THE EFFECTS OF A MIDDLE SCHOOL MAGNET PROGRAM ON EIGHTH GRADE STUDENT PERFORMANCE

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(ABSTRACT)

Magnet schools were developed in the early 1970s when a large number of urban school districts began seeking alternatives to court-ordered desegregation mandates (Levine and Steel, 1994). Since that time, numerous studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of magnet schools in providing a racially balanced learning environment as well as increasing academic achievement. The purpose of the causal-comparative study was to determine if the math and science magnet program at a middle school affected achievement, attendance, and parent perceptions.

This study conducted three different analyses. A chi square analysis of the student population was conducted to determine racial balanced on attendance data from the school years 1993-94 through 1996-97, and if the racial balance of the magnet program mirrored that of the district. Three-way ANCOVA analyses, with a 2x2x2 factorial design were performed on attendance and the five components of the 1997 Stanford Achievement Test Form 9-TA results for the eighth grade population at the targeted middle school enrolled during the 1996-97 school year. Complete data for 177 eighth grade students was
utilized. Attendance and achievement served as the dependent variables. The independent variables tested were group membership (magnet, non-magnet), gender (male, female), and race/ethnicity (black, white). Socio-economic status (SES) and Literacy Passport Test (LPT) scores served as the covariates in the study. A survey of school effectiveness was sent to a random sample of parents. A t-test was performed to determine if there was a statistically significant difference between the perceptions of parents of magnet students and parents of student not enrolled in the program on school effectiveness.

The racial balance of the magnet program did not mirror that of the district. There was more of an equally distributed number of blacks and whites in the magnet program. Within the district, approximately 68% of the student enrollment was black, the white enrollment was approximately 31%. Magnet students achieved statistically significantly higher scores on each of the five components of the Stanford Achievement Test Form 9-TA than non-magnet students. Gender and race/ethnicity differences were statistically significant in science achievement in that male and white students achieved higher scores than female and black students. There was a statistically significant difference in attendance between magnet students and non-magnet students. Magnet students attended school more than non-magnet students. There was no significant difference in perceptions of parents of magnet and non-magnet students. Both groups felt that the school was very good. Implications for future avenues of research were also suggested.