GPA

KISSCE - ENGAGEMENT

Evidence in Action

A K20 Center Research Brief

Peer Mentoring for Freshmen Achievement
The Impact of Link Crew on Ninth-Grade Success

Lifsey, J. E.

2010

Introduction

The transition from middle school to high school is a challenging period for many students. Research reviewed in this study found that ninth-grade students commonly struggle with three types of transition concerns: academic, social, and procedural challenges. Students often face increased academic demands, more complex school procedures, and significant social adjustment pressures as they enter a larger, less familiar school environment. These challenges contribute to higher rates of course failure, retention, and dropout during ninth grade than at any other grade level.

The literature also suggests that students who experience successful transitions are more likely to be academically successful and remain on track for graduation. Prior studies highlighted the importance of helping students build peer relationships, learn school procedures, connect with adults, and become involved in extracurricular activities. While transition programs have been widely implemented, the author found limited empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of the Link Crew program specifically.

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether participation in the **Link Crew Transition Program** was associated with improved academic outcomes, greater social satisfaction, and increased involvement in extracurricular activities among ninth-grade students.

Methodology

Research Design

The study used a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data. Students naturally formed comparison groups based on whether they attended the Link Crew orientation before ninth grade. Because students self-selected into participation, the study used statistical controls to account for differences that existed before

the intervention. Quantitative analyses examined academic outcomes, and survey responses provided qualitative information about students' experiences with the program.

Sample

Participants

The study included a ninth-grade cohort of approximately 330 students enrolled during the 2007–2008 school year at a medium-sized suburban high school.

For academic analyses:

- **233 students participated** in Link Crew
- **44 students did not participate** in Link Crew orientation

For the survey component:

- 101 permission forms were returned
- 29 students completed the survey
- 24 survey respondents participated in Link Crew
- 5 survey respondents did not participate.

Grade Level

- Ninth-grade students

Student Characteristics

The ninth-grade class included the following:

- 53% male (172 students)
- 48% female (158 students)
- 72% White/Caucasian
- 15% African American
- 11% Hispanic
- 3% Asian/Other
- 18% free/reduced lunch recipients

Setting

The study occurred at a **medium-sized suburban high school** in a high-achieving school district. The school had the largest minority population among district high schools and the second-highest free/reduced lunch population.

Intervention Description

The intervention evaluated was the Link Crew Transition Program developed by the Boomerang Project. The program was designed as a year-long transition program intended to address the social, academic, and procedural concerns experienced by incoming freshmen.

According to the methodology and program description provided in the study, the following information was collected:

What Students Did

Students participated in the activities listed below:

- A freshman orientation before the school year began
- Small-group activities with upperclassmen
- Social activities throughout the year
- Classroom follow-up lessons delivered by Link Leaders

Academic and Developmental Focus

The program focused on helping freshmen address the following issues:

- Transitioning successfully into high school
- Addressing academic concerns
- Addressing procedural concerns
- Addressing social concerns
- Learning skills related to time management, using resources, and achieving academic success

How the Intervention Was Delivered

Intervention included the following activities:

- A large-group freshman orientation assembly
- Small mentoring groups in which one Link Leader worked with approximately 10 freshmen
- Structured classroom lessons
- School-sponsored social activities, including events such as sporting events and movie nights
- Ongoing relationship-building and mentoring throughout the school year

Who Implemented the Intervention

The program was implemented by trained upperclassmen known as **Link Leaders**. These students received extensive training with the following resources:

- Group facilitation
- Communication
- Leadership
- Organization
- Mentoring and relationship development

Dosage

Reported Sessions and Activities

The study reports the following activities:

- One freshman orientation before the start of ninth grade
- Follow-up classroom lessons throughout the year
- Social activities throughout the year
- Ongoing mentoring and relationship building between Link Leaders and freshmen

Session Length

The study does not report the length of orientation, classroom lessons, mentoring contacts, or social activities.

Duration

The study describes Link Crew as a **year-long program** that begins prior to ninth grade and continues throughout the school year.

Data Analysis

Researchers collected academic records for participating and nonparticipating students, including the following:

- Eighth-grade academic averages
- Ninth-grade GPA
- Number of classes failed
- Demographic data

To examine outcomes, the study used analysis of covariance (ANCOVA), which enabled researchers to compare students while accounting for differences in prior academic

performance. Survey responses were summarized to better understand students' perceptions of the program and their experiences during the high school transition.

Results

Academic Outcomes

Students who participated in Link Crew demonstrated stronger academic outcomes than students who did not participate.

Participants:

- Earned significantly higher ninth-grade GPAs
- Failed significantly fewer classes during ninth grade

Specifically:

- Link Crew participants had an average GPA of 3.141
- Nonparticipants had an average GPA of 2.718

Link Crew participants also failed fewer courses:

- Participants averaged 0.25 classes failed
- Nonparticipants averaged 0.61 classes failed

Student Groups

Positive findings were observed across multiple student groups:

- Male and female participants outperformed nonparticipants academically.
- Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who participated performed better than similar students who did not participate.
- Benefits for ethnic groups were mixed; the program did not eliminate achievement differences among ethnic groups.

Social and Procedural Outcomes
Survey results suggested that students perceived Link Crew as helpful for the following outcomes:

- Learning school procedures
- Navigating the school environment
- Reducing social concerns
- Building connections with peers and school staff

Many students reported that Link Leaders exhibited the following behaviors:

- Helped them meet people
- Explained school expectations
- Introduced them to extracurricular opportunities
- Made adjustment to high school easier

Extracurricular Participation and Social Satisfaction
The study was unable to draw conclusions regarding extracurricular involvement and social satisfaction because too few surveys were returned for meaningful statistical analysis.

Implications for Practice
The findings suggest that structured peer-led transition supports may improve freshman academic outcomes while helping students address social and procedural challenges associated with entering high school.

Application into Practice
The Link Crew model can be used by schools as a year-long freshman transition strategy designed to provide academic, social, and procedural support through peer mentoring.

Schools seeking to implement a similar program should consider the following actions:

- Recruit upperclassmen to serve as Link Leaders
- Provide extensive training in leadership, communication, mentoring, and facilitation skills
- Conduct a freshman orientation before the beginning of ninth grade
- Organize freshmen into small groups led by trained upperclassmen
- Include activities that help students learn school procedures and navigate the campus
- Provide structured classroom lessons focused on time management, use of resources, and academic excellence

- Schedule social activities throughout the school year to strengthen student connections
- Encourage Link Leaders to maintain mentoring relationships beyond formal activities
- Use the program to address all three transition domains identified in the study: social, procedural, and academic concerns

Work Cited

Lifsey, J. E. (2010). High school transition: The "Link" to success? The effects of participation in a Link Crew transition program. (Doctoral dissertation, Trevecca Nazarene University). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. UMI No. 3413108.