

Title: Middle Schools and Traditional Junior High Schools: A Comparison of Academic Achievement

Author: James P. Smith Jr.

Dissertation Chairperson: Dr. Sue Rieg

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. George Bieger
Dr. Joseph Marcoline

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this quantitative study was to use existing data to compare academic achievement between middle schools and traditional junior high schools. The questions of this study derived from the debate on whether or not the middle school, with all of its components that are specifically geared towards young adolescents and their unique needs, had an impact on achievement.

This quantitative study used three types of variables to describe the schools in the sample. The control variables were the percentage of low-income students, total school enrollment, and the classification of the schools as rural, urban, or suburban. The independent variable was the grade configuration either as a middle school or junior high school. The dependant variables were PSSA scaled scores in math and Reading, as well as, the percentage of students scoring in each quartile on the exam. Academic achievement was measured by the changes from the 2005 fifth grade to the 2008 eighth grade PSSA math and reading

scores, the change in the percentage of students scoring in each quartile on the 2005 fifth grade as compared to the 2008 eighth grade PSSA math and reading exams. This measure of achievement was performed for all students in the sample, as well as, the special education and economically disadvantaged sub - groups.

Descriptive statistics were used to describe each of the variables in the study. T-tests were used to compare the dependent variables among the two types of schools structures. Multiple regression analysis was performed to determine statistical significance between the independent and control variables to the dependent variables.

Results indicated that no relationship was found between school structure and the change in PSSA scores for all students, special education students, and economically disadvantaged students. The use of middle school practices did have an association with students scoring in certain quartiles and overall scaled scores in math and reading. As schools and districts strive to increase student achievement, this study will help decision makers make choices that will affect students and the community for years to come.