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The Perceptions Students Have About Transitioning from a Small Rural K-8 School District (Tamaroa) to a Larger Community High School (Pinckneyville) in Southern Illinois

Robert J. Hamerski

Eastern Illinois University

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The Perceptions Students Have About
Transitioning From a Small Rural K-8 School
District (Tamaroa) to a Larger Community High
School (Pinckneyville) In Southern Illinois

BY

Robert J. Hamerski

Field Experience

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Specialist in Educational Administration

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

1997
YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
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Abstract

The purpose of this field study was to ascertain the perceptions of former Tamaroa, Illinois, Grade School students regarding their transition to Pinckneyville High School. The research questions were:

1. How successful were former Tamaroa Grade School eighth graders at Pinckneyville High School as evidenced by perceived high school academic standing?
2. What are the perceptions of former Tamaroa Grade School students regarding issues related to the importance of completing high school?
3. What are the perceptions of former Tamaroa Grade School students attending Pinckneyville High School regarding adjustments needed to perform well academically in high school and graduating?
4. What practices can the staff of Tamaroa Grade School implement to assist their graduates in transitioning effectively regarding academics to Pinckneyville High School and graduating?
5. What are the perceptions of former Tamaroa students concerning Tamaroa Grade School's effectiveness of preparing them to perform well academically at Pinckneyville High School?

Thirty former Tamaroa Grade School graduates who attend or attended Pinckneyville High School were individually interviewed at Tamaroa Grade School in the spring of 1997 by the researcher. The students were chosen through a stratified random sample from Tamaroa class records for the school years 1990-1991 through 1995-1996. The researcher attempted to control for gender and achievement level of respondents.

Respondents were asked thirty questions from an interview schedule designed to answer the research questions. Ideas for the research questions were based on a review of literature and research regarding common transition problems students face.

Regarding research question 1, it was concluded that respondents were, in general, academically successful at Pinckneyville High School. Regarding research question 2, it

was concluded that respondents generally felt it was important to receive a high school diploma. It was also concluded that respondents perceived that they were not likely to drop out of school. It was further concluded that the Tamaroa staff had encouraged them to complete high school, and the Tamaroa staff did put enough emphasis on the importance of staying in school.

Regarding research question 3, it was concluded that there were some adjustments needed in high school, but most respondents were able to make these adjustments. Adjustments needed were to allow more time for homework in high school and be prepared for harder high school instruction, especially in mathematics courses.

Regarding research question 4, it was concluded that the Tamaroa staff did an adequate job of preparing students to compete academically with other students at Pinckneyville High School. Regarding research question 5, it was concluded that the Tamaroa staff was generally successful in preparing respondents to perform well at Pinckneyville High School except for preparation in mathematics and science.

Recommendations made to the Tamaroa staff by the researcher were:

1. Assign more homework to students in all courses of study so they will be better prepared for high school.
2. Upgrade the instruction offered in mathematics courses so it is more challenging to the students and will better meet their needs for high school.
3. Articulate the curriculum with that of Pinckneyville High School.
4. Update current curriculum to include a research-oriented computer course, life skills course, and shop course.
5. Evaluate the science curriculum.
6. Conduct a study to identify the reasons why former Tamaroa Grade School students have dropped out of high school.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----|
| List of Tables | .vi |
| Chapter 1: Overview of the Problem | 1 |
| Background | 1 |
| Statement of the Problem | 1 |
| Research Questions | 2 |
| Assumption | 2 |
| Limitations | 2 |
| Delimitations | 3 |
| Definition of Terms | 3 |
| Uniqueness of the Study | 3 |
| Chapter 2: Rationale, Related Literature, and Research | 4 |
| Rationale | 4 |
| Literature Reviewed | 4 |
| Research Reviewed | 9 |
| Chapter 3: Design of the Study | 11 |
| General Design | 11 |
| Sample and Population | 12 |
| Data Collection and Instrumentation | 13 |
| Data Analysis | 14 |
| Chapter 4: Results | 15 |
| Overview | 15 |
| Results | 15 |
| Results for Research Question 1 | 15 |
| Results for Research Question 2 | 19 |
| Results for Research Question 3 | 21 |
| Results for Research Question 4 | 23 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Results for Research Question 5 | 27 |
| Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations | 33 |
| Summary | 33 |
| Conclusions | 35 |
| Recommendations | 36 |
| References | 38 |
| Appendix A: Interview Schedule | 39 |
| Appendix B: Graduation Rate Data From Pinckneyville High School | 45 |

List of Tables

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1: Descriptive Information about the Sample | 12 |
| Table 2: Results for Research Question 1 | 15 |
| Table 3: Results for Research Question 2 | 19 |
| Table 4: Results for Research Question 3 | 21 |
| Table 5: Results for Research Question 4 | 24 |
| Table 6: Results for Item 19 on Interview Schedule | 25 |
| Table 7: Results for Item 20 on Interview Schedule | 26 |
| Table 8: Results for Research Question 5 | 28 |
| Table 9: Graduation Rate of Former Tamaroa Students at Pinckneyville | 45 |

Chapter 1

Overview of the Problem

Background

The importance of students completing their high school education has been discussed by teachers, administrators, board members, and parents for many years. The reasons why students choose to drop out of school must be analyzed and understood if the issues of keeping students in high school and performing well academically are to be addressed. In the researcher's opinion, there are major social, psychological, and academic adjustments adolescents face in making the transition from the eighth grade to the freshman year. Some students are capable of making this transition and being successful in high school; others have difficulties with this process and are at risk of dropping out of school.

The task can be very challenging for students who must make a transition from a small rural k-8 grade school district to a larger high school district. Students transitioning from a small k-8 district such as Tamaroa Grade School (15 to 18 students annually in the graduating class and an average school population of 130-140) to Pinckneyville High School (approximately 125-135 freshmen annually and an average population of 500-540 students) may face challenging issues related to social, psychological, and academic adjustment.

In Southern Illinois there are numerous k-8 districts whose eighth graders feed into a high school with a population considerably larger by grade level and total enrollment. To enhance the probability of graduating from high school, it is important that these eighth graders effectively adjust to the high school setting regarding social, psychological, and academic factors.

Statement of the Problem

While the staff at Tamaroa Grade School has speculated regarding how well its eighth grade students achieve at Pinckneyville High School and how many graduate, no

evidence has been collected and analyzed to provide empirical information regarding this issue. It is important to the students, parents, and staff at Tamaroa Grade School for entering students to perform well academically at the high school level and ultimately receive a diploma. Being more knowledgeable of how effectively eighth graders from Tamaroa Grade School have transitioned to Pinckneyville High School should aid the Tamaroa staff in better preparing future students for an effective transition.

Research Questions

The research questions were:

1. How successful were former Tamaroa Grade School eighth graders at Pinckneyville High School as evidenced by perceived high school academic standing?
2. What are the perceptions of former Tamaroa Grade School students regarding issues related to the importance of completing high school?
3. What are the perceptions of former Tamaroa Grade School students attending Pinckneyville High School regarding adjustments needed to perform well academically in high school and graduate?
4. What practices can the staff of Tamaroa Grade School implement to assist their graduates in transitioning effectively regarding academics to Pinckneyville High School and graduating?
5. What are the perceptions of former Tamaroa students concerning Tamaroa Grade School's effectiveness of preparing them to perform well academically at Pinckneyville High School?

Assumption

It was assumed that information obtained from prior Tamaroa Grade School eighth graders who currently attend (or previously attended) Pinckneyville High School is representative information.

Limitations

Including additional small elementary district students in the study would have

been useful, but was beyond the time and resources available to the researcher (a seventh grade teacher and Assistant Principal at Tamaroa Grade School at the time of the study).

Delimitations

The study could have focused more on participation pertaining to social activities by Tamaroa students at Pinckneyville High School and their psychological adjustment to high school. This was not done because the staff at Tamaroa Grade School was more interested in information pertaining to academic success and graduation from high school.

Definition of Terms

Operational definitions basic to understanding this study are presented here.

Transition. The change encountered when going from one school level to another school level.

Grade school. Grades k-8 in the same building.

Articulation. Cross referencing the curriculum of one school to another school attended by the same students.

Uniqueness of the Study

The results of this study provided information specifically relevant to the staff at Tamaroa Grade School about the success of former students at Pinckneyville High School. This information did not previously exist. This information is specific to Tamaroa Grade School and based on systematically collected information, as opposed to general information which exists at random, about how well students perceived their transition to Pinckneyville High School.

Chapter 2

Rationale, Related Literature, and Research

Rationale

A premise was that effectively transitioning from a small k-8 school district to a larger high school district could present adjustment or transition problems for students regarding academic success and completing high school.

Being employed by Tamaroa Grade School for the past four years has instilled in the researcher a sense of community pride and an emotional attachment to the people of Tamaroa, especially the students. Based on the experiences and perceptions of the researcher, Tamaroa appears to be socio-economically depressed, with a high unemployment rate and little industry. The students of Tamaroa need a quality education to enable them to be competitive in the job market. Based on the researcher's knowledge, several former Tamaroa Grade School students have dropped out of high school because of unsuccessful academic work. The researcher believes these academic shortcomings could have been caused in part by the inability of some students to make a successful transition from a small grade school, where personal needs can be better met, to a larger high school.

Literature Reviewed

Transition means change, and change is sometimes difficult for people. Transition and change often result in anxiety, frustration, fear, insecurity, and failure (Lammel, 1995, p. 1). As indicated by Lammel, students entering new levels of educational experiences face potentially traumatic transitions and must have proper preparation to adjust to new learning organizations and cultural environments. He also suggested that transition does not receive the attention it deserves and that a successful transition can set the tone for a successful experience in high school.

Over the past 30 years supporters of early and middle level education have brought to light the critical periods of human development that present special needs and

opportunities for learning (Loda, 1995, p. 10). If these critical periods are overlooked, severe implications for future development exist. Little time has been spent studying early adolescence. It is a time of rapid change during which youth must develop the skills necessary for a successful transition to adulthood. Clearly, acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary for a successful adulthood is a key task for the young adolescent and vital to the mission of schools (Loda, 1995, p. 10).

A developmental needs approach may aid in assisting adolescents in acquiring skills and knowledge. A developmental needs approach suggests (a) positive social interaction with adults and peers, (b) structure and clear limits, (c) physical activity, (d) creative expression, (e) competence and achievement, (f) meaningful participation in schools and communities, and (g) opportunities for self-definition (Scales, 1992, p. 30).

The transition process from one school to another--whether it is from elementary school to junior high school, junior high school to high school, or grade school to high school--can be very stressful to students. It can also be stressful to parents because they do not want to witness their children struggling. Although it would be difficult to address all the issues that could arise, there are a number of suggestions for parents to ease the process.

1. Help your children understand that the expectations regarding study skills, behavior, and personal responsibility will increase.
2. Help your children understand that they are responsible for their actions and when they fail to act appropriately, in or out of class, there will be appropriate consequences.
3. Assure that diversity is celebrated and recognized in all schools even as children move from each level.
4. Visit the school with your children.
5. Help your children find their way around the building.
6. Help your children learn how to operate the locker.

7. Help your children understand which bus route to take to and from school.
8. Know your children's friends.
9. Encourage your children to get involved in school activities.
10. Support your children by getting involved in school functions.
11. Work with your children to help with accessing computerized systems such as homework hotlines.
12. Designate for your children a time for homework, and be consistent.
13. Contact the school if you have any concerns or problems.
14. Make sure that the nurse is notified of any medical situations regarding your children (Bellamy, 1996, pp. 30-31).

Differences in feeder schools, students' cultures, levels of parental involvement, family economic status, and the basic problems of adolescence can contribute to poor academic performance, feelings of alienation, and stress among high school freshmen (Daugherty, 1995, p. 12). Daugherty discussed a school in Maryland's Queen Anne's County that has dedicated a building solely to incoming ninth graders. This eased the transition from middle school to high school. The school--Kennard Annex--is a place where the students from the county's three middle schools come together for the first time. The freshmen attend all their classes at Kennard but are allowed to participate in the extra-curricular activities at the main high school building. Thus, the students are isolated from the influences of upperclassmen during the school day and have the opportunity to bond as a group while they become familiar with the high school they will attend the following year (Daugherty, 1995, p. 13).

The ninth grade year is a critical time for most adolescents. It is a transitional year with which many students struggle. They must become secure in their own roles as developing adults and with the actual role of education in their lives (Pierce, 1995, p. 14).

During the ninth grade, students often recognize for the first time that education ultimately counts toward the future. At this time, the feeling of comfort with oneself is

replaced with grades and responsibility. Students often have trouble with this transition (Pierce, 1995, p. 14).

The ninth grade year is typically marked by declining student achievement. Eleventh and twelfth graders frequently report wishing they had taken the ninth grade year more seriously (Pierce, 1995, p. 14). Studies of at-risk students revealed that those who drop out of high school typically make the decision to do so during the ninth or tenth grade. An increase in risky behaviors--drug and alcohol use, sexual experimentation, and criminal activity--occurs during the ninth grade more than previous years (Pierce, 1995, p. 14).

The transition from a middle-level school to a high school environment is often an abrupt one, and many students fail to understand that expectations have changed. For example, middle-level students are accustomed to someone taking charge of them with regard to completing homework, whereas high school students are expected to take complete responsibility for their assignments (Pierce, 1995, p. 16).

Small rural schools have several aspects that are difficult to duplicate in larger schools. In small rural schools, students tend to be known on an individual level by teachers and administrators. Small schools become a microcosmic community in which people engage in higher levels of interpersonal relationships (Marshak, 1995, p. 9).

High school consolidation has had a negative impact on some students. Consolidation forces the destruction of small high schools and the relocation of millions of teens into larger, more impersonal schools through which many young people pass without forming significant relationships with any adults (Marshak, 1995, p. 9).

Teaching and learning are grounded in the relationship between the teacher and the learner and, thus, between the adult and the adolescent. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum extent. The most important change that can be made in high schools is to create structures that nurture relationships and quality time between students and teachers (Marshak, 1995, p. 11).

The small-town or rural school serves many purposes in the community. It engages many people in the community because they are drawn to it for numerous functions. People in small towns seek relationships that are friendly, supportive, and caring. Students in small-town schools develop close relationships with one another and the staff. They rank these relationships as a very important aspect of schooling (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1994, p. 29).

A 1988 study prepared for the Appalachian Regional Commission was a major report which assessed the consequences of school reform in small rural schools. The study concluded that the rural school environment is unique and that future reforms must account for the special circumstances confronting rural students, teachers, and administrators (Harman & Seal, 1995, p. 120). From this study the State Superintendent established a special task force on rural school districts and charged the members with the responsibility of determining the unique needs of rural school districts in West Virginia. Besides reporting on those needs, the task force identified the following facts pertaining to children in a rural area: (a) They will begin the day with a fairly long bus ride; (b) are likely to be from a poor family; (c) are more likely than other students to have parents who are unemployed; (d) are more likely than other students to receive special services; (e) are less likely than other students to be classified as gifted; (f) are more likely to have parents who did not graduate from high school; and (g) have a greater chance than other students of becoming high school dropouts (Harman & Seal, 1995, p. 120).

With regard to rural schools themselves, the task force reported that:

1. They are more influenced by the economic and cultural outlooks of their communities than other schools.
2. They reflect and shape the economic and social stratification of their communities.
3. They embody pride in values, including discipline and hard work.

4. They serve as more than just classrooms; they are the cultural and social centers of small towns and rural life.

5. They are often the major link between the community and the world (Harman & Seal, 1995, pp. 123).

Research Reviewed

Transitions are realities that all students face during school years. Students move from the familiarity of their family and home to school and from one building to another. Students move from self-contained classes, where they are nurtured by one teacher, to departmentalized schools with blocks of time spent in different classrooms with different teachers. Each level becomes more demanding and complex (George, 1995, p. 4).

Transitions were the topic of a three-year study co-sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, American Association of College Registrars and Admission Officers, and the National Association of College Admissions Counselors. Researchers studied various aspects of the transition process for students. They then developed and evaluated programs designed to strengthen the ability to transition. The project's final report recommended basic elements to bridge critical transition points and strengthen transitions for greater student achievement (George, 1995, p. 4).

In their effort to strengthen student transition skills, schools participating in the project identified the following points regarding when transition appeared to be most troublesome:

(a) students changing from self-contained classes to departmentalized classes, (b) students changing school buildings, (c) students moving to a school level where the philosophical approach or instructional process is different, and (d) students leaving secondary school and moving to independent college life or work away from home (George, 1995, p. 5).

Indicators that students may be having trouble coping with transition periods are (a) poor attendance, (b) increased discipline problems, (c) failing grades, (d) inability to

match the expectations of the new level, (e) complaints from students and/or their parents, (f) lack of an articulated curriculum between levels, and (g) lack of communication across levels (George, 1995, p. 5). These responses give educators ideas of the issues associated with transition points facing students. To help ensure system-wide participation in strengthening the transition process, educators should focus on the following three factors that contribute to effective transition:

1. Communication and cooperation among all members of the school and community.
2. Consensus regarding what should be changed, when, and how.
3. Commitment to carry out decisions and plans that are mutually agreed upon (George, 1995, pp. 5-6).

Students from small rural schools may face even more challenges when they transition to larger schools. While they face all the difficult transitions that other students face, they also encounter the challenge of moving out of their quaint little setting, where everyone knows them, to a less individualized setting (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, p. 114).

Research was conducted on 108 students in five courses in educational foundations and psychology at Western Carolina University. The idea behind the research was to obtain perceptions of the students on various aspects of rural schools. The survey contained open-ended questions designed to elicit students' reflections on personal experiences. Responses indicated what it is like to be in a rural area and how it could be difficult to adapt to other surroundings (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, p. 116).

The students spoke highly of their small schools. They enjoyed the comfort of knowing each other and developing strong friendships. They felt a family atmosphere in the schools and knew the names of every student in the graduating class (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, p. 118). For the students in the survey, the positive feelings they had about living in rural areas were connected with (a) family, (b) home, (c) the small community, (d) peacefulness, (e) safety, and (f) caring (Herzog & Pittman, 1995, p. 118).

Chapter 3

Design of the Study

General Design

This field study, which was conducted in Perry County, Illinois, utilized information from students who attended Tamaroa Grade School and Pinckneyville High School. The dependent variable was the students' perceptions related to transition issues. No true independent variable existed because no random assignment of respondents took place, and the respondents were treated as a whole as opposed to being partitioned into categories. The study was conducted in the spring of 1997. Appendix B was created from records at Pinckneyville High School to show the graduation progress of Tamaroa students but was not included in the research questions.

The research questions were:

1. How successful were former Tamaroa Grade School eighth graders at Pinckneyville High School as evidenced by perceived high school academic standing?
2. What are the perceptions of former Tamaroa Grade School students regarding issues related to the importance of completing high school?
3. What are the perceptions of former Tamaroa Grade School students attending Pinckneyville High School regarding adjustments needed to perform well academically in high school and graduate?
4. What practices can the staff of Tamaroa Grade School implement to assist their graduates in transitioning effectively regarding academics to Pinckneyville High School and graduating?
5. What are the perceptions of former Tamaroa students concerning Tamaroa Grade School's effectiveness of preparing them to perform well academically at Pinckneyville High School?

Sample and Population

The population was all 106 students who graduated from Tamaroa Grade School and were enrolled the following school year at Pinckneyville High School for school years 1990-1991 through 1995-1996. A random sample was selected from the previously described group. Further, the sample was stratified to control for gender and academic achievement level based on performance at Tamaroa Grade School. Representativeness was pursued through this stratified random sample but could not be guaranteed. Table 1 presents descriptive information about the sample, which contained an equal number of males and females. The sample was stratified to include academic achievement level, perceived academic status in grade school and high school, and perceived difficulty of transition to high school.

Table 1

Descriptive Information about the Sample

| Factors | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| A. Gender | | |
| Male | 15 | 50% |
| Female | 15 | 50% |
| B. Academic achievement level | | |
| High school graduate | 10 | 33% |
| High school student | 16 | 53% |
| Drop out | 4 | 13% |

(table continues)

| Factors | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| C. Perceived academic status in grade school | | |
| Grade average of A | 11 | 37% |
| Grade average of B | 5 | 17% |
| Grade average of C | 12 | 40% |
| Grade average of D | 2 | 7% |
| D. Perceived academic status in high school | | |
| Grade average of A | 5 | 17% |
| Grade average of B | 13 | 43% |
| Grade average of C | 9 | 30% |
| Grade average of D | 3 | 10% |
| E. Transition to high school | | |
| Very smooth | 7 | 23% |
| Smooth | 10 | 33% |
| Difficult | 10 | 33% |
| Very difficult | 3 | 10% |

Data Collection and Instrumentation

An interview schedule was devised by the researcher to collect data pertaining to the research questions (see Appendix A). The researcher obtained ideas for the interview

schedule based on a review of literature and research. Students in the sample were individually interviewed.

The validity of the interview schedule was addressed by basing it on information from literature and research pertaining to students transitioning from one school level to another, especially from middle school or junior high to high school. Reliability was approached by the researcher conducting all of the interviews to assure consistency in directions and the conditions under which the individuals responded.

Data Analysis

When the interviews were completed, the data were transferred to a tally sheet which was used as a basis for calculating the frequency and percentage of responses for the items on the interview schedule.

Chapter 4

Results

Overview

This chapter presents the results for each research question separately. Data are presented in tables referenced to a particular research question.

Results

Results for Research Question 1. Research question 1 was: How successful were former Tamaroa Grade School eighth graders at Pinckneyville High School as evidenced by perceived high school academic standing? Table 2 presents the results for research question 1 based on items 1 through 6 on the interview schedule.

Table 2

Results for Research Question 1 (Items 1-6 on Interview Schedule)

| Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| 1. What type of math student are/were you in high school? | | |
| Excellent | 5 | 17% |
| Above average | 4 | 13% |
| Average | 16 | 53% |
| Below average | 5 | 17% |

(table continues)

| Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| 2. What type of science student are/were you in high school? | | |
| Excellent | 3 | 10% |
| Above average | 6 | 20% |
| Average | 14 | 47% |
| Below average | 7 | 23% |
| 3. What type of English student are/were you in high school? | | |
| Excellent | 5 | 17% |
| Above average | 14 | 47% |
| Average | 6 | 20% |
| Below average | 5 | 17% |
| 4. What type of history student are/were you in high school? | | |
| Excellent | 2 | 7% |
| Above average | 12 | 40% |
| Average | 14 | 47% |
| Below average | 2 | 7% |

(table continues)

| Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| 5. How good are/were your reading for understanding skills in high school? | | |
| Excellent | 4 | 13% |
| Above average | 13 | 43% |
| Average | 9 | 30% |
| Below average | 4 | 13% |
| 6. How good are/were your writing skills in high school? | | |
| Excellent | 5 | 17% |
| Above average | 8 | 27% |
| Average | 13 | 43% |
| Below average | 4 | 13% |

Note. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number and may not total 100%.

Item 1 represented the type of math student respondents perceived themselves to be in high school. Thirty percent of respondents perceived themselves to be above average or excellent, and 53% perceived themselves as average. Overall, 83% rated themselves average or higher.

Item 2 represented the type of science student respondents perceived themselves to be in high school. Thirty percent of respondents perceived themselves to be above average or excellent, and 47% perceived themselves as average. Overall, 77% rated themselves average or higher.

Item 3 represented the type of English student respondents perceived themselves to be in high school. Sixty-four percent of respondents perceived themselves to be above average or excellent, and 20% perceived themselves as average. Overall, 84% rated themselves average or higher.

Item 4 represented the type of history student respondents perceived themselves to be in high school. Forty-seven percent of respondents perceived themselves to be above average or excellent, and 47% perceived themselves as average. Overall, 94% rated themselves average or higher.

Item 5 represented the level of skills regarding reading for understanding the respondents perceived themselves to possess in high school. Fifty-six percent of respondents perceived themselves to possess above average or excellent skills, and 30% perceived their skills as average. Overall, 86% rated their skills average or higher.

Item 6 represented the level of skills regarding writing the respondents perceived themselves to possess in high school. Forty-four percent of respondents perceived themselves to possess above average or excellent skills, and 43% perceived their skills as average. Overall, 87% rated their skills average or higher.

A summary of items 1-6, which were used to answer research question 1, indicated that respondents rated themselves average or better high school students in the following order for the six areas: (a) history (item 4--93%), (b) writing skills (item 6--87%), (c) reading skills (item 5--86%), (d) English (item 3--84%), (e) math (item 1--83%), and (f) science (item 2--77%). The percentages for the aforementioned were calculated by combining the results for the average, above average, and excellent categories.

Results for Research Question 2. Research question 2 was: What are the perceptions of former Tamaroa Grade School students regarding issues related to the importance of completing high school? Table 3 presents the results for research question 2 based on items 7 through 10 on the interview schedule.

Table 3

Results for Research Question 2 (Items 7-10 on Interview Schedule)

| Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| 7. How important to you is (was) it to receive a high school diploma? | | |
| Critical | 15 | 50% |
| Very important | 11 | 37% |
| Important | 3 | 10% |
| Not important | 1 | 3% |
| 8. Would (did) you ever consider dropping out of school? | | |
| Not at all | 24 | 80% |
| Maybe | 1 | 3% |
| Yes | 5 | 17% |
| 9. Do you feel that the Tamaroa staff encouraged you to complete high school? | | |
| Very much | 20 | 67% |
| Some | 10 | 33% |
| None | 0 | 0% |

(table continues)

| Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| 10. Do you feel that the Tamaroa staff put enough emphasis on the importance of staying in school? | | |
| Yes | 26 | 87% |
| No | 4 | 13% |

Item 7 represented respondents' perceived importance of receiving a high school diploma. Fifty percent felt it was critical; 37% felt it was very important; 10% felt it was important. Overall, 97% of the respondents felt it was at least important to receive a high school diploma.

Item 8 represented respondents' consideration of dropping out of school. The choice not at all was selected by 80% of the respondents. Twenty percent of the respondents indicated they had considered dropping out of school.

Item 9 represented the extent to which respondents perceived that Tamaroa staff encouraged them to complete high school. Twenty respondents (67%) indicated very much and 10 respondents (33%) indicated some. (The researcher assumed this took place while the respondents attended Tamaroa Grade School.)

Item 10 represented perceptions respondents had regarding whether or not Tamaroa staff put enough emphasis on the importance of staying in school. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents reported Tamaroa staff did put enough emphasis on the importance of staying in school, while the remaining 13% reported the staff did not.

Appendix B presents information from Pinckneyville High School staff, as opposed to the interview schedule, regarding graduation progress of Tamaroa students. A

problem with determining actual progress toward graduation by Tamaroa students was mobility in that it often was not known whether Tamaroa students leaving Pinckneyville High School graduated from another high school (unaccounted column in Appendix B).

Results for Research Question 3. Research question 3 was: What are the perceptions of former Tamaroa Grade School students attending Pinckneyville High School regarding adjustments needed to perform well academically in high school and graduate? Table 4 presents the results for research question 3 based on items 11 through 15 on the interview schedule.

Table 4

Results for Research Question 3 (Items 11-15 on Interview Schedule)

| Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| 11. On the average, did you have to put more time into homework and studies at the grade school or high school level? | | |
| Grade school | 7 | 23% |
| High school | 23 | 77% |
| 12. With regard to overall instruction, did you find high school to be harder to understand than it was in grade school? | | |
| Yes | 18 | 60% |
| No | 4 | 13% |
| Same | 8 | 27% |

(table continues)

| Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| 13. How difficult was it for you to adjust to academics in high school from grade school? | | |
| Very difficult | 3 | 10% |
| Somewhat difficult | 17 | 57% |
| Not difficult | 10 | 33% |
| 14. Which course offered the hardest adjustment for you in high school from grade school? | | |
| Math | 13 | 43% |
| Science | 6 | 20% |
| English | 9 | 30% |
| History | 2 | 7% |
| 15. Do you feel that you were (are) able to make the necessary adjustments in high school to perform as well as you did in grade school? | | |
| Yes | 22 | 73% |
| No | 8 | 27% |

Item 11 represented a comparison of the amount of time respondents spent on homework for each school. Seventy-seven percent of respondents spent more time doing homework assignments in high school as opposed to grade school, while 23% spent more time doing homework assignments in grade school.

Item 12 represented difficulty of instruction in high school. Sixty percent of the respondents reported high school instruction was more difficult to understand compared to their grade school experiences. Twenty-seven percent indicated the instruction

difficulty level was the same between grade school and high school.

Item 13 represented the extent to which it was difficult to adjust academically to high school from grade school. Ten-percent of the respondents felt it was very difficult to adjust academically, while 57% reported it was somewhat difficult to adjust. Thirty-three percent felt it was not difficult to make the adjustment.

Item 14 represented the course which offered the hardest adjustment in high school from grade school. Math was selected as most difficult by 43% of the respondents. English was next (30%), followed by science (20%), and history (7%).

Item 15 represented respondents' perceptions of their ability to make necessary adjustments in high school with regard to performing at least as well academically as they did in grade school. Seventy-three percent of the respondents reported they had been able to make necessary adjustments, while 27% indicated they had not.

Results for Research Question 4. Research question 4 was: What practices can the staff of Tamaroa Grade School implement to assist their graduates in transitioning effectively regarding academics to Pinckneyville High School and graduating? Table 5 presents the results for research question 4 based on items 16 through 18 on the interview schedule.

Item 16 represented the extent to which respondents perceived that the Tamaroa staff prepared them to fit in socially at Pinckneyville High School. Fifty percent of respondents stated that Tamaroa staff had prepared them to fit in socially at Pinckneyville High School, and 50% felt the staff had not done so.

Item 17 represented the respondents' perceptions of the extent to which the Tamaroa staff adequately prepared them to compete academically with the other students at Pinckneyville High School. Sixty percent indicated they were adequately prepared

Table 5

Results for Research Question 4 (Items 16-18 on Interview Schedule)

| Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| 16. In your opinion, did the staff at Tamaroa adequately prepare you to fit in socially at Pinckneyville? | | |
| Yes | 15 | 50% |
| No | 15 | 50% |
| 17. In your opinion, did the staff at Tamaroa adequately prepare you to compete academically with the other students at Pinckneyville? | | |
| Yes | 18 | 60% |
| No | 12 | 40% |
| 18. In your opinion, did the staff at Tamaroa help you to acquire the skills necessary for you to complete high school? | | |
| Yes | 25 | 83% |
| No | 5 | 17% |

academically by the Tamaroa staff to compete with other Pinckneyville students, while 40% felt they were not prepared to do so.

Item 18 represented the respondents' perception of possessing the skills necessary to complete high school. Eighty-three percent felt Tamaroa staff helped them acquire the skills necessary to complete high school, while 17% felt the staff had not done so.

Table 6 presents the results for research question 4 based on item 19 on the

interview schedule. (It should be noted that respondents could select more than one choice for item 19.)

Table 6

Results for Item 19 on Interview Schedule

| Responses | Frequency |
|--|-----------|
| 19. If you could change anything about the practices at Tamaroa, what change(s) would you suggest that would have helped you in your transition to Pinckneyville? (Respondents could select more than one choice.) | |
| 19-1. Articulate curriculum (whole) | 3 |
| Mathematics | 9 |
| Science | 6 |
| History | 4 |
| English | 2 |
| 19-2. Tougher academic and discipline standards | 5 |
| 19-3. More paper writing assignments | 4 |
| 19-4. Go to Block 8 scheduling | 3 |
| 19-5. No response | 3 |
| 19-6. Prepare gifted program students better | 1 |
| 19-7. More group work activities | 1 |
| 19-8. Stress physical education more as a class | 1 |
| 19-9. Provide computer usage class (no games) | 1 |

Item 19-1 showed that respondents felt articulation of curricula was needed between Tamaroa and Pinckneyville. Three respondents felt the entire curriculum of Tamaroa needed articulating. Results of the respondents identifying particular areas of study for articulation, were: (a) math--9, (b) science--6, (c) history--4, and (d) English--2.

Item 19-2 showed that five respondents felt Tamaroa needed to implement tougher academic and discipline standards to aid future graduates in their transition to Pinckneyville. Four respondents believed more paper writing assignments should be assigned (item 19-3), and three felt Tamaroa should go to Block 8 scheduling in order to be more similar to Pinckneyville (item 19-4).

Table 7 presents the results for research question 4 based on item 20 on the interview schedule. (It should be noted that respondents could select more than one choice for item 20.)

Table 7

Results for Item 20 on Interview Schedule

| Responses | Frequency |
|--|-----------|
| 20. If you could assist in adding practices to Tamaroa that were not done to help you in your transition to Pinckneyville, what practices would you add? (Respondents could select more than one choice.) | |
| 20-1. No response | 12 |
| 20-2. Computer usage class (no games) | 5 |
| 20-3. More English writing assignments | 3 |

(table continues)

| Responses | Frequency |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|
| 20-4. Teach life skills class | 2 |
| 20-5. Teach shop class | 2 |
| 20-6. Teach psychology class | 1 |
| 20-7. Modern science lab equipment | 1 |
| 20-8. Mid-term and final tests | 1 |
| 20-9. Hire a guidance counselor | 1 |
| 20-10. Tougher discipline policies | 1 |
| 20-11. Teach keyboarding class | 1 |
| 20-12. More use of independent study | 1 |

Item 20-1 showed 12 respondents had no response to item 20. Item 20-2 showed respondents felt a computer usage course (class) that allowed no games to be played was needed at Tamaroa. Three respondents believed more English writing assignments should be added (item 20-3), two respondents wanted a life skills course (class) added (item 20-4), and two respondents wanted a shop course (class) added (item 20-5).

Results for Research Question 5. Research question 5 was: What are the perceptions of former Tamaroa students concerning Tamaroa Grade School's effectiveness of preparing them to perform well academically at Pinckneyville High School? Table 8 presents the results for research question 5 based on items 21 through 30 on the interview schedule.

Table 8

Results for Research Question 5 (Items 21-30 on Interview Schedule)

| Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|-----------|------------|
| 21. Do you feel that you achieved your best academic work at Tamaroa or Pinckneyville? | | |
| Tamaroa | 17 | 57% |
| Pinckneyville | 13 | 43% |
| 22. Did the math instruction that you received at Tamaroa help you to meet the challenges of high school math? | | |
| Yes | 14 | 47% |
| No | 16 | 53% |
| 23. Did the science instruction that you received at Tamaroa help you to comprehend high school science? | | |
| Yes | 15 | 50% |
| No | 15 | 50% |
| 24. Did the English instruction that you received at Tamaroa help you to be a successful high school English student? | | |
| Yes | 22 | 73% |
| No | 8 | 27% |

(table continues)

| Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| 25. Did the history instruction that you received at Tamaroa adequately prepare you for high school history? | | |
| Yes | 24 | 80% |
| No | 6 | 20% |
| 26. Were the writing skills that you acquired from Tamaroa adequate enough to prepare you to compete with the other students' writing skills? | | |
| Yes | 19 | 63% |
| No | 11 | 37% |
| 27. Were the reading skills that you acquired from Tamaroa adequate enough to put you on level with the other students' reading skills? | | |
| Yes | 25 | 83% |
| No | 5 | 17% |
| 28. Overall, do you feel that the academic skills that you learned from Tamaroa were adequate enough to help you compete with the other students academically? | | |
| Yes | 25 | 83% |
| No | 5 | 17% |

(table continues)

| Items | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|-----------|------------|
| 29. With regard to the other students at Pinckneyville how do you feel that you compare/compared to them academically? | | |
| Far ahead | 0 | 0% |
| Ahead | 4 | 13% |
| Even | 16 | 53% |
| Behind | 10 | 33% |
| Far behind | 0 | 0% |
| 30. Do you feel that you received a good education at Tamaroa? | | |
| Yes | 29 | 97% |
| No | 1 | 3% |

Note. Percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number and may not total 100%.

Item 21 represented respondents' perceptions as to where they achieved their best academic work (Tamaroa or Pinckneyville). Fifty-seven percent of respondents indicated Tamaroa Grade School was where their best academic work had been accomplished. Forty-three percent stated Pinckneyville High School was where they achieved their best academic work.

Item 22 represented perceptions respondents had about the effectiveness of math instruction received at Tamaroa to help them meet the challenges of high school math. Forty-seven percent of the respondents felt that Tamaroa staff members were successful in

helping them meet the challenges of high school math, while 53% reported they were not.

Item 23 represented perceptions respondents had about the effectiveness of science instruction received at Tamaroa to help them meet the challenges of high school science. Fifty percent of the respondents felt that Tamaroa staff members were successful in helping them meet the challenges of high school science, while 50% reported they were not.

Item 24 represented perceptions respondents had about the effectiveness of English instruction received at Tamaroa to help them meet the challenges of high school English. Seventy-three percent of the respondents felt that Tamaroa staff members were successful in helping them meet the challenges of high school English, while 27% reported they were not.

Item 25 represented perceptions respondents had about the effectiveness of history instruction received at Tamaroa to help them meet the challenges of high school history. Eighty percent of the respondents felt that Tamaroa staff members were successful in helping them meet the challenges of high school history, while 20% reported they were not.

Item 26 represented perceptions respondents had about writing skills attained from Tamaroa preparing them to compete with other Pinckneyville students in writing skills. Sixty-three percent of the respondents felt that writing skills attained at Tamaroa adequately prepared them to compete with other Pinckneyville students, while 37% reported it did not.

Item 27 represented perceptions respondents had about reading skills attained from Tamaroa, putting them on a level with other Pinckneyville students. Eighty-three

percent of the respondents felt that reading skills attained at Tamaroa did put them on a level competitive with other Pinckneyville students, while 17% reported the skills attained in reading did not do so.

Item 28 represented perceptions respondents had about the overall preparation of academic skills learned at Tamaroa being adequate enough to help them compete with the other Pinckneyville students. Eighty-three percent of the respondents felt that academic skills learned at Tamaroa were adequate enough to help them compete academically with the other Pinckneyville students, while 17% reported they were not prepared to be competitive.

Item 29 represented perceptions respondents had about their comparison to other Pinckneyville students regarding academic performance. No respondents reported being far ahead or far behind other Pinckneyville students academically. Thirteen percent felt that they were ahead, 53% felt they were even, and 33% felt they were behind.

Item 30 represented perceptions respondents had about receiving a good education from Tamaroa. Ninety-seven percent of respondents felt they did receive a good education from Tamaroa, while 3% felt they did not.

Chapter 5

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of this field study was to examine the perceptions of former Tamaroa, Illinois Grade School students about their transition to Pinckneyville High School. The intent was to determine if the staff of Tamaroa Grade School had done an adequate job of preparing former students for high school.

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How successful were former Tamaroa Grade School eighth graders at Pinckneyville High School as evidenced by perceived high school academic standing?
2. What are the perceptions of former Tamaroa Grade School students regarding issues related to the importance of completing high school?
3. What are the perceptions of former Tamaroa Grade School students attending Pinckneyville High School regarding adjustments needed to perform well academically in high school and graduate?
4. What practices can the staff of Tamaroa Grade School implement to assist their graduates in transitioning effectively regarding academics to Pinckneyville High School and graduating?
5. What are the perceptions of former Tamaroa students concerning Tamaroa Grade School's effectiveness of preparing them to perform well academically at Pinckneyville High School?

The study utilized a review of literature and research regarding common transition problems students face to gain background information for the research questions and interview schedule. The interview schedule was created to answer the research questions. Interviews were conducted of 30 former Tamaroa Grade School students who attended Pinckneyville High School. The analysis of the data was presented through frequencies and percentages for each item.

Regarding research question 1, respondents frequently rated themselves average or higher as high school students in the six academic areas surveyed (math, science, English, history, reading, writing). History had the highest success rate with 93% of respondents perceived as average or higher. Science had the lowest success rate, with 77% of respondents perceived as average or higher.

Regarding research question 2, respondents rated very highly the importance of getting a high school diploma. Fifty percent indicated that getting a high school diploma was critical to them; 37% felt it was very important to them; and 10% felt it was important. Twenty percent of the respondents indicated they had considered dropping out of school. Eighty percent of respondents felt dropping out of school was not an option. Respondents felt Tamaroa staff had encouraged them very much to complete high school (67%), and all respondents felt Tamaroa did encourage them at least some. A total of 87% of the respondents felt Tamaroa did put enough emphasis on the importance of staying in school.

Regarding research question 3, respondents (77%) indicated they had to spend more time on homework at the high school level than they did in grade school. Sixty percent of respondents felt high school instruction was more difficult to understand than grade school instruction, while 27% reported it was the same. Many respondents (57%) felt it was somewhat difficult to adjust to high school academics. Forty-three percent of the respondents indicated that math was the hardest high school course regarding adjustment. Seventy-three percent of the respondents believed they were able to make the necessary adjustments in high school to perform at least as well academically as they had in grade school.

Regarding research question 4, respondents were evenly split as to whether Tamaroa staff had adequately prepared them to fit in socially at Pinckneyville. Sixty percent of the respondents felt they had been adequately prepared to compete academically with other Pinckneyville students. Eighty-three percent of respondents

believed that Tamaroa had helped them to acquire skills necessary to complete high school. Respondents indicated that articulation of curriculum with Pinckneyville was the change most needed at Tamaroa. Respondents felt the need for Tamaroa to add a computer course, a life skills course, and a shop course to the curriculum.

Regarding research question 5, 57% of the respondents indicated that they did their best academic work at Tamaroa Grade School. Forty-seven percent of the respondents felt that Tamaroa was successful in helping them meet the challenges of high school math; 73% indicated the same for English; and 80% indicated the same for history. Sixty-three percent of the respondents felt that writing skills attained from Tamaroa did enable them to compete with other Pinckneyville students' writing skills. Eighty-three percent of the respondents felt that academic skills learned from Tamaroa were adequate enough to help them compete with other Pinckneyville students academically. Fifty-three percent of respondents indicated that academically they were even comparatively with other Pinckneyville students. Ninety-seven percent of respondents felt they did receive a good education from Tamaroa.

Conclusions

The first research question was to determine how successful former Tamaroa Grade School eighth graders were at Pinckneyville High School regarding academics. It was concluded that respondents generally were academically successful in high school.

The second research question was to ascertain the perceptions of former Tamaroa Grade School students regarding issues related to completing high school. It was concluded that respondents generally felt it was important to receive a high school diploma. It was also concluded that respondents generally would not drop out of school. It was further concluded that the Tamaroa staff had encouraged them to complete high school, and the Tamaroa staff did put enough emphasis on the importance of staying in school.

The third research question was to ascertain the perceptions of former Tamaroa

Grade School students attending Pinckneyville High School regarding adjustments needed to perform well academically in high school and graduate. It was concluded from the responses that there were some adjustments needed in high school, but most respondents were able to make these adjustments. Adjustments needed were to allow more time for homework in high school and be prepared for harder high school instruction, especially in math courses.

The fourth research question was to determine what practices the staff of Tamaroa Grade School could implement to assist their graduates in transitioning effectively regarding academics to Pinckneyville High School and graduating. It was concluded that the Tamaroa staff did an adequate job of preparing their students to compete academically with other students at Pinckneyville High School. However, respondents did indicate the need to articulate Tamaroa's curriculum with that of Pinckneyville's curriculum.

Respondents also wanted Tamaroa to expand its curriculum and add practices beneficial to a smooth transition. Regarding curriculum practices, respondents indicated a need for a computer course which emphasizes research rather than game playing, more English writing assignments, a life skills course, and a shop course.

The fifth research question was to ascertain the perceptions former Tamaroa students had concerning Tamaroa Grade School's effectiveness to prepare them to perform well academically at Pinckneyville High School. It was concluded that the Tamaroa staff was generally successful, except for preparation in math and science.

Recommendations

The recommendations presented here were made to the Tamaroa staff by the researcher:

1. Assign more homework to students in all courses of study so they will be better prepared for high school.
2. Upgrade the instruction offered in math courses so it is more challenging to the students and will better meet their needs for high school purposes.

3. Articulate the curriculum with that of Pinckneyville High School.
4. Update current curriculum to include a research-oriented computer course, a life skills course, and a shop course.
5. Evaluate the science curriculum. (Determine what students need to be successful science students at Pinckneyville High School and incorporate those factors into the Tamaroa science curriculum.)
6. Conduct a study to identify the reasons why former Tamaroa Grade School students have dropped out of high school.

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Appendix A
Interview Schedule
Face Sheet

Name: _____

Year of graduation from Tamaroa: _____

A. Sex A. _____

1. Male
2. Female

B. Student status: B. _____

1. High school graduate
2. High school student
3. Drop out

C. Perceived academic status in grade school: C. _____

1. Grade average of A
2. Grade average of B
3. Grade average of C
4. Grade average of D

D. Perceived academic status in high school: D. _____

1. Grade average of A
2. Grade average of B
3. Grade average of C
4. Grade average of D

E. How would you rate your transition to high school? E. _____

1. Very smooth
2. Smooth
3. Difficult
4. Very difficult

Interview Schedule

1. What type of math student are/were you in high school? 1. _____
 1. Excellent
 2. Above average
 3. Average
 4. Below average

2. What type of science student are/were you in high school? 2. _____
 1. Excellent
 2. Above average
 3. Average
 4. Below average

3. What type of English student are/were you in high school? 3. _____
 1. Excellent
 2. Above average
 3. Average
 4. Below average

4. What type of history student are/were you in high school? 4. _____
 1. Excellent
 2. Above average
 3. Average
 4. Below average

5. How good are/were your reading for understanding skills in high school? 5. _____
 1. Excellent
 2. Above average
 3. Average
 4. Below average

6. How good are/were your writing skills in high school? 6. _____
 1. Excellent
 2. Above average
 3. Average
 4. Below average

7. How important to you is (was) it to receive a high school diploma? 7. _____
1. Critical
 2. Very important
 3. Important
 4. Not important
8. Would (did) you ever consider dropping out of school? 8. _____
1. Not at all
 2. Maybe
 3. Yes
9. Do you feel that the Tamaroa staff encouraged you to complete high school? 9. _____
1. Very much
 2. Some
 3. None
10. Do you feel that the Tamaroa staff put enough emphasis on the importance of staying in school? 10. _____
1. Yes
 2. No
11. On the average, did you have to put more time into homework and studies at the grade school or high school level? 11. _____
1. Grade school
 2. High school
12. With regard to overall instruction, did you find high school instruction to be harder to understand than it was in grade school? 12. _____
1. Yes
 2. No
 3. Same
13. How difficult was it for you to adjust to academics in high school from grade school? 13. _____
1. Very difficult
 2. Somewhat difficult
 3. Not Difficult

14. Which class offered you the hardest adjustment in high school 14. _____
1. Math
 2. Science
 3. English
 4. History
 5. Other
15. Do you feel you were (are) able to make the necessary adjustments in high school to perform at least as well as you did in grade school? 15. _____
1. Yes
 2. No
16. In your opinion, did the staff at Tamaroa adequately prepare you to fit in socially at Pinckneyville? 16. _____
1. Yes
 2. No
17. In your opinion, did the staff at Tamaroa adequately prepare you to compete academically with the other students at Pinckneyville? 17. _____
1. Yes
 2. No
18. In your opinion, did the staff at Tamaroa help you to acquire the skills necessary for you to complete high school? 18. _____
1. Yes
 2. No
19. If you could change anything about the practices at Tamaroa, what change(s) would you suggest that would have helped you in your transition to Pinckneyville?
20. If you could assist in adding practices to Tamaroa that were not done to help you in your transition to Pinckneyville, what practices would you add?
21. Do you feel that you achieved your best academic work at Tamaroa or Pinckneyville? 21. _____
1. Tamaroa
 2. Pinckneyville

22. Did the math instruction that you received at Tamaroa help you to meet the challenges of high school math? 22. _____
1. Yes
 2. No
23. Did the science instruction that you received at Tamaroa help you to comprehend high school science? 23. _____
1. Yes
 2. No
24. Did the English instruction that you received at Tamaroa help you to be a successful high school English student? 24. _____
1. Yes
 2. No
25. Did the history instruction that you received at Tamaroa adequately prepare you for high school history? 25. _____
1. Yes
 2. No
26. Were the writing skills that you acquired from Tamaroa adequate enough to prepare you to compete with the other students' writing skills? 26. _____
1. Yes
 2. No
27. Were the reading skills that you acquired from Tamaroa adequate enough to put you on level with the other students' reading skills? 27. _____
1. Yes
 2. No
28. Overall, do you feel that the academic skills that you learned from Tamaroa were adequate enough to help you compete with other students academically? 28. _____
1. Yes
 2. No

29. With regard to the other students at Pinckneyville, how do you feel that you compare/compared to them academically? 29. _____

1. Far ahead
2. Ahead
3. Even
4. Behind
5. Far behind

30. Do you feel that you received a good education at Tamaroa? 30. _____

1. Yes
2. No

Appendix B

Graduation Rate Data From Pinckneyville High School

Table 9

Graduation Rate of Former Tamaroa Students at Pinckneyville

| Year of graduation from Tamaroa | Students | Graduated or on pace | Graduation percentage | Unaccounted for |
|------------------------------------|----------|-------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 1990-91 | 18 | 9 | 50% | 9 |
| 1991-92 | 17 | 10 | 59% | 7 |
| 1992-93 | 24 | 18 | 75% | 6 |
| 1993-94 | 21 | 12 | 57% | 9 |
| 1994-95 | 13 | 12 | 92% | 1 |
| 1995-96 | 13 | 11 | 85% | 2 |