trained
Number/Percent FA teachers trained in Highly Effective Teaming	V.b	75-100% FA team teachers trained	25-50% FA team teachers trained	0-25% FA team teachers trained
Number/Percent FA teachers trained in PBL	V.b; VII.b; VII.f	75-100% FA team teachers trained	25-50% FA team teachers trained	0-25% FA team teachers trained

FA Mission and Vision statement developed	I.a-e	Developed	In development	Does not exist
Evidence FA Mission/Vision posted/marketed to students and families	I.e	Posted and known by students and faculty	Posted or known by students and faculty (but not both)	Neither posted nor known by students and faculty
Common Team Planning Time	II.f; V.a	Team planning		No Team Planning
Career Seminar Course	VII.c; VIII.e	Course exists with common (to school) curriculum that addresses career, personal, and academic development with 100% 9th graders enrolled	Course exists with common (to school) curriculum but does not address all three career, personal, and academic development or less than 100% 9th graders enrolled	No course exists
Only true 1st year freshmen in academy	II.c	100% True Freshmen Only	80% True Freshmen Only (repeaters sitting in MESS courses)	Less than 80% True Freshmen Only (repeaters sitting in MESS courses)
Regularly Scheduled Academy Team Meetings, protocols, minutes	II.f; V.a; VI.b	All three elements exist and are tracked	Less than all three elements exist and are tracked	None of these elements exist or are tracked
Student Advisory Team	VI.d	Planned and organized way to give student voice to the FA development process	Student voice to the FA development process	No student voice in the FA development process.

**Objective 2: Support Programs for Students**

Core Feature	NCAC	Effective	Developing	Not Met
Freshman Orientation	II.e; V.c	100% of true 9th graders have an orientation to the school and processes with a consideration towards parent/family orientation options	75% of true 9th graders have an orientation to the school and processes with little consideration towards parent/family orientation options	0-74% of true 9th graders have an orientation to the school and processes with little consideration towards parent/family orientation options
Name & Claim Processes for Support Programming (Attendance & Behavior & Academic Progress)	II.e; IX.a-b	FA Teams have Name & Claim processes for attendance, behavior, and MAP growth	FA Teams have Name & Claim processes for attendance, behavior, or MAP growth (1 or 2 of 3)	FA Teams do not track student needs for attendance, behavior, and MAP Growth
Academic Supports for content and credit recovery Acceleration Plans	II.e; VII.a-c; IX.a	FA Teams have Acceleration Planning in place with a name and need process specific to reducing freshman retention	FA Teams have Acceleration Planning systems in place	FA Teams do not have Acceleration Planning in place
Promise to Graduate Ceremony	II.e	100 % of true freshmen participate in a ceremony/event	75-99 % of true freshmen participate in a ceremony/event	0-74% of true freshmen participate in a ceremony/event
Scheduling protocol to Select Academy	II.b	100 % of true freshmen select an academy in Spring	75-99% of true freshmen select an academy in Spring	< 75% of true freshmen select an academy in Spring
Backpack alignment/PBL Projects	VII.b	FA Team planning aligns FA work with Backpack of Success Skills with 100% of 9th grade students with min one artifact saved by the end of the first term	FA Team planning aligns FA work with Backpack of Success Skills with < 100% of 9th grade students with min one artifact saved by the end of the first term	No systemic backpack alignment specific to the FA teams and <100% of 9th graders with min one artifact saved by the end of the first term

**Objective 3: Student Personal Skills and Career Development**

Core Feature	NCAC	Effective	Developing	Not Met
Guest Speakers	VIII.b	100% of true Freshmen participate	50-99% of true Freshmen participate	< 50% of true Freshmen participate
In-House Academy Tours	IX.c	100% of true Freshmen participate	50-99% of true Freshmen participate	< 50% of true Freshmen participate
Career Ladder Information	VII.d	Information posted and integrated into the Career Exploration Course	Information posted but not integrated into the Career Exploration Course	Information is neither posted nor integrated into the Career Exploration Course
JA Finance	VII.d; VIII.a-b	100% of true Freshmen participate	50-99% of true Freshmen participate	< 50% of true Freshmen participate
Learning/Personality Styles	VII.d	100% of true Freshmen participate	50-99% of true Freshmen participate	< 50% of true Freshmen participate
Career Discovery & Exploration Activities	VII.d	100% of true Freshmen participate	50-99% of true Freshmen participate	< 50% of true Freshmen participate
Career Related Capstone Project ( backpack aligned)	VII.f	100% of true Freshmen participate	50-99% of true Freshmen participate	< 50% of true Freshmen participate
Participation in at least one extra-curricular activity	VIII.d (service)	100% of true Freshmen participate	50-99% of true Freshmen participate	< 50% of true Freshmen participate
ILP Action Plan	VII.d	Action Plan min 90% fully functioning level (KDE ILP Self-Implementation Rubric)	Action Plan min 75-89% fully functioning level (KDE ILP Self Implementation Rubric)	Action Plan min 50-69% fully functioning level (KDE ILP Self Implementation Rubric)

## APPENDIX B

JCPS' Comprehensive School Survey asks the following questions that relate to school:

1. I learn interesting and useful things at school.
2. I think school is fun and challenging.
3. I enjoy going to school.
4. I really like other students in my school.
5. I feel that I belong in my school.
6. I feel like I am part of my school community.
7. I feel comfortable stating opinions in class that disagree with those of other students.
8. My teachers respect my opinion in class even if it disagrees with their opinions.
9. I feel free to disagree openly with my teachers about political and social issues.
10. I often talk about politics or national issues with my teachers or other adults at school.
11. I feel my teachers really care about me.
12. I believe I can talk with my counselor or dean.
13. My school provides a caring and supportive environment for students.
14. I feel safe on my way to and from school.
15. I feel safe outside my school building before and after school

16. My school provides a safe and secure environment.
17. I participate on sports teams sponsored by my school.
18. I participate in clubs or activities (besides sports) sponsored by my school.
19. I believe I will be prepared to go to the next grade level in school.
20. My JCPS education will prepare me for employment.
21. My school does a good job of preparing me for college.
22. I believe I am developing essential skills for life (such as reading, writing and math) in JCPS.
23. I am very satisfied with my school.
24. I would rather go to this school than any other school.
25. I am very satisfied with JCPS.
26. There is at least one adult at my school whom I feel I can trust.
27. When I have a problem there is at least one adult at my school whom I can talk about my problem.
28. There is at least one adult at my school who says positive things to me frequently.



## CURRICULUM VITA

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### **RESEARCH INTEREST:**

The Exploratory Study of Jefferson County Public Schools' Freshman Academies of Louisville Model on Student Promotion, Attendance, And Sense of Belonging.

### **EDUCATION:**

**University of Louisville:** May 2022  
Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.) in Educational  
Leadership and Organizational Development

**Spalding University:** January 2012  
Master of Arts in School Guidance Counseling

**University of the Cumberlands:** May 2014  
Rank I – Elem., Middle, and Secondary Education  
Standard Certificate for Guidance Counseling

**University of Louisville:** August 2007  
Bachelor of Science in Business Administration  
Major in Management and Minor in Marketing

### **LEADERSHIP / PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:**

#### **Freshman Academy Counselor**

Waggener High School: Louisville, KY

July 2014 – Present

- Provide systematic and on-going individual and group counseling services related to the academic, personal/social, and career development of students so they achieve success in school and are prepared to lead fulfilling lives as responsible members of society.
- Developed our nationally accredited Freshman Academy model as well as the Freshman Seminar course.
- ACT, Advanced Placement, and Advance Program Coordinator.
- Established the Freshman Academy Alumni Mentoring Program.
- Coordinate middle school visits to promote Waggener High School and to lead enrollment sessions.
- Produce student schedules and track credits toward graduation and CTE participation.
- Coordinate 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Open House, Parent Night, Student Orientation, Registration, Freshman Academy Award/Commitment to Graduation Ceremony, Honor Roll Breakfast, and Showcase of Schools.
- Lead the admissions process for 8<sup>th</sup> grade applicants.
- Chair ARC meetings for students with disabilities who have IEPs.
- Chair 504 Plan meetings for students with disabilities that substantially limits a major life activity.
- Responsible for Individual Learning Plans.
- Lead suicide prevention training for the entire school population.

- Provide interventions and orchestrate family meetings for students who are struggling academically or personally.
- Helped lead the school out of priority status in 2015 and earn a Bronze Medal from the U.S. News and World Report in 2017.

#### **National ACT / SAT Test Coordinator**

Waggener High School: Louisville, KY

December 2016 – Present

- Recruit, select, and train room supervisors and proctors before test day.
- Reserve rooms and prepare them before test day
- Receive and secure test materials.
- Organize and prepare test materials for test day.
- Conduct a pretest briefing session for all test center staff on test day.
- Ensure completeness and accuracy of all test date documentation including test center rosters, seating diagrams, forms, and reports.
- Return all rosters, reports, seating diagrams, forms, tickets, answer documents, and test booklets immediately after testing.
- Submit online test date payment requests.
- Cooperate with ACT and SAT in resolving irregularities and investigation of examinee complaints.

#### **Summer College, Career, & Academic Counselor**

Jefferson County Public Schools: Louisville, KY

June 2021 – July 2021

- Provided counseling supports for a caseload of 100 JCPS juniors and graduated seniors for college applications, ACT/SAT sign-ups/tutoring, scholarship searches and applications, FAFSA education and assistance, Evolve 502 applications, college essays, transcript checks, academic counseling/advising, career exploration, and job applications.

#### **Summer Coaching Coordinator**

55,000 Degrees: Louisville, KY

May 2016 – August 2016

- Led the implementation, operations, and evaluation of a peer mentoring program designed to bridge the gap between high school graduation and the beginning of college to reduce “summer melt.”
- Helped recruit and select 15 College Coaches to serve as peer mentors. Coaches enrolled college students from colleges Jefferson County Public Schools students typically attend. They supported their caseload of students by actively reaching out to them over the course of the summer to ensure they matriculate.
- Helped train and provide ongoing support to the College Coaches including information on financial aid, mentoring, college readiness, community resources, student organizations and activities, classroom expectations etc.
- Helped coaches develop a plan of action to support their caseload of students and problem solve issues as they arise.
- Supervised the College Coaches to ensure they are fulfilling their duties and meeting program requirements.
- Mediated conflict and served as a primary contact for parents and supportive individuals of participating students.
- Designed and promoted programming for students and coaches to attend together that will promote college readiness.
- Ensured students successfully transitioned to college by reaching out to universities and determining appropriate first year support programs for students to join.

**Student Support Services (SRT) Coordinator / Extended School Day Program Coordinator / Temporary CART**

Waggener High School: Louisville, KY

August 2013 – May 2016

*Student Support Services Coordinator:*

- Led a team of 12 Student Support Services Team (SRT) members, coordinated bi-weekly team meetings, and presented crucial SRT systems at faculty meetings.
- Identified and intervened with at-risk, truant students by putting numerous SRT systems in place school-wide.
- Developed a three tier RTI process for behavior, academic, and attendance student support.

*Extended School Day Program Coordinator:*

- Coordinated and managed the Achievement Through Teaching and Intervention project.
- Designed the scheduling/calendar of the Extended School Day (ESD) Program to consist of remediation in core content as well as programming in community support and instructional technology/media support.
- Directed the ESD student referral process for roughly 80 faculty members.
- Sustained a student attendance rate over 90% of the student body population.
- Calculated the daily student attendance for the monthly area Assistant Superintendent report.

*Temporary CART (College Access Resource Teacher):*

- Coordinated the Advisory Program while the CART was on leave.

**Career Planner / LEEP (Louisville Education & Employment Partnership) Coordinator / College and Career Readiness Chair**

Waggener High School: Louisville, KY

August 2011 – July 2014

*Overview:*

- Built strong relationships with students to assist their efforts to earn promotion to the next grade, to graduate in four years, and to make a successful transition to college and career.
- Actively engaged youth on an individual basis to obviate or diminish barriers to the completion of high school.
- Created an online employment readiness course used by youth across district and community.
- Helped students focus on academic, personal/social, and career development so they achieve success in school and are prepared to lead fulfilling lives as responsible members of society.

*Services/Events Coordinated:*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ▪ College Field Trips and Application Assistance  | ▪ Parent Night & Suicide Prevention                   |
| ▪ ACT Preparation & Metro Youth Advocates         | ▪ FAFSA and Scholarship Assistance                    |
| ▪ KentuckianaWorks SummerWorks Program            | ▪ Teambuilding Activities / Financial Success Seminar |
| ▪ HOBY (Hugh O’Brian Youth Leadership) Workshop   | ▪ Metro United Way Student Campaign                   |
| ▪ Mayor Fischer’s Week of Service                 | ▪ UPS School-To-Work Program                          |
| ▪ Waggener High School College and Career Fair    | ▪ Hispanic/Latino/ESL College Admissions Workshop     |
| ▪ KY College Application Week                     | ▪ Upward Bound and Junior Achievement Programs        |
| ▪ Men of Quality/Young Women L.E.A.D. Conferences | ▪ Youth and Adult Voices in Action (YAVA) Summit      |
| ▪ Employment Readiness Training                   | ▪ Building a GradNation Summit – Washington, D.C.     |

**Career Coach / Instructor II**

Jefferson County Public Schools - Adult Education / KentuckianaWorks: Louisville, KY

June 2012 – August 2013 (Summer Position)

- Built relationships with employers/youth employees to help resolve barriers that might interfere with employment.
- Provided job tips and improved the youths' employment readiness skills allowing them to thrive in the workplace.
- Maintained an employee caseload of 60 youth employees by contacting the employer and employee weekly.

**College Admissions Assistant/Representative**

Spalding University – Admissions Department: Louisville, KY

July 2010 – August 2011

- Provided campus tours for prospective students.
- Prepared informational packets about the academic programs, financial aid programs, and extracurricular activities.
- Helped student's gather academic records to apply to school and provided them with information they requested.

**Long-Term/Permanent Substitute Teacher**

Jefferson County Public Schools: Louisville, KY

March 2010 – June 2011

- Met and differentially instructed students in assigned classes.
- Created and maintained a classroom environment that was conducive to learning and appropriate to the students.
- Guided the learning process toward the achievement of curriculum goals and established learning objectives.

**COMPUTER SKILLS:**

Worked extensively with Microsoft Office (Word, Excel, Access, PowerPoint, and Outlook), Infinite Campus including Course Scheduler, Adhoc Reporting, JCPS Online, JCPSeSchool, Edgenuity, Study Island, Career Cruising (KDE's ILP), SmartEd, KDE's Persistence to Graduation Tool, CASCADE, College/Career Ready Dashboard, and website creation.

**AWARDS / COMMITTEES / LEADERSHIP:**

- 2020-2023 NCAC Model Academy
- 2017 Flying Person Inspiring Greatness Award
- 2017 JCSCA Innovation in School Counseling Award
- 2017 Hilliard Lyons' PLC Excellence Award
- JCPS Freshman Academy Task Force Team
- Waggener Administration Team
- Waggener Student Support Services Chair
- Waggener Instructional Leadership Team
- Waggener Admissions Committee
- Waggener Scheduling Committee
- Waggener Racial Equity Committee
- JCPS High School Counseling Pod Leader
- JCPS Comprehensive School Counseling Cohort
- JCPS School Counselors' Public Relations Chair
- College Transition Action Network (CTAN) Chair
- Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS)
- PREPaRE Crisis Response
- Mayor's SummerWorks (2012-2015)
- 2014 National Dropout Prevention Conference
- LEEP Data Committee Lead (2011-2014)
- LEEP Annual Report Committee (2011-14)

**PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS /**

**PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIPS:**

*Becoming a National Model/Accredited Academy*

- 2020 Jeff. Co. Counseling Association Conference

*Student Support Services Team*

- 2016 Kentucky Counseling Association Conference
- 2016 High Schools That Work Conference
- 2015 Kentucky Counseling Association Conference
- 2015 Jeff. Co. Counseling Association Conference
- 2015 KY School Counseling Association Conference

*Reducing 9th Grade Retentions*

- 2019 National Career Academy Conference
- 2018 National Career Academy Conference
- 2018 High Schools That Work Conference
- 2017 National Career Academy Conference
- 2016 National Career Academy Conference
- 2016 Jeff. Co. Counseling Association Conference
- 2016 High Schools That Work Conference
- 2016 Persistence to Graduation Summit
- 2015 National Career Academy Conference