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Should Triton High School continue its study hall policies and procedures?

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SHOULD TRITON HIGH SCHOOL CONTINUE ITS STUDY HALL
POLICIES AND PROCEDURES?

By
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A Master's Thesis

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Professor

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Abstract

William D. Westerby   Should Triton High School continue its current
                                       study hall policies and procedures?
                                       3/26/2000
                                       Dr. Gini Doolittle
                                       Educational Leadership

The focus of this study was to determine if Triton High School should continue its

current study hall policies and procedures. Conclusions are drawn based upon data

collected using action research, which included observations, interviews, and surveys.

All study hall periods were observed. Students, teachers, and varying administrative

levels were interviewed.

The intern concluded that Triton High School should revise its current policies

and procedures regarding study hall. A strong belief that study hall should be available to

a student remains, but the perceptions of students, teachers, and administrators is

negative. Recommendations to improve the perceptions are to empower the staff and

revise the policies and procedures using their ideas and input.

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I would like to thank Dr. Harold Melleby for agreeing to be my internship mentor. Without his valuable insight and recommendations, the internship would not have been as enriching. I would also like to thank the other administrators who allowed me to work in their office and provided data for specific projects.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Focus of the study

Curriculum changes occur constantly within schools. If a course is no longer relevant to students, it is revamped or eliminated. For example, students now take keyboarding as opposed to a typing class. "With the advent of the departmentalized high school came the simultaneous introduction of the study hall. The intention was to provide students with the opportunity to get a head start on the day's assignments or to use the time for constructive leisure through self-enrichment reading" (Long, 1977, p.3). A visit to study hall would reveal to today's visitors that study halls in general are not an arena of self-enrichment, but rather, an exercise in creative discipline for the monitors. Students practice wasting, not using time where the most common activities include writing and passing notes, reading magazines, and sleeping. Thus, it would be important to ask if Triton High School should continue its current study hall policies and procedures.

As effective educational leaders feel pressure from elected school boards to reduce spending and increase academic achievement they now analyze all aspects of the educational process. Correll, Huling and Trang (1993), for example, found principals and school leaders have spent hours scrutinizing the education system to meet the demands placed upon them. An area overlooked by many educational leaders is the study hall. One explanation for the oversight stems from the lack of research that either proves or disproves its value to the school system Ziegler, 1986, (p.60).

Purpose of the study

The focus of this study is to determine if Triton High School should continue its current study hall policies or revise them. Using action research the intern will observe, interview, and evaluate study hall. If the action research reveals that the study hall policies of Triton High School should be eliminated, the intern will recommend methods to accommodate the transition. If the research reveals study hall is an intricate and productive part of the educational process at Triton High School, then the intern will suggest methods and alternatives to enhance the program to increase effectiveness on student performance.

This study may result in the elimination or development of study hall policies for Triton High School. The data gathered from the action research will help determine if students use, or fail to use, study hall to advance their learning. Using data collected from the action research, district and school leaders will be able to recommend a course of action for Triton High School's study hall policies and procedures. Moreover, administration, school board members, parents, and staff can apply the action research to evaluate the study hall policies of Triton High School.

Definitions

Academic achievement – student success measured by an array of criteria

Study hall – a scheduled period individual students use for the completion of academic assignments

Open study hall – a scheduled period in which students are free to work on assignments in the library or study area or to visit a teacher

Closed study hall – a scheduled period of study hall in which students remain in their seats and work on assignments

Filler – use of a study hall period by students to offset lab days and fill the schedule of open time.

Holding tank – area of school building that hold s a large number of students at one time. Allows school leaders to have more students then classrooms will hold.

Peer tutoring – students that tutor fellow students who are deficient in a particular subject area

Limitations of the study

This study will only involve Triton High School and its student body. The results of this study may be difficult to generalize to any other school district. However, the findings may contribute to the limited knowledge base pertaining to study halls and student learning.

Setting of the study

In September 1957, Triton High School opened its doors to deliver education and instruction for students in the Black Horse Regional School District. The growth and development over the next four decades would require an additional high school to be built and many policies and procedures to be developed, adjusted or changed. The Black Horse Pike Regional School District is comprised of three municipalities: Bellmawr Borough, Runnemede Borough, and Gloucester Township. These three municipalities form the north east corner of Camden County. These communities are located just a few miles from the Delaware River. This area was among the earliest settled in Colonial Southern New Jersey because of the easy availability by water for transportation.

Bellmawr Borough, Runnemede Borough and Gloucester Township were once part of the Irish Tenths, an arbitrary division of the land during the early colonial times running from the Delaware River to the Atlantic Ocean. This area was particularly important because Gloucester Township's community of Chews Landing was at the headwaters of a navigable stream flowing west to the Atlantic Ocean near what is now Atlantic City. Consequently, one of the earliest settlements in New Jersey grew at this spot. On the other hand, Bellmawr and Runnemede were part of the Old Center Township until 1929. They became independent boroughs following an action of the New Jersey Legislature.

During the late 18th century the area consisted of a dozen huge farms. In the 1920's improvements to the Black Horse Pike through Bellmawr, Runnemede and Gloucester Township provided a direct link between Philadelphia and Atlantic City. Many families began to settle in the area and communities began to grow. As new families settled in these communities, industry and commerce flourished. Eventually, construction brought the New Jersey Turnpike, bridges, freeway system, and rail lines.

Bellmawr covers approximately 3.02 square miles of land area. At its peak in 1970, Bellmawr's population totaled 15,618. In the last two decades the population has declined to 12,603. Bellmawr Borough is the northern most of the three district municipalities. Even with two decades of decline Bellmawr is estimated to be the tenth most populous municipality in Camden County. The largest population shift has been accompanied by the nature of the population. In 1970 the median age was 25.5 with 28% of the population being school-aged and 4% over 65 years old. By 1990 the median age

was 35.5. The school-aged population dropped to 16% and 10% of the population was

over 65 years old. See figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Bellmawr Borough
Change in Student and Senior
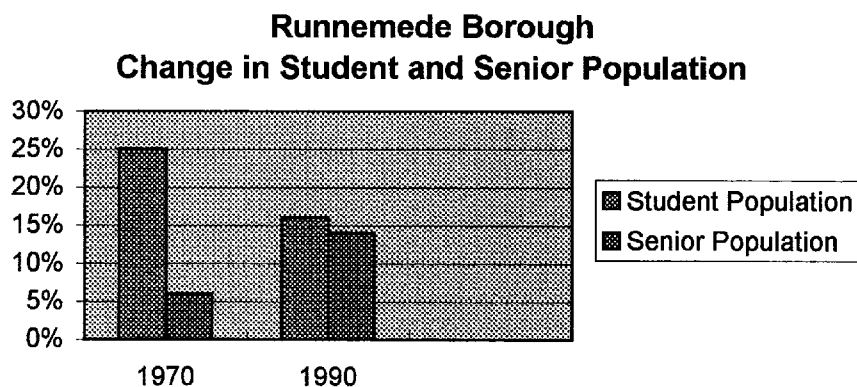**Population**
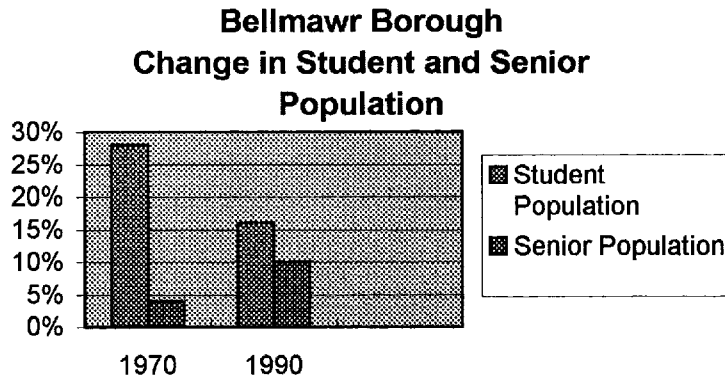
The town of Bellmawr is predominately white. As of 1989 African Americans

totaled 0.9 %, Hispanic Americans totaled 1.6 % and other races totaled 1.4 % of the

population (See chart on page 8). The number of households in the Borough of Bellmawr

was 4,679 with 59% owned by married couples. The average household contained 2.5

persons. At the time of the 1990 census, the housing in Bellmawr consisted of 2,981

single family detached houses, 800 single family attached units, 975 multi-family units,

and 33 other units. Housing growth is limited in Bellmawr Borough because of the lack

of vacant land. An average of six building permits was issued per year prior to 1990.

Runnemede Borough is adjoined with Bellmawr Borough on the north and

Gloucester Township on the south. Runnemede is 2.0 square miles and is the smallest of

the three towns that make up the Black Horse Pike School District. In 1950 the

population consisted of 4,127 residents. The population continued to climb until the

1970s when it reached its highest population of 10,475. Since that time the population

has decreased to 8,930 residents. This decrease occurred at the same time as Bellmawr's decline.

As with Bellmawr Borough the change in population of Runnemede Borough was accompanied by a change in the age characteristics. During the 1970s the average age was 27 and 25% of the population was school-aged. Senior citizens totaled 6%. By the 1990 census Runnemmede's median age of 34 increased seven years. School-aged children totaled 16% and senior citizens more than doubled to 14%. See figure 2 below.

Figure 2

Runnemede Borough
Change in Student and Senior Population

The ethnic makeup of Runnemmede resembles the town of Bellmawr with 95.9 % of the population white and 2.7 % of the population African American (See chart b on page 8). There are 3,420 households in Runnemede. The housing trend in Runnemede reflects a stable community because of the lack of developable land.

Gloucester Township is the southernmost of the towns. The township consists of 23.14 square miles of land. The area of Gloucester Township is 4.6 times the combined land area of Bellmawr and Runnemede and is the fourth largest municipality in Camden County. According to the 1950 census, the population of Gloucester Township consisted of 7,984 residents. With continual development and growth, Gloucester Township now

has 58,004 residents. This is 2.7 times the combined population of Bellmawr and

Runnemede.

Gloucester Townships population has also experienced the same aging

characteristics as Bellmawr and Runnemede but to a lesser degree. In 1970 the median

age of Gloucester Township was 28. By 1990 the median age moved a few tenths to

28.3. The school aged population decreased from 26.3% in 1970 to 21.7% in 1990.

Senior citizen levels decreased from 7.1 % in 1970 to 6.7 % in 1990. See figure 3 below.

Figure 3

Gloucester Township
Change in Student and Senior Population
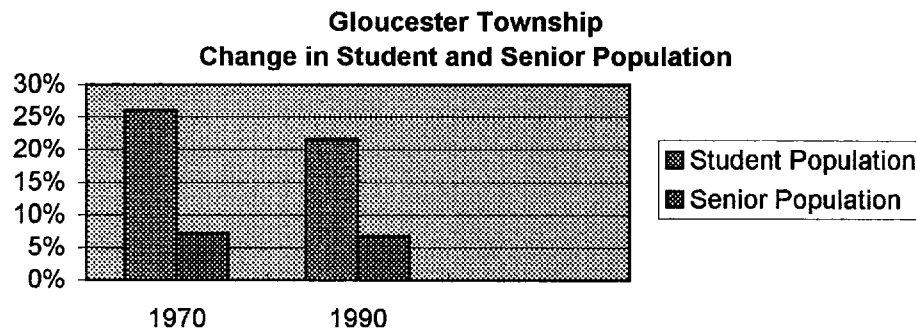
The housing trend in Gloucester Township directly reflects the population

increase. In 1970 there were 7,323 households in the township. By 1990 that number

exploded to 19,893 households. During the 1990s the housing and population growth has

slowed because of the scarcity of land. The racial makeup of Gloucester Township is

91.2 % white, 6.1 % African American and 2.7 % other races (See figure 4)

Figure 4

Bellmawr
chart a

Runnemede
chart b

Gloucester Township
chart c

☐ White   ☐ African American   ☐ Other Races

7
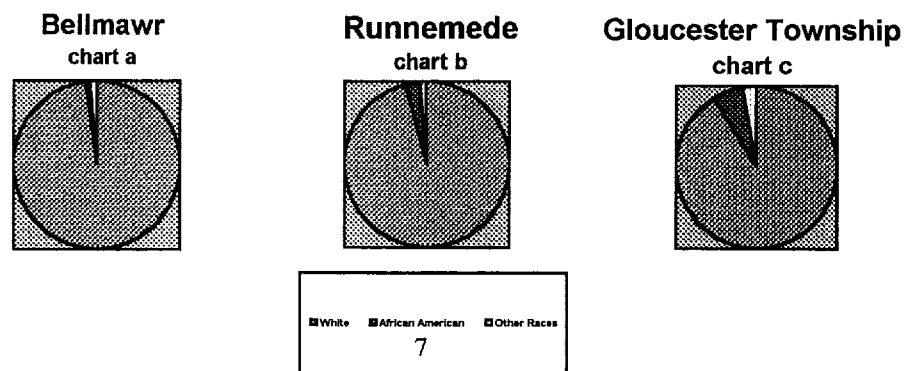
Triton Regional High School draws students from Bellmawr, Runnemede and Gloucester Township. Highland Regional High School draws students exclusively from the Gloucester Township municipality. The median family income for Bellmawr was $20,797 in 1979 and increased to 39,253 when the last census was conducted in 1989 - a percentage change of 88.7%. Runnemede's median family income went from $19,697 in 1979 to $39,370 in 1989 a percentage change of 99.9%. Gloucester Township's median family income went from $22,638 in 1979 to $45,694 in 1989 a percentage change of 101.8%. See figure 5 below.

Figure 5

Median Family Income
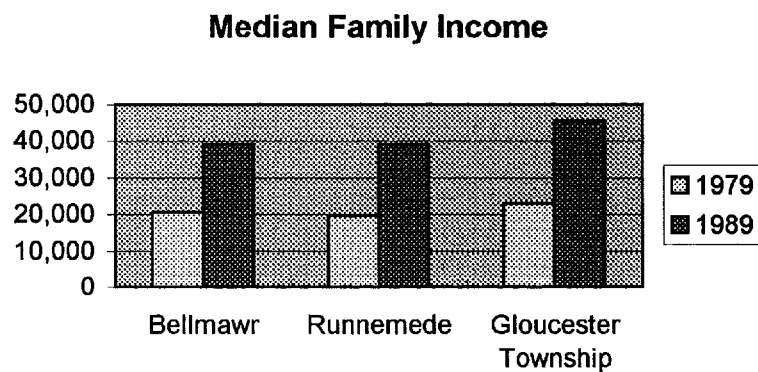
Unemployment percentages in the three districts are comparable. Bellmawr has the highest unemployment percentage at 5.2%. Gloucester Township is the second highest at 5.1%, and Runnemede has an unemployment percentage of 4.8%. The three communities in the Black Horse Pike School district are all below the Camden County unemployment percentage, which is 5.9%. These figures represent the unemployment percentages from the 1989 census and pertain to all people ages 16 and over. See figure 6 below.

Figure 6

Unemployment Percentages
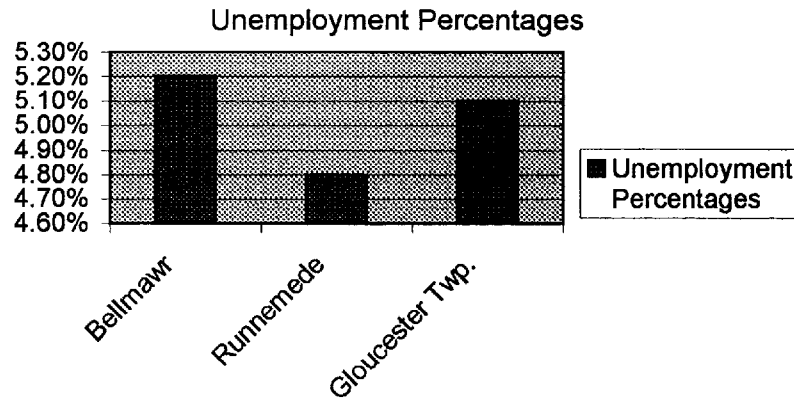
Bellmawr, Runnemede, and Gloucester Township form the Black Horse Pike Regional School District. The district provides education to grades 9 through 12. Each of the three towns manages their own school district for grades K through 8.

Significance of study

This study will provide valuable information for Triton High School. The intern will conduct a thorough literature review, observe study halls and record time on task, interview vice-principals and teachers assigned to study hall, and survey students enrolled in a study hall.

Some significant outcomes resulting from the action research may be the elimination of study hall in Triton High School or improvements in the policies and procedures for study hall. Students may receive more instructional time. Discipline referrals related to study hall could be reduced lessening the load on the vice-principals.

Organization of the study

The following chapters will focus on specific aspects of the thesis project. Chapter 2 will discuss the literature that is available on study hall and its relationship to academic achievement. Chapter 3 will discuss the design of the study and address the

five areas related to the research design used for the study. Chapter 4 will be the presentation of the research findings, and chapter 5 will discuss the implications for further study.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Study halls represent a key piece of the culture in most high schools, where "students are assigned study hall because there may be a shortage of course offerings, their schedule may be overloaded with difficult courses, or they desire free time" Correll, Huling and Trang, 1983 (p. 71). While some students may study, others spend time writing notes, reading magazines, sleeping, copying homework, playing cards or talking. Study hall proctors then attempt to control students, who are usually placed in the auditorium or cafeteria in large numbers, rather than utilize the time to engage in academic tasks.

The search for literature uncovered a limited amount of research on linking study hall to student performance. However, the literature that exists does provide valuable connections and insights to study hall and its effectiveness. Researcher David Doss (1983) examined ninth grade courses that related to freshman dropouts. He found a correlation between freshmen enrolled in study hall to the drop out rate of freshmen. If freshman students took keyboarding instead of study hall, they were less likely to drop out. The literature focused on three general areas: improving study hall in a school, alternatives for study hall, and using the library media center for study hall.

Improving Study Hall

The literature also provides research and ideas for improving study halls. Joe Passantino (1986) attempted to improve study hall in Dowling High School by creating an "open study hall". By limiting the number of students in each section, he allowed

students to complete laboratories, schedule appointments with other teachers, and work on upcoming assignments in his open study hall.

Passantino (1986) argues that just as teachers are more effective with fewer students in the classroom, so are study hall monitors. He claims that reducing the number of students in any given study hall makes great sense. With study halls held in the cafeteria or auditorium with minimal work area and large numbers of students, these areas are not designed for student learning or student work. Passantino also claims that students are less likely to get distracted with fewer peers around them, and schools with facilities large enough should limit the number of students seated in a particular study hall.

Lynette Long (1977), a researcher for the Curriculum Development Center of Catholic University of America, found students responded positively to a study hall that was broken into three areas: quiet, activity, and conversation. The quiet area was very similar to the original study hall and allowed students to read, do homework, and write. The area contained comfortable places to sit, read, and work quietly, and was designed to be used for individual and group activities. The conversation area gave students a room to socialize and even permitted "rap" sessions. The study evidenced a rise in student attendance, and learning began to take place, however, school officials had to develop guidelines to keep the study hall from becoming a recreational lounge.

The literature describes "peer tutoring" as third method used to improve student performance among students enrolled in a study hall. Peer tutors are students who volunteer to tutor other students during a free period and requires training for potential tutors. This results in additional costs for school districts than a typical study hall,

(Correll, 1983). During study hall students may work with a peer tutor to enhance a grade in a particular course or prepare for a test. Correll's (1983), study claims that disruptive behavior dropped for students using peer tutoring during the first six week period, and disruptions from students who did not use the tutoring program increased.

Study Hall in the Library Media Center

The fact that many schools hold study halls in the library media centers has researchers publishing their research in popular journals. In the journal "Technology-Connection", an article written by Doug Johnson (1995) lists the "Six ways to beat the study hall syndrome in your media center".

Librarians are being handed the responsibility of proctoring study halls. Thus they currently frown when a study hall is placed in the library media center. The supervisor of the library media center for Triton High School states "vandalism, noise, and distractions usually occur during scheduled study halls". To combat this trend the literature provides several suggestions. These include providing activities, adding technology, limiting rules and changing the school climate (Johnson, 1993). The literature however, does not demonstrate that holding study hall in the library media center is more or less effective than another area in the school.

Alternatives

The literature suggests several alternatives for typical study hall. As previously mentioned, offering an open study hall is one alternative. Open study halls were compared to closed study halls by Passantino, (1986). His research offered choices for students as opposed to the standard closed study hall where students had to remain in their seats. Students were permitted to move about freely as long as they were engaged

in learning. In his comparison of opened and closed study halls no significant increase in student performance was discovered, however, Passantino (1986).

Thomas Watman's findings were supported by Passantino, (1986). Watman identified positive results generated from the open study hall structure. First, there was an increase in the number of educational activities available to students. Students were given the responsibility of choosing how to use their free time and make use of school facilities. According to Watman, (1992) this helped to promote independent study, encourage teacher-student contact, and improve student self-esteem.

The lounge alternative provided students with many of the same options as the open study hall Draayer and Teague (1969). Students could move about freely in a designated lounge area with few restrictions and guidelines. Draayer and Teague (1969) tested their hypothesis in which those students who were not given a student lounge option under an open study hall system would achieve at a higher level. In essence they claimed that a closed study hall would impact student performance more than a student lounge area where students used time at their own discretion. The results demonstrated that grade point averages of those students using the lounge option decreased while that of the closed study hall group increased. Draayer (1969) believes that " to reduce the likelihood of the above happening, it appears that expectations for students and teachers on the use of unstructured time must be made very clear."

The literature also evidenced study centers as an option to study hall. Study hall and study centers are not synonymous, with study centers being offered during non-school hours. Raebeck's(1993) research indicated significant improvement in grades among students who use study centers. Study centers are presently popular in colleges

and foreign countries where students are self-motivated. Study centers are increasing in popularity with coaches and athletes because high schools and colleges are now beginning to provide study centers as a means to improve student performance.

<u>Alternatives in action</u>

Other alternatives were provided by local schools. Edgewood High school allows senior students to take a course pass or fail. (Edgewood H.S, 1999). The pass/fail alternative provides students the option to enroll in a class because they are interested in the subject area. The study hall enrollment for seniors has declined. Collingswood High School allows students to "audit" a course. When a student chooses to audit a course they receive no credit for that particular course. Auditing a course offers students the chance to take a class without the threat of failure. However, students are held to the same standards as the other students enrolled in the class. Both alternatives provide students concerned about their grade point averages with the opportunity to take a course that is not weighted as heavily as an academic course. (Collingswood H.S . 1999).

Moorestown High School established a committee to find alternatives to study hall. The outcome was to offer "seminars" during the study hall period. These seminars would consist of college recruiters, armed forces recruiters, parent visitations that discussed specific careers, and seminars for college essay writing. (L. Mathews, personal communication, November 10, 1999).

A final alternative the literature offers is to eliminate study hall entirely and replace it with another course. Catherine Batsche (1984) recommends study hall be eliminated and replaced with a career development course. The Maryland State advisory council (1989) recommends eliminating study hall to add an agricultural science course.

Eliminating study hall entirely may not be a wise action for all educational leaders. "Principals should be aware of the formal and informal power structure" (Hughes, 1997, p.97). First the staff and student body should be surveyed to get their opinions on study hall. The guidance department should be questioned about scheduling difficulties. If possible a needs-assessment could be conducted. (Hughes,1997) If there is an overwhelming consensus that study hall is non-effective, then study hall should be eliminated without much resistance. If support is limited for eliminating study hall, then a committee should be established to restructure or find alternatives to the study hall period.

Schools with large enrollment numbers or a lack of course offerings may find eliminating or restructuring study hall to be a challenge. In over-crowded situations schools use study halls as "holding tanks" (H. Melleby, personal communication, October 12, 1999). These holding tanks alleviate crowded classrooms by placing a large number of students in one area, thus easing the burden on room capacity and availability. Scheduling is also made easier by using study hall a "filler" period. Guidance departments use study hall to complete a student's daily schedule, allowing students to take labs on specific days and study hall on others. Without the filler period students would have open blocks of time during the school day. (Powell, 1999).

There is not a tremendous amount of literature linking study hall and student performance. However there is evidence that suggests schools with building wide instructional efficiency are successful (Venezky, 1979). For most, using study hall for a holding tank or filler period would not fall into the realm of instructional efficiency.

Barry Raebeck (1994) believes study halls should be abolished for the following reason. "The only thing that does not happen in study hall is studying". Ron Bratlie (1986) created a guide listing 100 ways to save schools money. Eliminating study hall was number 60 on the list. Study hall should be observed and evaluated by educational leaders to determine if the resources used to offer study hall are impacting students positively. Although a simple observation of a study hall will support what research has already found, study hall will continue to be used until problems are addressed and alternatives are explored.

Chapter 3

The Design of the Study

<u>Overview</u>

In Triton High School students are enrolled in study hall for several reasons. A student may desire extra time to complete his/her schoolwork. Study hall gives that student a 45-minute block of time to complete daily assignments. Students may also request study hall because they want a period of non-academic time. Students that are unmotivated see this as a period to socialize or rest, rather than be challenged by another course.

Another reason study hall is chosen by students is the need for extra time to handle a difficult course load. Students that are competing for class rank and scholarships take academically challenging courses. Scheduling study hall gives students a chance to study or catch up on reading and assignments. For example a student that is enrolled in Advanced Placement English course could use study hall to read a novel that was assigned by his/her instructor.

Sometimes students do not have a choice about enrolling in study hall. A lab science course runs three periods a week. When a student has lab science in his schedule it leaves two free periods which must be filled to complete the students schedule. Guidance uses study hall as the solution for this scheduling problem.

Triton High School was originally designed to handle 1300 students; it now holds almost 1900 students. Overcrowded conditions create difficult scheduling situations for administration and guidance. During specific periods of the school day every classroom is in use, therefore, other courses can not be offered at these times. To ease the

scheduling difficulties guidance and the administration use study hall as a holding tank. These holding tanks ease the burden of scheduling for the guidance department by absorbing a large number of students during specific periods. The areas that are considered holding tanks for scheduling purposes are lunch, physical education, and study hall. Without these holding tanks additional classroom space would have to be created.

The focus of this study is to determine if Triton High School should continue its current study hall policies or revise them. Using action research the intern will observe students and study hall monitors, interview students, study hall monitors, and administrators, and evaluate study hall to determine if the current policies should be updated. If the action research reveals that the study hall policies of Triton High School should be eliminated, the intern will recommend methods to accommodate the transition. If the research reveals study hall is an intricate and productive part of the educational process at Triton High School, then the intern will suggest methods and alternatives to enhance the program to increase effectiveness on student performance.

This study may result in the elimination or development of study hall policies for Triton High School. The data gathered from the action research will help determine if students use, or fail to use, study hall to advance their learning. Using data collected from the action research, district and school leaders will be able to recommend a course of action for Triton High School's study hall policies and procedures. Moreover, administration, school board members, parents, and staff can apply the action research to evaluate the study hall policies of Triton High School.

<u>Context of Study</u>

During the last few years I have actively pursued a graduate degree in educational leadership. In many of the courses in which I was enrolled the professors always asked for characteristics of an effective leader. The usual response is that a leader should be honest, compassionate, resourceful and empowering, and he should have good listening skills. I have attempted to incorporate these leadership qualities into my own decision making process.

Varying viewpoints and perspectives of students, teachers, parents, and administrators make affecting change in schools very challenging. During my tenure as a graduate student and teacher, I have listened to a wide cross section of students, teachers, and administrators discuss various topics related to education, with each group having valid points and considerations. Realizing that it is difficult to satisfy all that are involved in the education process, I began to look for areas where students, teachers, and administrators have a common ground. If all parties view an issue the same, creating positive change could be accomplished. Other than the fundamental belief that all children are entitled to a quality education, it can be difficult to find an area in which all parties have the same perspective.

In my experience study hall is an area that all groups recognize to be non-productive. During casual conversation with students, teachers, and administrators many will openly admit study hall is not a productive work period for students. In fact, many students confess that study hall is boring and little schoolwork is completed. Because students arrive to their study hall without schoolwork, monitors must attempt to maintain quiet and manage the study hall armed only with the threat of a discipline referral that is

sent to the vice-principal. Forcing students with the threat of discipline to sit quietly and remain in their seats for a period is challenging, even for the best monitors. Study hall then becomes a test of patience for students who want to meander in the hallways, hold conversations, play cards, or sleep. Students receive no grade for attendance or work completed during this period. Discipline is the only option to sway students from unwanted behaviors.

The interview process revealed 3% - 5% of discipline referrals are generated during study hall periods. Referrals for cutting study hall, insubordination to a study hall monitor, failure to sit in assigned seat, and lateness to study hall are the most common referrals. Administrators, already overloaded, spend their precious hours responding to discipline referrals generated by study halls.

Methodology

After listening to conversations and remarks of students, teachers, and administrators I began wondering why study hall continues to be offered at Triton High School. Are there other alternatives that might be available? Have other high schools eliminated study hall? Could study hall be restructured so it is more effective? What problems could arise if study hall was eliminated? I used Action Research as a method to examine any questions.

<u>The nature of action research</u>

Action research is used in social situations to justify and rationalize a particular practice. It is defined as research that contributes to both practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and addresses the goals of social science by joint collaboration and an acceptable framework (Kemmis, 1990). Because all participants are

knowingly involved in the action research, education fits very well into this research framework.

Action research uses a recursive framework. A cycle of planning, action, observing, and reflecting is repeated several times. The repetition of each cycle allows for deeper understanding of a situation, starting with the determination of a problem and then moving through several interventions and evaluations (Hopkins, 1993). Constant revision and clarification occur during each phase of the cycle resulting in valuable and reliable research.

Action research allowed me to focus on the day to day problems of study hall in Triton High School (Wiersma, 1995). The large number of variables related to study hall and academic performance made action research a natural fit. My first action cycle involved an exhaustive literature review and analysis of study hall policies and procedures. The second action cycle consisted of observations of study halls and student behaviors during the study hall period. The final action cycle was a survey that reflected the synthesis of data retrieved in the previous cycles.

Although the research methodology changed during each action cycle of the inquiry, specific student behaviors consistently appeared in all phases. The varying methodologies employed during selected action cycles and the continuous use of reflection, observation and action provided me with the opportunity to narrow and clarify the research while in progress.

Observations and data collection techniques

Multiple data gathering techniques were used to collect information. First, a review of the literature was conducted. It included analysis of research studies, review of policy and procedures for study hall, study hall enrollment figures for the 1999 – 2000 school year, student classifications, and alternative programs used in other area districts.

After reflecting on the information at hand, further defining of my framing questions and sub-questions was completed. The next step in the research cycle was to conduct informal interviews. The interviews were conducted with students, building administrators, the director of instruction, and the superintendent to identify and clarify procedures and policies directly related to study hall. The information was obtained through casual conversation during chance encounters. The informal interviews resulted in a more narrowly defined group of research and sub-questions.

During the reflection phase of the informal interviews that were conducted I felt observations of study hall should be executed to clarify and further define these policies and procedures found in earlier cycles of the action research process. Teacher and student surveys were conducted to determine opinions and attitudes towards study hall in Triton High School and used as a secondary source to support data found in the research. All methodologies employed by the intern provided a full description of Triton High School study hall and the accompanying policies and procedures.

Throughout the first two months of the research I conducted informal interviews with students, teachers, and administrators. Questions were used to determine attitudes of study hall, its impact on schoolwork, and discipline problems.

Students consisting of grade levels 9-12 who may or may not have been enrolled in study hall were interviewed. The wide range of students did not reveal a large difference of opinions and statements. In fact, many of the interviewees supported the literature. Students told study hall stories and offered valuable insight regarding their reasoning for enrolling in a study hall.

Teachers were also interviewed, and the intern used this information to define and narrow the survey instrument. Teacher opinions were similar. They supported the literature and described the problems inherent to study halls. The interview process questioned procedures used to implement study hall. They also addressed discipline actions related to the study hall period.

The interview process provided valuable insight into the use of study hall for non-academic purposes, discipline associated with study hall, resources used to offer a study hall program, and study hall policy and procedure implementation and enforcement.

Administrators provided insight into study hall procedures and policies. They explained how study hall was used to address difficulties with scheduling and overcrowding issues. With large numbers of students enrolled in study hall discipline problems occur. Administrators handled discipline referrals generated by study hall students.

The next step in the action research process was to conduct ongoing observations of students and monitors during the study hall period. The intern scheduled classroom observations. The monitor and the intern worked closely to find a mutually agreeable date. Classroom rosters and attendance records were checked. The intern reviewed the

seating charts and observed student behaviors during the study hall period. Again the observations should support the literature and also the interviews.

Should Triton continue its current study hall policies? I began this study by developing sub questions that would aid in the determination. I developed questions that I felt would narrow the focus of the research. Were educational resources such as teacher and administrator time being wasted on study hall? What opinions existed of study hall? How many students and on which academic tracks are students who enroll in study hall at Triton High School? Should Triton High School continue to offer its current study hall program?

Outcomes

Study hall in Triton High School exhibits many of the characteristics of a non-effective period as stated in the literature review. The investigation revealed the existence of a school period where little academic work is accomplished. The students and proctors were not given clear guidelines for study hall. Additionally, students listened to headphones, slept, read, or chatted while proctors worked on other tasks. Triton High school provided students with the opportunity to get schoolwork accomplished, but many students choose to waste this time. I believe the result is a research study that accurately reflects the current policies and procedures of Triton High School. The research study should be used by school leaders to support them in the decision making process. The study is a resource that can bring about positive change if used correctly.

Chapter 4

Research Findings

The internship project took place from September 1999 to April 2000 at Triton

High School. As the initial design stated, I employed multiple data collection techniques.

A literature review was completed to aid the researcher in defining and clarifying the

research topic. Observations, interviews, and surveys were executed to unearth the

perceptions of study hall and describe the daily activities during study hall. While no

particular technique provided better data than the other, the use of multiple data

collection methods established a detailed description of Triton High Schools study hall

procedures and policies. It was then my job to analyze and evaluate the data.

Informal Interviews

From October 1999 to January 2000 I conducted informal interviews throughout

the course of a typical school day. The informal interview process occurred during

casual conversation and daily interaction with administrators, teachers, and students. I

selected this form of interview because it allowed me to provide a comfort level

conducive to inquiry into Triton High School's current policies and procedures.

Administrators such as the Superintendent, Director of Curriculum, principals, vice-

principals, teachers and students were interviewed informally.

Administration

Superintendent

Informal interviews were conducted with the Superintendent and Director of

instruction. Although the Superintendent of my district acknowledged that study hall is

not a productive period for many students, he believes students should be given a choice. He feels different strategies should be investigated by teachers in order to make study hall more effective. Reward systems, positive reinforcement, and peer tutoring could increase the effectiveness.

Director of Instruction

The director of instruction felt that study hall was needed for scheduling purposes. Describing a scenario that occurs during scheduling he explained why lab science and study hall are paired together. Students have a double period lab two days a week. During the other three periods they attend a study hall. Unless curriculum changes occur, he believes it would be very difficult to eliminate study hall entirely.

Principal

Triton's principal believes students who enroll in a elective course instead of study hall benefit in the long run. Although it is beneficial, eliminating study hall would be extremely difficult because of overcrowded conditions that exist in Triton High School. A third high school is scheduled to open in 2001.

Because there are 1900 students enrolled in Triton High School (built for 1500 students) large study halls ease the burden on classroom space. Without study hall, regular classrooms would not be able to hold all of the student body. He calls this the holding tank mentality. Without large study halls Triton High School would have to schedule split sessions to accommodate all students.

Guidance Director

The director of guidance feels that although many students do not make effective use of study hall there are students who benefit from it. She directs her staff of guidance

counselors to enroll students in study hall only as a last resort. When asked if study hall could be eliminated she states "eliminating study hall entirely would make scheduling more difficult but not impossible. However, if study hall was eliminated policy and procedure issues must be addressed." This is because students would not be able to drop courses during the year unless it they could enroll in another.

Vice-Principals

Triton High School has three vice-principals, all of which provided similar responses during their interviews. All of the vice-principals felt that study hall was not effective when held in the cafeteria or auditorium. Because a student does not receive a grade for study hall monitors are placed in an awkward position. The teacher's only leverage over a student in study hall is a discipline referral to the student's vice-principal. These referrals account for 3% to 5% of the total discipline referrals.

Students are referred to the vice-principal for a variety of reasons. In one incident a student physically attacked a male study hall monitor because he asked the student to sit in his assigned seat. Other referrals relating to talking, eating, playing cards, and listening to music are more common.

Cutting study hall is a major problem for the vice-principals. Ten percent of student cuts occur during the study hall period. The vice-principals believe the perception of students that study hall is a block of free time gives students a false sense of freedom.

<div align="center">Teacher Interviews</div>

Teachers

Teachers did not hesitate to offer their opinion on study hall. Many teachers stated study hall was a complete waste of time for the student and the study hall monitor.

Amazingly if given the choice most teachers would not eliminate study hall if they had the choice. Teachers believe eliminating study hall would only punish the few students who need and use study hall, while the other students would just act out in class. "Students should not be allowed to enroll in study hall unless they are responsible" stated a math teacher. Students that are not interested in learning will find ways to disrupt any classroom setting. Teachers want study hall to be more effective. Study hall should only be held in a small class setting not the cafeteria or auditorium, but this would increase the need for even more classroom space as mentioned previously.

Teachers described a period where few if any students use study hall to its potential. Sleeping and chatting with friends were the most common activities among students in study hall. The teachers provided valuable insight pertaining to their perceptions regarding study hall. I felt it would be important to interview students to compare their perceptions of study hall.

<center>Student Interviews</center>

The students were the most candid among all interviewees. They would openly admit that little work was completed during their study hall period. "If I could do it again study hall would not be in my schedule," stated Valerie, a senior female student. Senior students who have study hall at the end of the day can be signed out to leave before that period because of overcrowding. Other students offered study hall tales that described them doing everything but schoolwork. A sophomore described study hall as "a break from you teachers."

When I asked students why they chose to enroll in study hall, two common responses were given. Some stated that it was a period away from schoolwork and others

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admitted that study hall was a good time to catch up on their sleep. The academic students tended to be sorry they enrolled in study hall while the basic students would enroll in as many study halls as they could. The student perception of study hall is anything but a place to do school work.

<div align="center">Study Hall Observations</div>

I chose to use observations to collect additional data relating to the policy and procedures for study hall in Triton High School. I conducted the observations of study hall throughout periods 1-8 from October 1999 to December1999. I observed both large and small study halls.

Large study halls have more than one monitor and consist of 30 students or more. Large study halls are held in the cafeteria or auditorium and have multiple proctors. Each monitor is responsible for his own group of students. Small study halls are usually held in classrooms, although some small study halls are held in the auditorium and consist of 30 or less students with only one proctor. The observations revealed many similarities and differences between the two types of study halls.

<u>Large Study Halls</u>

In the large study hall, the atmosphere is less conducive to learning or studying because of the many distractions. Noise from other students chatting or moving about in the study hall could distract even the most focused students. In the large study halls, it takes the monitors an average of seven minutes to get students situated and semi-quiet. Before the study hall monitor could begin to take attendance students would begin to ask for passes for the lavatory, guidance, or vice-principal. The volume of students entering one area while the monitors try to place students into their designated areas takes time.

<div align="center">30</div>

Study hall held in the auditorium provides seats but no desks for students to work. Proctors spend a significant amount of time doing routine administrative tasks required by school policy. Each proctor of the large study hall is responsible for an average of forty-five students. Although I did not observe a single proctor assisting students with their schoolwork during any study hall period, the proctors did their best to get students seated, take attendance, and quiet them to a minimal amount of noise.

A problem that arises with large study halls is that the study hall monitors often have different philosophies pertaining to study hall. For example, one monitor may feel students should not be allowed out of their seats during the entire period, while a second monitor believes in a more open atmosphere and allows students to move about the cafeteria or auditorium. Students do exceptionally well at exploiting the differences in philosophies. They twist words and play games to pitch one teacher against the other. "Mrs. ____ said that I could come over here to study as long as we are quiet," states a study hall student. These types of problems that are only related to large study halls could be reduced if procedure was a clear between monitors. Observation of large study halls clearly shows that administrators should develop specific rules for large study halls.

Small Study Halls

Unlike large study halls, small study halls provided an atmosphere more conducive to learning. Small study halls are held in classrooms that seat no more than thirty students. The monitor determines study hall procedures resulting in specific expectations for students. If a monitor wants to limit the amount of times a student can use the lavatory in a week, she can do it. Some monitors demand a quiet study hall and students respond well. Other monitors allow students to walk the halls and talk. Student

passes, noise level, and sleeping are reduced, but only if the monitor actively seeks these results.

Because clear procedures do not exist for study hall, monitors often feel isolated. Guided by their peers and past practice of small study halls, teachers develop their own procedures for study hall. This ultimately creates a number of different study hall procedures throughout Triton High School.

Small study halls are not free of problems. Providing a quiet atmosphere to learn is important, but achieving this is challenging for many monitors. Sometimes "treaties" Cohen, Powell, Farrar.(1995) are used to establish a quiet atmosphere. Monitors allow students to sleep, visit the lavatory, and disappear to library media center in exchange for quiet. Monitors sacrifice productive schoolwork for a quiet classroom and thus leaving the concept of study hall overlooked. Once the classroom is quiet, most monitors use the period as an additional prep-period, completing daily tasks of their own instead of using the period to assist students with questions pertaining to school work.

<div align="center">The Survey Instrument</div>

During the final action research cycle a survey was used as the data collection instrument. Faculty and students were surveyed to support and validate data already collected during earlier action research cycles. More importantly, the survey instrument measured the attitudes and opinions of individuals toward study hall at Triton High School.

<u>Teacher survey</u>

The survey was delivered to the teachers via their school mailbox. Attached to the survey was a letter of transmittal explaining the survey and its intentions. The

responses from the teachers supported many of the findings throughout earlier action research cycles and further described study hall in Triton High School.

Teachers indicated that educational resources (class space, books, course offerings, and teachers) should be reorganized or adjusted to provide a better study hall. In fact 80% believed that limited resources aided the ineffectiveness of study hall. Ninety-four percent wanted to adjust resources to improve study hall. I believe these results reflect the teachers' desire to always improve.

When asked if study hall should be completely eliminated, 53% of teachers responded yes and 47% no, but 77% wanted to place additional resources in programs other than study hall. This leads the researcher to believe study hall could be eliminated without much resistance if resources were given to the classroom. I believe these results indicate the belief of teachers that educational resources could be used more effectively in an area other than study hall. Seventy-four percent indicated that study hall needed to be restructured if it remained.

Research linking student performance and study hall usually lacks validity and reliability because of the large number of variables related to student performance. The survey instrument was used to further support the perceptions of teachers about study hall's impact on student performance. The perception of study hall in Triton High School is that study hall is non-effective if offered in a large setting such as the auditorium or cafeteria. Data collected from the interviews further support teacher perceptions. On the survey instrument teachers used words to describe study hall like "wasteful, holding tank, ineffective, and dumping ground". Sixty percent of the teachers believed study hall did not raise the level of academic performance of students.

The perceptions and beliefs of the teachers who perform the monitoring duties for study hall are important. If a teacher believes that study hall is a waste of time it will be just as perceived, a waste of time. Survey data indicates that teachers want administration to use resources more effectively to improve study hall. Clear procedures should be established for monitors and administrators should observe study hall periods to facilitate positive change.

Student Survey

Students were surveyed during their study hall period. The perception students have of study hall at Triton High School varies in relationship to the teacher's perceptions. Ninety-five percent of the students believed the purpose of study hall was to study and do homework. The majority of the students believed that study hall affected their grades. Responses among students varied when asked if time in study hall was spent on schoolwork. The activities students commonly engaged in during study hall were working on school assignments, sleeping, and conversation. Student responses on enforcing existing school policies pertaining to eating, sleeping, and talking were unfavorable. They felt study hall was a time where these leisurely activities should be allowed.

Students enrolled in study hall mainly for the purpose of lightening their course load, although some students were scheduled study hall because they were enrolled in a lab science class. This means they attend study hall three periods a week and the other two periods are spent in lab science. They responded positively on questions relating to time management, academic achievement, and restructuring of study hall. Students

overall preferred having a study hall option. The idea of eliminating study hall in the future was viewed unfavorably by a vast majority of the students.

Students' written opinions of study hall contradicted their survey results. They described study hall as place to relax and unwind. Students in the academic tract felt that they deserved a period to "catch up" and "quickly study" before tests. Basic students complained that they should be allowed to eat and drink, talk and hold conversations among friends, and visit students in other areas of study hall. Once again written descriptions from a majority of students did not describe study hall as a productive work period.

Summary

Throughout the entire research project, data was collected from a variety of groups. Administrators freely admit study hall is not a productive work period for the vast majority of students. They realize that it is necessary to accommodate certain students, while providing a place for large numbers of students in an overcrowded school. They also believe that students deserve the opportunity to use study hall as a productive work period if they so choose. Teachers supported the administrators' beliefs but see that inconsistencies in the way study hall is run contributes to many discipline problems. Students also view study hall as a necessity, but for different reasons than their teachers and administrators. While most view study hall as a time for socializing and relaxing, there are some who truly do not appreciate how study hall is being managed. All students described a place where little schoolwork could get accomplished because of the many distractions and the lack of a strict set of guidelines for study hall monitors.

After reflecting on the views of the administration, teachers, and students, it

Is unlikely that study hall would be eliminated altogether at Triton High School.

However, the results of these surveys indicate that all of these groups would like to see

these issues addressed in order for study hall to be beneficial to the student body.

Chapter 5

Conclusions, Implications and Further Study

Major Conclusions

The internship and the research indicated that two areas should be addressed pertaining to study hall at Triton High School. I concluded that the perceptions of study hall are negative among students, teachers, and administrators throughout our district and policy and procedure regarding study hall should be reviewed to address those perceptions. Addressing the perceptions could improve the effectiveness of study hall at Triton High School.

Perceptions

Teachers, students, and administration support the concept of study hall but the reality is different. The concept of providing students with a place for study and self-enrichment is well received by teachers, students, and administrators. Surveys and interviews clearly show the belief among teachers, administrators, and students that enrolling in study hall should be a choice for all students. The mention of eliminating study hall to many brings the reaction "study hall should not be eliminated, some students do need it". Because the belief system is already in place throughout Triton High School study hall should undergo some changes.

Policy and procedure changes

Policy and procedure changes for study hall at Triton High Scholl must occur to change the perceptions and support the beliefs of everyone in Triton. Careful review by the school improvement committee should begin as soon as possible. My

recommendations include decreasing the number of study hall students, observing study hall and eliminating large study halls.

Implications

Reducing study hall enrollment

Because study halls are perceived to be non-productive by many students, the amount of students should be reduced. Reducing the number of students in study hall can be accomplished a number of different ways. I recommend offering a pass/fail option to students for elective courses. Students who may be interested in learning an area that they are not sure about. Art for example could be offered to students as pass/fail. Students would not feel the pressure of getting a high grade while experiencing an enriching activity.

The pass/fail option will be available to students for the 2000-2001 school year (pending board approval). The committee used input from staff, administration, and students. Triton and Highland High School will offer this option to juniors and seniors that have a grade point average of 3.0 or higher.

The pass/fail option will not reduce study hall enrollment numbers greatly. The guidance department should also further reduce the number of students enrolled in study hall by reminding students; that study hall is a place for academic work not sleep or socializing. Students that enroll in study hall should be made to sign a contract that clearly shows the demands and expectations of study hall. Study hall is a privilege not a required course. Study hall should not used by any student as a means to avoid academic work.

Academic students should be scheduled before basic students. The majority of basic students use study hall for a sleep or conversation period. Student discipline records for academic students and basic students should be reviewed. If the discipline record indicates that a student has cut class or has numerous infractions, the student should not be enrolled in study hall. Students with discipline problems relating previous study halls should not be scheduled. Forbidding students to enroll in study hall that have difficulty with discipline is a proactive step in reducing the number of referrals and reduces the number of students enrolled in study hall.

Eliminating large study halls

Decreasing study hall enrollment can eliminate the need for large study halls. Everyone agrees that large study halls are set up for failure. Lack of student work areas and limited space give students little chance for a productive period. At this time Triton High School is so overcrowded this may be impossible to achieve. But with the completion of a third High School in 2002 the opportunity will become available.

Observations of study halls

The final recommendation I have calls for observations of study halls. With policy and procedure changes occurring the administration should study halls to see if the changes in policy and procedure are working. Observations should be made to adjust and define the new procedures for study hall.

Areas of further study

During the action research I stumbled upon area that I feel should be further researched. New Jersey has passed the Core Content Curriculum Standards that require all public schools to meet specific state standards. Schools are searching for alternative

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methods to meet the required goals. Study hall could provide schools with an area where new alternatives could be tested.

Study hall is not mentioned in any of the content standards. Therefore study hall may be used for tutoring or a basic skills workshop. Study hall could be a period where who students lack life skills must attend. Instead of monitors that use study hall as prep-period they could be paid a stipend to teach enrichment classes like: computer skills, math, reading, writing, and history. Meeting students needs would be much more productive and meaningful then just providing a block of free time for students.

Conclusion

After many hours of data collection and reflection on the information obtained I have drawn from my experience specific conclusions. The perceptions of study hall throughout Triton High School directly impact on study halls effectiveness. Changing these perceptions will require hard work and transformational leadership.

It is clear from my research that the belief in study hall as a valuable piece of the educational process exists. However, restructuring study hall is not a simple task. All parties involved with study hall should develop a restructuring plan. Allowing input and responsibilities to rest on their shoulders. Implementing the plan will be received better if the participants are intrinsically motivated. Success in bringing about change to study hall at Triton High School can not be guaranteed, but continuing the current policies and procedures for study hall will negatively impact Triton High School.

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